‘Are They Not Human?’:

Childhood, Gender and Child Abuse in Later Medieval England

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores medieval ideas about childhood and gender and how these related to the abuse of children in later medieval England. It takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining sources and methodologies from historical and literary studies as well as new theoretical insights from sociology, anthropology and psychology. The thesis makes four key arguments: firstly, ideas about childhood and narratives of development fulfilled important discursive functions in late-medieval culture which have hitherto not been recognised, demarcating the boundaries of social categories such as the human, the animal, the monstrous, the sacred, and the pure. Secondly, ideas of childhood were highly gendered in medieval discourse: boys were thought to be 'born bad' and to require training and physical correction; girls tended to be seen as pure and innocent but to be subject to moral decline during adolescence and adulthood. Thirdly, these conceptualisations of childhood maintained children's subordination to adults and meant that children were too often dehumanised and abused in medieval society. Finally, the form that this maltreatment took also varied by gender: girls were more often treated as desirable objects and were more likely to be subjected to extreme forms of control as well as rape and sexual violence. Boys were more likely to be subjected to physical abuse in the process of 'correcting' their supposed deviance. This thesis draws on ecological systems theory to understand the ways in which individual, familial, community and socio-cultural factors interacted to produce child abuse. Chapters 1 and 3 examine discourses of male and female childhood in medieval culture, drawing on romance, conduct literature, ages of man texts and philosophical and medical treatises. Chapter 2 deals with the abuse of boys in grammar schools via an analysis of children's schoolbooks. Chapter 4 assesses the prevalence and gendered nature of child abuse in medieval court records.

CONTENTS

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

INTRODUCTION:

PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDHOOD

In around the year 1500, an Italian visitor to London wrote a now famous assessment of the attitudes of medieval English people towards their children:

> The want of affection in the English is strongly manifested towards their children; for having kept them at home till they arrive at the age of 7 or 9 years at the utmost, they put them out, both males and females, to hard service in the houses of other people, binding them generally for another 7 or 9 years. And these are called apprentices, and during that time they perform all the most menial offices; and few are born who are exempted from this fate

According to this visitor, the English claimed that the reason for their apparent callousness toward their offspring was that they believed it was in the best interests of their education and socialisation: 'they did it in order that their children might learn better manners'. His own interpretation of the behaviour of English parents however was markedly less charitable: 'I, for my part, believe that they do it because they like to enjoy all their comforts themselves, and that they are better served by strangers than they would be by their own children'.[1]

The report he produced, now known as the 'Italian Relation', anticipated many of the fundamental questions and debates which have occupied medieval scholars in more recent times. The question of whether medieval culture was one in which children were systematically abused, neglected or otherwise ignored has been a central pillar of modern scholarly discussion. So too the extent to which the medieval English manifested a 'want of affection' towards their children, or foisted upon them adult roles, responsibilities, dress and status from an early age. The Italian visitor recognised too at least implicitly that childhood is not the same at all times and in all places, that the social norms which persisted in his own culture were different to those which he observed among the English, and indeed were fundamentally incompatible with the conception of childhood which he and his compatriots held. In his view, children were too vulnerable to be put

[1] Charlotte Augusta Sneyd, ed., *A Relation or Rather a True Account, of the Island of England. With Sundry Particulars of the Customs of These People, and of the Royal Revenues Under King Henry the Seventh, About the Year 1500*, Camden Society, OS xx (1847), 24-25.

out of the family home at such a tender age and subjected to 'hard service'; too valuable to be assigned menial tasks; too beloved to be so callously ejected from the family home.

Those who study the medieval period today would likely take issue with much of what this particular visitor claimed to have observed. Apprenticeship contracts starting at such a young age were hardly the norm in late-medieval England, and an age of entry of around fourteen was more common.[2] Life-cycle service was indeed a common feature in the lives of many adolescents, but modern scholars have inclined to be more charitable in their assessment of parental motivations for enlisting their offspring.[3] They have pointed out that service or apprenticeships in the households of others fulfilled many beneficial functions in acquiring the necessary skills for adult life. They have demonstrated too the real affection which characterised the ideal relationships between these adolescents and their masters and mistresses, who often took on responsibilities that we today would consider parental in providing for the future marriages and employment of their young charges.[4] Today, we would perhaps not be so quick to rush to judgement, but would consider medieval childrearing practices as evidence of love, care and compassion expressed in a different way from that which we are accustomed, rather than a diminution or complete lack of affection. Yet we too may sometimes look askance at aspects of medieval childrearing. The biblical injunction that 'whoever spares the rod hates his children' – a phrase that has been implicated in much human misery over the centuries – was vociferously articulated by medieval preachers and pedagogues, and the medieval record contains abundant examples of young people falling victim to this piece of proverbial wisdom. In the surviving medieval documents we may also read of children forced into marriages or subjected to sexual violence, with comparatively little in the way of legal right to protection or recourse to justice. However much we may wish to maintain the detached objectivity of the *Wissenschaftler/-in,* it is difficult not to sympathise with depictions of children undergoing treatment that we today would consider cruel and inhumane.

This thesis will approach the issues of childhood and child abuse in later medieval England from a new perspective, taking into account recent research in the sociology and anthropology of childhood as well as developmental and social psychology. I will shed new light on the ways in

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[2] Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 129-53. See also Caroline M. Barron, 'The Education and Training of Girls in Fifteenth-Century London', in *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages,* ed. Caroline M. Barron (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), 139-153.

[3] *Ibid.,* 146-49; For life-cycle service see John Hajnal, 'European Marriage Patterns in Perspective', in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (London: E. Arnold, 1965), 101-43.

[4] Barbara Hanawalt, '"The Childe of Bristowe' and the Making of Middle-Class Adolescence', in *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England,* ed. Barbara Hanawalt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 178-202.

which childhood was conceptualised in medieval society, how this translated into the treatment and maltreatment of children, and how such treatment was experienced and understood by medieval children themselves. I will show that concepts of childhood are essential to understanding medieval cultural discourse and were deeply embedded in the ways in which medieval people understood and categorised the social and natural world. I will argue that ideas about the nature of childhood were strongly gendered, and this meant not only that boys and girls were treated differently but that they tended to be subjected to different forms of abuse. I will show how discursive constructions of childhood made their way into the medieval schoolroom and the medieval courtroom and impacted the ways in which child abuse was processed at a social and institutional level. I will investigate the ways in which children conceptualised their treatment, giving fresh insights into the lives and perspectives of individual children whose voices have not yet been heard. Given my interdisciplinary approach, this introduction will begin by surveying the role of medievalists and concepts of 'the medieval' in the study of childhood across disciplines. In light of this, I will then explore the terminology of 'child' and 'abuse' and explain how I will be using them in this thesis. Finally, I will outline my theoretical framework and methodology.

Medievalists and the Interdisciplinary Study of Childhood

Modern scholarly interest in the history of childhood effectively began in 1960 with the publication of Philippe Ariès's *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*.[5] Translated into English in 1962, this book made two stark and now famous claims which went on to shape scholarly discourse over the following decades. Firstly, Ariès claimed that the concept of childhood was an invention of the early modern period and that people in the Middle Ages lacked a concept (*sentiment*) of childhood.[6] Medieval people, in Ariès's view, did not think of childhood as a particular life stage with its own special characteristics and needs. Rather, medieval children were dressed, treated, and conceptualised as little adults. Secondly, Ariès appeared to suggest that parental affection was limited in the Middle Ages due to social and demographic conditions. High infant mortality rates meant that parents did not invest emotionally in their offspring to the same extent as modern ones, and dead children were not considered worthy of remembrance. 'Nobody thought, as we ordinarily think today, that every child already contained a man's personality. Too many of them died ... This indifference was a direct and inevitable consequence of the demography of the period'.[7] In a less well-known aspect of his theory, Ariès also claimed that sexual contact between children and adults was not considered taboo because no notion of childhood innocence existed: 'the idea did not yet exist that references to sexual matters ... could

[5] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood,* trans. P. A. Wells (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) [First Published 1960].
[6] *Ibid.,* 125.
[7] Ariès, *Centuries,* 37.

soil childish innocence, either in fact or in the opinion people had of it: nobody thought that this innocence really existed'.[8] Instead, he posited that children were thought to be indifferent to sex, and made the startling claim that 'the practice of playing with children's privy parts formed part of a widespread tradition'.[9] For the first modern scholar to grapple seriously with historical childhood, then, the Middle Ages was a period during which children were at best seriously misunderstood and at worst, from a modern standpoint, systematically abused.

By bringing the concept of childhood within the purview of historians, Ariès stimulated a range of authors to take up the mantle and to elaborate on his ideas. Edward Shorter's *The Making of the Modern Family* (1975) waxed lyrical about the harshness, indifference, cruelty, abuse and neglect of premodern parents, crediting Ariès with first bringing the matter to the attention of scholars: 'it was the pioneer social historian Philippe Ariès who first argued that maternal indifference to infants characterised traditional society'.[10] Lawrence Stone similarly suggested that parents did not bond emotionally with their young children due to high infant mortality rates, and proposed that loving bonds between family members first arose with the inception of the nuclear family, which he placed at the turn of the eighteenth century.[11] His observations of English society c.1500 resemble in some respects those of the Italian visitor:

> In such a society relations with one's own children were not particularly close ... Most children of all classes left home very early, between the ages of seven and fourteen, to work in other people's houses as servants or apprentices, to serve in a magnate's household, or to go to school.[12]

Stone's historical narrative is one of progress in three stages from a brutal Middle Ages with its loveless open lineage family via the Enlightenment, capitalism and individualism to the modern domesticated nuclear family in which children are treated with affection. He rejects as a 'mistake' the notion that 'generativity and nurturance are innate traits of all animals ... and that mothers must always have striven to keep their children alive and well'.[13] Instead, he views caring and intimate familial relationships as the products of society; specifically, 'the key middle and upper sectors of English society' in the eighteenth century, whence the ideal of the nuclear family later diffused through the rest of the social order. For Stone, then, parental love for children is a

[8] *Ibid.,* 102-3.
[9] *Ibid.,* 101.
[10] Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 169.
[11] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977).
[12] *Ibid.,* 6.
[13] Stone, *Marriage,* 16.

product of elite Western modernity, a triumph of civilisation over the natural state of premodern man.

A similar narrative underlies the work of Lloyd DeMause, who presented an even more sceptical view of premodern parenting in his contribution to his 1974 edited volume *The History of Childhood*:

> The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, and sexually abused.[14]

Inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis, DeMause proposed a 'psychogenic theory of history' in which 'the evolution of parent-child relations constitutes an independent source of historical change' as each generation shapes the personality of the next via parent-child interactions. He suggested that this had produced a 'closing of psychic distance' between adults and children over the centuries, from the 'infanticidal mode' of antiquity through stages of abandonment (fourth to thirteenth centuries), ambivalence (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), intrusiveness, socialisation, and finally the 'helping mode' which he hoped would predominate in his own day. For DeMause, the final stages of enlightened child rearing had to await the insights of twentieth century psychologists.[15] His model in particular suffers from an ethnocentric failure to imagine humanity in a broader context than Western recorded history, and a theoretical failure to account for any biological influence on human parenting. Quite what he thought life must have been like for the previous 200,000 years of humanity's existence is never spelled out clearly, but on his account it is miraculous that the species managed to propagate itself at all for such a lengthy span of time whilst plagued by such rampant infanticidal urges.

Such bleak view of the lives of children in the medieval past has been challenged by successive historians who have marshalled an impressive array of evidence to show that medieval society did not lack a concept of childhood, and that medieval parents probably loved their children just as much as modern ones. Linda Pollock examined nearly five-hundred diaries and autobiographies spanning four centuries and concluded that 'there have been very few changes in parental care and child life from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century in the home'.[16] Shulamith Shahar found in medieval writings a clear concept of childhood as distinct from adulthood, and argued that medieval society recognised distinct stages of child development that resembled those

[14] Lloyd DeMause, *The History of Childhood* (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), 1.
[15] *Ibid.*, 51-53.
[16] Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 268.

propounded by modern developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson.[17] Barbara Hanawalt too found clear evidence of both a concept of childhood and parental affection in her analysis of London legal records.[18] Ronald Finucane showed that, in accounts of saintly miracles, depictions of parental grief following the accidental deaths of their children were every bit as poignant as might be expected in a society where the young were loved and valued.[19] Hagiographies too show saints passing through stages of childhood and adolescence which are clearly recognisable to modern readers.[20] Building upon this work, Nicholas Orme's compendious *Medieval Children* (2001) marshalled an impressive array of evidence from across medieval society that may be seen to have finally settled the matter, at least as far as late-medieval England is concerned.[21] Scholars interested in illuminating the lives of young people have branched out into the study of adolescence, youth, education, work, service, apprenticeship, sainthood and sanctity, orphans and wardship, socialisation and gender, and most recently, disability.[22] The historical consensus is now unambiguous, and the death of the Ariès thesis has been firmly and wholeheartedly declared.[23]

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[17] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990).
[18] Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1993).
[19] Ronald Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); see also Dider Lett, *L'enfant des Miracles: Enfance et Société au Moyen Âge, XIIe-XIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Editions Aubier, 1997).
See also Lett, *L'enfant.*
[20] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), Ch. 1-2.
[21] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).
[22] P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy, ed., *Youth in the Middle Ages* (York: York Medieval Press, 2004); Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Konrad Eisenbichler, ed., *The Premodern Teenager: Youth in Society 1150-1650* (CRRS Publications: Toronto, 2002); Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984); P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c.1300-1520* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Joel T. Rosenthal, ed., *Essays on Medieval Childhood: Responses to Recent Debates* (Shaun Tyas: Donington, 2007); Rosalynn Voaden, 'Visions of My Youth: Representations of the Childhood of Medieval Visionaries', *Gender & History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 665-84; Jenny Swanson, 'Childhood and Childrearing in *ad status* Sermons by Later Thirteenth Century Friars', *Journal of Medieval History* 16, no. 4 (1990): 309-331; Noël James Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship in Romance and Law* (Woodbridge, D.S. Brewer, 2001); Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Childhood and Gender in Later Medieval England', *Viator* 39, no. 1 (2008): 249-62; Merridee L. Bailey, *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England c.1400-1600* (York: York Medieval Press, 2012); Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle In Western Europe, c.1300-c.1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Jenni Kuuliala, *Childhood Disability and Social Integration in the Middle Ages: Constructions of Impairments in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Canonization Processes*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016). For surveys see Barbara Hanawalt, 'Medievalists and the Study of Childhood', *Speculum* 77, no. 2 (2002): 440-60; Louis Haas and Joel T. Rosenthal, 'Historiographical Reflections and the Revolt of the Medievalists', in *Essays on Medieval Childhood: Responses to Recent Debates,* ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Shaun Tyas: Donington, 2007), 12-26; Nicholas Orme, 'Medieval Childhood: Challenge, Change and Achievement', *Childhood in the Past* 1, no. 1 (2008): 106-19.
[23] Colin Heywood, '*Centuries of Childhood:* An Anniversary – and an Epitaph?', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3, no. 3 (2010): 341-65; Albrecht Classen, 'Philippe Ariès and the Consequences: History of Childhood, Family Relations, and Personal Emotions, Where do we Stand Today?' in *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality,* ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 1-65; P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy,

As much as the medieval evidence falls clearly on the side of Ariès's opponents, these debates about historical childhood also functioned as a proxy war between alternative ideologies and the models of human nature and culture with which historians are required to work. Historians such as Shahar, Hanawalt, and Orme explicitly rejected the teleology and ethnocentrism of Stone and DeMause.[24] In its place, they posited a 'steady state' theory of society, at least as far as childhood was concerned, grounded in a belief in the psychic unity of humanity. As Nicholas Orme said of medieval children: 'I believe them to have been ourselves, five hundred or a thousand years ago'.[25] They also sought to re-establish some features of childhood and parental love as biological facts as opposed to arbitrary constructs of Western society. Shahar noted that:

> although it cannot be valid to discuss child raising and parent-child relations purely in terms of instinct and natural conduct, there are certainly immutable factors involved. A considerable part of the developmental process is biologically determined, and the continued existence of society is impossible without the acknowledgement (and conduct attuned to this acknowledgement) that, up to a certain stage in its life, the child has need of nurturing and protection in order to survive.[26]

Although both Shahar and Hanawalt maintain that childhood is a social construct which may be historicised, they see the process of construction as operating within fairly strict parameters. As a consequence of this overall outlook, examples of child abuse which do appear in the medieval record are characterised as exceptional – a matter of individual rather than social pathology. As Shahar explains, 'Study of battering parents shows that, almost without exception, they are psychoneurotic or suffer from severe personality disturbances'.[27] Such an outlook puts many of the questions of the aetiology of child abuse beyond the reach of historians, as Hanawalt recognises: 'Modern explanations for intrafamilial violence emphasise psychological or social psychological roots that simply cannot be researched with medieval records'.[28] Child abuse then becomes like childhood itself, historicisable only within certain parameters, a naturally occurring if undesirable aspect of all human societies past, present and future.

'Introduction: After Ariès', in *Youth,* ed. Goldberg and Riddy, 1-10; Hanawalt, 'Medievalists'; Orme, 'Medieval Childhood'.

[24] See for example Hanawalt, 'Medievalists and the Study of Childhood', 441-2; Shahar, *Childhood,* 3-5.

[25] Orme, *Medieval Children,* 10.

[26] Shahar, *Childhood,* 1; see also Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 171; Pollock, *Forgotten Children,* Ch1-2.

[27] Shahar, *Childhood,* 110.

[28] Barbara Hanawalt, 'Violence in the Domestic Milieu of Late Medieval England', in *Violence in Medieval Society,* ed. Richard W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 201.

This model is now well established among historians of medieval childhood. Indeed, in 2005 Albrecht Classen declared that a 'paradigm shift' was about to occur and called on medieval scholars from different disciplines to unite around a new model.[29] However, the paradigm which Classen proclaimed was largely a refutation and negation of Ariès's original thesis rather than a substantial new direction in scholarship. As Colin Heywood points out, the new paradigm which Classen sought to forge amounted, 'rather disappointingly', to a restatement that medieval people recognised childhood as a distinct life stage and that the majority of medieval parents loved their children and were deeply concerned about their welfare.[30] This paradigm continues to underlie discussions of child abuse in the later Middle Ages. In Classen's own study he discusses the writings of the late-medieval poet Oswald von Wolkenstein. He notes that Wolkenstein discusses his own violent beating of his children, casting himself as an abusive father, but concludes in line with the work of previous scholars that such behaviour was widely condemned.[31] Loretta Dolan has studied notions of nurture and neglect and their effect on child-rearing practices in Northern England at the close of the Middle Ages. She finds that beatings were a common feature of children's upbringing but insists that the majority of such beatings were 'discipline, not violence'.[32] Sara Butler has investigated cases of infanticide and child murder in later medieval England. She notes that 'for a jury, a loving father who disciplined his child as part of a moral upbringing may have been difficult at times to distinguish from a child murderer'.[33] However, she argues that 'neither jurors nor royal officials treated child murder with indifference'.[34] Alan Kissane has recently researched cases of the rape of girls under the age of canonical consent, pointing out that the surviving court records are almost certainly only the tip of the iceberg compared to cases which went unreported. He notes that shortcomings in the justice system as well as the class and gender privilege of some rapists often allowed the guilty to go free, but argues that medieval communities in general demonstrated 'a real concern over the welfare of girls'.[35] Jeremy Goldberg's *Communal Discord: Child Abduction and Rape in the Later Middle Ages* bucks this trend, showing via a detailed case study how gendered power dynamics and the conflict between canonical and feudal ideologies in fourteenth-century England were implicated in the abduction

[29] Classen, 'Ariès', 53.
[30] Heywood, 'Centuries', 350.
[31] Classen, 'Ariès', 29-32.
[32] Loretta A. Dolan*, Nurture and Neglect: Childhood in Sixteenth-Century Northern England* (London: Routledge, 2016)*,* 214.
[33] Sara M. Butler, 'A Case of Indifference? Child Murder in Later Medieval England', *Journal of Women's History 19,* no. 4 (2007): 65.
[34] *Ibid.,* 61.
[35] Alan Kissane, '"Unnatural in Body and a Villain in Soul": Rape and Sexual Violence Towards Girls Under the Age of Canonical Consent in Late Medieval England'. In *Fourteenth Century England X,* ed. Gwilym Dodd (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2018), 110.

and rape of a ten or eleven-year-old girl.[36] Goldberg considers this to have been tantamount to rape despite the fact that it was never prosecuted as such at the time.

In the main, then, the consensus around the refutation of Ariès thus continues to shape the terms under which the discussion of medieval child maltreatment takes place. For the most part, medieval people loved and cared for their children even if, as Dolan puts it, 'the beliefs and norms of what was considered as nurturing are at times completely opposite to that of modern-day parents'.[37] Practices which went beyond socially-accepted standards of child-rearing were unusual and, where they occurred, were generally a result of the actions of aberrant individuals which were condemned by society at large even if they were not always effectively policed. As such, their aetiology lies in individual psychological factors that are beyond the reach of historians. At least as far as childrearing practices are concerned, there is a general consensus that the past should be studied in its own terms, and that presentist judgements of the sort made by the previous generation of historians must be laid to one side in order to comprehend the medieval evidence. Perhaps for this reason, no single study has yet attempted to treat together all four aspects of what are now considered to be child abuse in the Middle Ages: physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as neglect. This thesis will fill this gap in the historiography and 're-historicise' child abuse as a product not only of pathological individuals but of specific social and cultural circumstances. By engaging with psychological scholarship, I will also attempt to reach some of the internal psychological factors which have so far been considered beyond the reach of historians and explain how these relate to cultural discourses and practices.

Just as medievalists were in the process of driving the final nails into the coffin of Ariès's thesis, his ideas were enthusiastically taken up by a new generation of scholars in the burgeoning field of childhood studies. In 1990, Allison James and Alan Prout also proclaimed a 'new paradigm' in the study of childhood in their contribution to their edited volume *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood.* The first and most important tenet of this influential paradigm was that childhood should be understood first and foremost as a social construction:

[36] Jeremy Goldberg, *Communal Discord: Child Abduction and Rape in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[37] Dolan, *Nurture and Neglect,* 61.

> Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.[38]

The indebtedness of this perspective to Ariès is acknowledged: 'Rather than seeing childhood as a universal constant, whether biological or cultural, in the post-Ariès intellectual landscape it became possible to think of childhood as a variable and changing entity'.[39] The 'new paradigm' also held that childhood is a variable of social analysis which 'cannot be divorced from other variables such as class, gender and ethnicity', but that children were 'worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.[40] What is more, James and Prout insisted that children should be studied as social actors possessed of agency:

> Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them, and the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.[41]

They were critical of the developmentalist accounts which predominated in academic psychology for their tendency to emphasise rationality as the mark of adulthood. In the work of Jean Piaget, for example, James and Prout argued that childhood is conceptualised as a period of apprenticeship during which rationality develops, or 'a biologically determined stage on the path to full human status i.e. adulthood'.[42] They also critiqued traditional functionalist socialisation theories for their emphasis on outcome, on children's *becoming* rather than *being,* as well as for erasing children's agency: 'The child is portrayed, like the laboratory rat, as being at the mercy of external stimuli: passive and conforming'.[43]

The work of James and Prout has been highly influential and indeed has come to be regarded as one of the foundational texts of the field of childhood studies. Work in this field has been particularly successful in highlighting the ways in which society's conceptualisations of childhood have been shaped in the context of power relations, by discourses which have sought to maintain dominant hierarchies and, in the process, have subordinated children to adults.[44] This move to

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[38] Allison James and Alan Prout, 'A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems', in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Childhood, Classic Edition,* ed. Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Routledge, 2015 [1990]), 7.
[39] Alan Prout*, The Future of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2004), 51.
[40] James and Prout, 'New Paradigm', 7.
[41] *Ibid.,* 7.
[42] *Ibid,* 9.
[43] *Ibid.,* 11; for a defence of studies of socialisation see Robert Levine, *Childhood Socialisation: Comparative Studies of Parenting, Learning and Educational Change* (Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, 2003).
[44] See Allison James and Alan Prout, ed., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Childhood, Classic Edition,* ed. Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Routledge, 2015); Allison

'deconstruct' childhood was consciously inspired by the work that feminist scholars have undertaken in challenging gender norms. As Chris Jenks puts it:

> the history of the social sciences has attested to a sequential critical address and debunking of the dominant ideologies of capitalism in relation to social class, colonialism in relation to race, and patriarchy in relation to gender; but as yet the ideology of development in relation to childhood has remained relatively intact.[45]

Jenks thus criticises the elision of the child with the 'savage' in nineteenth-century social thought as primitive or 'natural' as opposed to civilised and cultured, a representation of 'untutored difference' to be juxtaposed with adult society.[46] He also criticises socialisation theorists such as Talcott Parsons for their tendency to equate childhood with deviance, or a threat to the social order which must be controlled:

> The child, like the deviant, signifies difference. In an un-socialised state the child is manifestly profane; it threatens to bring down social worlds, and the threat can only be mollified within theory by treating the child through an archetype as proto-adult.[47]

Such arguments stand in marked contrast to the consensus view that has emerged in medieval studies, that the general attitude of medieval society towards its offspring was positive and nurturing, and that although childhood is a 'social construct' that changes over time, a significant force shaping that construction has been the realities of biological development rather than the operation of discursive power. Perhaps Jenks's most important theoretical insight is that the study of childhood can be illuminating not only of children themselves and their lives but also of the social and discursive structures of society.[48]

When he moves from theoretical to historical assessments of childhood, however, Jenks is on shakier ground. He concurs with Ariès that a fundamental shift took place during the eighteenth century, and that children only emerged in history in the wake of the Middle Ages.[49] Although he briefly mentions that alternative accounts have been presented, citing Pollock and Hanawalt among others, he asserts that 'the critiques of Ariès rarely succeed in achieving more than a modification of his central ideas'.[50] Indeed, he somewhat misleadingly quotes Pollock's statement that 'some writers feel that the sources which are available for the history of childhood are so

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James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout, ed., *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Chris Jenks, *Childhood,* 2nd Edn. (London: Routledge, 2005).

[45] Jenks, *Childhood,* 5.

[46] *Ibid.,* 5.

[47] *Ibid.*, 19.

[48] *Ibid.,* 51.

[49] *Ibid.,* 57.

[50] *Ibid.,* 59.

problematic that the subject cannot be studied' as if it were an admission of defeat.[51] Jenks argues that the history of childhood is characterised by a shift from a 'Dionysian' image of childhood as wilful, obdurate and potentially evil to an idea of the 'Apollonian' child, construed as 'angelic, innocent and untainted by the world'.[52] Following Ariès, he locates the major turning point in this narrative in the mid-eighteenth century with Rousseau's 'announcement of the modern child'.[53] Jenks argues that this coincides with the paradigm laid out by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish,* whereby brutal public displays of punishment gave way in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to more subtle forms of coercive control.[54] His portrayal of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century parenting is correspondingly stark:

> Stemming from this period ... a severe view of childhood is sustained, one that saw socialisation as almost a battle but certainly a form of combat where the headstrong and stubborn subject had to be 'broken', but all for its own good. This harsh campaign of child-rearing persisted through the Puritanism of the seventeenth century, with rods not being spared in order to spoil children.[55]

In contrast, the idea of Apollonian childhood suited the needs of modernity in which control of the individual moved from the outside to the inside. This required the child to be more 'visible' in order that he or she could be monitored, hence the 'birth' of childhood in this period: 'the crudity of the old regime of control in social relations gives way to the modern disciplinary apparatus, the post-Rousseauian way of looking at and monitoring the child in mind and body'.[56]

Jenks's ideas have proved highly influential and his book *Childhood* has received over two thousand citations. It is important to note that other scholars in the field have engaged more substantively with the critiques of Ariès as these have grown in number and force.[57] However, on other occasions Ariès's thesis continues to be presented with merely a brief acknowledgement that criticism exists, and *Centuries of Childhood* continues to be the recommended historical reading on the subject in textbooks.[58] The fundamental paradigm which Ariès established thus continues to influence the ways in which the discipline conceptualises the construction of childhood over

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[51] *Ibid.,* 58; Pollock, *Forgotten Children,* 64.
[52] Jenks*, Childhood,* 62-70.
[53] *Ibid.*, 66.
[54] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1991 [1975]).
[55] Jenks, *Childhood,* 63.
[56] *Ibid.*, 68.
[57] William Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood,* 4th Edn. (London: Sage Publications, 2015), 66-86; Prout, *Future,* 9-10.
[58] Alison James and Adrian James, *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies, 2nd Edition,* (Los Angeles and London: Sage, 2012), 1-3; 14-16; Marek Tesar, 'Childhood Studies, An Overview of', in *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory,* ed. Michael. A Peters (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2016).

historical time, and there is a corresponding tendency to see many ideas about childhood as products of enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.[59] The teleology which characterised Ariès's narrative is still present, and the discipline still lacks a fleshed-out concept of medieval childhood, perhaps because its radically constructionist paradigm is incompatible with or unreceptive to the work of scholars such as Shahar, Hanawalt and Orme. As a consequence, 'the medieval' as it is implicitly constructed within the discipline continues to function as a convenient but fictive historical 'other' – a time when the concept of childhood was embryonic or unformed, awaiting the conditions of modernity for its full realisation.

In some ways then the responses to Ariès in the field of Childhood Studies have more in common with the approaches of earlier historians such as Stone and DeMause than they do with more recent scholarship on medieval childhood. The larger narratives upon which they draw originated in poststructuralist theory and tended to emphasise regression as much as progression, but they have nonetheless tended to see Western modernity as a turning point, and today's concept of childhood as an arbitrary construct emerging out of the conditions of liberal capitalism. Their often insightful critiques are generally of modern rather than medieval society, but like DeMause they are motivated by a conviction that children were and continue to be systematically oppressed and that studying childhood could improve the lot of children in the future. Jenks, for instance, encourages his readers to challenge and revise their assumptions about childhood, hoping that 'in this way the child might be reinvented or at least recovered positively'.[60] The double hermeneutic of the social sciences identified by Anthony Giddens – that sociologists influence social concepts and categories in the process of analysing them – was held to be 'acutely present'.[61] If our concept of childhood bears little or no relation to biological realities and is instead a product of arbitrary social forces, then a judicious application of discursive pressure should be all that is required to fundamentally change society's relationship to its young. In other words, if childhood is arbitrarily 'constructed' it can be deliberately 'reconstructed' along more congenial lines.

More recently, Alan Prout has argued that the field of childhood studies should move away from this harder form of constructionism. He argues that this paradigm has simply replaced biological reductionism with sociological reductionism, and criticises constructionist accounts for being evasive about the extent to which biological factors impinge on their arguments.[62] In its place, he

[59] Mark Tesar, Sophia Rodriguez and David W Kupfrerman, 'Philosophy and Pedagogy of Childhood, Adolescence and Youth', *Global Studies of Childhood* 6, no. 2 (2016): 169-76.
[60] Jenks, *Childhood,* 4.
[61] Anthony Giddens, *The New Rules of Sociological Method* (London: Hutchinson, 1976) James and Prout, 'New Paradigm', 7.
[62] Prout, *Future,* 63.

argues that childhood must be theorised as a 'nature-culture hybrid', and that the interdisciplinary outlook of the field should be extended to bridge the gap between the natural, social and human sciences.[63] He also argues that the study of childhood is essential to the study of social reproduction, and criticises theorists such as Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu for paying insufficient attention to the ways in which children influence this process:

> Both seem to treat children as passively and gradually accreting or accumulating embodied dispositions in the transition to the full sociality of adulthood. There is little (or only equivocal) recognition of the possibility that children actively appropriate and transform as well as absorb.[64]

Influenced by the work of Bruno Latour, he argues that the study of childhood can help to transcend modernist binaries such as nature/culture and structure/agency, as well as bridge the gap between the macro and the micro in cultural analysis.[65] A similar set of arguments have also been made in the field of anthropology, particularly in the subfield of cognitive anthropology which explores the kind of interdisciplinarity which Prout advocates. Christina Toren suggests that current theories of socialisation are inadequate and fundamentally ahistorical in that they tend to assume that the endpoint of socialisation is known. In other words, 'at least with respect to cognition, to their grasp of particular concepts, children simply become – with perhaps some minor variation – what their elders already are'.[66] Instead, she proposes that children constitute their own cultural understandings as a result of their age, cognitive abilities and the microhistory of their relations with others. She suggests that the ways in which children form these understandings are crucial to understanding the cultures which they inhabit.

In her insistence that cultural change arises in the process of intergenerational transmission, Toren's ideas echo the basic framework of Lloyd DeMause's 'psychogenic theory' of history. Both see an important and overlooked source of cultural change in the process of interaction between children's innate and developing psychologies and the cultural norms and values to which they are exposed. However, while DeMause's reliance on Freudian theory lacks empirical and cross-cultural validity and places undue emphasis on the parent-child relationships, cognitive anthropologists advocate a more nuanced approach, taking into account a broader range of social, cultural and psychological factors. The same interactive process between childhood cognition and cultural norms has been proposed as a mechanism for cultural stability as well as change. In an

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[63] *Ibid.*, 110-11.
[64] *Ibid.*, 106; For similar criticisms and an alternative theory of reproduction, see William Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood, 4th Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2015), 1-29.
[65] See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
[66] Christina Toren, 'Making History: The Significance of Childhood Cognition for a Comparative Anthropology of Mind', *Man* 28 (1993): 461.

influential article provocatively entitled, 'Why Don't Anthropologists Like Children', Lawrence Hirschfeld suggests that an understanding of developmental psychology is essential to the study of cultural reproduction: 'Many cultural forms are stable and widely distributed just because children find them easy to think and easy to learn'.[67] Hirschfeld argues on this basis that child-focused research should occupy the attention not only of specialists but also of the mainstream. His own work focusses on the ways in which children construct ideas about social groups and the implications which this could have for undoing damaging race and gender stereotypes.[68] Common to all these approaches is the conviction that children must be studied not only as an interesting appendage to adult societies but as a fundamental constituent of them, and that children are important contributors to broader social processes and to the construction and reconstruction of cultural values. It is from this perspective that this thesis will approach medieval childhood.

The importance of studying childhood in past cultures is also being recognised in the field of archaeology, stimulated in part by Katheryn Kamp's article 'Where Have All the Children Gone?'.[69] Influenced by the 'new sociology' of childhood, Kamp argued that archaeology's focus on adulthood had impoverished its view of past cultures: 'It is only our ethnocentric construction of childhood as a time of little economic, political, or social importance that has blinded us to the need to use it as an analytic category'.[70] Medievalists have been quick to heed the call, and the archaeology of medieval childhood is now a burgeoning area of research.[71] Carenza Lewis points out that children outnumbered adults in most medieval settlements, and shows how features such as seemingly random holes, flattened stones, and collections of pebbles look very much like the evidence of children's games as they are depicted in historical, literary, and art-historical sources.[72] Such features have generally been interpreted as evidence of 'light industrial' or 'ritual activity', but Lewis argues that they may in fact represent the 'sticky fingerprints' of children on the archaeological record. Sally Smith has argued that medieval children contributed to social

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[67] Lawrence Hirschfeld, 'Why Don't Anthropologists Like Children?' *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 2 (2002): 611-627.
[68] Lawrence Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making: Cognition, Culture and the Child's Construction of Human Kinds* (Cambridge: MA, MIT Press, 1996); 'On a Folk Theory of Society: Children, Evolution, and Mental Representations of Social Groups', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5, no. 2 (2001): 107-117;'The Myth of Mentalizing and the Primacy of Folk Sociology', in *Navigating the social world: What infants, children, and other species can teach us,* ed. Mahzarin Banaji and Susan Gelman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101-6.
[69] Katheryn A. Kamp, 'Where Have All the Children Gone?: The Archaeology of Childhood', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 8, no. 1 (2001): 1-34.
[70] *Ibid.,* 2.
[71] For a recent overview, see D. M. Hadley and K. A Kramer, 'Introduction: Archaeological Approaches to Medieval Childhood, c. 500-1500', in *Medieval Childhood: Archaeological Approaches,* ed. D. M. Hadley and K. A. Kramer (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 1-25.
[72] Carenza Lewis, 'Children's Play in the Later Medieval English Countryside', *Childhood in the Past* 2, no. 1 (2009): 86-108.

reproduction, illustrating this via an analysis of space in late-medieval villages.[73] Medieval archaeologists have also championed the value of interdisciplinarity in the study of medieval childhood, and the recognition that greater cross-disciplinary study of past childhoods is an urgent necessity has prompted the foundation of the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past and its journal *Childhood in the Past.*[74] Historians of the later Middle Ages too have begun to embrace the perspectives offered by sociological theories of children's agency and their role in social reproduction.[75]

The charge of erasing the 'sticky fingerprints' of childhood may perhaps be levelled to some extent at medieval literary scholarship. As Daniel Kline puts it, 'literary scholars still seem prone to "the Ariès effect" and have not attended to the widespread appearance of children and childhood in Middle English texts'.[76] As well as Kline's own edited collection on literature for children, two recent monographs have gone some way towards remedying this and demonstrate that the importance of studying childhood is gaining traction in the field.[77] J. Allan Mitchell's *Becoming Human: The Matter of the Medieval Child* draws attention to the continuities between the Middle Ages and today in ways of grappling with the fundamental questions of human ontogeny.[78] Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour and Actor Network Theory, his book contains a wide-ranging discussion of toys and children's play centred around the figurine of a miniature mounted knight, and of the opportunities for socialising, communing and disciplining around the table or 'mess'. His work recognises that questions of childhood are of fundamental importance to the ways in which human beings conceptualise and structure the social and even the physical world. Eve Salisbury's *Chaucer and the Child* draws attention to the fact that children have often been overlooked in Chaucer's work, and argues for the necessity of attending to their presence.[79] Salisbury also attempts to liberate the author himself from his paternalistic image by constructing

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[73] Sally V. Smith, 'The Spaces of Late Medieval Peasant Childhood: Children and Social Reproduction', *Medieval Childhood: Archaeological Approaches,* ed. D. M. Hadley and K. A. Kramer (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 57-74.

[74] Carenza Lewis, 'Interdisciplinarity, Archaeology and the Study of Medieval Childhood', in *Medieval Childhood: Archaeological Approaches,* ed. D. M. Hadley and K. A. Kramer (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014), 145-70; Sally Crawford and Carenza Lewis, 'Childhood Studies and the Study of Childhood in the Past', *Childhood in the Past* 1, no. 1 (2008): 5-16.

[75] Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Ville Vuolanto, 'Children and Agency: Religion as Socialisation in Late Antiquity and the Late Medieval West' *Childhood in the Past* 4, no. 1 (2011): 79-99; Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, 'Socialisation Gone Astray? Children and Demonic Possession in the Later Middle Ages', in *The Darker Side of Childhood in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,* ed. Katariina Mustakillio and Christian Laes (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), 95-112.

[76] Daniel T. Kline, '"That child may doon to fadres reverence": Children and Childhood in Middle English Literature', in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary,* ed. Adrienne E. Gavin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21-22.

[77] Daniel T. Kline, ed., *Medieval Literature for Children* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[78] J. Allan Mitchell, *Becoming Human: The Matter of the Medieval Child* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[79] Eve Salisbury, *Chaucer and the Child* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

the idea of 'Child Chaucer', who is 'resistant and rebellious, mischievous and sly, obtuse and unpredictable, noisy and carefree, and as capable of conformity and obedience as he is of resisting the conventions that constrain him'.[80] Other areas that have attracted the attention of literary scholars include conduct literature and the depictions of the child Jesus in Middle English renditions of the apocryphal infancy gospels.[81]

That depictions of violence against children are common in Middle English literature has not gone unnoticed. Kline notes that when children appear 'they are often abused in some way – regularly threatened, violated, killed, or already dead'.[82] Kline argues that the figure of the violated child functions as a discursive opportunity to rearticulate and reproduce the dominant values of late-medieval culture.[83] Salisbury suggests that where children and particularly infants are abused or neglected in Chaucer's writings, 'there seems to be a clear indication of the failure of society to protect its most vulnerable members'.[84] The common trope of incest between parents and children and particularly between fathers and daughters has been the subject of detailed research by Elizabeth Archibald. She argues that there was an increase in such stories from the twelfth century and that tales of incest function discursively as examples of extreme moral or spiritual degradation.[85]

Although many such abused children appear in the pages of Middle English romance, no systematic attempt has yet been made to analyse portrayals of childhood across the genre.[86] This may be partly due to the necessity of ridding romances of their pejorative association with children

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[80] *Ibid.,* 7.

[81] Felicity Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text', *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 66-86; Ashley and Clark, ed. *Medieval Conduct*; Juanita Feros Rhys, ed. *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); Julie Nelson Couch, 'Misbehaving God: The Case of the Christ Child in MS Laud Misc. 108 "Infancy of Jesus Christ"', in *Mindful Spirit in Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honour of Elizabeth Kirk,* ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 31-43; Daniel T. Kline, 'The Audience and Function of the Apocryphal Infancy of Jesus Christ in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108', in *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108: The Shaping of English Vernacular Narrative*, ed. Kimberley Bell and Julie Nelson Couch (Boston: Brill, 2011): 137-56; Mary Dzon, *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

[82] Daniel T. Kline, 'Textuality, Subjectivity, and Violence: Theorising the Figure of the Child in Middle English Literature', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 12 (1995): 23; see also Jost; F. Xavier Baron, 'Children and Violence in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*', *Journal of Psychohistory* 7, no. 1 (1979): 77-103.

[83] Kline, 'Textuality, Subjectivity, and Violence', 23-38; Kline, 'Children and Childhood', 22.

[84] Salisbury, *Chaucer and the Child,* 106.

[85] Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); 'The Appalling Dangers of Family Life: Incest in Medieval Literature', in *Medieval Family Roles: A Book of Essays*, ed. Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre (New York: Garland, 1996), 157-72; 'Incest Between Adults and Children in the Medieval World', in *Children and Sexuality: From the Greeks to the Great War*, ed. George Rousseau (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 85-107.

[86] For an analysis of childhood in Old French romance, see Phyllis Gaffney, *Constructions of Childhood and Youth in Old French Narrative* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

which has led all too often to their wholesale critical dismissal.[87] It may be assumed with some confidence that children were part of the romance audience in the later Middle Ages.[88] These children may have included junior household servants such as William Slywright the kitchen knave and John Ramsey the butcher's knave whose names appear in a manuscript containing *Sir Isumbras*.[89] However, where romance has been studied from the perspective of child readers, there has sometimes been a tendency to emphasise readings that are black and white, simplified, or straightforwardly didactic.[90] These have tended to portray children as passive readers rather than active participants in the construction of romance worlds. Phillipa Hardman for example suggests that the combination of romances and conduct texts could have provided 'a coherent programme of simple, practical instruction on appropriate behaviour'.[91] In this thesis, I will suggest that a recognition of children's engagement with the genre need not entail either a return to characterising it as 'children's literature' or closing down all but straightforward or didactic readings. Instead, I hope to show that acknowledging children's presence both inside and outside the texts can open up new possibilities for understanding the ways in which romances discursively construct ideas of the medieval social world. Medieval romances were not *for* children any more than medieval houses, fields and villages were exclusively for children, but they were almost certainly used by children, and I will argue that here too children have left behind their mark upon the narratives.

The interdisciplinary study of childhood then is a burgeoning area of research in which medievalists have played and must continue to play a hugely important role. The work of Phillipe Ariès has proved highly influential and has sparked a variety of responses which have all contributed in different ways to the cross-disciplinary and cross-temporal understanding of children and childhood which is emerging. His work has compelled medievalists to pay close attention to the portrayals of childhood in their sources and led to a richer understanding of the lives of children in the past. It has also helped to spark a new sociology of childhood which has questioned and critiqued the ways in which children are perceived and studied in academic and popular discourse today. As medievalists have recognised, engaging with recent work in childhood studies has the potential to enrich understandings of historical childhood in various ways. Moving

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[87] Nicola McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction', in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance,* ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 1-21.
[88] See Orme, *Medieval Children,* Ch. 8.
[89] Michael Johnston, 'New Evidence for the Social Reach of "Popular Romance": The Books of Household Servants', *Viator* 43, no. 2 (2012): 303-32.
[90] Phillipa Hardman, 'Popular Romances and Young Readers', in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance,* ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Corey James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 15--64; Mary E. Shaner, 'Instruction and Delight: Medieval Romances as Children's Literature', *Poetics Today,* vol. 13, no. 1 (1992): 5-15.
[91] Phillipa Hardman, 'Introduction', in *The Heege Manuscript: A Facsimile of National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.3.1,* ed. Phillipa Hardman, *Leeds Texts and Monographs,* New Series 16 (Leeds, 2000), 27.

beyond traditional socialisation theories can highlight the role which children play in their own 'socialising' and in societal reproduction. It can open up ways of looking at the relationship of childhood to discursive power and the ways in which the conceptualisation of childhood impacts negatively upon the way in which children are treated and maintains their status as subordinate to adults. Seeing childhood as an identity which children assume as well as a social category to which they are assigned can lead to a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of meanings that childhood can take on for individuals across the life course.[92] Although there will be some important points of disagreement, I will draw upon the insights generated by this body of work throughout this thesis.

At the same time, medievalists have much to contribute to the new social studies of childhood, which sometimes lack a broader historical perspective and tend to over-emphasise novelty over continuity and invention or innovation over adaptation and evolution. Indeed, Patrick Ryan has argued that many of the ways of looking at childhood proposed by the 'new paradigm' had their roots further back in history.[93] He points out, for example, that the works of Dickens are replete with children conceived as social actors exercising agency. As I hope to show in this thesis, the same may be said for medieval romance, medieval schoolbooks, medieval court records and even medieval conduct texts. Ryan also suggests that greater engagement between historians and social scientists would benefit both disciplines:

> Interdisciplinarity should proceed from historians to other social scientists as well. Historians of childhood have a responsibility to address how contemporary works about childhood relate to past ones. Strengthening the link between historians and the contemporary social scientists who study childhood is to the advantage of both groups.[94]

I hope this thesis will contribute to the productive dialogue between medievalists and social scientists working in the field of childhood studies which is now beginning to emerge. I hope to demonstrate not only that the roots of many of the enlightenment ideas go back further than is generally supposed, but that childhood in the later Middle Ages had many of its own particular features which were deeply embedded in medieval discourse and implicated in the ways in which medieval people perceived the natural and social world. Far from embryonic or unformed, medieval discourses of childhood were rich, diverse, complex and above all consequential, playing

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[92] Allison James, *Childhood Identities: The Self and Social Relationships in the Experience of the Child* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993); Jennifer Hockney and Allison James, ed., *Social Identities Across the Life Course* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
[93] Patrick J. Ryan, 'How New Is the "New" Social Study of Childhood? The Myth of a Paradigm Shift' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 4 (2008): 553-76.
[94] *Ibid.*, 555.

an essential role in structuring and reproducing the medieval social hierarchy. Just as today's concepts of childhood have been implicated in maintaining children's subordinate social position, medieval concepts of childhood too could profoundly impact the treatment children received, and, as I will argue, could lead all too often to their victimisation and abuse. I hope to show that, by paying close attention to the sources, it is possible to see the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of some of these children begin to emerge. First, however, it is necessary to establish criteria by which they may be identified.

What is a Child?

As John Boswell has observed, '"Child" is itself not an uncomplicated term'.[95] Medieval culture contained multiple ideas about children and childhood which varied according to the discourse in which they were situated – philosophical, medical, theological, pedagogical, didactic or poetic – as well as along the familiar axes of time, place, gender, ethnicity and social status. Perhaps the most obvious place to begin is the various texts which discuss the ages of man. These divided man's life (and occasionally woman's too) into various stages each with its own particular traits appropriate to the time of life. Three-stage theories derived from Aristotle and generally posited a period of development or growth that lasted until around 25, a period of stasis from roughly 25 to 45, and then a period of decline from 45 until 70.[96] This scheme underlies the Middle English poem *The Parlement of the Thre Ages*.[97] Four-stage theories connected the stages of life to the seasons of the year (spring, summer, autumn, winter) and the four corresponding humors (blood, red choler, black choler, phlegm). These were popular with medieval physiologists and in medical writings, and generally included the phases of *pueritia* (childhood), *adolescentia* (adolescence), *iuventus* (youth), and *senium* (old age). One of the few texts to deal with the Ages of Woman, the Middle English translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum,* followed a four-stage model.[98] Six and seven-stage theories were more popular with theologians and astrologers, and tended to further subdivide childhood into two stages by adding *infantia* (infancy). The Church Father Isidore of Seville (c.560-636) propounded an influential six-stage model which included *infantia* (infancy) from 0-7, followed by *pueritia* (7-14), *adolescentia* (15-28), *iuventus* (29-50), *aetas*

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[95] John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (London: Penguin Press, 1989), 26.

[96] See J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Mary Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael E. Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age: The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought, 1250-1350* (New York and London: University Press of America, 1989); Youngs, *Life Cycle*; Isabelle Cochelin and Karen Smyth, ed., *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2013).

[97] Warren Ginsburg, ed., *Wynnere and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992).

[98] M. A. Manzalaoui, ed., *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions,* Vol. 1, EETS, O.S. 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

senioris (51-70) and *senectus* (70-death). This was adapted by Bartholomaeus Anglicus in his thirteenth-century encyclopedia *De proprietatibus rerum,* which was subsequently translated into English in the fourteenth century by John Trevisa.[99] Poems expounding on this theme – often in order to stress the transience of this life in relation to the next – can also be found circulating in manuscripts belonging to mercantile and gentry households, so they likely exerted some significant influence over perceptions of children in later medieval England.[100]

To treat these texts which originate in Latinate clerical discourse as defining childhood as it was experienced by the majority of late-medieval English children would however be problematic. As Jeremy Goldberg has pointed out, these abstract conventions do not map straightforwardly onto social practice, which in fact recognised a variety of potential thresholds between childhood and maturity which varied according to gender and social rank.[101] According to canon law, the age at which people could freely contract marriages was fourteen for boys and twelve for girls. Boys entered the tithing at twelve in peasant society, but the age at which they fully came of age varied from manor to manor between around fourteen and twenty-one.[102] Aristocratic boys usually came of age and could inherit at twenty-one, a full six years later than their sisters who came of age at around fifteen.[103] A boy in school might be still in a similar position of subordination to his master at seventeen or eighteen as he had been when he entered the school aged eleven, whereas a girl married at fourteen might very quickly find herself taking on adult roles and responsibilities including caring for children of her own. Indeed, for women, the most important divisions in life may have been between maidenhood, wifehood and widowhood rather than childhood, adolescence and youth or old age.[104] As Goldberg argues, the transition from childhood to adulthood in later medieval England is best conceptualised as a process rather than an event, with different responsibilities and degrees of autonomy being acquired at different ages.[105] In light of this, I will refrain from adopting a strict definition of childhood for the purposes of this thesis but will try to judge the examples I discuss on a case-by-case basis and, where possible, to explain my reasoning throughout.

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[99] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum,* 2 Vols., trans. John Trevisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1988).
[100] See below Ch. 1.
[101] P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Life and Death: The Ages of Man', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500,* ed. Rosemary Horrox and Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[102] *Ibid.,* 422.
[103] *Ibid.,* 422.
[104] Cordelia Beattie, 'The Life Cycle: The Ages of Medieval Women', in *A Cultural History of Women in the Middle Ages,* ed. Kim Phillips (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 15-37.
[105] Goldberg, 'Life and Death', 421.

An important way in which medieval concepts of childhood varied from ours is that we have a well-established concept of 'adulthood' which does not have an obvious counterpart in late-medieval England. The word 'adult' did not enter the vernacular until the mid-sixteenth century: the Latin *adultus* from which it originated was confined to a small section of the population and used primarily in the context of theological discussions of baptism.[106] This is not to suggest a 'reverse Ariès' thesis that medieval society in some sense lacked a concept of adulthood, although it is worth noting that in seeking to denaturalise and historicise the concept of childhood, Ariès inadvertently took for granted that the concept of adulthood was universal and natural. Medieval society had multiple concepts that together did much of the work that our modern idea of 'adulthood' does today. Deborah Youngs has suggested that 'middle age' or the middle stage(s) of life in ages of man literature encompassed many of the ideas of modern adulthood, including physical strength, rationality, social responsibility and economic productivity, although unlike our modern concept of adulthood this excludes old age.[107] Other relevant discourses include maturity, father/motherhood, husband/wifehood, woman/manhood and 'age', which is often contrasted with 'youth' as in Chaucer's Miller's Tale: 'Youthe and elde is often at debaat'.[108] However, the child-adult binary which has come to define our modern concept of childhood was far less salient in medieval society. Although we recognise many stages of life including adolescence, youth, middle age and old age, all these may be subsumed today under the umbrella categories of 'child' and 'adult'. In the Middle Ages, there were no 'two-stage' ages of man theories analogous to our own. For all the meanings that 'childhood' could encompass in later medieval England therefore it did not straightforwardly mean 'not adult'. As I will argue, this had important consequences for how childhood was conceptualised and the ways in which it functioned discursively.

It is customary at this point to mention that childhood is a social or cultural construct: i.e. that concepts of childhood vary across time and place, that they do not straightforwardly reflect biological immaturity, and that we certainly cannot assume our own modern Western concept of childhood to be universal and natural. While all three of these latter statements are undoubtedly true, there are problems with asserting on that basis that childhood can or should be defined as a socio-cultural construct. The phrase 'childhood is a social construct' admits at least two readings. On one reading, it is essentially tautological: 'childhood' (i.e. the concept of childhood) is socially constructed. It implies that 'childhood' is a construct only in the sense that *all* knowledge is constructed: because the natural world is unknowable without observers and those observers tend

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[106] A search of the Brepols Library of Latin Texts reveals examples of this usage in Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham; http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/QuickSearch.aspx

[107] Deborah Youngs, 'Adulthood in Medieval Europe: The Prime of Life or Midlife Crisis?', in *Medieval Life Cycles,* ed. Cochelin and Smyth, 239-64.

[108] Larry Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, *3rd Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 68.

to be part of societies. On another reading, however, the phrase implies a more startling claim: childhood (i.e. biological immaturity itself) is in fact an arbitrary product of the social imagination. At its most extreme, this version implies that any apparent differences between five and fifty-year-olds are produced entirely through discourse rather than reflecting reality. Most researchers of childhood use the phrase in something closer to the former than the latter sense, but as Prout has argued, this often justifies treating childhood *as if* it were an arbitrary product of the social imagination and 'bracketing out' questions of biology for the purposes of research. This not only leads to impoverished accounts of childhood but also maintains the idea that 'nature' and 'culture' are separate binary entities which can or should be studied in isolation of one another.[109] Concepts of childhood represent varying socio-cultural *interpretations* of a range of biological and psychological phenomena which, like all interpretations, must be situated in the context of power relations in human societies. To assume that the underlying biological 'text' permits one straightforward interpretation in isolation of socio-cultural context is the conceit of positivism, yet to study only the different interpretations whilst disavowing the 'text' to which they refer is ultimately equally untenable.

In practice, the built-in ambiguity of the phrase 'childhood is socially constructed' also allows it to mean very different things to different people. Hanawalt and Shahar, for example, along with Jenks, James and Prout, all refer to childhood as 'socially constructed', where in fact they are closer to the opposite poles of the nature/culture debate. Jenks sees childhood largely as an arbitrary product of discursive power and Hanawalt has argued for a 'strong biological basis for child development as opposed to decisive cultural influences'.[110] Their apparent harmony relies on the fact that both are implicitly positioning themselves in opposition to a strongly determinist position that childhood is *purely* a biological fact and that it is therefore *exactly* the same at all times and in all places. As Sally Crawford puts it in her book on Anglo-Saxon childhood:

> childhood is essentially a social construct – the childhood you experience is dependent not on biological growth, *which would mean that all children everywhere and at all times were treated in exactly the same way*, but rather is a product of a particular social setting [emphasis added].[111]

This relatively low bar – which includes the great majority of biologists in the ranks of social constructionists – means that the language of social constructionism misses the useful distinctions between different academic perspectives on childhood which do legitimately co-exist. Furthermore, it also elides the useful distinction which can be made between social categories

[109] Prout, *Future.*
[110] Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound,* 171; Shahar, *Childhood,* 1; Jenks, *Childhood.*
[111] Sally Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), xiv.

which are purely arbitrary and those which at least to some extent map onto biological differences. Crawford gives a useful illustration of this distinction in the introduction to *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*:

> social categories, such as priests or slaves, are not biologically predetermined – a slave does not have to be a slave except that society makes him so; there is nothing about him, physically, that decrees he should be a slave as opposed to a freeman … but all societies have children who are, inevitably, different to adults, and therefore need to be treated as such.[112]

Most writers who argue that childhood is a social construct would not go so far as to suggest that the biological distinction between child/adult is as arbitrary as that between a priest and a slave. In practice, then, the statement that childhood is a social construct gives relatively little indication as to the writer's position on the important questions relating to how they perceive childhood as a social and/or biological category.

In this thesis, then, I will attempt to tread a line between the many important insights of constructionism and broader, more 'universalist' (i.e. species-level) insights, acknowledging roles for both biological factors and discursive power in creating medieval conceptions of childhood. Extended juvenility is a characteristic feature of our species, but cultures by no means interpret this uniformly even if there are often cross-cultural parallels.[113] Importantly, recognition that childhood is in part biological need not and indeed must not entail making pejorative judgements about children's inherent 'lack' or 'deficiency'. It is possible, for example, to recognise that human children in most socio-cultural circumstances tend to engage in play which is qualitatively different from adult work – a characteristic we share with the young of other species – whilst simultaneously critiquing the dismissal or devaluation of children's play as lesser or worthless.[114] We can recognise that children are sometimes not as socially 'competent' as adults and that a considerable part of their 'socialising' involves gaining expertise in navigating the social world, but we can do this without erasing their agency, assessing their value by their adherence to adult norms, or reducing all dissenting activities to either incompetence or pathological deviance. We can acknowledge that the young often have less knowledge and experience than the old, and that developing brains take time to be able to learn and process complex ideas, without maintaining that this invalidates children's feelings or perspectives or renders them any less worthy of consideration.

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[112] *Ibid.*, xiv.
[113] David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings,* 2nd Edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6-9.
[114] On children's play across cultures see Lancy, *Anthropology,* 174-80.

What is Abuse?

As the report of the Italian visitor to England with which I began this introduction demonstrates, questions of the right and wrong treatment of children are fundamentally intertwined with the matter of perspective. The modern world has taken steps in recent years towards creating cross-cultural consensus on this matter with the implementation in 1990 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has become the most widely ratified international treaty currently in existence with 196 countries having agreed to abide by its strictures, the USA being the notable exception.[115] It codifies the idea of the child as an autonomous individual possessed of certain rights, and invests nation states with the responsibility for protecting children from behaviour which infringes upon those rights, including 'all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse'.[116] In later medieval England, however, no such framework existed: there was no clear analogue to our modern concept of 'child abuse' which encompasses physical, sexual and emotional abuse as well as neglect. As I hope to show, this does not mean that medieval society drew no distinction between the right and wrong treatment of children in these areas. Rather, there existed in medieval society multiple competing ideas about what children were, how they should be treated, and how, to what extent, and by whom they should be protected. These can be found in a range of sources including didactic and pedagogical literature, legal texts, medical and philosophical writings, sermons, romances, conduct texts and children's schoolbooks. This thesis is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of these ideas and to arrive at a definitive medieval concept of child abuse. Rather, it is an attempt to trace some of these ideas through a variety of discourses and social practices and understand their impact on the lives of medieval children.

Since the term 'child abuse' did not exist during the Middle Ages, it is important to consider the question of anachronism in using it to frame this discussion. The modern concept of child abuse which is the basis of child protection efforts today is generally seen to have arisen in the 1970s following the publication in 1968 of *The Battered Child*.[117] However, like the concept of childhood, we should be wary of assuming that the concept of child abuse is entirely a modern construct.

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[115] *Convention on the Rights of the Child,* 1990, United Nations Treaty Series Online, https://treaties.un.org/ [accessed July 30, 2019].
[116] Unicef UK, 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/ [accessed July 30, 2019].
[117] Ray E. Helfer and C. Henry Kempe, ed., *The Battered Child* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968). See Brian Corby, *Child Abuse: Towards a Knowledge Base, 3rd Edition* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 8.

Louise Jackson notes that the term 'sexually abused' dates at least to the mid-nineteenth century and suggests that Victorians 'would certainly have recognised the term "child sexual abuse"'.[118] The conflation of extreme physical punishment and sexual molestation under the umbrella of 'abuse' goes back at least to the seventeenth century and to the *Children's Petition* of 1669, later republished in 1698 as *Lex Forcia,* with the subtitle 'being a sensible address to the Parliament, for an Act to remedy the foul abuse of children at schools'.[119] Keith Thomas has described these as 'a searing exposure of the sexual perversions involved in corporal punishment'.[120] Neglecting the perceived duties of proper parenting could also be described as abuse. In 1579 John Jones complained of 'the abuse of sundry parentes' who indulged their children and failed to bring them in accordance with Christian discipline, comparing them to 'Apes, who with ouer-diere embracing their yong ones, doe strangle them'.[121] Whilst I do not wish to deny the particular nature of the modern framework of child abuse with its associated aetiology and treatment, many of the ideas contained therein did not spring suddenly into existence in the second half of the twentieth century.

The idea that child abuse is in some sense a historical phenomenon has been present since its inception. *The Battered Child,* one of the foundational texts which gave rise to the modern concept, begins its opening chapter thus:

> Maltreatment of children has been justified for many centuries by the belief that severe physical punishment was necessary either to maintain discipline, to transmit educational ideas, to please certain gods, or to dispel spirits.[122]

The chapter goes on to discuss the whipping of children on holy Innocents day and the brutality of ancient, medieval and early modern schoolmasters, before noting that 'Western education gradually began to yield to the demands of exemplars of modern thought, such as Erasmus'.[123] It also makes explicit reference to *The Children's Petition* and *Lex Forcia,* as well as the gentle educational methods of John Colet, who founded St Paul's School in 1512. The contributors to *The Battered Child* are thus portrayed as following in the footsteps of these early reformers in

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[118] Louise Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.
[119] *The children's petition, or, A modest remonstrance of that intolerable grievance our youth lie under in the accustomed severities of the school-discipline of this nation humbly presented to the consideration of the Parliament* (London: Printed for Richard Chiswell ..., 1669); *Lex forcia : being a sensible address to the Parliament for an act to remedy the foul abuse of children at schools, especially in the great schools of this nation*, (London: Printed for R.C. and are to be sold by Eliz. Whitelock, 1698); See C. B. Friedman, 'The Children's Petition of 1669 and its Sequel', *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 14, no. 2 (1966): 216-23;
[120] Keith Thomas, *Rule and Misrule in the Schools of Early Modern England* (Reading: University of Reading, 1976), 15.
[121] John Jones, *The Arte and Science of preseruing Bodie and Soule in al Health, Wisedome, and Catholike Religion: Phisically, Philosopically, and Diuinely deuised* (London, 1579), 60.
[122] S. X. Radbill, 'A History of Child Abuse and Infanticide', in *The Battered Child,* 3.
[123] *Ibid.,* 4.

addressing a problem – child battery – which originated somewhere in the depths of historical time. The volume's introduction by Helfer and Kempe portrays the early reformers as 'truly heretical' for their day, and suggests that it is only during the past one hundred years that children's rights have gradually been recognised.[124]

The idea that child abuse is something that happened in the past, a hangover from a less enlightened time from which modern society now seeks to escape, is therefore integral in some ways to its contemporary definition. A more recent textbook on child abuse opens with a chapter on the 'History and Definition of Child Maltreatment' by characterising historical child abuse in these terms:

> The history of childhood prior to the late nineteenth century is littered with tales of murder, burnings, beatings, and sexual exploitation that by today's standards are atrocious. To understand the evolution of childhood – and by extension child maltreatment – it is important to put in perspective the social, political, economic and religious challenges of the past.[125]

Writing for practitioners, Brian Corby makes a more critical appraisal of what he terms the 'barbaric past perspective' but notes that it is widespread.[126] He argues that 'careful of analysis of the history of childhood can serve to dispel myths and put current problems into perspective'.[127] His comments echo those of historians who have reflected on the purpose and utility of historical child abuse: 'historical research challenges teleological assumptions (about linear trajectories of either improvement or decline) that are prevalent within the media and other public narratives'.[128] My aim in framing this research in terms of modern ideas of child abuse, therefore, is not to impose uncritically a modern concept onto the Middle Ages. Rather, I hope to offer ways of critiquing and developing that concept in light of the medieval evidence.

As well as the problem of anachronism, studying child abuse in past societies brings into sharp focus the problem of where to draw the line between avoiding ethnocentrism and advocating an

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[124] Ray E. Helfer and C. Henry Kempe, 'Introduction', in *The Battered Child,* ix.
[125] Maria Scannapieco and Kelli Connell-Carrick, *Understanding Child Maltreatment: An Ecological and Developmental Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3; For a similar perspective see Ola W. Barnett, Cindy L. Miller-Perrinn and Robin D. Perrinn, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan: An Introduction,* 3rd Edn. (London: SAGE Publications, 2011), 10.
[126] Brian Corby, *Child Abuse: An Evidence Base for Confident Practice,* 4th Edn. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2012), 20-32; *Child Abuse: Towards a Knowledge Base,* 3rd Edn. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 7-21.
[127] Corby, *Child Abuse: An Evidence Base,* 31.
[128] Adrian Bingham, Lucy Delap, Louise Jackon and Louise Settle, 'Historical Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales: The Role of Historians', *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 411-29.

extreme cultural relativism that fails to acknowledge children's suffering. As Louise Jackson notes in her study of child sexual abuse in Victorian England, there is a balance to be struck between withholding presentist judgements and the ethical responsibility of researchers to treat the accounts of victims with care and sensitivity.[129] As a response to this problem in the field of anthropology, Jill Korbin has proposed a useful cross-cultural framework for discussing child abuse which is formulated in three levels: (1) practices which are acceptable in some cultures but not others and may seem harsh or abusive to outsiders but which are approved within the culture; (2) treatment by individuals within a culture that violates the accepted norms of that culture; and (3) social or structural factors which disadvantage children such as poverty or inadequate housing.[130] I propose to adapt and expand Korbin's third level in line with recent research in childhood studies to include structural and discursive factors which maintain children's subordinate social position and thus contribute to levels 1 and 2. I will consider all three of these levels in this thesis, but will differentiate as far as possible between those discourses, structures and practices which disadvantaged children from a modern perspective and those which violated medieval norms.

In my view abusive practices have sometimes been too readily explained away in historical and cross-cultural research as lying within the accepted standards for the time and place.[131] Assessing the treatment of children purely against a criterion of social acceptability places the greatest weight on the perspectives of those in a position to police what is acceptable. There is a danger of treating the voices of the powerful who dictate social norms as if they speak for the culture as a whole and paying insufficient attention to dissenting voices including those of children themselves. This may result from understandable desire to avoid ethnocentrism, and of course a return to the teleological complacency of Stone, Shorter or DeMause is highly undesirable. But recognising problems in the conceptualisation and treatment of children in other cultures need entail no ethnocentric conceit that our own culture has somehow solved the perennial question of what is in the 'best interests' of children. It is worth noting that medieval people transposed into twenty-first century England might well have considered some of our own child-rearing practices to be harsh, neglectful or otherwise unacceptable. In this thesis, then, I will consider both emic and etic questions, and will adopt a flexible definition of abuse which recognises the existence of different perspectives within medieval culture. Given the fluidity and contingency of medieval norms with respect to childrearing, I will tend to consider practices abusive if it can be reasonably surmised

[129] Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse,* 12.
[130] Jill E. Korbin, 'Crosss-Cultural Perspectives and Research Directions for the 21st Century', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 15, no. 1 (1991): 67-77; Jill E. Korbin, ed., *Child Abuse and Neglect: Cross-cultural Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
[131] For a discussion of this problem in an anthropological context, see Helen Kavapulu, 'Dealing With the Dark Side in the Ethnography of Childhood: Child Punishment in Tonga', *Oceania* 63 (1993): 313-29.

that some medieval people, including children themselves, would have considered them to violate acceptable standards of care.

The questions which this thesis will seek to address can thus usefully be split into emic and etic questions – those which seek to understand medieval society in its own terms and those which seek to understand it from a modern perspective. The emic questions I aim to consider include: how did medieval people conceptualise childhood and children's place in the natural and social world? Where were the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable treatment of children and how were they produced and policed? How did medieval people conceptualise these boundaries? How did medieval parents, teachers and justices conceive of their role in disciplining and protecting children? How did medieval children feel about the ways in which they were treated? The etic questions I will consider include: why did medieval culture permit and sometimes condone practices that we today consider to be child abuse? What was the rationale behind such practices and how was this produced through discourse? How did social structures and institutions both protect children and enable their abuse? If, as I will argue, there are points of continuity between medieval and modern attitudes, what might we be able to learn which could help us to rethink our assumptions about childhood today, and better live up to our own standards of child protection?

The Aetiology of Abuse

It would be difficult to write a historical account of child abuse which took no account of the reasons why such abuse occurs. There is a substantial literature on the subject from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and it would be far beyond the scope of this thesis to survey this in detail. Indeed, many of the issues are beyond the scope of historical analysis, straying as they do onto the terrain of psychology and biology as well as sociology, politics, social work and medicine. Nevertheless, in writing about historical child abuse, taking positions on some of these issues is unavoidable. Even if these positions are not explicitly articulated, they are liable to emerge implicitly in the course of any discussion which seeks to do more than establish basic historical facts. Some engagement with the literature on the aetiology of child abuse therefore seems necessary. Although it carries with it the risks of amateurism and misunderstanding which are inherent in discussing disciplines outside of one's specialism, this seems preferable to the alternative of relying on pre-existing beliefs and unspoken assumptions.

The most common framework for understanding child abuse and neglect is ecological systems theory.[132] First proposed as a means of understanding human development by Uri Bronfenbrenner, it was adapted by Jay Belsky to understanding the problem of the aetiology of child maltreatment.[133] Recognising that no single factor can successfully account for child maltreatment, it offers a multidimensional account which synthesises explanations from a variety of perspectives within a single framework. It locates the abuse of children in a combination of interacting factors which are situated at different 'levels' of the child's ecological environment. Each of these levels is imagined to be nested within the next, so that the model is commonly depicted as a series of concentric circles, with the most 'individual' causes in the centre ringed by increasingly broad familial, community, and wider social and cultural factors.[134] Working from inside to out, these levels are:

Ontogenic Development

This level explores the background of parents who abuse, their individual developmental histories, psychopathologies, background and experiences. It includes insights from Social Learning Theory which posits that people who are exposed to violence as children model these behaviours and carry them through into adulthood. It may also include Attachment Theory which proposes that children form an Internal Working Model of interpersonal relationships based on their attachment to their primary caregiver which in turn provides a template for their future relationships. Both of these theories attempt to explain the intergenerational transmission of child abuse – the fact that people who were abused themselves are at increased risk of becoming abusers themselves.[135]

Microsystem

This is the immediate context in which abuse takes place, most often the family, and includes the individual characteristics of the parents or caregivers, the child, and patterns of family interaction. Risk factors at this level might include child disability, negative family dynamics, family breakup, incoming step-parents, spousal abuse or violence within the family.

Exosystem

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[132] For a recent overview of research in this area, see Catherine Hamilton Giachritsis and Alberto Pellai, 'Child Abuse and Neglect: Ecological Perspectives', in *The Wiley Handbook of What Works in Child Maltreatment; An Evidence-Based Approach to Assessment and Intervention in Child Protection,* ed. Louise Dixon and Daniel F. Perkins (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 29-47.

[133] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Jay Belksy, 'Child Maltreatment: An Ecological Integration', *American Psychologist,* 35 (1980): 320-55; 'The Etiology of Child Maltreatment: A Developmental-Ecological Analysis', *Psychological Bulletin* 114 (1993): 413-34.

[134] See Scannapieco and Connell-Carrick, *Understanding Child Maltreatment,* 31.

[135] For an overview of different approaches to studying child abuse, see Corby, *Child Abuse: An Evidence Base,* 144-68; Scannapieco and Connell Carrick, *Understanding Child Maltreatment,* 22-43.

This locates abuse within wider social and community structures including schools, religious or community groups, social support networks and socioeconomic status. I will interpret this to include institutions such the medieval ecclesiastical, borough and royal courts which could both help and hinder child protection. Risk factors might include social isolation, community violence, poverty and lack of opportunity.

Macrosystem

This level encompasses the broader social and cultural factors and discourses which have been shown to contribute to child maltreatment. These include attitudes to violence, inequality, the prevalence of physical punishment, concepts of childhood and gender roles. Important theories at this level include sociological and cultural explanations that focus on acceptability of violence and physical punishment in society, or the sexualisation and objectification of women and sometimes children. They also include feminist perspectives which locate child sexual abuse in gendered power relations and see sexual violence as a means by which men assert authority over women. Macrosystem analysis may also incorporate children's rights perspectives which see subordination of children as a social group as partly responsible for their abuse.

Belsky's model has been expanded by Dante Cicchetti and Michael Lynch, who have integrated the role that protective factors can play at different levels of the ecology in mitigating risk factors.[136] Thus for example positive familial relationships or social support networks might protect children from the risks associated with living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, or a school teacher who did not believe in corporal punishment might protect her pupils in a culture in which such violence was the norm. In the medieval period, parents may intervene to protect children from abusive teachers, or servants and apprentices may be able to seek recourse against abusive masters through the courts. Likewise positive relationships with parents, masters or mistresses may mitigate against cultural discourse which mandated physical punishment. Although the different levels are somewhat artificially separated by the model, the ways in which they interact are crucial to understanding this process.

The particular nature of the medieval evidence and of medieval culture means that I will not seek to apply this model stringently to understanding child abuse in the Middle Ages or to analyse each level in isolation. Rather, I will use it loosely as a useful framework within which to consider the

[136] Dante Cicchetti and Michael Lynch, 'Toward an Ecological/Transactional Model of Community Violence and Child Maltreatment: Consequences for Children's Development', *Psychiatry* 56, no. 1 (1993): 96-118; Dante Cicchetti, Sheree L. Toth, and Angeline Maughan, 'An Ecological-Transactional Model of Child Maltreatment', in *Handbook of Developmental Psychopathology, 2nd Edition,* ed. Arnold J. Sameroff, Michael Lewis and Suzanne M. Miller (New York: Plenum Publishers, 2000), 689-722.

various factors, cultural, social structural, institutional, community, household and individual, which contributed to the abuse of children in later medieval England. Indeed, the flexibility of this framework mean that it has been widely adapted as a means of understanding and preventing a variety of complex social issues, including for example violence against women, and is used to underpin the World Health Organisation's 'Global Campaign for Violence Prevention'.[137] A further advantage of ecological systems theory lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between the macro and the micro and to highlight the ways in which broad sociocultural factors impinge on the lives of individuals and communities. For this reason, Alan Prout suggests that it may be one way to begin to move beyond dualistic oppositions such as nature/culture, structure/agency, being/becoming which are particularly pertinent to the study of childhood.[138]

Methodology and Sources

Fuller discussion of methodological issues and my approach to the sources will be found in the subsequent chapters, so a brief outline of the thesis is all that is necessary here. This thesis will be structured in two halves, with the first two chapters considering boys and the second half considering girls. I follow the general trend in medieval terminology which, as I shall argue, tended to use 'child' in isolation to refer to boys and 'maiden' or 'maiden child' to refer to girls.[139] The structure of each half will loosely reflect the Social Ecological Model, beginning with a discussion of broader cultural factors before working inwards to understand their impact on the lives of individual children. Chapter 1, will examine the ways in which the nature of (male) childhood was conceptualised in medieval culture and will thus focus primarily on the macrosystem of the Social Ecological Model (SEM). Using medieval romance as well as conduct literature, philosophical and medical treatises and texts concerning the ages of man, I will investigate how ideas about childhood intersected with ideas about the natural and supernatural world. I argue that concepts of childhood played a discursive role in the construction of animality, monstrosity, wildness and incivility. The male developmental trajectory was conceptualised as a journey from unreasoning creature to rational man, and boys were conceptualised as a threat to the social order which must be contained.

Chapter 2 will discuss the exosystem and the microsystem of the SEM, using the surviving school exercises from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. I have selected these as a case study

[137] Lori L. Heise, 'Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework', *Violence Against Women*, 4, no. 3 (1998): 262–290; World Health Organisation, 'The Ecological Framework', www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/ecology/en/ [accessed July 30, 2019].
[138] Prout, *Future,* 52-65.
[139] For discussion of terminology see Goldberg, 'Childhood and Gender'.

because of the wealth of detail these sources provide on the treatment of children in grammar schools. I will trace the influence of the discourses I identified in Chapter 1 'down' through the social structure, and show how the treatment and maltreatment of boys arose in the context of networks of relationships within the school and wider community including masters, parents, and their peers. I will then consider the perspectives of the individual children whose manuscripts have survived. Finally, I will consider the ontogenic level of the SEM, examining the perspectives and developmental histories of abusive masters.

Chapter 3 will mirror Chapter 1, investigating the nature of maidenhood in medieval culture using similar sources. I investigate the place of young maidenhood in the natural and supernatural world and argue that maidenhood functioned discursively to construct the boundaries of purity, innocence and divinity. Maidens were associated with the beautiful, unspoiled aspect of the natural world rather than the wilderness, and their developmental trajectory went from maidenly perfection to feminine corruption. Since even young maidens are so often portrayed as desirable, I will also consider the thorny question of female childhood and sexual desire.

In Chapter 4 I consider the implications of these discourses for the treatment and maltreatment of girls. This chapter loosely mirrors Chapter 2 by delving into the ecosystem and the microsystem of the SEM, this time via an analysis of court records. I will examine the relative prevalence of physical and sexual abuse between girls and boys and how these arose in the context of familial and community relations. Reading the court records as narratives, I will also draw on psychological and anthropological literature to understand how the rape of maidens was conceptualised and processed in medieval courtrooms and communities. Finally, I move on to the governance of maidens in households via a reading of the *Book of the Knight of the Tower,* attempting to reconstruct something of the perspectives of the medieval girls to whom it is addressed. I argue that they, like many of the other children this thesis will discuss, have left behind their mark upon the texts which have come down to us.

CHAPTER 1:

THE NATURE OF CHILDHOOD

The late fifteenth-century conduct poem *Symon's Lesson of Wysedome for all Maner Chyldryn* articulates the importance of the correct upbringing of the young with recourse to a piece of proverbial wisdom:

> Old men yn prouerbe sayde by old tyme
> 'A child were beter to be vnbore
> Than to be vntaught, and so the lore'.
> The child þat hath hys wyll always
> Shal thryve late, y thei wel say,
> And þer-for euery gode manys child
> That is to wanton and to wyld,
> Lerne wel this lesson for sertayn.[1] (4-11)

The maxim that it were better for a child to be unborn than untaught appears to have enjoyed broad currency from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.[2] As well as other conduct poems, it appeared in the manuscripts of households containing children and young servants, notably that of the London grocer Richard Hill. It also found its way into sermons, appearing in Richard Fitzjames' *Sermo die lune in ebdomada Pasche* printed by Wynkyn de Worde in c.1495. Its inclusion in Robert Whittinton's extremely popular collection of *vulgaria* meant that it rang out across early sixteenth-century schoolrooms, translated into Latin and recited out loud by successive generations of schoolboys. Occasionally, it is rendered as 'better unborn than unbeaten/unchastised' or, in Robert Mannyng's more extreme formulation, 'better were the chylde unbore / Than fayle chastysyng and sythen lore [not chastised and thereafter ruined/damned].[3] The message from all quarters is clear: childhood is defective by nature and needs to be brought under the control of the 'old men' who are imagined by *Symon* as the seat of wisdom and authority. Children are by nature inclined to be 'wanton' and 'wild', characteristics which place them at the imagined fringes of the medieval social world. Those who had not been

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[1] Frederick J. Furnivall, *The Babees Book,* EETS, O.S. 32 (London: Trübner, 1868), 399.
[2] See Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases: From English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), C200.
[3] Robert Mannyng*, Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne,* ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, O.S. 119 (London: Trübner, 1901), 161, lines 4855-56.

subject to the proper correction represented a threat to the social and moral order; it were better that such frightening potentialities remained unconceived.

This concept of childhood can be traced across a range of medieval sources, particularly those which concern themselves with the 'ages of man'. In the poem *This World is but a Vanyte* an old man looks back on and laments the failings in his conduct throughout his life. When he was young, he acted according to the 'kinde' or nature of childhood, finding pleasure in fighting and quarrelling with his peers:

> Þe kinde of childhode y dide also,
> Wiþ my felawis to fiȝte and þrete.
> Al þat y dide, it þouȝte me swete,
> For al þis childhode tauȝte me.[4] (19-22)

In *The Mirrror of the Periods of Man's* the child between seven and fourteen is advised by a wicked angel to call his father and mother shrews. The tempter then goes on to advise the child to act in accordance with his nature and do harm to others both with words and deeds:

> Quod þe wicked aungil, "while þou art a child,
> With þi tunge on folk þou bleere; [mock/insult]
> Course of kynde is for ȝouþe to be wilde,
> To beete alle children, and do hem deerre" [harm].[5] (77-80)

The same discourse appears in the Middle English play *Mundus et Infans*. The child between seven and fourteen is called Wanton and displays similar behaviours, lashing out physically and verbally at all around him:

> I can with my scorge stycke
> My felowe vpon the heed hytte
> And wyghtly [quickly/vigorously] from hym make a skype [leap away]
> And blere on hym my tongue
>
> If a brother or a syster do me chide
> I wyll scratche and also byte.
> I can crye and also kyke

[4] Frederick J. Furnivall, *Hymns to the Virgin and Child: The Parliament of Devils, and Other Religious Poems,* EETS, O.S. 24 (London: Trübner, 1867), 83.
[5] Furnivall, *Hymns,* 60.

And mocke them all be rewe.[6] (80-87)

As well as violence toward one's fellows, childhood was associated with violence or sometimes inappropriate cruelty toward animals.[7] Wanton boasts of hunting sparrows, gelding snails, and catching cows by the tail, and *Symon's Lesson* includes a prohibition on casting stones at dogs, horses and pigs.[8] It is important to note here that this concept of the nature of childhood was gendered male; wanton girls violently lashing out at their playfellows with sticks are absent in medieval discourse.

This poetic tradition would certainly have been well-known to readers of romance. Texts expounding the theme of the Ages of Man are commonly found alongside both romances and conduct literature in household manuscripts. *Mirror* for example appears in Cambridge, CUL MS Ff.2.38 which also includes *Bevis of Hampton, Octovian, Sir Tryamour, Guy of Warwick, Le Bone Florence of Rome* and *Sir Degaré* as well as *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*.[9] *I Wiyte My Silf Myne Owne Woo* appears with *Sir Landeval* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell* in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C.86, and sits alongside *Chevalere Assigne, Octavian, Sir Isumbras, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Sir Launfal and Lybeaus Desconus* in London, British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.2. Yet such poems are often overlooked by modern scholars of romance, perhaps because they have little to offer aesthetically and because of their seemingly mundane trans-historicity – there is nothing profoundly or uniquely 'medieval' about the idea of old criticising the young for their manner of living.

The childhood of the hero of *Bevis of Hampton* would certainly have been recognisable to the authors of these poems.[10] The first important events of the narrative take place when the hero is seven years old and thus at the beginning of the period of childhood which the above texts describe. Upon learning that his mother has engineered his father's death at the hands of the Emperor of Germany, Bevis launches into an insulting diatribe in which he calls her a 'whore' and suggests that she would be better suited to managing a brothel:

Vile houre! Thee worst to-drawe [You should be drawn]

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[6] Clifford Davidson and Peter Happé, ed., *The Worlde and the Chylde* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), 38.
[7] Mary Dzon, 'Wanton Boys in Middle English Texts and the Christ Child in Mnneapolis, University of Minnesota, MS Z822 N81', in *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change*', ed. Isabelle Cochelin and Karen Smyth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 81-145.
[8] Davidson and Happé, ed. *Worlde,* lines 111; 101; Furnivall, ed. *Babees Book,* 400, lines 23-24.
[9] For discussion of the parallels between CUL, MS Ff.2.38 and MS Advocates 19.3.1 which contains *Sir Gowther* and *Sir Ysumbras*, see Phillipa Hardman, 'Popular Romances and Young Readers', 150-64.
[10] Edition cited throughout is Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, ed., *Four Romances of England* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

And al to-twight! [pulled apart]
Me thenketh, ich were ther-of ful fawe, [I would be very glad]
For thow havest me fader slawe [slain my father]
With mechel unright! [much injustice]

Allas moder, thee faire ble! [complexion/appearance]
Evel becometh thee, houre to be,
To holde bordel [manage (a) brothel]. (303-09)

His uncontrolled, ill-considered and, as it turns out, injudicious outburst marks him out as childish rather than heroic at this stage of the romance. Although the tone of his address may appear adult to modern audiences, particularly in its explicit references to prostitution, it was in keeping with medieval assumptions about children's speech. A fifteenth-century schoolmaster made a similar complaint about the language of his young charges: 'yf thei hape to call the dame 'hoore' or the father 'cockolde' ... thai laffe thereatt and take it for a sport, saynge it is kynde [natural] for children to be wanton'.[11] Wanton in *Mundus et Infans* also boasts of insulting his mother by calling her 'shrewe'.[12] Bevis, then, is a child in more than simply stature and chronological age; he is a child in 'kinde'. The text explores the relation of childhood to other structuring discourses in medieval society; here, the conduct which is taken to symbolise children's inferiority may be imagined to place childhood paradoxically in the right when pitted against the sexually promiscuous and treacherous femininity embodied by his mother.

Bevis' childishness is also evident in his behaviour towards his new stepfather. Ignoring his master Saber's advice to leave home, Bevis returns and confronts the Emperor, who dismisses him as a 'fool'. Outraged, the young hero attacks his stepfather with a club and knocks him unconscious:

Beves was nigh wod [mad] for grame, [anger]
For a clepede [he called] him "foul" be name,
And to him a wond; [he turned]
For al that weren in the place,
Thries a smot him with is mace [club]
And with is honde.

Thries a smot him on the kroun; [head]

[11] William Nelson ed., *A Fifteenth Century Schoolbook From a Manuscript in the British Museum (MS. Arundel 249),* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 13.
[12] Davidson and Happé, ed. *Worlde*, line 91.

That emperur fel swowe [in a swoon] adoun. (439-46)

As well as the nature of the attack – Bevis and his club call to mind the stick-wielding child of medieval discourse – the hero's lack of emotional control presents him as childish. Bartholomaeus Anglicus characterised boys between seven and fourteen as emotionally changeable and quick to anger due to their natural heat and humoral balance.[13] In becoming 'nearly mad with anger' Bevis acts like a child; he falls short of the reason and restraint required of mature masculinity. His behaviour resonates with French physician Bernard de Gordon's admittedly idiosyncratic designation of *pueritia* as 'the age of concussion' (*etas concussionis*), so called because 'in that age they begin to run and jump and to hit each other'.[14] Rather than a *puer senex* as he is sometimes characterised, Bevis again represents a 'realistic' portrayal of childhood according to medieval understandings of children's nature. His precocity extends only so far as the physical strength required to administer a beating to a grown man, and even this appears to be transitory as Bevis' first foray into heroic battle ends with his being vanquished by his mother: 'his moder tok him be the ere' (492). He may have beaten his stepfather senseless with a club, but he can still be taken by the ear and led away in disgrace.

Yet just as his diatribe against his mother pitted childhood against a negative construct of femininity, here too pejorative concepts of childhood are subverted as they are placed in contention with other discourses. The Emperor represents a real threat and has already expressed his intention to kill Bevis during his encounter with his father, Guy: 'The sone schel anhanged be' (220). As an incoming stepfather, he is also a threat to the family which Guy gave his life trying to protect, and the way in which Bevis refers to the attack places it firmly within the realms of domestic rather than heroic violence: 'Beten ichave me stifadre / With me mace' (464-65). By using the term 'beaten' and referring to the Emperor with the familial term, Bevis aligns him with the motif of the abusive stepfather, associated with the cruel treatment of children in medieval discourse.[15] Bevis's reaction to the Emperor's appearance may thus represent a child's perspective on domestic upheaval, and to the acquisition of a stepfather whom he rightly regards as a threat both to his relationship with his mother and his inheritance; in short, to his current and future identity and livelihood. This is given voice by the young hero as he challenges his stepfather to

[13] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum,* Vol. 1, trans. John Trevisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 300.
[14] Cited in Luke Demaitre, 'The Idea of Childhood and Child Care in Medical Writings of the Middle Ages', *The Journal of Psychohistory* vol. 4, no. 4 (1977): 466, translation Demaitre's. 'Concussion' here is intended in the sense of 'violent shock or shaking' rather than the effects associated with a loss of consciousness, although as the young Bevis aptly demonstrated on the body of his stepfather, the latter can be a direct result of the former.
[15] Beatrice White, ed., *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton,* EETS, O.S. 187 (London: Trübner, 1932, reprint 1971), 55; see Ch2 below.

explain his incongruous presence immediately prior to physically attacking him: who are you? And what are you doing with my mother?

> "Sire," a sede, "what dostow here?
> Whi colles [embrace] thow aboute the swire [neck]
> That ilche [same] dame?
> Me moder is that thow havest an honde; [in your hand]
> What dostow here upon me londe
> Withouten leve? (424-29)

The young Bevis's words are perhaps 'childish' in their matter-of-fact statement of the obvious – 'that is my mother' – but they are also rather perceptive for someone of his age: that person may just be another 'dame' to you, but she is a 'moder' to me. By drawing attention to this fact, the child asserts that he has a prior and a greater claim to her affections.

The depiction of the young Bevis highlights many of the discourses which this chapter will explore. He embodies a pejorative concept of male childhood as violent and anti-social, a threat to the social and moral order which must be subjected to strict discipline. His violent punishment at the hands of his mother illustrates the consequences which this could have for medieval boys. Reading romances alongside both Ages of Man and conduct literature as well as philosophical and medical texts, this chapter will explore this medieval conceptualisation of the boy's developmental trajectory from wild and wanton child to restrained and rational man, highlighting the ways in which competing ideas about childhood intersected with other discourses which lent meaning and structure to the medieval social world: the natural and the supernatural, human and animal, reason and unreason, the centre and the margins. Yet for child readers or audiences of romance, such pejorative portrayals may paradoxically have offered opportunities to construct aged identities as children. Although the image of the child Bevis with his club conjures up the medieval trope of the stick-wielding young tearaway, here the delinquent is reimagined as righteous avenger pitted against the equally negative trope of the abusive stepfather. In the context of romance, the child is empowered by virtue of his heroic status to strike back at the usurper, who threatens both his safety and the integrity of his family as well as the transmission of his lands and title. The threat posed to the social order by the usurpation of patrilineage is comically halted, at least temporarily, when it runs up against the threat of uncontrollable childhood. No doubt this image was amusing to many medieval readers, but it also offers possibilities for exploring and questioning the place of childhood in medieval society, as well as for the self-fashioning of childhood identities against the grain of moralistic or didactic discourse. Can 'childish' behaviour, too, be heroic?

Sir Perceval of Galles: The Child in a State of Nature

Perhaps the most thorough exploration of the nature of childhood is to be found in the romance *Sir Perceval of Galles*.[16] After his father dies, the young Perceval is raised by his mother, who resolves to protect him from his father's fate by raising him in the forest. 'Fostered in the felle' (6), Perceval spends his childhood hunting and playing with beasts rather than attending tournaments:

> Under the wilde wodde-wande [branches]
> He wexe and wele thrafe [thrived]
> He wolde schote with his spere
> Bestes and other gere, [things]
> As many als he myght bere. [carry]
> He was a gude knave! [boy/lad]
> Smalle birdes wolde he slo,
> Hertys, hyndes also;
> Broghte his moder of thoo: [those]
> Thurte hir none crave [She need not ask for them]. (211-20)

Perceval thrives in the forest in part because he acts in accordance with medieval expectations for this stage of his life. The association of children with hunting small birds and animals was prevalent in medieval culture: 'I wyll fynde a wyle to alure those sparowes / and to distroye them', declares one passage in a sixteenth-century schoolbook writing in a child's narrative voice. 'I haue nede of a feret, to let into this beery [burrow/warren] to ftyrt out [put to flight] the conies [rabbits]: that they may be take aboue grou[n]d', opines another bloodthirsty young scholar in the same collection.[17] It is for this reason that Perceval's antics mark him out as a 'gude knave', in other words, an accomplished and successful exponent of his knavish craft. The image of the child perhaps overenthusiastically endowing his mother with the spoils of his hunts adds a charming note to this portrayal of unfettered boyhood.

Although Perceval soon reaches the age of fifteen when childhood was thought to end, he is kept in a state of social infancy by his mother's protective influence. As such, he remains a social child, albeit in the strong and capable body of a youth:

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[16] Edition cited throughout is Mary Flowers Braswell, ed., *Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).
[17] William Horman, *Vulgaria Uiri Doctissimi Guil. Hormani Caesariburgensis* (London: Printed by Richard Pynson, 1519), 283r; 283v.

Fyftene wyter an mare
He duellede in those holtes hare;
Nowther nurture ne lare [learning]
Scho [his mother] wolde hym none lere [teach] (229-32)

This social infancy is reinforced further by the fact that Perceval continues to sleep in his mother's bed long after such an arrangement would have been considered socially inappropriate. The romance thus poses and explores the question: 'What would an unsocialised or "feral" child be like?' Negotiating the transition from childhood to adulthood, from ignorance to knowledge, from 'nature' to 'nurture', encompasses the major portion of the narrative; Perceval continues to be referred to as a 'child' in the text until he defeats the Sultan Golotherame and proves himself worthy to wed the Lady Lufamour, which takes place around line 1711 in a poem of 2288 lines.

Uninhibited by the restraining influence of proper 'nurture', the young Perceval embodies all the negative characteristics of childhood imagined by medieval moralists: he is violent, impulsive, wilful, and quick to anger. Upon arriving at King Arthur's court, for instance, he demands to be made a knight and threatens to kill the king if the honour is refused:

Than sayde Peceyvell the free,
"And [If] this Arthure the Kynge bee,
Luke he a knyghte make mee;
I rede [demand] at it be swaa!" [so]
Thofe he unborely [meanly] were dyghte, [dressed]
He sware by mekill Goddes myghte:
"Bot if the Kyng make me a knyghte,
I sall him here slaa!" [slay]. (521-28)

Like Bevis, his assertiveness nearly gets him into trouble as all those who are present marvel that the king suffers such treatment. Indeed, it is only his resemblance to his late father which saves the hero. The king is so moved by the child's appearance that he sheds tears and expresses his enduring sorrow at the loss a beloved knight: 'Thou art lyke to a knyghte / That I lovede with all my myghte / Whils he was on lyve' [alive] (546-48). Perceval's response to Arthur's outpouring of emotion is again dismissive and impatient, and he upbraids the king: 'Sir, late be thi jangelynge! [chattering] / Of this kepe [care] I nane' (575-76). The prospect of a child reprimanding a king for 'jangelynge', a word more commonly associated with women's or children's excessive or inappropriate speech, may well have amused medieval audiences. The passage betrays Perceval's complete lack of understanding of appropriate behaviour and shows that he himself has not yet internalised the message, ubiquitous in medieval conduct literature, to 'keep your tongue'.

The word most often used to describe this comic vision of untrammelled childhood is 'wilde', an adjective which is applied both to the hero himself and to his actions, referred to as 'wilde gerys' [ways] (1353) or 'werkes full wylde' (1678).[18] The word could have multiple meanings which all hold significance for understanding the concept of childhood in medieval culture. On the one hand, it could mean lacking in restraint, undisciplined or unmanageable, rash or impetuous, or ill-brought up and unruly, particularly if used of a child.[19] All of these epithets could justifiably be applied to the young Perceval. Yet 'wilde' could also imply madness, especially being out of one's mind or frenzied because of strong emotion, another state which could be associated with childhood, calling to mind, for instance, Bevis' characterisation as 'near mad with anger'. In addition, 'wilde' could imply that someone was uncivilised, primitive or savage, as well as inhuman, brutish or beastly. In the figure of Perceval the different senses of wildness coalesce and are shown to stand in close relation to one another in medieval discourse; in situating the child in a state of nature, the poem seeks to explore the nature of the child.

When Perceval first arrives at court, his wildness is immediately recognised by the king, who associates it both with his upbringing in the forest and with his resultant lack of knowledge of good and evil:

> The childe hadde wonnede [lived] in the wodde;
> He knewe nother evyll ne gude;
> The Kynge hymselfe understode
> He was a wilde man. (593-96)

The knowledge of evil and good was not something which children were expected to have from birth, but was seen to develop throughout childhood. Children under the age of seven were not thought to be capable of sin. The encyclopaedic dialogue *Sidrak and Bokkus* concludes that children are incapable of doing either good or evil: 'For as a childe noon yuel can do, / Also it can no good þerto' (L 8703-04). The age at which children were judged to have sufficient knowledge of right and wrong to be held criminally responsible was not fixed according to medieval law but required them to be considered 'capable of trickery' which tended to be at around the age of ten.[20] Whether Perceval would have passed this test is highly debatable – if the hero has one redeeming feature it is the honest and straightforward correspondence between his

[18] Maldwyn Mills observes the frequent characterisation of Perceval as 'wilde' in the commentary to his edition of the text; *Yvain and Gawain, Sir Percyvell of Gales, The Anturs of Arther* (Guernsey: The Guernsey Press, 1992), 193.
[19] MED, 'wild(e) (adj.)'.
[20] P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Life and Death: The Ages of Man', in *A Social History of England 1200-1500,* ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 421.

thought and action. Indeed, much of the romance's comedy is situated therein. In contrast to texts which describe the acquisition of a moral sense as if it were an inevitable developmental outcome, *Perceval* poses the vexed question of whether a child's moral sense would ever develop in the absence of societal influence, and invites the audience to ponder, in his subsequent exploits, the relationship between age, experience, and moral responsibility. At fifteen, Perceval may be a late developer but the characteristics which mark him out as 'wilde' are not only those of the animals in the forest, they are also those of the child.

Through the figure of the 'wild child', then, the romance literalises and explores the association between childhood and animality in late-medieval discourse. It is the wildness of his conduct which strikes the Lady Lufamour when she becomes acquainted with the hero: 'Scho had sene with the childe / No thyng but werkes wylde' (1569-70). In response to her concerns, King Arthur makes explicit the connection between the wildness of Perceval's character and wildness of the animals amongst which he was brought up:

> Fully feftene yere
> To play hym with the wilde dere:
> Litill wonder it were
> Wilde if he ware! (1581-84)

Yet it would be overly complacent to follow King Arthur's diagnosis and to attribute Perceval's wildness entirely to the influence of his beastly playmates. Indeed, this passage poses as many questions as it answers about Perceval's development. Is he 'wild' because he played with the deer or was he able to play with the deer because, as a child, he was 'wild' like them? Has the wildness of his playmates and his surroundings been a socialising influence which shaped his characteristics, or has his development simply been arrested at an early stage by his lack of contact with the human world? On the former reading, children's play emerges as one means by which they acquire a particular *habitus*, an idea that is hardly apparent in other medieval sources which tend to treat play as at best a distraction from and at worst antithetical to children's learning. On the latter reading, childhood inhabits a borderland between the human and animal. Clad in his goatskins, Perceval is a pan figure who represents an animalistic yet all-too-human wilfulness which has not yet been subordinated to mature 'witte' or 'resoun'. As *Mirror* reminds the reader: 'Course of kynde is for ȝouþe to be wilde'. Perceval is the physical embodiment of a discourse which conceptualised the socialisation of the child as a journey from a state of semi-animality to a state of humanity.

The construction of childhood as somewhere between the human and animal in *Perceval* reflects this same conflation in philosophical discourse. The development of the foetus was conceptualised as a transition from vegetable to animal to human, and the soul was only believed to enter the body at forty-six days for a male and ninety for a female.[21] Writing in the fourteenth century, Nicole Oresme somewhat bizarrely proposed that the foetus also passed through stages resembling different species of animal from the 'lower' to the 'higher' during its development:

> As an example and illustration, say that in the generation of the human there is the following sequence: first, the sperm; then, something fungus-like; third, something like an animal but unformed as it were ... fourth, something monkey-like; fifth, something like a pygmy; sixth, a completed human being.[22]

It was not merely foetal development which was associated with inhumanity: children continued to bear the stamp of their lowly origins even after birth. Discussing the correspondence of qualities between humans and animals, Aristotle presents childhood as evidence some qualities are shared between both groups and other qualities are analogous:

> ... for in children may be observed the traces and seeds of what will one day be settled psychological habits, though physiologically a child hardly differs for the time being from an animal; so that one is quite justified in saying that, as regards man and animals, certain physical qualities are identical with one another, whilst others resemble, and others are analogous to, each other.[23]

For Aristotle and his followers, then, childhood was a liminal or marginal state between the animal and the human, capable of displaying some human traits, but ultimately bestial both in its psychology and physiology.

These ideas continued to be the subject of discussion in learned circles in the late Middle Ages. Albertus Magnus' disputations on Aristotle's works, preserved by his student Conrad of Austria, address the question of the child's liminal status raised by the above passage in Aristotle. Discussing the proposition that 'a child is a sort of intermediary between a brute beast and a human, since he drinks and eats the whole day just like a beast', Albertus concludes that this is true in a certain sense because the child lacks the capacity for understanding:

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[21] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 14.
[22] Nicole Oresme, *Nicole Oresme and the Marvels of Nature*, ed. and trans. Bert Hansen (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1985), 239.
[23] Aristotle, *History of Animals, Volume III: Books 7-10,* ed. and trans. D. M. Balme, Loeb Classical Library 439 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), VII(VIII), 588a-588b.

> A human "does not understand without phantasm," as is clear in *On the Soul*. But there are no ordered phantasms in a child, owing to its excessive moisture, a moisture that is in the first rank of the soul's confusion according to Galen, because the power of the phantasm [*virtus phantastica*] is receptive of the sensible species, and this is why the child does not understand, just as the brute beast does not.[24]

Similar ideas appear in medical treatises: writing in the fourteenth century, the French physician Bernard of Gordon also likened children under fourteen to beasts in their lack of reason and pursuit of pleasure and suggested that they were therefore incapable of true happiness, understood to be found in contemplation:

> It is clear, therefore, that he [the child] employs little or no reason, since he has not reached the age of discretion… The age of childhood is not an age of happiness, since it possesses the stupidity of infants, and does not care about anything except pleasures, and therefore they live, as it were, a bestial life.[25]

Mary Dzon has argued that texts such as these point to the emergence in the later Middle Ages of 'a new anthropology of children' which offered a learned, physiological explanation for children's behaviour.[26] Dzon suggests that these ideas influenced the reception of the apocryphal *infantia Christi* tradition in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, producing a resurgence of interest in portrayals of Christ's early years, particularly those in which he displays 'typical' childish conduct. In the Middle English romances circulating in the same period, the influence of this renewed interest in childhood is also evident, yet romances go further perhaps than any other body of writings in exploring and interrogating the societal implications of such an understanding of childhood.

This philosophical discourse on the nature of childhood also influenced didactic literature addressed to children. The fifteenth-century Middle Scots poem *Ratis Raving,* for example, combines the practical advice on how to behave typical of such conduct literature with an exposition of the nature of children which draws on the Aristotelian model of the vegetative, sensitive and intellectual powers of man.[27] Rate proposes that in the first three years of life the child is capable of thinking only of food and sleep: 'Rycht as a best [beast] child can no mare'

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[24] Magnus Albertus, *Questions Concerning Aristotle's On Animals*, ed. and trans Irven M. Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 228-9.
[25] Bernard de Gordon, *Lilium Medicinae* (Lyons, 1574), 830, cited and translated in Mary Dzon, 'Boys Will be Boys: The Physiology of Childhood and the Apocryphal Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages', *Viator* 42, no. 1 (2011): 192.
[26] Dzon, 'Boys Will be Boys', 203.
[27] J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 49.

(1120).[28] The only properties which distinguish children of this age from animals are their ability to laugh and cry, but otherwise they feel in the same way as beasts. Children from the age of three to seven are characterised as innocent but lacking good judgement, still capable of experiencing and observing the world only bestially: 'as a best may feil [feel] & see' (1147). It is only in the third age, from seven to fourteen, that the roots of reason begin to develop from which will follow manly discretion, yet still slowly and imperfectly: Than springis rutis of resone / That beris the froyt discressione. / Bot thai ryp [ripen] nocht sa hastely' [not so hastily] (1152-54). According to Rate's text, it is only with the age of thirty that reason and discretion reach their perfected state.

In *Perceval,* this contrast between reasoned and mature masculinity and a childhood that is constructed as wilful, wild and animalistic is most clearly articulated in the meeting between the young hero and king Arthur's knights at the beginning of the narrative. Mistaking the knights for gods because of their attire, Perceval threatens to slay them if they do not reveal their identities and is consequently taunted by Sir Kay. Characteristically, Perceval immediately flies into a violent rage, but Gawain's response is to criticise Sir Kay for responding to Perceval's provocation and antagonising the child:

> Bot than said Gawayn to Kay,
> "Thi prowde wordes pares ay; [do harm always]
> I scholde wyn this childe with play, [in a softer manner]
> And thou wolde holde the still.
> "Swete son," than said he,
> "We are knyghtis al thre;
> With Kyng Arthoure duelle wee. (305-311)

In contrast to the wild and angry Perceval and the proud Kay, Gawain alone demonstrates the courteous speech and the restrained and reasoned conduct that make him the epitome of chivalric masculinity. His approach calls to mind the advice of the fifteenth-century didactic poem *How the Wise Man Taught His Son.* Urging his son not to chide his wife or call her by any 'fowle name', the wise man remarks: 'Softe and feyre men make tame / Harte, bukk and wylde roo'.[29] Mature masculinity is predicated upon controlling or 'taming' the natural and the bestial, whether identified with femininity, childhood or with man's own wilful nature. Childhood is constructed as an animalistic state which must be overcome both within and without. That this construction of childhood is utilised for comic effect in romance no more negates its ability to harm medieval

[28] J. Rawson Lumby, ed., *Ratis Raving, and Other Moral and Religious Pieces, in Prose and Verse,* EETS, O.S. 43 (London: Trübner, 1870), 57.
[29] Rudolf Fischer, ed., *How the Wyse Man Taught Hys Son. In Drei Texten* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1970 [1889]), 33, lines 151-52.

children than the deployment of misogynistic discourses for humorous purposes diminishes their negative effect on the lives of medieval women. The implications for medieval children will be explored more fully in in the following chapter but one general point should already be clear: in some sense less than fully human, they risked being treated like animals.

A similar picture emerges from the Middle English *Lybeaus Desconus*.[30] Also raised by his mother in the forest, the hero displays the by-now-familiar qualities of childhood: he is wild and uncivilised, quick to anger, and violent towards his fellows:

> For he was so savage [wild/barbarous/uncivilised]
> And lyghtly wold outrage [do harm]
> To his felows in fere [company]. (19-21)

Like Perceval, he plays among the wild deer: 'Gangelyn wolde hym to pley, / To se wyld dere bename' [captured] (32-33). Aged ten, he marches into King Arthur's court and asks to be made a knight, describing himself as a 'chyld uncouthe' (49), a word that could mean both 'unknown' and 'uncivilised/barbarous'.[31] It is left to the audience to decide whether he is referring to his lack of a name or displaying an impressive knowledge of his own shortcomings for one of such tender years. There is no such ambiguity however in the way that he is characterised by the maiden who rides into Arthur's court asking for a champion. Upon hearing that the king has assigned Lybeaus to the mission, she upbraids the king:

> That thou wold send a chyld
> That is wytteles and wyld
> To dele mannes dynte [deal a man's blow]. (187-89)

Again, the child is conceived as unreasoning and animalistic, and therefore incapable of carrying out the tasks of mature men. Although Lybeaus quickly proves himself capable of delivering manly blows in combat, his impulsive and unrestrained conduct throughout the first part of the romance vindicates at least in part the maiden's concerns.

Construed as wild and wilful, childhood is therefore compatible with the wilderness in a way that rational, mature masculinity is not. Although heroes often pass *through* the wilderness – and indeed conquering its threats is part of the chivalric ideal – it is much rarer for them to become *part of* the wilderness and to live a bestial life. A notable exception is the romance of *Ywain and Gawain*

[30] Edition cited throughout is George Shuffleton, ed., *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008).
[31] MED, 'uncouth (adj.)'.

in which the hero, like Perceval and Lybeaus, spends time living in the forest.[32] The parallels with Perceval are instructive: he hunts deer with a bow and arrow – in Chrétien's original he takes this from a passing boy – and brings the fruits of his efforts to a hermit who stands in as a quasi father-figure.

> Everilka day he come ogayne,
> And with him broght he redy boun [prepared]
> Ilka day new venisowne;
> He laid it at the ermite gate. (1692-5)

The hermit then cooks the venison for Ywain and provides him with bread that he cannot source for himself. The above passage from *Ywain* resembles the image of Perceval depositing the animals he has killed with his mother. However, unlike Perceval and Lybeaus, Ywain does not take naturally to his new environs, nor is he described as thriving or sporting happily among the wild beasts. In fact, Yvain must first go mad in order to assume this position as a wild man living in the forest: 'An evyl toke him als he stode; For wa [sorrrow] he wex al wilde and wode' [mad] (1649-50). Whether he is possessed by an evil spirit, as may be implied by the image of him being 'taken by evil', or simply succumbs to a humoral imbalance caused by an excess of emotion, it is clear that in order to become 'wilde', mature men must first lose that very 'witte' or reason which marks them out as embodiments of the masculine ideal.[33]

In its capacity for wildness, then, childhood can occupy positions on the margins of the medieval social world in a way that mature masculinity cannot. The association of childhood with a state of nature as opposed to maturity with culture was already present in the Middle Ages. It may perhaps be objected here that I am comparing an *idealised* concept of masculinity against its opposite, a negative discourse of childhood. Of course, other models of masculinity existed in medieval culture, as indeed did other models of childhood. Yet the Ages of Man literature suggests that these particular discourses – the rational, controlled, mature male and the wild, wanton youth – were considered the natural conditions of the ages in question. Moreover, it is significant that in romances which, as is generally agreed, are in the business of constructing identities, this particular vision of childhood so often features as a central constituent of this process of construction.[34] Together with animality and insanity, male childhood exists at and plays a role in demarcating the boundaries of the human, yet it also ruptures them for it is a boundary which even the most noble of chivalric knights was forced to cross. Indeed, it is through childhood that

[32] Edition cited throughout is Braswell, ed., *Ywain*.
[33] On the source of Ywain's madness, see Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, 'Yvain's Madness', *Philological Quarterly,* Vol. 71, no. 4 (1992): 377-97.
[34] See Phillipa Hardman, ed., *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002).

the border which medieval society sought to erect between the rational human world within and the 'wilderness' without is shown to be fluid and permeable.

Nurturing Perceval

Perceval does not admit to the same optimism as moralistic discourse regarding the potential for adult intervention to steer the child toward a more perfected state. In fact, where learning takes place in the text, it is rarely, if ever, through explicit instruction. Scenes in which the young are explicitly instructed are often lost in the process of romances' translation from Old French to Middle English, which may perhaps reflect changing or culturally varying ideas about developmental theory. In *Lybeaus,* the Middle English rendering of the 'fair unknown' story, Gawain's training of the hero is omitted entirely in some manuscripts and relegated to a couple of lines in others. As Eve Salisbury and James Weldon put it, this leaves 'the impression that everything Gawain's son knows about jousting, horsemanship and the wielding of lethal weapons is somehow hardwired into his DNA'.[35] In the Old French *Conte de Graal,* Perceval receives combat instruction from Gornemant, one of Kings Arthur's knights. Although the hero learns these skills 'naturally' and precociously in the Old French text, the narrative still takes the time to pause and emphasise the importance of instruction:

> Then the nobleman had him mount
> And he began to bear
> His lance and shield as skilfully
> As if he had spent his entire life
> At tournaments and wars
> ...
> For it came naturally to him,
> And as nature was his teacher
> And his heart fully intent upon it,
> There could be no difficulty,
> Whenever nature and the heart collaborate.[36] (1473-84)

This moment where nature and nurture align in perfect harmony is omitted from the Middle English *Perceval.* Indeed, in this text and in Middle English romance more generally, nature and nurture are more frequently portrayed in conflict with one another. Where instruction of the

[35] Eve Salisbury and James Weldon, 'Lybeaus Desconus: Introduction', in *Lybeaus Desconus,* ed. Eve Salisbury and James Weldon (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013).
[36] Cited and translated in Phyllis Gaffney, *Constructions of Childhood and Youth in Old French Narrative* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 150.

young does occur it is rarely unproblematic. As Helen Cooper has pointed out: 'As models of manners and behaviour, romances should come with a warning attached: use with care; keep away from babies and children. For good advice may at best be redundant, and at worst confound the giver and mislead the young recipient inside or outside the text'.[37] Romances remind us that multiple ideas about children's learning or 'socialisation' coexisted in medieval society – nurture emerges as a site of contest not only between old and young, but between competing ideas about what children were, how they learned and thus how they should be treated.

Perhaps Perceval's most egregious and revealing misunderstanding of parental advice takes place as he leaves the forest which has been his childhood home and sets out in a quest for adventures. Concerned at her son's lack of social knowledge, his mother provides him with some words of wisdom to guide him in his travels:

> Lyttill thou can of nurtoure:
> Luke thou be of mesure
> Bothe in haulle and in boure,
> And fonde to be fre [try to be well-mannered]. (397-400)

When he finds a table set out with dinner in a hall, he remembers his mother's advice and resolves to be 'of mesure' [moderate] (446) in his approach and to eat only half of what he finds. Ignoring the knife lying beside the food, he divides it with his hands and leaves half lying for the next person:

> The mete ther he fande,
> He dalte it even with his hande, [divided]
> Lefte the halfe lygganade
> A felawe to byde. [Another person to sustain]
> The tother halfe ete he;
> How myghte he more of mesure be? (446-62)

Perceval's careful 'measuring' of the food and his apparent belief that only stealing half of it is an exercise of courteous restraint is an amusing take on the important concept of moderation. Indeed, Perceval's conduct amounts to a direct contravention of the rules of courtesy which his mother has attempted to impart. Hugh Rhodes' *Booke of Nurture* cautions the child: 'Rend not thy meate asunder, / For that swarues from curtesy' (219-220). The *Babees Book* extends to bread the same advice against tearing food: 'Kutte with your knyf your brede, and breke yt nouhte' (141). Perceval's mother's advice thus turns out to be worse than useless. It not only fails to restrain

[37] Helen Cooper, 'Good Advice on Leaving Home in the Romances', in *Youth in the Middle Ages,* ed. P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), 121.

Perceval from thinking with his stomach and stealing the maiden's food, it also prompts further transgression of the rules of courtesy. However, as the poet's narratorial interjection makes clear, Perceval has in fact followed the letter if not the spirit of his mother's injunction. This woeful misunderstanding and misapplication of parental advice amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that children can be simply 'programmed' by adults to behave correctly, and therefore that their knowledge of the social world stems entirely from what adults tell them.

Such a model of learning is implicit in the conduct literature of the period which Perceval's mother's advice deliberately echoes. Indeed, reading medieval conduct literature, it is easy to come away with the impression that medieval people thought children's nurture and socialisation consisted in a form of Skinnerian Operant Conditioning, in which behaviour is modified by external punishment and reward with little intrinsic input from the learner.[38] By their nature as conduct texts, they necessarily construct the subjects of their advice as incompetent and ignorant yet passive and receptive to training. It is certainly true that this concept of children as passive learners in need of careful training formed an important part of medieval discourse surrounding nurture. Posing the question, 'Hou shal a man his children ȝeme [control/manage/bring up] / So þat þeraftir þei may him queme?' [please/gratify], *Sidrak and Bokkus* likens children to green saplings in that they can be shaped while they are young.[39] A similar discourse imbued medieval pedagogy: one fifteenth-century schoolmaster wrote that 'the myn of a yong mann is as waxe, apte to take all thynge. whatsumever is prynted in hym he receyveth it'.[40] Yet *Perceval* recognises that this 'printing' or 'shaping' requires input on the part of the child to make it possible. Instruction in a vacuum is portrayed as entirely ineffectual, and the efficacy of didactic literature is shown to rest upon a whole range of contextual information which the child must be expected to glean for themselves.

In fact, Perceval must infer and understand the *intention* behind his mother's advice and apply this to his conduct rather than simply internalise the literal meaning of her words. In failing to make this imaginative leap, Perceval demonstrates that he lacks Theory of Mind – the ability to imagine the world from the perspective of another person – a cognitive development which appears consistently across cultures during early to mid-childhood, generally around the age of 3-5 but in

[38] B. F. Skinner, *The Behavior of Organisms: An Experimental Analysis* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1938).
[39] T. L. Burton, ed., *Sidrak and Bokkus: A Parallel-Text edition from Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 559 and British Library, MS Landsdowne 793,* Vol. 2, EETS, O.S. 312 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 403, lines 6819-20; 404-5; see also Whiting, P251, W35.
[40] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 20.

some cultures as late as 8-13.[41] Being truly 'of mesure' would similarly require the hero to understand the ways in which his conduct impacts on those around him, a capability which he aptly fails to demonstrate when, having devoured half of her provisions, he next barges into the chamber of a sleeping maiden, kisses her, and takes the ring from her finger. He replaces the ring with his own as a pledge of their future marriage, missing the point that an exchange of tokens is merely a signifier of mutual consent, i.e. his partner's state of mind, and not itself sufficient to create a betrothal. Perceval's various comic failings may thus be read not simply as indicators of his stupidity or rusticity but as a more sophisticated play on ideas about children's cognitive development and socialisation.[42]

If not by explicit instruction, then, how does Perceval negotiate the transition from unsocial (or perhaps antisocial) to social? Instead of learning by passively internalising advice, Perceval is portrayed as learning through active engagement with the world. He is shown to experiment with his environment, evaluate the results, and use those as the basis for his subsequent action. This often leads to comic situations, for instance when he is unable to remove the Red Knight from his armour after vanquishing him. He resolves to burn the body, because his mother has told him that he can remove and reuse the iron tip of a weapon by burning away the wooden handle, and is only prevented from carrying out the procedure by the intervention of Gawain. This is more than an amusing blunder; it relies on an understanding that both wood and flesh, as 'living kinds', share properties which are not shared by metals – e.g. combustibility – and it is a rational inference that a procedure which can be applied to one may perhaps be applied to another. It draws an interesting parallel between the spear, understood as a 'once living thing combined with metal to make it more effective in combat' and the body of the knight which may, in a sense, be similarly described. It is thus a creative solution to a lack of social knowledge, and the comedy lies as much in the child's ingenuity as in his ignorance. It leaves the audience wondering whether his approach would in fact be effective as a means of separating armour from knight.

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[41] Paula Leverage, 'Is Perceval Autistic?: Theory of Mind in the *Conte del Graal*', in *Theory of Mind and Literature,* ed. Paula Leverage, Howard Mancing, Richard Schweickert, and Jennifer Marston William (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2013), 133-52; On the cross-cultural development of Theory of Mind see Henry M. Wellman, 'Universal Social Cognition: Childhood Theory of Mind', in *Navigating the Social World: What Infants, Children, and Other Species can Teach Us,* ed. Mahzarin Banaji and Susan Gelman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 69-74; bethany l. ojalehto and Douglas L. Medin, 'Perspectives on Culture and Concepts', *Annual Review of Psychology* 66 (2015): 249-275; 261.

[42] Paula Leverage has argued that the way in which Chretien's *Conte du Graal* portrays Perceval encompasses several of the characteristics of autism, based partly on the character's lack of Theory of Mind which is associated with Autistic Spectrum Disorders, and that the character may perhaps be grounded in Chretien's observation of individuals who today would be thought of as autistic. I think it more likely that Perceval's characterisation represents an exaggeration of the observable characteristics of childhood, particularly because, at least in the Middle English *Perceval,* he appears to develop Theory of Mind toward the end of the romance, as I will argue below.

Perceval also recognises that learning about the world involves a process of categorisation, and that socially constructed categories are not necessarily obvious to those unfamiliar with them. Having seen Sir Gawain and Sir Kay riding horses, he mistakenly identifies a field of colts and mares as knightly steeds, saying: 'Swilke thynges as are yone / Rade the knyghtes apone' (330-1). He thus spends much of the romance comically riding around on a pregnant mare. When his mother asks him what he is doing with his mare, he naturally assumes that 'mare' is the general term for all horses. Perceval is thus portrayed constructing his own categories from the information he gains by interacting with the world. The implied model of cognitive development is one in which children infer the categories into which they should group objects via observation and continue to modify these via further experience. As well as providing the audience with an opportunity to laugh at Perceval's mistake, the romance reminds us that a 'child's eye' view of social categories is liable to be different from our own.

Perceval's equine error is only corrected towards the end of the romance during his encounter with Golotherame. The hero enters this pivotal battle woefully unprepared, and is unable to kill the sultan because of his lack of training:

> Fayne wolde he hafe hym slayne
> This uncley Sowdane,
> Bot gate [means] couthe he get nane,
> So ill was he kende [trained]. (1673-76)

Sir Gawain, seeing Perceval's dilemma, chimes in with some helpful advice; he tells Perceval to alight from his steed and strike the sultan down. Yet this advice only confuses Perceval further, because when Gawain uses the word 'steed', he finally realises his mistake in thinking all this time that his horse was called a 'mare'. The child exclaims: 'Lorde! Whethir [can] this be a stede / I wende it had bene a mere?' This revelation throws Perceval into a state of complete confusion in which he is unable to fight the sultan at all: 'The childe hadd no powste [power] / His laykes [sword play] to lett [oppose]' (1703-4). It is only when the sultan attempts to strike him down that Perceval is roused into action and realises what he must do to win the battle. He cries out, 'Now has thou taughte me / How that I sall wirke with the' (1717-18) before cleaving the sultan with his sword.

Caroline Eckhardt suggests that this is an instance of the poet's simpleton motif being over-used and 'wearing thin', since Perceval apparently forgets how to kill a man despite having done so on

previous occasions and reverts again to the idea of using fire.[43] However, the parallel may perhaps be making a more subtle point about the hero's development from untrained youth to chivalric warrior. For much of the romance, as Eckhardt recognises, Perceval appears to understand his adventures as 'play', saying for instance of his slaughter of twenty-score Saracen fighters, 'Me thoghte it bot a playe' (1488). His violence stems from the gratification of his own desire for bloodshed rather than chivalric duty. When he kills and burns the Red Knight then impales the witch on a spear before casting her body into the fire, the narrative remarks as he goes forth in search of more such adventures: 'Siche dedis to do moo / Was the childe fayne' [eager] (867-88). This outlook continues until the beginning of Perceval's battle with Golotherame when his taunting of the Sultan is introduced with the line: 'Than said Percevell one [in] play' (1663).

The conceptualisation of what he is doing as 'wirke', then, is a significant departure for the hero, invoking the distinction between play and work which parallels the romance's concern to delineate the boundaries of childhood and mature knighthood. What Perceval must be 'taughte' is not how to kill somebody – he has ample experience of that. Now that he has just been knighted by King Arthur, what he must learn is how to do battle in the manner of a knight – 'work' – rather than in the manner of a boy – 'play'. Rather than fighting for the sheer pleasure of inflicting violence, he must fight to defend Christendom from a Saracen enemy and defend the honour of the Lady Lufamour. Indeed, when King Arthur suggests that the battle with the Sultan will be the turning point which cements his status: 'Þou sall wynn thi schone [i.e. earn your spurs] / Appon þe sowdane (1595-96). For the first time, Perceval now undertakes a mission at the request of the king, and he clearly understands this as different from his previous exploits:

> He says, "Als I hafe undirtane
> For to sla the Sowdane,
> *So sall I wirke als I kanne,*
> That dede to bygynn." [carry out]. (1661-64; my emphasis)

Gone is his previous bullish overconfidence in his own abilities which led him to threaten three heavily armed knights and even King Arthur with instant death. Instead of repeating his established pattern and simply proclaiming that he will slay the sultan, he states his intention to 'work' to undertake the deed which his king has requested.

It is therefore significant that it is during the battle with the sultan (line 1711) that the narrative refers to Perceval as a 'child' for the final time:

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[43] Glenn Wright agrees with Eckhardt on this point; for his discussion see '"Þe Kynde Wolde Oute Sprynge": Interpreting the Hero's Progress in *Sir Perceval of Galles*', *Studia Neophilologica* 72 (2000): 50.

Than thynkes the childe
Of olde werkes full wylde:
"Hade I a fire now in this filde,
Righte here he solde be brende." (1677-80)

The evocation of his previous proclivity for immolating his enemies is more than simply an attempt to resurrect a worn-out joke as Eckhardt suggests. The key contrast here that the poem draws attention to is between his childish 'wilde werkes' and the knightly 'wirke' that he must now undertake. It marks this point as a moment of transition in Perceval's life course; after this battle he weds the Lady Lufamour, takes up his place among King Arthur's knights, and is able to recognise for the first time the wildness of his previous conduct (1786). He later goes on to save his mother from the forest and from the unwanted attentions of a giant, and to reconstruct his relationship with her along lines appropriate for a manly knight by reintegrating her into the courtly world. From this point onwards, then, in the eyes of the poet at least, he is no longer a child.

In this pivotal and transformative final battle of the romance, however, Perceval characteristically takes entirely the *wrong* message from Sir Gawain's instruction. Instead, we are presented with the glaring irony that Perceval finally learns how to act like a knight by imitating the intentions of his Saracen enemy, demonstrating in the process that he has now acquired the requisite Theory of Mind. This amounts to a recognition that children's learning is not always subject to adult direction or control – a Saracen sultan could hardly be conceived of as an ideal role model, whereas Gawain is the paragon of chivalric virtue. Perceval is thus offered two sources of learning which are set up in distinct opposition to one another. One is a didactic model in which he receives instruction from a wise and virtuous teacher represented by Gawain. The other is an experiential model in which the child constructs an understanding from his interaction with the world, represented by the Sultan. The hero emphatically chooses the latter. For Perceval, learning is a process of seeking and interpreting rather than passively receiving knowledge, a model of cognitive development that aligns the romance more closely with the constructivist learning theory of Jean Piaget than the transmissionism traditionally associated with medieval education. To borrow the metaphor famously associated with John Lock: Perceval may be a *tabula rasa,* but the text portrays the child holding the *stylus*.

At the same time as appearing to confirm medieval moralists' worst fears about the 'condicione' of childhood, therefore, Perceval shakes the complacency that the condition is curable with

appropriate intervention.[44] Perceval's entire journey from wanton child to chivalric knight takes place not only in the absence of but largely *in spite of* attempts by those around him to influence his progress. The parody is not, perhaps, the world of the court or of chivalric ideals as has sometimes been suggested, but rather the notion that the path to chivalry was the solemn intonation of the facile instructional precepts that characterise much medieval didactic literature. Perhaps the key to the poem's outlook is to be found in the observation of Perceval's mother when she realises that her son, having seen King Arthur's knights, is determined to seek out such a future for himself: 'Scho wiste wele, by that thynge / That kynde wolde oute sprynge' (353-54). This phrase may of course be interpreted with regard to gender and social status; as a noble male, Perceval cannot escape his destiny to become a chivalric knight.[45] Yet the phrase also permits a reading with regard to the hero's age: at fifteen, Perceval is too old to remain in the forest with his mother; her protective influence is now in conflict with his youthful propensity to adventure and to self-actualisation. While instructing the young is presented as a largely futile exercise, so too is hindering their progression. Childhood may be wanton, wild and animalistic, but these characteristics are naturally left behind with the advancement of age. The romance thus underscores the tension inherent in texts such as *Ratis Raving* between naturalistic models of child development which suggest progression towards adulthood in clearly defined and fairly mechanistic stages, and the moralistic impulse to intervene and attempt to steer children towards the desired outcome. Portraying the child or youth as 'naturally' wild is a double-edged sword in that it inevitably provides material out of which young people may construct aged identities against the grain of normative discourse. In so doing, Perceval offers a subversive reading to young audiences which undermines adult authority, furnishes them with an alternative model of learning, and invites them to go out and explore the world for themselves.

***Sir Gowther*: Childhood and the Supernatural**

The location of childhood at the margins of humanity does not end with their association with animals. The same harmful discourse appears in cases of children born of the union of human and demon. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the Middle English *Sir Gowther* in which the wife of an earl, struggling to conceive a child and therefore threatened with separation by her

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[44] C. Horstmann, 'Orologium Sapientiae or the Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom, aus MS Douce 114', *Anglia* 10 (1888). 323-89.

[45] See for example Yin Liu, 'Clothing, Armour and Boundaries in *Sir Perceval of Galles*', *Florilegium* 18, no. 2 (2001): 84; David C. Fowler, '*Le Conte du Graal* and *Sir Perceval of Galles*', *Comparative Literature Studies* 12, no. 1 (1975): 15-16; Joerg O. Fichte, 'Manifestations of Otherness in *Sir Perceval of Galles*: Witches, Saracens, and Giants', in *Public Declamations: Essays on Medieval Rhetoric, Education, and Letters in Honour of Martin Camargo,* ed. Georgiana Donavin and Denise Stodola (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 149-71, esp. 168. For the opposite interpretation, that the phrase refers to Perceval's essential anti-chivalric qualities which remain unmodified by his experiences with the Arthurian court see F. Xavier Barron, 'Mother and Son in *Sir Perceval of Galles*', *Papers on Language and Literature* 8 (1972): 3-14.

husband, prays that a child be given to her by any means.[46] A demon takes on the likeness of her husband and lies with her, and afterwards reverts to his true 'felturd' [shaggy] (74) form, saying 'Y have geyton a chylde on the / That in is yothe full wylde schall bee' (76-77). The resultant offspring Gowther certainly lives up to his father's prediction: he kills nine of his wetnurses by voraciously suckling them and, in an act symbolic of an excessive or destructive demand for maternal nurture, bites off his mother's nipple when she attempts to feed him. He grows rapidly at the rate of six or seven times a normal child: 'In a twelmond more he wex / Then other chyldur in seyvon or sex' (145), a characteristic which, along with his father's shaggy appearance, marks him out as bestial as well as diabolic. At fifteen, he is made a knight by his father and his exploits grow ever more extreme, cleaving horses in two with a self-fashioned falchion, raping maidens and wives and murdering their husbands, making friars jump off cliffs, hanging parsons on hooks, slaying priests, burning hermits, setting poor widows on fire and, along with his men, raping an entire convent of nuns before trapping them in their church and burning it to the ground. In the figure of Gowther*,* the wildness of youth meets the threat of demonic influence, and anxieties over animalistic and ungovernable childhood are turbo-charged via their intersection with fear of the supernatural.

Yet the responsibility for Gowther's conduct cannot be placed entirely with his demonic parentage. In *Of Arthour and Merlin,* the young Merlin is similarly conceived, in this case via the rape of a sleeping maiden by a demon.[47] Indeed, Gowther is described as Merlin's half-brother, born of the same demonic father: 'For won fynd gatte [begat] hom bothe' (99). As a boy, Merlin shares with Gowther a hairy hybrid form, precocious powers and childlike vices. These include in particular a loose tongue and a comic propensity for smutty gossip, as the omniscient infant reveals on more than one occasion sordid secrets that his neighbours and other members of his community would prefer to keep under wraps. In one particularly egregious example, the boy reveals the king's chamberlain to be a woman disguised as a man, and furthermore that the queen, impressed by the chamberlain's good looks, had demanded that she be her lover. The text makes a great deal of the point and attributes to the infant a precocious sexual knowledge as well as a turn of phrase designed to delight adult audiences:

> Nede heo [the chamberlain] moste þat game forsake
> For heo no hadde takil [equipment] forþ to take
> Forto make hire [the queen] no counfort

[46] Edition cited throughout is Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, ed., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).
[47] Edition cited throughout is O. D. Macrae-Gibson, ed., *Of Arthour and Merlin,* Vol. 1, EETS, OS 268 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). As in edition, L refers to London, Lincoln's Inn Library MS Hale 150 and A refers to National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck Manuscript).

For hire takil was to schort
Þerfore þe quene was a fool
For hadde heo wist of hire tol [tool]
And how schort it was wroȝt
Heo neo hadde of hire loue souȝt. (L 1431-38)

This passage may be reference to Merlin's role in unmasking the character of Silence in the thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence* which also circulated in fifteenth-century England. Silence was a young woman who dressed as a man to overcome social gender expectations and was similarly sexually pursued by the queen until her identity was revealed by Merlin.[48] In *Arthour and Merlin,* however, it is but one of many examples in which the child demonstrates his inability or disinclination to keep his tongue on matters which adults would prefer remained private.

Unlike Gowther, however, Merlin is saved from an ignoble destiny by his baptism which negates the power of the demons to influence his behaviour. At his Christening the narrative remarks, 'All þeo feo[n]des þat weoren in helle / Weore agramed [troubled] þerof ful sore – / Þerþoruȝ was heore pouste [power] lore [lost]. (L 1012-14). The young Merlin later explains that although the demons had hoped to use him to destroy Christendom, God has now turned him to good:

For alle þe foendes wende wiþ me
To haue schent al Christiaunte
And hadde of me a wickid fode [child]
Bote God haþ me now turned to gode. (L 1133-36)

Although he inherits from his father the miraculous ability to foretell the future, Merlin has been spared from acting in accordance with his evil nature through the state of grace conferred upon him by his baptism. That Gowther, despite his own baptism, goes on to 'wyrke is fadur wyll' (176) is therefore far from an inevitable consequence of the circumstances of his birth.

Indeed, the text strongly implies that Gowther's conduct is as much the result of deficiencies in his upbringing as his inhuman parentage. The poem emphasises that his adoptive father, the Duke, fails to administer corrective beatings to him, despite the fact that his wicked conduct demands such treatment:

He was so wekyd in all kyn wyse [all kinds of ways]
Tho Duke hym myght not chastyse

[48] Sarah Roche-Mahidi, ed. and trans., *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999).

Bot made hym knyght that tyde. (148-50)

Following the proverbial injunction that 'He that spareth the rod hateth his son', medieval moralistic discourse characterised failure to beat children as a failure of nurture, akin to parental neglect, holding that children unchastised would inevitably grow up to be wicked and would come to curse their parents' lack of diligence on the way to the gallows.[49] *Dives and Pauper* explained that parents who failed to chastise their children would be held accountable for their wicked deeds: 'Þe fadir & moodir schul answern þan for her owyn wyckydnesse & for her childrys wyckydnesse, but [unless] þei don her deuer [duty] to chastysen hem in her yougþe'.[50] Lack of chastisement could also be associated with a diabolic threat to the child, whose soul was imperilled by their parents' failure to carry out their scripturally-mandated duty. Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* recounts a cautionary tale in which a father fails to chastise his child who is in the habit of cursing God's name. When, at only five years old, the child becomes sick and dies, the devil appears and drags his soul down into hell.[51] Seemingly incapable of acting as a father should, and at a loss for what to do about his problem teenager, the duke attempts to short-cut the usual process of nurture and makes Gowther a knight with disastrous results – his killing and raping spree which immediately follows.

The failure in Gowther's parents' duty of care also extends to curbing his appetites, symbolised by his appetite for food. In a symbolic inversion of a narrative trope common to saints' lives whereby the pious infant refuses or abstains from the nurse's breast, Gowther bites off his mother's nipple and feeds so voraciously and insatiably that he drains his wetnurses not only of milk but of their lives.[52] No woman dares to suckle the child and he is instead fed on as much rich food as he demands: 'Bot fed hym up with rych fode, / And that full mych as hym behovyd' (136-37). Bartholomaeus Anglicus described the desire for too much food as a characteristic of boys, ascribing it to their natural heat: 'for grete and strong hete he desiriþ moche mete, and so for superfluyte of mete and drynke he falliþ li3tlich into diuers sikenes and eueles'.[53] The word 'eueles' could simply describe physical illnesses but could also imply wicked or immoral states or

[49] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 14.
[50] Priscilla Heath Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper,* Vol. 1*,* EETS, O.S. 275 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 325.
[51] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne,* 161-62.
[52] See for example the life of Saint Nicholas in the *Golden Legend,* 'he would not take the breast nor the pap but once on the Wednesday and once on the Friday', Jacobus de Voraigne, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints,* ed. and trans. F. S. Ellis (Temple Classics, 1900), https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ [accessed July 30, 2019]. For further discussion see Dzon, 'Wanton Boys', 95. Margaret Robson points out that medieval physiological theories understood breast milk to be created from the woman's blood, so that Gowther may be seen as exsanguinating his nurses with his excessive feeding, 'Animal Magic in *"Sir Gowther"*', *The Yearbook of English Studies,* Vol. 22 (1992): 140-53.
[53] Bartholomeus, *Properties,* 300-301.

actions.[54] Medieval conduct literature too suggests a propensity to excessive consumption among the young and equates this with immorality. 'Ete þi mete by smalle mosselles; / Fylle not thy mouth as done brothellis' [worthless people, vile creatures, rascals, scoundrels], advises the *Lytlle Childrenes Lytil Boke,* a text which appears along with *Gowther* in National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1.[55] The mid-sixteenth-century *Boke of Nurture* of Hugh Rhodes is liberally endowed with such advice: 'Bee not greedye of meate and drinke', 'Fyll not thy mouth to full', 'Defyle not thy lips with eating much, / as a Pigge eating draffe'.[56] Anna Chen has argued that the medieval concept of 'nurture' equated proper physical nourishment with parental care, and that conduct books 'envisage the child's modulation from a beastly creature into a human being through the work of learning how to eat'.[57] In failing to act to restrain their son's appetites, Gowther's parents are thus implicated in his wicked conduct. Never 'nurtured' to comply with the wishes of his ostensible father, the Duke, he instead follows his demonic/youthful nature and works the will of his biological father.[58]

The nature of the threat which Gowther poses to society thus combines the malevolent supernatural with the tropes of unruly childhood and youth, and this continues to be apparent in his adolescent conduct. Mirk's *Festial* provides a helpful catalogue of common demonic mischief, which includes causing wars, making tempests in the sea, drowning ships and men, causing arguments and murder between neighbours, tending fires, and burning houses and towns. Other actions attributed to diabolic influence include blowing down houses, steeples and trees, making women overlay their children, and causing men to drown themselves, hang themselves or otherwise commit suicide out of hopelessness.[59] Aside from his pyromaniacal and antireligious tendencies, Gowther's behaviour does not fit neatly into the stereotypically diabolic. In fact, it resembles the construction of wayward childhood and youth in medieval discourse as much as the malevolent demon. Chopping horses' backs into two echoes the inappropriate cruelty to animals associated with the wanton child. His attacks on the church too, embody a childish

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[54] MED, 'ivel (n.)'.
[55] Furnivall, ed. *Babees Book,* 18 (lines 37-38).
[56] *Ibid.,* 77; 79 (lines 215; 281; 237-38).
[57] Anna Chen, 'Consuming Childhood: Sir Gowther and National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 11, no. 3 (2012): 373.
[58] Aquinas held that demons, lacking physical form, could only father children using semen collected from mortal men via prior impersonation of a woman during a sexual encounter, a point that is also made in the prologue to the Royal MS version of *Sir Gowther* (although not in the Advocates version which forms the basis for this discussion). I use 'biological' here because it is clear that some kind of 'essence' is regarded as having passed from demon to child which causes Gowther to stand in a fraternal relation to Merlin and produces physical (early dentition) and psychological effects in the hero, although as I argue the extent to which the latter are the products of a demonic nature as opposed to a negligent nurture is left deliberately ambiguous.
[59] John Mirk, *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus*, ed. T. Erbe, EETS, E.S. 96 (London: Trübner, 1905), 150.

playfulness for all their destructive violence – burning hermits, forcing friars to jump off cliffs, and hanging parsons on hooks – rendered with a pleasing alliteration which belies their evil nature: 'And make frerus to leype at kraggus / And parsons for to heng on knaggus' (199-200).

Indeed, the latter two examples closely parallel the exploits of another supernaturally-charged hybrid child in medieval discourse: the young Jesus in the Middle English poetic renderings of the apocryphal infancy tradition. While playing with the other children of the community, the boy-God leaps from a hill and, when his fellows attempt to follow him, they fall to their deaths. While collecting water, he hangs his pitcher from a sunbeam to the dismay of his peers when they fail to repeat the feat and their own pitchers fall and smash. Later in the narrative, Christ himself is to be found sitting on a sunbeam and his playmates again come to grief when they try to imitate him. The graphic description of their shattered bodies – a sight which the young Jesus finds hilarious – is a reminder that even divine childhood is not immune from inflicting mischievous but brutal violence:

> Jesus loughe [laughed] and made hym playe,
> Thase that leuede full sare þay grette; [cried out, wept]
> Some brake þe haulse [neck] & some þe thee [thigh]
> Some brake þe schanke & some þe arme,
> Some þe bakke & some the knee
> Þare skapede nane with-owttene harme.[60] (478-83)

Further examples of the young Jesus's exploits include striking dead his teacher who attempts to discipline him and turning his playmates into swine. He does so with callous, almost psychopathic indifference to the distress which his actions cause the children's parents, and indeed to the feelings of anyone except his close friend Osepe and his mother Mary, whose tearful intercessions seem to be the only thing preventing absolute carnage. Since Jesus's violent actions can hardly be put down to the supernatural side of his nature, one is forced to conclude that Gowther's actions too may have as much to do with his unrestrained youthful humanity as his diabolic paternity. It is a case of irony rather than destiny that Gowther, in giving free reign to his violent impulses, is in fact performing an act of obedience to the will of his real father rather than, as is more usual, acts of wanton disobedience.

It is not only Gowther's capacity for creative and mischievous acts of violence which can be associated with his tender years. His unbridled sexuality too is youthful as well as demonic. While

[60] Carl Horstmann, ed., 'Nachträge zu den Legenden', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 74 (1885): 327-39.

Gowther's sexual exploits may appear to modern readers incongruous to a reading which emphasises his childish qualities, it is worth noting the two were not necessarily seen as antithetical in late medieval England. In Middle English romance, Floris and Blancheflour famously fall in love as children and consummate their union aged around twelve.[61] John Mirk's *Instructions of Parish Priests* urges that male and female children from the age of seven should no longer sleep in bed together because of the risk of sin.[62] The mid-fourteenth century manual for confessors *Memoriale presbiterorum* advises the priest to ask children who are 'able to tell right from wrong, and are close to puberty' (*doli capax, proximus pubertati*) if they have 'committed adultery, fornication or incest'.[63] The manual goes on to urge the confessor to act more leniently in the infliction of penances on delinquent children than older people, 'and especially when the sin is sexual, because in an old person the natural heats are dying out as it were of cold and exhaustion but in a young person they are aflame'.[64] Even during much of the twentieth century, the dominant Freudian-based psychological theory conceptualised even young infants as already acting out forms of sexual instinct. This is not to say that medieval people, like Freud, commonly associated infancy or childhood with the expression of sexuality, merely that the two were not as categorically opposed in the Middle Ages as they later became. In fact, I wish to argue that Gowther's sexual drives are best understood as facets of 'youth' rather than childhood and that the figure of the child/adolescent/youth is conflated in Gowther as it is in medieval three-stage ages of man theories.

The construction of young male sexuality as a threat to the patriarchal or 'father-ruled' social order is widely attested in Middle English texts, and forms a major concern of literature on the Ages of Man.[65] In *Mirror* the youth at age fourteen is advised by reason to 'Goo to oxenford, or lerne lawe' (90), but lust chimes in and advises him instead to go to the tavern, to pursue women and associate with wild companions: 'make wommen myrie cheere, And wilde felawis to-gidere drawe' (93-4). Indeed, lust suggests that it is impossible for the youth to do otherwise: 'ȝouþe can

[61] Erik Kooper, ed., *Sentimental and Humorous Romances* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005).
[62] John Mirk, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock and Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, O.S. 31 (London, 1868), 7, lines 216-221.
[63] Michael Haren, 'Interrogatories of the *Memoriale presbiterorum*', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages,* ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1998), 162-63; [Si adulterium, fornicacionem vel incestum commiserrit]. It is unclear whether this was intended to refer only to male children or also to apply to female children. The word used throughout is 'puer' which could carry either meaning and which Haren translates as 'child'.
[64] *Ibid.,* 162-63; [et maxime quando delinquitur circa canis lapsum, quia in sene calores naturales tamquam frigidi et quasi consumpti extingu<u>ntur, set in iuvene exardescunt]. Translations Haren's.
[65] See Rachel Moss, *Fatherhood and its Representations in Middle English Texts* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013).

not kepe him chast'.[66] The young man follows the path which lust lays out for him, resolving to 'spare' no woman in his quest to satisfy his sexual appetite: 'Al my lust y wole ful-fille, / I wole spare [avoid/shun/leave unhurt or undamaged] no womman' (107-08). At age sixty man comes to repent his youthful follies and seeks reconciliation with God: 'How schal y rekene with god almy3t? / I am aschamed wonder soore' (337). Like Gowther, he comes to realise that his youth was spent in the service of the devil: 'Whanne 3ouþe was maistir, y was page, / We lyueden myche in þe feendis seruice' (377-38).

In another poem, *Reuerte,* which elaborates upon a similar theme, the metaphor of hunting is used to represent the unbridled lusts of youth.[67] Just as Gowther's hunting expedition represents his violent desire for sexual gratification and ends with his attack on the nunnery, the young man in *Reuerte* uses a hawk, representative of his heart, to pursue a pheasant hen, the female bird representative of the object of his lust. With the refrain 'reuerte', solemnly sounded like a divine command at the end of every stanza, the poem advises the youth to turn from the wicked path to which the deficiencies of his age have brought him:

> Þis herte of 3ouþe is hie of port,
> And wildenes makiþ him ofte to fle,
> And ofte to falle in wickid sort;
> Þanne is it þe beste, reuerte. (85-88)

I Wiyte My Silf Myn Owne Woo, a poem in which an old man looks back on his life and laments the follies of his youth, also closely parallels Gowther's changing identity across his life course.[68] The poem begins with the line 'In my 3onge age ful wielde y was', before the old man goes on to elaborate on his youthful failings:

> I made couenaunt, true to be,
> First whanne y baptisid was;
> Y took to þe world, & wente from þee,
> Y folewide þe feend al in his traas; [path]
> From wraþþe and enuye wolde y not pas;
> Coueitise and auarise y usid also,
> Mi fleische hadde his wille, alas!

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[66] Furnivall's edition of the text, edited from London, Lambeth Palace MS 853, has the age at 'xx 3eer' (89) rather than fourteen, but this seems to be a copying error, since it would leave a gap in the narrative of man's life between the ages of fourteen and twenty. The age of fourteen has been supplied from the equivalent line in Lee's edition, edited from London, British Library MS Additional 36983; B. S. Lee, "'Gubernacio Hominis": A Fifteenth-Century Allegorical Poem', *Medium Ævum* 50, no. 2 (1981): 230–58.
[67] Furnivall, *Hymns,* 91-94.
[68] *Ibid.,* 35-39.

Y wiyte my silf myn owne woo! [I blame myself for my woe] (9-16)

Breaking the covenant which he made with God at his baptism, then spending his youth in the service of the devil and the fulfilment of worldly and fleshly desires, before coming to a state of profound remorse in old age, the old man who narrates this stanza could almost be the aged Gowther himself. It is perhaps with this contrast between age and youth in mind that we should understand the insight of the 'old' earl who first recognises Gowther's demonic heritage; the wisdom of age is presented as a counterpoint to the wildness and sinful follies of youth.

In its account of the exploits of the wild, lustful and wicked youth, followed by subsequent regret and redemption, *Gowther* therefore closely parallels this poetic tradition. And, as I have argued, it was certainly a tradition that would have been well-known to readers of romance, appearing alongside romances in multiple manuscripts.[69] Although these poems focus on the theme of sin and atonement, and thus may lend some support to penitential readings of *Gowther,* they are also profoundly concerned with age and the construction of identity across the life course; indeed, the two strands are inseparable.[70] In the figure of Gowther the threat of the child/youth/demon/animal is deliberately conflated, and threat is conceived of as directed against that which his attacks violate: the institutions of church, marriage and family which were the bedrock of governance in medieval society. I do not mean to suggest that there is no connection between his demonic parentage and his conduct – clearly Gowther is not a 'normal child' – but his youth is an essential feature of his demonic hybridity. As Chen puts it, 'Gowther's transformation from a monstrous creature into a properly socialised member of his human community is underpinned by the medieval conception of children as uncouth, appetitive beasts who must be trained and tamed into civilized human beings through education'.[71] I would go further – the deliberate conflation of childhood and youth with demonic monstrosity in *Gowther* is the articulation of a fear of childhood in medieval culture: the child is inherently deviant, and

[69] See above, 42.
[70] For penitential readings of *Gowther* see Margaret Bradstock, 'The Penitential Pattern in *Sir Gowther*', Parergon 20 (1978): 3-10; Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 144-78; Alan S. Ambrisco, '"Now y Lowve God": The Process of Conversion in Sir Gowther', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37, no. 1 (2015): 195–225 who argues that the text is closely aligned with fifteenth-century attitudes towards conversion; and Emily Rebekah Huber, 'Redeeming the Dog: *Sir Gowther*', *The Chaucer Review* 50, no. 3–4 (2015): 284–314 who suggests that in its representation of dogs, 'the poem interweaves frameworks of animal meaning within its more dominant penitential project' (p. 285). For alternative readings which emphasise the political rather than religious nature of Gowther's penance, see Aaron Hostetter, '*Sir Gowther*: Table Manners and Aristocratic Identity', *Studies in Philology* 114, no. 3 (2017): 497–516; Raluca Radulescu, 'Pious Middle English Romances Turned Political: Reading *Sir Isumbras, Sir Gowther, and Robert of Sicily* in Fifteenth-Century England', *Viator* 41, no. 2 (January 2010): 333–59.
[71] Chen, 'Consuming Childhood', 365-66.

the child left unsocialised and undisciplined is therefore a threat to the reproduction of the established social order.

When Gowther is informed by the old earl of his suspicion that he is the devil's son, he goes immediately to his mother who tells him the truth about his conception. Suddenly overcome with remorse, he travels to see the pope, who assigns him the penance of remaining silent and eating only that which he can tear from the mouths of dogs. This, Gowther dutifully carries out, living a mute life under the table in the household of the Emperor, eating with the dogs and known by all as Hob the fool. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has argued that, during Gowther's penance among the dogs, the hero's animality functions as a passage via which to construct a more secure humanity: 'In order to be a man, Gowther is going to have to become a dog'.[72] This humanity is understood as predicated upon a rejection of the characteristics of animality which have been temporarily assumed: 'Once the overcoding "takes," the body passes out of its freakish hybridity to be inscribed more fully than ever into the secure space of the Human'.[73] Yet Gowther's penance may also be understood as a regression to childhood, calling to mind as it does the trope of the lost child fed and cared for by wild beasts so common in medieval romance. Among the dogs, Gowther must abdicate the control of his appetites – of when, what, and how much he eats – that he prematurely wrested from his parents during his infancy with disastrous results. As a medieval proverb put it: give your child when he will crave and your whelp what it will have, and you will make a 'foule chylde and a feyre hounde'.[74] In Gowther's passage to a secure humanity, his childhood too must be left behind along with his monstrous hybrid state. The child's journey from unsocial to social being ruptures the distinction between the rational, ordered human world and the disordered world of the animal/demon 'other'. The not-yet-social child is thus imagined as an antisocial threat which must be contained and assimilated if the integrity of human society is to be upheld.

Nurturing Gowther

Because of *Gowther*'s focus on the 'socialisation' of its hero, several recent studies have argued that the poem should be read alongside conduct texts and have suggested that the romance functioned similarly as a means of educating the young. This stems from the codicological work of Phillipa Hardman, who has pointed out that prior to its binding in MS Advocates 19.3.1, *Sir*

[72] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Inhuman c. 1400', in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed., Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997), 230; see also Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 119-41.
[73] Cohen, 'Gowther', 232.
[74] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne,* 323, line 7242; Whiting C214.

Gowther existed in a booklet alongside the conduct poem *Urbanitatis.* Hardman sees this as part of a pattern in the manuscript of three booklets which pair conduct texts containing 'a coherent programme of simple, practical instruction on appropriate behaviour' with edifying romances which reinforce their advice by teaching 'the necessity and value of gentle nurture' through example. 'The romances and the didactic poems make the same moral points: the duty to care for the poor, respect for men of all degrees, observance of the Church's teaching; but at the same time, worldly success is urged in terms of wealth and high social status'.[75] Building on Hardman's work, Mary Shaner argues that the romances, including *Gowther,* show evidence of revision toward materialistic and domestic themes which she suggests were more appropriate for a young audience. Just as *Urbanitatis* offers a pragmatic delineation of the behaviour by which one may succeed in society, 'Sir Gowther is likewise a very pragmatic hero: adherence to the rules of his penance will lead to success (awarded by his heavenly lord) in both the material world and the spiritual hereafter'.[76] Anna Chen offers a more complex and nuanced reading of *Gowther* as structured around two different cultural imaginaries of childhood, the one brutish and beastly and the other innocent and spiritually redemptive.[77] She suggests that Gowther 'consumes' his way from the former model of childhood into the latter by learning how to eat, and the booklet in which *Gowther* appears offers young readers a means by which they can do the same, by 'consuming' the text of the romance paired with *Urbanitatis.*

Reading romance as a form of conduct text however can sometimes seem to involve an assumption of straightforward passivity in children's literary engagement which reproduces problematic assumptions about children's lack of agency. Shaner suggests, for example, that the romances in Advocates 19.3.1 may have functioned as an 'attractive lure' to the more straightforwardly didactic materials which followed, which 'might have been deliberately selected in recognition of the brevity of a child's attention span for instructive materials'.[78] The idea that children's lack of engagement with instructive materials was due to a lack of 'attention span' may perhaps be to confuse differences in priorities and outlook between parents and children for an inherent deficiency on the part of the child. Indeed, it may be problematic to construe children's unwillingness to submit to a regime of instruction as a lack of mental capacity.[79] At times, such accounts also appear to project adult ideals about the identities and concerns of children onto the young readers themselves, and to assume that the goals of 'instructor' and 'instructee' are

[75] Phillipa Hardman, 'Introduction', in *The Heege Manuscript: a Facsimile of National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.3.1,* ed. Phillipa Hardman, *Leeds Texts and Monographs,* New Series 16 (Leeds, 2000), 27; 23; 27.
[76] Mary E. Shaner, 'Instruction and Delight: Medieval Romances as Children's Literature', *Poetics Today,* vol. 13, no. 1 (1992): 12-13.
[77] Chen, 'Consuming Childhood'.
[78] Shaner, 'Instruction', 9.
[79] Nicholas Orme similarly assumes that young people have 'briefer attention spans' than older readers, *Medieval Children,* 286.

conterminous: 'The prominence of this theme of nurture in so many Middle English romances would seem to indicate a readership in which the business of *providing and acquiring* a gentle education is an issue of prime importance' [emphasis added].[80] Even where such arguments are not explicit in their attribution of a parental outlook to child audiences, they often leave unexamined the potential for discrepancy between the perspectives of readers of different ages: 'Gowther eats in order to learn how to become a human being, at the same time that his childish audience devours the text in order to learn, too, what "maketh a mon"'.[81] The construct of 'the child' which lurks behind these analyses is cognisant of the necessity of learning good manners and desires meekly to internalise his lessons. For this to represent the majority of young readers' engagement with *Gowther,* the gap between the medieval discursive construction of childhood and the social reality would need to have been truly vast.

In fact, the extent to which *Gowther* has anything to offer as a model for children's education is debatable to say the least. If anything, any independent-minded child could easily walk away with the message that 'there is nothing you can do in your youth that is so bad that it will prevent you from achieving both worldly success and a state of grace'. Although children probably were part of the audience for *Gowther* – and some may indeed have drawn this conclusion – it is hardly something we might expect to have been at the top of any parental didactic agenda. If compilers wanted romances featuring idealised portrayals of youth which could stand as *exempla* for their children, there were plenty of others which would have been a much closer fit, some of which will be discussed below. I propose instead that *Gowther* functioned as a cautionary tale for all members of the family about what would happen if the process of 'nurture' broke down or was not followed correctly. In so doing, *Gowther* provides an ideological underpinning to a particular model of socialisation, also evident in conduct texts, which is committed to the necessity of adult intervention to correct children's developmental trajectory. The recalcitrant child is not simply misbehaving, he or she is acting in the devil's service, threatening both the child's own safety and the safety and integrity of wider society.

Unlike Perceval, Gowther does not naturally 'grow out of' his bad behaviour as he gains experience of the world. Both Gowther and the conduct poems construct their subjects as inherently deviant but ultimately willing to commit passively to a process of character reform directed from without. This leads to an uneasy compromise in *Gowther* – having raped and burned an entire convent of nuns with impunity, the reader is required to suspend disbelief when the

[80] Phillipa Hardman, 'Popular Romances and Young Readers', in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance,* ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Corey James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 164.
[81] Chen, 'Consuming Childhood', 377-78.

hero's discovery of his demonic parentage causes him suddenly to develop a burning angst about the state of his soul. Indeed, the text recognises that that this is a significant departure from its previous characterisation of Gowther, but offers little explanation for this rapid change of heart other than, 'This thoght come on hym sodenly' (238). The compromise highlights an essential feature of this didacticist construct of childhood – childhood must be redeemably wicked, that is to say, children must be understood as naturally wild and antisocial but not so far as to be impervious to attempts to socialise them.

In light of *Gowther,* it is worth reconsidering the extent to which the work done by the conduct texts too may have been primarily ideological rather than practical. Instead of allowing the association with conduct texts to close down or limit understandings of *Sir Gowther* to the straightforwardly didactic and/or entertaining, it may be possible to take the contrary approach, and use the thematic complexity of the romance to open up less straightforward readings of poems such as *Urbanitatis*. Indeed, the extent to which a conduct poem is of practical value in teaching table manners is open to question; table manners are most easily taught at the table, not in the library. It is highly optimistic to believe that reading a poem will prevent a child desirous of picking their nose, belching, or dipping their fingers in the sauce from acting upon that desire. A stern word and the ever-present threat of violent repercussions were likely far more effective. Whether or not they could be made to function as practical guides to behaviour, one function that they certainly fulfil is to provide an ideological underpinning to the model of socialisation described above, one which envisages a process of subject formation in which the young passively internalise the instructions of older people. A modern critical assessment of one fifteenth-century conduct poem notes that, 'The plodding, if sincere, platitudes of "How the Wise Man Taught His Son" seem to assume that the son is a fool, or at least easily tempted into misbehaviour'.[82] In constructing the child as essentially incompetent and insubordinate, they maintained the perceived necessity of their subordination.

Conceptualising these texts as primarily ideological rather than practical opens them up to a further potential reading which is worthy of brief exploration as it has some significance for the understanding of the figure of the child in medieval literary culture. I believe we should be wary of assuming that 'instructional manuals, although entertaining to the twentieth century adult, would have been of little interest to medieval grown-ups except, possibly, in their roles as parents or mentors'.[83] In fact, I want to suggest that it is precisely the qualities that make them entertaining

[82] Bradford Y. Fletcher and Leslie A. Harris, 'A Northampton Poetic Miscellany of 1455-56', *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700* 7 (1998): 221.
[83] Shaner, 'Instruction', 14.

to contemporary readers which may have appealed to medieval audiences, old and young. The conduct texts can display a turn of phrase and a gift for the construction of mental images which can make them a delight to read. *Urbanitatis,* for example, offers the following advice:

> Foot & hond þou kepe fulle stylle
> Fro clawyng [scratching] or tryppng [tripping], hit ys skylle; [moderate behaviour]
> Fro spettyng & snetyng [snotting] kepe þe also;
> Be priuy of voydance [the expulsion of wind], & lette hit go.[84] (17-20)

It is easy to see that, in the cultural context in which Chaucer wrote the *Miller's Tale,* such an image of flatulence and other bodily emissions could have amused audiences young and old. The *Lytylle Childrenes Lytil Boke* which also appears in Advocates 19.3.1 is even more forthcoming: 'Pyke not þyne Eris ne thy nostrellis; / If þou do, men wolle say þou come of cherlis' [churls] (33-4); 'Bulk [belch] not as a Beene [bee] were yn þi throte / [As a ka]rle [man of low estate] þat comys oute of a cote [hovel] (47-8).[85] It is difficult to see what mocking references to those of low status and the imagery of the child's belch sounding like the buzzing of a bee are intended to add to the text if not an injection of humour. It would be stretching a solemn and serious reading of the text to suggest that the author is simply attempting to communicate a more specific message about the precise type of flatulent noise he would like children to avoid making.

An even stronger case can be made for the availability of such a comic reading of *Symon.* The poem reads like an amusing catalogue of children's misbehaviour, urging the reader specifically, for example, against throwing stones at dogs, horses and pigs, men's houses and glass windows. Surely a general prohibition against throwing stones could have achieved the didactic aim without the need to offer such a potentially entertaining and evocative list of offences. The child is also cautioned against making faces at men, particularly behind their backs which creates a comic image of an author cognisant with what children do, even if he is unable to see them doing it: 'Chyld, make þou no mowys ne knakkes / Be-fore no men, ne by-hynd here bakkes' (65-6). The advice is accompanied by the threat of violence visited specifically upon the backside of the offender: 'And but þou do, þou fhat fare the wors, / And þer-to bete on þe bare ers' (61-2). It is important to consider the possibility that, for all the anxiety which childhood could engender, medieval people may have found children themselves and their social *faux pas* inherently *funny*; that fears over the threat which unsocialised childhood posed to the social order may have been tempered with humour. Certainly medieval schoolmasters appear to have delighted themselves as well as their pupils in creating (often otherwise sympathetic) portrayals of squabbling,

[84] Furnivall, *Babees Book,* 13.
[85] *Ibid.,* 18.

mischievous, rebellious boys playing truant, insulting one another and fighting: 'Syt awaye or I shall gyue the a blowe', exclaims one pugnacious youth from the pages of Robert Stanbridge's *Vulgaria*. Other childish remarks include: 'He clypped me about the myddle'; 'Thou stynkest'; 'His nose is lyke a shoynge horne'.[86] Such accounts, in common with medieval fabliaux, also tend to treat the image of the arse being struck as a source of comedy, as will be discussed below in Chapter 2. Read in the context of such portrayals, conduct texts may perhaps be liberated to some extent from their solemn, didactic image.

Yet there is also a darker side to such a concept of childhood as a source of entertainment. In taking children's antisocial behaviour as a source of amusement, the socially incompetent child is constructed as an object of ridicule, akin to the unsocial Gowther's designation as 'Hob the fool'. *Perceval* too is open to being read as a catalogue of childish stupidity in the *Dummling* tradition, although, as I hope I have demonstrated above, this is not all that the text has to offer.[87] Ridicule too serves a normative purpose, compelling via different means conformity to the same cultural code of conduct, a conformity enforced by the shame and policed by public mockery. Furthermore, as bullied children down the ages can testify, making a person or group of people an object of ridicule can have the effect of undermining the extent to which they are perceived as feeling subjects deserving of empathy, care and respect. This outlook too, then, is implicated in the process by which children in medieval culture could come to be dehumanised and mistreated. Both *Gowther* and the text with which it is paired, *Urbanitatis*, therefore, construct the adult-child relationship in such a way as to maintain the necessity and normality of children's subordinate status for the supposed benefit of the family, society and Christendom itself as well as for the benefit of the child.

The importance of this to the present study should be clear: children can only be 'abused' in a culture in which their subordinate status is assured. Unlike women whose subordination in medieval culture has received greater scholarly attention, children's subordinate status may be seen to arise partly out of a biologically-imposed dependency, a dependency which encompasses among other things their reliance on adults to provide them with food. This does not mean that this state of affairs is so 'natural' a fact that the maintenance of children's subordination requires no sustained work at a discursive level. Children's dependence on their parents for food becomes an important site in which this work can take place, as is embodied in the double meaning of the

[86] White, *Vulgaria*, 15; 16; 17; 19.
[87] David C. Fowler, '*Le Conte du Graal* and *Sir Perceval of Galles*', *Comparative Literature Studies* 12, no. 1 (1975): 5-20; Caroline D Eckhardt, 'Arthurian Comedy: The Simpleton-Hero in *Sir Perceval of Galles*', *The Chaucer Review* 8, no. 3 (1974): 205-220.

Middle English 'nurture' as both provision of sustenance and teaching table manners.[88] In the ideal envisaged by the authors of conduct texts, the 'nurture' of providing children with food provides a platform for the 'nurture' of inculcating adherence to the dictates of mature society. Indeed, this is the primary feature which, as *Gowther* makes clear, distinguishes the nurturing of children from the feeding of animals. Table manners may thus be read as engaged in the construction of an ideal childhood and the implied denigration and ridicule of its opposite. By presenting good table manners, children enact a public performance of submission to their elders, a performance which is made to signify far more than their ability to follow arbitrary rules of conduct, but stands as a method by which they demonstrate control of their appetites, deference to their instructors, their respect for social hierarchy, their very humanity; in short, that the threat they pose to the seamless reproduction of the social order is being contained. Conversely, consideration of *Gowther* alongside conduct texts furnishes parents with a model by which to interpret their offsprings' bad behaviour as evidence of inhumanity and therefore as a justification for extreme discipline; the worse the conduct, the more inhuman the child and the more inhumane the required intervention.[89]

Conclusion

The discourse of the 'wild and wanton' child is found across a range of medieval sources from literature on the Ages of Man, to conduct texts, to philosophical and medical treatises. It is perhaps in medieval romance, and in particular in figures such as Perceval, Lybeaus and Gowther, that its implications are most fully explored. This discourse was involved in the construction of boundaries between the natural and the cultural; the savage and the civilised; the margins and the centre; the monstrous, the demonic, the animal, and the human. Childhood in this discourse was a state onto which were projected fears and concerns about the state of the social order. This fear of childhood was not a fear of children themselves but of what they might become if they were left to their own devices. Despite its pejorative tone, in the context of romances such as *Perceval* and *Lybeaus* this discourse presented the child as possessed of autonomy and agency, and offered young male readers opportunities to construct heroic childhood identities. At the same time,

[88] Chen, 'Consuming Childhood', 375; Nicholas Orme, 'Education and Recreation', in *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England,* ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 63-64.

[89] It is worth pointing out that this seamless reproduction was – and to some extent remains – a pervasive fiction. If the fidelity of social reproduction were entirely maintained between generations, social structures, attitudes, discourses etc. would remain static, as has been pointed out by (among others) Dennis H. Wrong, 'The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology', *American Sociological Review* 26, no. 2 (April 1961): 183-93. For alternative models which take into account the role that children play cultural (re)production, see for example Christina Toren, 'Making History: The Significance of Childhood Cognition for a Comparative Anthropology of Mind', *Man* 28 (1993): 461-78; William Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood, 4th Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2015).

however, as will become clear in the following chapter, it justified and maintained children's subordination and could slide all too easily into dehumanisation and abuse.

CHAPTER 2:

THE TREATMENT OF CHILDREN

In a touching passage, the writer of a late fifteenth-century schoolbook describes in a child's narrative voice the dismay of an eleven-year-old boy forced to leave his home to attend school:

> The worlde waxeth worse every day, and all is turnede upside down ... for all that was to me a pleasure when I was a childe, from iij yere olde to x (for now I go upon the xij yere), while I was undre my father and mothers kepyng, be tornyde now to tormentes and payne. For than I was wont to lye styll abedde tyll it was forth dais [late in the day], delitynge myselfe in slepe and ease ... My brekefaste was brought to my beddys side as ofte as me liste to call therfor, and so many tymes I was first fedde or I were cledde ...
>
> But nowe the world rennyth upon another whele. for nowe at fyve of the clocke by the monelyght I most go to my booke and lete slepe and slouthe alon. and yff oure maister hape to awake us, he bryngeth a rode stede of a candle ... here is nought els preferryde but monyshynge [admonishing] and strypys. brekfastes that were sumtyme brought at my biddynge is dryven oute of contrey and never shall cum agayne ... I sech all the ways I can to lyve ons at myn ease, that I myght rise and go to bede when me liste oute of the fere of betynge.[1]

This passage speaks to the lives and concerns of medieval schoolboys in several important ways. It is reflective of the fact that no doubt for some children it was indeed a difficult and perhaps traumatic experience to be sent away from the familiar comforts of home at such a young age. Elsewhere in the text we learn that it may have been some years before children saw their parents again, and one passage speaks of both parents and child weeping for joy on beholding one another after a prolonged period of absence.[2] It is possible perhaps to see one reason why narratives of abandonment in romances – of dislocation, torment, growth and triumphant return – were culturally resonant in later-medieval England. The voice of the master is very much present here, perhaps with his tongue slightly in his cheek, protesting against a perceived tendency of parents to be too lenient towards their children but also perhaps capable of

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[1] William, Nelson, ed., *A Fifteenth Century Schoolbook From a Manuscript in the British Museum (MS. Arundel 249)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 1-2.
[2] *Ibid.,* 14-15.

empathising with their plight. After all, as an educated man, he himself was once in the discomfiting shoes of the boy to whom he gives voice, and he too perhaps lived through the daily fear of beating. At the same time, he affirms the necessity of re-inflicting this cycle of violence upon the upcoming generation, affirming the cultural discourse of the child as naturally inclined to sloth and to gluttony and in need of correction.

How far can we take such portrayals of children in schoolbooks as representative of the real lives and perspectives of medieval children? The children's voices in these texts are, of course, the production of their adult writers, but nonetheless one of their most fascinating and beguiling characteristics is that they are recognisably childlike. Who cannot sympathise with the voice of the child stuck indoors on the last fine day of the year?

> The Maister shulde do us all a great pleasur today yf he wolde gyve us leve to go and make us mery this afternone while the weder is so fair, for it is doutefull yf hereafter ther wolde be so great a temperatnes of weder.[3]

Childhood boasting is apparent: 'I am excellent of strenght. I marvell why the kynge commaundith not me to be sent for that I may bere his standerde'.[4] Also recognisable is the child's sense of injustice at being blamed unfairly for others' misdeeds: 'Ther is no unhappy [evil] dede done here emonge us but all the fawte is put upon me though I be not gylty'.[5] Another short passage speaks of joy at receiving news of family and friends:

> My brother hath writtyn to me from london that my father and mother and all my frendes fare well, the which letters hath made me right mery, for why the more I love them the more I rejose ther helth and welfar.[6]

These texts exist as collections of *vulgaria* containing parallel English and Latin sentences which were used in the classroom for teaching Latin grammar. The context of their production was important in shaping their portrayals of children. In texts for language learning, the normal linguistic process is inverted in that meaning is used primarily as a vehicle to convey grammatical structure rather than structure to convey meaning. As a result, such texts function best with meanings that are easily recognisable and relatable for their users. Medieval educators recognised this: Cardinal Wolsey, once a grammar master at Magdalen school, Oxford, wrote that masters should produce exercises 'not silly or pointless, but with a clear or well-phrased meaning which

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[3] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 40.
[4] *Ibid.,* 81; for admonitions against such boasting in conduct literature see Frederick J. Furnivall, *The Babees Book,* EETS, O.S. 32 (London: Trübner, 1868), 52.
[5] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book.,* 40-1.
[6] *Ibid.,* 16.

a boy's mind might sympathise with'.[7] This outlook is evidenced in *vulgaria* in the clear and often sympathetic depictions of the lives of medieval boys. What is more, *vulgaria* were designed not only to be appealing to children but to be written out, translated and recited by children. They were shaped in the classroom in interaction with children themselves, and Orme suggests it is often 'hard to distinguish between the influence of master and pupil'.[8] As I shall show, the children in many of these texts do not present a uniform perspective, but instead they explore a variety of ideas which cannot all be taken to reflect the view of their writers. As such, they may perhaps represent the closest that it is possible for modern historians to come to the voices of medieval children.[9]

The utility of the early Tudor *vulgaria* as sources for medieval children and childhood has long been recognised by scholars. Some, seeing within them an evident desire on the part of the authors to include material to which their young audiences could relate, have extolled their virtues as repositories of incidental information on the lives of medieval children.[10] None of these accounts has failed to notice the ubiquitous references to the schoolmaster's rod and to remark that the physical experience of this potent symbol of office seems to have been a frequent and painful reality for the young scholars of late-medieval grammar schools. Schoolroom texts have also been of use to historians and literary scholars interested in their potential to (re)produce or subvert power structures in Tudor society, particularly those writing about the early modern period and the influence of humanism. Jonathan Goldberg has seen an alliance between humanism and the ruling class of Tudor England in the attempts apparent in *vulgaria* to delineate boundaries between the gentle and the vulgar.[11] Alan Stewart argues that humanist pedagogy revised the structure of personal relations and transactions between masters and scholars, and was underpinned by an 'erotic economy of beating' within which both information and sustaining material rewards were transferred.[12] Richard Halpern's Foucauldian and Marxian analysis suggests that humanism ushered in a new form of political authority which articulated and instilled a new class structure in Tudor society. In Halpern's eyes, the *vulgaria* thus bear witness to the replacement of a 'juridicial' teaching model with a 'civil' model which

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[7] Quoted in R. S. Stanier, *Magdalen School: A History of Magdalen College School Oxford* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958)*,* 45-6.
[8] Nicholas Orme, 'The Culture of Children in Medieval England', *Past and Present* 148 (1995): 77.
[9] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 158-60.
[10] B. White, 'Introduction', in *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton,* EETS, O.S. 187 (New York: Krauss Reprint, 1971), xi-lxi; W. Nelson, 'Introduction', in *Fifteenth Century Schoolbook,* ed. Nelson, vii; Stanier, *Magdalen School*, 34-55; Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London: Hambledon Press 1989), esp. 73-149; *Medieval Children,* 158-161.
[11] Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990).
[12] Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 98.

caused 'the schooled subject to desire his own ideological subordination'.[13] More recently, Paul Sullivan has emphasised the subversive potential of *vulgaria,* suggesting that they promoted social ambition rather than docility. Stressing the use of these texts for classroom performance, he proposes that *vulgaria* 'regularly provided impressive scripts for resistance and audacious self-assertion', and that violence in these texts is merely a 'background to the dominant theme of self-advancement'.[14]

The theatrical reading of schoolroom texts as 'scripts' has received widespread support. Lynne Eterline has explored the connections between sixteenth-century pedagogy and Shakespearean drama, stressing the 'theatricality of everyday life in humanist grammar schools'.[15] Enterline places exemplarity and imitation at the heart of her analysis, and suggests that humanist masters attempted to discipline boys' gestures and physical demeanours as well as their memories and voices in the process of rehearsal and repetition of schoolroom exercises. This process of education:

> turned England's schoolrooms into a kind of daily theatre for Latin learning. And it turned early modern schoolboys into self-monitoring, rhetorically facile subjects who modulated their performances of acceptable speech, vocal modulation, and affective expression by taking the institutional scene of judgement inside, as their own.[16]

Enterline too draws attention to the homoerotic overtones of portrayals of beating, but unlike Stewart she sees children as largely uncomprehending participants in the 'erotic economy', at least at the ages of 7 to 12 when they experienced it.[17] In his recent analysis of punishment in medieval education, Ben Parsons also stresses the 'quasi-theatrical character of these texts', pointing out that in some instances they ask the pupil to imagine himself in the role of the master. The texts 'do not simply present flogging to the pupil as a force to which he must submit, but require him to visualise himself as a prospective agent of beating'. As such, Parsons argues that these texts set out to 'train boys in the use of proper force as well as letters'.[18]

Viewing schoolroom exercises as akin to theatrical 'scripts' which functioned to 'train' children via a process of repetitive performance may well reflect the intentions of some medieval

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[13] R. Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 30-1.
[14] P. Sullivan, 'Playing the Lord: Tudor Vulgaria and the Rehearsal of Ambition', *English Literary History* 75, no. 1 (2008), 180; 190.
[15] Lynne Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 1.
[16] *Ibid.,* 44.
[17] *Ibid.,* 48-61.
[18] Ben Parsons, *Punishment in Medieval Education* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2018), 199; 200.

pedagogues, but it presents a decidedly one-way model of the process by which children became socialised. It relegates children largely to the role of passive, if occasionally dissenting or uncomprehending, performers of scripts, and imbues with agency primarily the adult 'playwright'. Even Sullivan and Parsons who stress the ambitious potential in *vulgaria* do little to challenge the fundamental assumption that children *needed* scripts written by adults in order to challenge authority or assert their own individual or collective identities. As I argued in the previous chapter, this model of learning receives satirical treatment in some medieval romances, particularly *Perceval,* and is also out of step with the findings of modern research into children's acquisition of culture. Indeed, Enterline's use of Freud, Lacan and Laplanche to inform the ways in which normative identities are formed during childhood highlights the chasm which now exists between psychoanalytic theory and the fields of developmental psychology and the sociology and anthropology of childhood.[19] Moreover, I believe that the theatrical reading of *vulgaria* misses a crucial feature of the performance: the clear influence of the *dramatis personae* themselves over the creation of their lines.

I suggest instead that the schoolbooks can be read as records of an interactive process of dialogue between the *scriptor* and the scripted. By choosing to write and present a particular sentence for translation, schoolmasters communicated directly with their pupils about matters relevant to the classroom and the community at large, including references to current events such as the repair of the weathercock atop St. Paul's Cathedral.[20] School exercises functioned as a means of building relationships between masters and pupils, and ways in which the feelings of both parties could be expressed and acknowledged. When a grammar master wrote this example for translation in the 1490s, he was surely communicating something of his own personal suffering to his pupils although choosing to write from their perspective:

> It were better to eny of us all to be dede than to suffre suche thynge as the maister hath sufferyde these iij dais agone in the totheache ... [he] myght nother ete nother drynke. And ... he myght not slepe nother day nother nyght.[21]

He also recognised that his deliverance from pain would not engender universal approval among those whom he taught:

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[19] Alison James, *Socialising Children* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1996); William Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood, Fourth Edition* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015), esp. 1-44; Judith Rich Harris, *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); Christina Toren, 'Making History: The Significance of Childhood Cognition for a Comparative Anthropology of Mind', *Man* 28 (1993): 461-478

[20] See Nelson, 'Introduction', xvii.

[21] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century Schoolbook,* 29.

> Fellows, what is youre mynde? ar ye glad that the maister is recoverede of totheache? ... I wolde spende a noble worth of ale emonge good gosseps so that he hade be vexede a fortnyght longer.[22]

As these sentiments were pored over, translated and read out in a classroom setting they no doubt injected a personal touch and perhaps a degree of humour to the master-pupil relationship. As records of communication they share some qualities with letters as well as with theatrical scripts. In the context of classroom relationships, these sentences functioned as missives from a teacher to his pupils which also record, however imperfectly, the pupils' varied responses.

This chapter, then, will investigate the ways in which male children were treated in schools through an analysis of their school exercises. These comprise parallel collections which include both Latin and English versions as well as some which include only Latin sentences. They span around 90 years from c.1430-1520 and encompass relatively professional productions of named schoolmasters as well as the notes and compilations of children themselves.[23] In line with the Social Ecological Model of child maltreatment which I outlined in the introduction, this chapter will investigate the mesosystem and the microsystem to understand how children's treatment and maltreatment depended on the relationships and wider community structures in which they were embedded. The first section will focus primarily on those schoolbooks which were produced by schoolmasters. These include four collections of *vulgaria* associated with Magdalen College School in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, those of John Stanbridge and of Robert Whittinton, as well as two anonymous collections preserved in London, British Library MS Arundel 249 and London, British Library MS Royal 12.B.xx. (hereafter Arundel and Royal *vulgaria*).[24] It will argue that in the absence of clearly defined standards for the right and wrong treatment of children in medieval culture, the boundaries of acceptable conduct for pupils and masters were subject to a constant process of negotiation and renegotiation involving children and their peers as well as external authorities such as parents. The second section will move on to consider those surviving manuscripts which were created by individual children themselves. In the same way as manuscripts produced by adults have been read for evidence of their compilers' concerns, interests and perspectives, this section will look for patterns in the sentences that different pupils chose to record in their collections to try to understand the ways

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[22] *Ibid.,* 29.
[23] For an overview see Nicholas Orme, 'General Introduction', in *English School Exercises* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 2013), 3-43.
[24] Beatrice White, ed., *The Vulgaria of John Stanbridge and the Vulgaria of Robert Whittinton,* EETS, OS 187 (London: Trübner, 1932 [repr. 1971]); Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* Nicholas Orme, 'An Early-Tudor Oxford Schoolbook', in *Education and Society,* 123-51.

in which they themselves understood their treatment at school. The final section will look most explicitly at the impact of the dehumanising discourses which were explored in Chapter 1 by focusing on the perspectives of abusive masters. It will seek to reach the ontogenic level of the Ecological Model, and suggest ways in which some masters' own developmental trajectory as schoolboys themselves may have been implicated in the perpetuation of a cycle of abuse in educational institutions.

Children and Authorities

The anonymous author of the Arundel *vulgaria*, produced at Magdalen School at the end of the fifteenth century, portrays a dialogue between master and scholar on the subject of beating which encapsulates something of the give and take inherent in the relationship. In it, the scholar and the master both set out their expectations from one another and affirm a code of conduct which is binding on both of them:

> Gentle maister, I wolde desire iij thynges of you: onn that I myght not wake over longe of nyghtes, another that I be not bett when I com to schole, the thirde that I myght ever emong [from time to time] go play me.
>
> Gentle scholar, I wolde that ye shulde do iij other thynges: onn that ye ryse betyme of mornynges, another that ye go to your booke delygently, the thirde that ye behave yourselff agaynst gode devoutely, all menn honestly, and then ye shall have youre askynge.[25]

For this particular schoolmaster, then, beating is not an automatic and necessary response to children's inherent deficiencies but rather a tool to police the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. These boundaries are portrayed as subject to a process of affirmation and reaffirmation in the context of individual relationships between schoolmasters and their pupils.

In the Arundel *vulgaria,* beating is generally portrayed in the context of individual misdemeanours as opposed to being depicted as routine practice. These misdemeanours could include failing to produce the required work: 'The rules that I must say to my maister ar scantly halfe writyn, wherefore I am worthy to be bett'.[26] They could also include paying insufficient attention to their possessions. In a touching passage, a child is portrayed saying:

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[25] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 28.
[26] *Ibid.,* 33

> Though I sholde be bett now, and not withoute a cause, for I was so lewde and so negligent to lesse my bookes, yete I am glade that at the laste I have fonde them agayne.[27]

By presenting such exercises for translation, the schoolmaster communicated a punitive framework which promised that beating would only be imposed upon those who were negligent in upholding their end of the bargain. And the interpretation of negligence too was up for negotiation, as students were presented as able to voice their objections when they felt that standards had been unfairly applied.

> Maister, I marvell greatly that ye be so importune unto me. I trowe I never deservede it. therefore, I do not all only monyshe you, but also I exorte and praye youe that ye wolde be goode frende to me. and if ther be eny thynge in me that ye have nede of ye shall fynde me redy at all tymes.[28]

No doubt many schoolboys made similar pleas, and by recycling their words back to them in the scripted form of school exercises, the master communicated the message that such entreaties would not necessarily fall on deaf ears. The ideal relationship with the master that emerges is one which includes a good deal of friendship and mutual respect.

As well as punishment, the possibility for leniency is also portrayed. One sentence for example portrays a young scholar pleading for forgiveness for a mistake in terms which may well reflect the type of language he heard regularly from his students:

> Forgyve me this fawte ... for I am of thes condicions, the more I am forgevyn, the lesse I fawte, and if ever I do another fawte, ye may well punyshe me for them bothe.[29]

The logic here that forgiveness rather than punishment is the most efficacious corrective to this young scholar's shortcomings seems to owe more to the ingenuity of children than to medieval theories of pedagogy.[30] Nevertheless, by presenting this dialogue to his pupils the master informs them that their perspectives will be taken into consideration and that their protestations would be heard: the plea is successful and the young scholar is forgiven: 'go thy way quyte [free/clear] for this tyme. thou shalt not fynde me so herde to intret as thou supposyde'.[31] Indeed, the Arundel *vulgaria* betrays a recognition that not all children would respond well to punishment but that some would benefit from a softer approach. These individual differences

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[27] *Ibid.,* 33.
[28] *Ibid.,* 31-2.
[29] *Ibid.,* 33.
[30] For a detailed overview of pedagogical theories see Parsons, *Punishment,* Ch2.
[31] *Ibid.,* 34.

in children affected the ways in which this schoolmaster taught them: 'sum on ways, sum another; sum with betynge, sum with fairnesse'.[32]

As well as differences in children's response to beating, individual differences in aptitude for learning were also recognised by this master and incorporated into the expectations which he placed on his students. Classroom engagement with the *vulgaria* may have provided an opportunity both to communicate this to his weaker pupils and for them to articulate their understanding of the individual expectations placed on them: 'The maister knoweth what a slowe wytt I am of, ... yf I kepe well in remembrance such thyngs as I have lurnede I shall content hym'.[33] Masters also recognised the potential in their brighter students and communicated their frustration when this was not reached, complaining that the most quick-witted children are often those who apply themselves the least to their studies, but that these students, would be outstanding if they could only be persuaded to apply themselves.[34] Both of these characterisations of children will no doubt be recognisable to modern educators and betray a complexity to medieval schoolroom life which the moralising tone and oppressive descriptions of physical violence which characterise some other school exercises make it easy to overlook. The perspectives of students on their own abilities may also be present in the *vulgaria.* One passage recognises that students differ in the times of day at which they learn best, portraying a student saying that '[everything] I lurne in the mornynge is sone gone oute of mynde, for nyght studye dothe me moste goode'.[35] This passage runs contrary to the usual advice directed at the young in moralistic discourse 'go to bed bi tyme'.[36] Whether it originated in the observation in the schoolmaster or the protestations of the young, its inclusion in a collection of school exercises betrays a further recognition that children's individual perspectives were worthy of consideration.

It is perhaps no coincidence that those schoolmasters who portray the relationships with their pupils in the most positive light are also those who tended to see them as most receptive to the process of education, and conceived of their own role as imparting knowledge rather than instilling discipline. The author of the Arundel *vulgaria* anticipated John Locke by some two-hundred years in articulating the theory that the child's mind was as wax, apt to receive all things that were imprinted on it, although admittedly his *vulgaria* are liberally peppered with complaints

[32] *Ibid.,* 28.
[33] *Ibid.,* 36.
[34] *Ibid.,* 36; Orme, 'Schoolbook'*,* 141.
[35] *Ibid.,* 39.
[36] Rudolf Fischer, ed., *How the Wyse Man Taught Hys Son. In Drei Texten* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1970 [1889]), 38.

about the intractability of the young waxworks placed before him.[37] The author of the Royal *vulgaria* who taught at Magdalen school in the early sixteenth century demonstrates an obvious pride in the 'honest labor' of teaching, and devotes an extended passage to elucidating just what he thinks this labour should entail.[38] He associates teaching with conceptions of parental nurturing instincts via the metaphor of the bird feeding its chicks so that they may eventually fly the nest:

> Lykewise as brides [birds] gether mete in ther mowghtes and part it among the yong ... so good techeres gather smalle rules and latyns and part them a-monge the yong scolares, ... and sease not teching them vntyll the be able to rede them selfe.[39]

Elsewhere, he communicates his good intentions directly to his pupils through the examples he sets them for translation:

> If ther shalbe any thyng that ye thinke that [I] can do you good yn, cum vnto me when ye will; ye shall lacke nother my duty nother my diligens in suche thinges as I thynke shalbe for your profet.[40]

This collection of *vulgaria* is particularly notable for its lack of emphasis on beating; indeed Nicholas Orme argues that beating is 'strangely underemphasised' compared to other schoolbooks.[41] It serves as further evidence that the idea of the child as naturally wild, wanton and unruly which is so visible in late-medieval culture was not subscribed to by all schoolmasters. For some pupils, a positive relationship with a kind and caring master likely mitigated against the consequences of the ubiquitous emphasis on corrective violence in medieval discourse.

Other schoolmasters however evidence a very different attitude towards corporal punishment. Robert Whittinton's *vulgaria,* published in 1520, goes beyond the simple depiction of violence against children; it positively revels in it:

> I played my mayster a mery pranke or playe yesterdaye / and therfore he hathe thaught me to synge a newe songe to daye. He hath made me to renne a rase (or a course) that my buttokkes doeth swette a blody sweat. The more instantly that I prayed hym to

[37] Nelson, ed. *Fifteenth Century Schoolbook,* 20; John Locke, 'Some Thoughts Concerning Education', in *The Educational Writings of John Locke,* ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 325. For complaints see Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 31; 35; 37.
[38] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 140.
[39] *Ibid.,* 141-42.
[40] *Ibid.,* 138.
[41] *Ibid.*, 128.

> pardon me the faster he layed vpon. He hath thaught me a lesson that I shall remembre whyles I lyue.[42]

The euphemistic language serves to trivialise and make light of this otherwise rather brutal description of a boy's suffering. A later depiction of the master beating a naked boy makes particularly distasteful reading to modern eyes: 'My mayster hathe bete me so naked in his chaumbre that I was not able to do of nor vpon myn owne clothes'.[43] That Whittinton chose to site this particular example in the chamber adds to the disquieting sexual overtones of the passage. The violence here goes far beyond that which is in evidence in the earlier text: 'He hath torne my buttokkes. so that theyr is lefte noo hole skynne vpon them. The wales be so thycke that one can stande scantly by an other'.[44] Quite how these would have played out as classroom exercises is difficult to say. Some pupils may have found them funny, others perhaps genuinely frightening. It is worth bearing in mind that grammatical or lexical mistakes made while translating or reciting these passages could themselves have led to the very consequences which they described.

Although this text also functions to delineate boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, the negotiation is extremely one-sided. The child's individuality and agency are stripped away and dissent is reduced to fear and impotent rage: 'I am so afrayde of the mayster that I tremble and quake / all t[h]e partes of my body'.[45] 'If euer I be a man. I wyll reuenge his malyce. I truste ones to growe able to rydde myself out of this daunger. And to restore myselfe in lybertye'.[46] Dissent and resentment are acknowledged but the possibility of actively challenging the master's authority is negated or at least relegated to the realm of a fantasised future. The master's authority is established as absolute, and the boundaries of acceptable treatment are no longer understood as resting on a form of social contract negotiated with individual children as active agents. On the contrary, the very idea of maltreatment is represented as little more than a childish and immature understanding of the legitimate process of correction. Sullivan discusses these passages as evidence of the rehearsal of ambition and aspiration. 'This same schoolmaster had his students recite the revenge fantasies he invented for a brutalized pupil ... While this curriculum clearly teaches terror of the rod, it likewise teaches the boy to aspire to seize the rod himself'.[47] It is however worth questioning for whose benefit these fantasies were acted out. No doubt the profession which took the rod as its symbol

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[42] White, *Vulgaria,* 89.
[43] *Ibid.,* 90.
[44] *Ibid.,* 102.
[45] *Ibid.,* 86.
[46] *Ibid.,* 102.
[47] Sullivan, 'Playing the Lord', 187.

occasionally drew in those attracted for whatever reason to the idea of inflicting pain and mental torment on boys and adolescents, and Whittinton's text betrays an erotically-charged sadism which goes beyond the mere enforcement of discipline.

Whittinton's outlook may in part reflect change over time and certainly has more in common with the trope of the sodomitical schoolmaster which Early Modern scholars have identified than it does with the majority of medieval school exercises. A generalised move away from centring the perspectives of children to those of adults is not unique to school exercises, but is also apparent in sixteenth-century conduct literature.[48] However, it is important to note that in Whittinton's day there was significant variation and this process of change was far from complete. His *Vulgaria* was published only around twenty years after the production of the Arundel *vulgaria* at Magdalen School, where Whittinton himself was a pupil. It was roughly contemporaneous with the Royal *vulgaria* which Orme has dated to either 1512-14 or 1522-27.[49] Moreover, as I will show in the final section of this chapter, in some ways Whittinton's text shares more in common with a schoolbook produced in London c.1450 in its tendency to dehumanise pupils and engage with them as representatives of a defective 'kinde' rather than as individual subjects. While the general backdrop of historical change is therefore important, from the perspective of children attending school in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the extent to which they were subjected to violence and cruelty depended to no small extent on the proclivities of the particular schoolmaster under whose rule they found themselves.

And it was not just schoolmasters who impacted the ways in which children were treated. Medieval schoolchildren were embedded in a wider network of relations comprising parents, 'frendes' and peers who all exerted influence over their lives. For some medieval children, the difficulties of being away from home were compounded by the loss of one or both of their parents. Several passages in the *vulgaria* make allusion to the financial and emotional consequences of the deaths of fathers and mothers.[50] For children living at home, losing a parent could also create circumstances in which abuse could occur. In a notable reversal of common gendered assumptions about parental care, one boy is portrayed expressing sadness that his father has died since in his eyes his mother has always hated him through no fault of his own.[51] In other examples, incoming stepparents are implicated in abuse: 'He dealeth with me as hardely

[48] M. Bailey, *Socialising the Child in Late Medieval England c.1400-1600* (York: York Medieval Press, 2012), 157.
[49] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 126.
[50] White, *Vulgaria,* 14; 28; Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 15; 17.
[51] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century Schoolbook,* 17.

/ as I were his stepsone'.[52] The assumption which is present in romances such as *Bevis of Hampton* and *William of Palerne* that the entry of a stepparent into the household represented a potential threat to children is upheld across children's schoolbooks and may indeed have been a potential contributory factor to abuse in some cases. Evidence from across cultures today suggests that children in stepparent families are indeed at a slightly elevated risk of abuse known as the 'Cinderella effect'.[53] The size of this effect and its explanations are a matter of debate, but it is likely that the medieval stereotype of the abusive stepparent reflected at least to some extent a wider social reality for medieval children. For others, positive relationships with surrogate parents in the form of masters or mistresses likely compensated for the shortcomings of their biological families.[54]

As well as harming children, parents could at times intervene to protect them from the violence of schoolmasters. In another passage a boy's mother is portrayed weeping and wailing and complaining of the 'cruelte of techers' upon seeing the marks of beating on her child's body.[55] Although the schoolmaster's caricature clearly portrays his dislike of parental intervention, parents were not without influence in medieval grammar schools which were likely mostly fee-paying until the early sixteenth century. As Orme puts it: 'for institutions which depend on fees the fee-payers are as potent a force as governors'.[56] In Whittinton's vulgaria it is both parents who are involved: 'Both my father and my mother be so tendre and choyse vpon me / that they will nat suffre me to be punisshed'.[57] However, he makes clear his disapproval of such leniency, invoking the trope common in moralistic discourse that the child unbeaten would come to curse his parents on the way to the gallows.[58] Other parents however were not so congenial. In 1458 Agnes Paston wrote to her son's tutor, John Grenefeld, demanding that he 'truly bellassch' her son to amend his behaviour. Apparently she felt that this approach had been efficacious in the past and had decided it should be repeated: 'so ded the last mayster, and þe best that euer he had, att Caumbrege'.[59] Parents could thus significantly impact master-pupil relationships for good or ill – depending on one's perspective – which is perhaps why the writers of *vulgaria* are

[52] White, *Vulgaria,* 55.
[53] Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, 'Violence Against Stepchildren', *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* 5 (1996), 77-81; for an overview of debates, see Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, 'Is the "Cinderella effect" controversial', *Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology* (2007): 383-400.
[54] Barbara Hanawalt, '"The Childe of Bristowe" and the Making of Middle-Class Adolescence', in *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England,* ed. Barbara Hanawalt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 178-202.
[55] Nelson*, Fifteenth Century Schoolbook,* 14.
[56] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 26. Magdalen College School itself was an endowed school but according to the *vulgaria* it seems this did not stop parents from demanding less brutal treatment for their sons.
[57] White, *Vulgaria,* 48.
[58] See above Ch1.
[59] Norman Davis, Richard Beadle and Colin Richmond, *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century, vol. 3*, EETS, s.s. 23 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41-2.

so quick to complain about their influence.[60] It is therefore possible to overstate the extent to which even those schoolmasters who were minded to do so had the ability to mould boys into docile subjects under threat of violent correction. In many cases, the learned musings of pedagogical theorists on the necessity of beating to child development likely did not survive their confrontation with an angry mother or father demanding that their child be treated in accordance with their wishes.

Schoolmasters who wished to inspire a Foucauldian docility in the pupils in their charge also had to contend with the fact that children could and did act to challenge or evade them. The writer of the Arundel *vulgaria* seems somewhat resigned to the fact that his pupils will routinely break the rules, suggesting for example that many are likely to have attended a public execution despite its having been prohibited.[61] Occasionally, his frustration is palpable, for instance as he describes the various excuses which his pupils use to avoid their lessons:

> As sone as I am cum into the scole this felow goith to make watyer and he goyth oute to the comyn drafte [privy]. Sone after another askith licence that he may go drynke. another callith upon me that he may have license to go home. thies and such other leyth my scholars for excuse oftyntyms that they may be oute off the waye.[62]

In the medieval era as well as the modern it seems that schoolboys were capable of exploiting the available loopholes in order to resist doing things they did not want to do and to assert their own identities within a system that sought to control and homogenise their behaviour. Based on an observational study in an elementary school in Canada, Sharon Carere has described the ways in which children act within and against the structures imposed upon them. Her description strikes a chord with the frustrations of the medieval schoolmaster:

> Most of them *do* school but they often insist on doing it with their own personal flair. They become highly perceptive analysts of the workings of the system and begin to watch for nooks and crannies ... They add to, subtract from, and rework the order, forcing it to look and feel a little more like them. Their work is not always heavy-handed; it often displays the fine touch and subtle delights of the virtuoso who plays an instrument with the knowledge of its intricacies.[63]

The overarching biological necessity of attending to bodily needs provides a mechanism by which the teacher's absolute authority may be disrupted. If used carefully and subtly, this may

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[60] See also Parsons, *Punishment,* 156-60.
[61] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 93.
[62] *Ibid.,* 39.
[63]Sharon Carere, 'Lifeworld of Restricted Behaviour', in *Sociological Studies of Child Development,* Vol. 2, ed. Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler (Greenwich, CN and London: Jai Press, 1987), 135-6.

have afforded children opportunities to resist those aspects of medieval education that were most irksome to them.

Others went further and engaged in open rebellion. A Bristol schoolbook claims that: 'My felowis haue opynlych ychyd [chided] the master, þe wych schal turne hem to grete repreff'.[64] Others simply absented themselves from school: 'I toke my pleasure in the towne walkynge to and froo into the castell and about, but todaye, when I cam to schole I was welcummyde on the new fascyon'.[65] The juxtaposition of a jocular expression which makes light of beating alongside a description of the obvious enjoyment felt in playing truant conveys the impression that the writer at least feels that the schoolboy considered his day of freedom worth the price he paid for it. While the punishments meted out by medieval schoolmasters could no doubt be traumatic and brutal for some pupils, others perhaps considered the occasional beating as the unpleasant side effect of living life more on their own terms.

As well as acting individually to challenge or defy authority, medieval schoolchildren could act collectively. The Arundel author created a dialogue between two pupils in which they discussed the possibilities to do whatever they pleased while their schoolmaster was away visiting friends in the country. One of the boys expresses his doubts, worrying that the master may only pretend to leave in order to 'bryng us in a foolys predicatment'.[66] As a classroom exercise, this communicates a clear message that the master understands that his pupils may conspire against him to engage in acts of collective rebellion, but perhaps attempts to sow the seeds of doubt in their minds. He recognises that his pupils will conspire to keep him in the dark about their activities:

> Felow, I besech the hertely to kepe oure counsell lest the maister know how unthriftely we myspent oure tyme yesterday, for yff he may know he wyl be verey angrye and not withoute a cause.[67]

In their attempts to assert authority over their pupils, schoolmasters faced the difficulty that it was not always possible to isolate them from their peer group. Elsewhere he complains that he had returned from dinner in the town to find that his entire class had disappeared in his

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[64] Nicholas Orme, *English School Exercises, 1420-1530* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medival Studies, 2013), 104.
[65] *Ibid.,* 40.
[66] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 30.
[67] *Ibid.,* 29.

absence.[68] Despite his insistence that the whole class would be punished for the outrage, such acts of collective rebellion surely tested and reformed the boundaries of expected behaviour.

Just as children could collude with one another to challenge or circumvent the authority of their masters, so they could invoke adult authority at the expense of one another when this better suited their interests. The Arundel *vulgaria* has one student remark with more than a hint of bitterness: 'Thomas, I thanke the, for I was present and stode by the when thou complaynest of me to my Creanser'.[69] Stanbridge similarly portrays a student complaining about his classmate's unwelcome disclosures: 'Thou art a blabbe'.[70] Not all these complaints were apparently genuine. The author of the Arundel *vulgaria* is clearly aware that his pupils are capable of manipulating him to disadvantage one another, portraying a child reprimanding his fellow for wrongfully accusing him of mischief and expressing his frustration that 'the maister belevyth the'. [71] In recognising and communicating their own fallibility, some masters thus recognised that the ways in which children were treated depended to no small extent on the network of relationships in which they were embedded. Indeed, in medieval grammar schools as in urban society more generally, treatment at the hands of authorities may have depended upon one's standing within the community. Several examples portray young scholars claiming to have been wrongfully accused of misdeeds, and entreating their masters to be allowed to bring forth several witnesses from among their peers to attest to their innocence.[72] In this aspect, the internal community of the grammar school may have mirrored the way in which authority functioned in legal institutions such as the ecclesiastical courts, where recourse to justice depended upon one's ability to call upon witnesses of good fame and good name.[73] The Arundel *vulgaria* also portrays boys jostling for position in order to win the master's favour, and complaining that 'he hath suche flaterers aboute hym' that 'I am oute of conseyt' [favour].[74] The consequence, the boy explains, is that he will be unable to exert any influence with the master on behalf of his friends. The relationships between individual masters and pupils within which physical punishment was meted out should not be seen in isolation, but were contingent on wider individual and group relations within the communities of boys and men that made up medieval grammar schools, and the wider communities within which these were situated.

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[68] *Ibid.,* 143.
[69] *Ibid.,* 41.
[70] White, *Vulgaria*, 22.
[71] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 40.
[72] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 135; 140; 148.
[73] See P. J. P. Goldberg, *Communal Discord: Child Abduction and Rape in the Later Middle Ages.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
[74] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 30.

Within these communities, authorities did not always speak with one unified voice and negotiating safe passage within and around them provided both dangers and opportunities for young scholars. The author of the Royal *vulgaria* launches into a diatribe to express his frustration that a task he had set his pupils had been stymied by outside intervention: 'I hade leuer teche in any place in the wor[l]de then her at oxford, wher I can teche nothyng that I thanke profitable for my scholares but sum be agenst yt'.[75] Apparently he had instructed them to make verses and to set them upon a post, wherupon some 'hare brane' feared what they were doing and commanded them to stop. He instructs his pupils that if they receive any more trouble from the man to commit 'insurreccion' against him. In another example it is a clash of authority between the creanser (similar to a house master) and the schoolmaster to which a boy falls victim.[76] Although his creanser will not allow him to go forth in the morning before seven o'clock, the master will forbid him from attending school unless he arrives earlier, prompting the boy in this portrayal to state that, 'I can not tell what y may do, wether I shuld do after him [the creanser] or eles the scole master'.[77] In another example, it is parental intervention which prevents the boy from attending school, although it may perhaps be possible here to read the stamp of a child's own ingenuity in excusing his lateness:

> my mother commandyd that ther shuld be no noyse be mayd and wold not let me be callyd vp. Therfor my mother is the cause of my late comyng and not I, for if I had wakynd my selfe or eles anny other body had wakynd me, y wold haue ben glad to a comyn hether at the owr that was a-powyntyd to me.[78]

Whether or not we read this particular fictional schoolboy's excuse as credible, this example provides a hint that children themselves had opportunities to make use of the fact of their subordination to a variety of conflicting authorities in order to escape punishment.

As a result of the focus on child maltreatment here the points of tension between schoolmasters and their pupils have been the main focus. It is worth pointing out however that some children avoided punishment simply by following the rules set out for them in order to win the master's favour. Some no doubt found this easier than others, but there is evidence that a number of children displayed an aptitude for study that made their experience of education far easier than their fellows: 'Y and my felow, þe wyche buth y-sette in þe scole þe best answerer and the best lerner, hyt befallyth þe mayster to preyse'.[79] The author of the Arundel *vulgaria* writes of the enjoyment which a master can take from teaching such students: 'It shulde be a pleasure to the

[75] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 146-7.
[76] *Ibid.*, 129.
[77] *Ibid.*, 135.
[78] *Ibid.*, 139.
[79] *Ibid.,* 111.

maistre to tech such scholars as be quyke wytide and wyll endevor themselff'.[80] Of course, this option may not have been available to all students; one child is portrayed as lamenting the fact that, 'Every mann provailith in their lurnyng save I, and be worthy of praisynge... I, unhappy felowe, cannot tell what goode I doo'.[81] Nonetheless, there is every reason to suppose that some children at least found the exercise of learning grammar enjoyable and intellectually stimulating and were motivated to work hard. Others, perhaps, simply took the path of least resistance and chose to fall in line.

The relationship between medieval children and their masters in medieval grammar schools was multifaceted and by no means unidirectional. Speaking generally of the relationship between 'the schooled subject' and the teaching methods of his master fails to capture the complexities of children's treatment and maltreatment in medieval grammar schools. Rather, it is perhaps more accurate to think in terms of the interaction between child*ren* and authorit*ies*. The dyadic relationships between individual masters and pupils were of course important as I have argued above, but to understand children's treatment purely in these terms is to miss the broader community context within which they existed and by which they were influenced. Children had multiple options available to shape their own experiences and the treatment of one another, from outright defiance either individually or collectively to more subtle resistance including deceit and the manipulation of social forces including the various different authorities to which they were subject. Far from being passive and compliant, medieval children were active partners in their own socialisation and consequently their influence is writ large over the materials penned for their education. Their thoughts, their attitudes, their actions and their language all permeate the pages of their schoolbooks despite the obvious disapproval of some of their behaviour on the part of their masters. Perhaps the texts themselves can be seen to embody an act of compromise: if medieval grammar masters wanted to teach Latin to their young charges, they evidently found it necessary to do so on their terms at least to some extent. The way in which a child was treated was influenced not only from the top down by broad social and educational practices but also by a complex web of social interactions within the school and the wider community of which they were active members.

Peer Groups

An important aspect of this community was the relationships that children had with one another. The fact that nearly all of our sources for medieval childhood were written by adults

[80] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 38.
[81] *Ibid.,* 42.

creates something of an optical illusion which tends to privilege their role in children's lives. The centrality of relationships with adults to children's socialisation however has been challenged by sociologists and anthropologists as well as social and developmental psychologists. As David Lancy puts it, 'one of the most unequivocal findings re[garding] childhood from the ethnographic record is children learning their culture *without teaching*'.[82] Judith Rich Harris has influentially and not uncontroversially argued that it is the peer group rather than parents or teachers that is the most important influence on children's socialisation.[83] In her 'Group Socialisation Theory', Harris sees cultural transmission as taking place not at the level of individual relationships between children and their adult caregivers, but at the level of inter- and intra-group processes. Children are not simply taught how to take on social roles by adults, but instead cultural values and practices filter into their peer group from a variety of sources, including parents and teachers but also children's own observations of the society around them. Within peer groups, these ideas are tried out, modified, discussed and negotiated rather than automatically or unreservedly accepted.[84] Children have their own identities, hierarchies and ways of measuring status within their peer groups which are informed by (but not always the same as) those of adult society, and it is these that Harris sees as of primary importance in children's development and socialisation.

Certainly there seems to have been a disconnect between the social expectations placed on children among their peers compared to when they were in the company of adults. In the Arundel *vulgaria,* a child claims to prefer the company of his fellows rather than adults because he can 'be mery and speke what I will' rather than speaking only when spoken to.[85] That children preferred the company of their peers was a common trope of medieval discourse, and likely related to the relative freedom that this offered. The willingness of the writers of *vulgaria* to present language for arguments, such as 'Syt awaye or I shall gyue the a blowe', may perhaps be understood as partly reflective of the fact that children had license to behave differently with one another than when interacting with adults.[86] It is worth bearing in mind that much of the conduct literature which aimed to teach children manners such as *Stans Puer ad Mensam* was written with a specific social context in mind: the great hall. While they were expected to treat their parents and masters with manners and respect, the *vulgaria* suggest that the same code of conduct did not apply when they were in one another's company. And it was in one another's

[82] David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings,* 2nd Edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 209, emphasis in original.
[83] Judith Rich Harris, 'Where is the Child's Environment? A Group Socialisation Theory of Development', *Psychological Review*, vol. 102, no. 3 (1995), 458-459; *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998).
[84] For further discussion of this process, see Corsaro, *Sociology of Childhood.*
[85] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 12.
[86] White, *Vulgaria,* 15.

company that medieval schoolboys spent a significant amount of their time during their formative years.

There is some evidence that children gained their world view partly from one another. One boy describes a piece of information that has been imparted to him by one of his fellows: 'Ther is a companion of myne that sayth that ther is [no] mete so hevi but it ma be digested in a daye and a nyght'. Since he ate meat three days ago and so far as he can tell it has not yet completed the process of digestion, he goes on to reason that he must therefore have a 'marvelus cold stomake'.[87] There is perhaps a hint of resemblance here to the pieces of information about the world which circulate in modern playgrounds, sometimes true, sometimes false and sometimes wildly exaggerated. Children's peer groups also had their own currencies and methods of acquiring status. A fifteenth-century collection from Bristol portrays a playground transaction in which an object of value, probably a wristlet or bracelet, is exchanged for a 'kast' which likely refers to a throw at dice or with a missile.[88] In another example from the Arundel text, a boy expresses his dismay that the pears which he was sent have gone rotten before he had the chance to eat them. Had he known this would happen, he would have shared them with his companions and 'have gete me many frendys'.[89] Favour and status in medieval peer groups could thus be won or lost through the exchange of things that children valued, and valuable things could be also be stolen: a boy in the Royal *vulgaria* complains that raisins and figs his father sent him were snaffled from his coffer. That different social norms applied in children's peer groups is suggested when he claims to be discontented only because the entirety of his cache has been stolen. If the thief had taken only a part, 'I wolde haue ben content'. [90] Examples such as these hint at a lively peer-group 'economy' in which items of value to children were traded, lent, borrowed and even stolen in exchange for friendship, favour and status. It is here that children probably learned many of the skills in negotiation, exchange and building and maintaining friendly relationships that would subsequently be of use when they took their place in adult society.

The relationships that children had with one another evidently formed an important part of the social world which they inhabited and in which they became socialised. Multiple examples portray children offering one another help and social support, from lending books so that they could copy the day's lessons to more serious matters. One boy expresses his sympathy at the

[87] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 139.
[88] *Ibid.*, 98.
[89] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 51.
[90] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 145.

death of a friend's father, mentioning that he was a special friend to him too and 'lovede me as well as I hade be his own son'.[91] In another, a child is described comforting his brother who has been robbed:

> My brother came to me before it was day, full of sorowe and hevynes, and shewde me that he was robbyde of all the goodes that he hade. I confortyde hym as well as I coulde for methought he was marveliously disposide to many thynges [rash actions].[92]

Nelson reads a suggestion of child suicide into this passage in the brother's disposition to rash actions, which makes it particularly striking that it is to his peers rather than parents or 'friends' that this boy is described as turning to for comfort and support.[93] Elsewhere, the value of having a friend to confide in is extolled, 'In whos talkynge a mann may put away all vexacions and hevynes'.[94] On the other hand, a child's dismay is described that his friend has betrayed his trust under such circumstances: 'I broke the secretnes of my hert todaye to onn that I lovede best of all the worlde and he thrughe the utterynge of my consell hath causede many to be very angered with me'.[95] Many of the children who attended schools such as Magdelen were drawn from the bourgeoisie: one pupil is portrayed as remarking that: 'Myn vncle is one of the alder men of the cyte'.[96] The emphasis on building lasting and reliable friendships with one another perhaps reflects the general values of an urban society in which business dealings and political stability were predicated on trust between men.[97] Indeed, some of the relationships that schoolboys developed with their peers may have continued to be important throughout their lives and gone on to form the basis of the next generation of commerce and civic government.

Alongside examples of children acting to support one another there are plenty of cases in which they are described as mistreating one another. The Bristol *vulgaria* portray the outcome of a fight between schoolchildren : 'My felow hath crachchyd [broken] my face for þe nonys [moment]'.[98] A similar episode occurs in the Arundel text, although here the schoolboy is quite philosophical about his experience:

> I hade nede to beware, Thomas, ... for thou Clowiste me so aboute the hede and aboute the chekys with thy fiste that thou madist my hede bolne [swollen] ... thou at not to be blamyde for I begane upon the myselff.[99]

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[91] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 66.
[92] *Ibid.,* 223.
[93] *Ibid.,* 97.
[94] *Ibid.,* 44.
[95] *Ibid.,* 47.
[96] White, *Vulgaria*, 56.
[97] Gervase Rosser, 'Crafts, Guilds and the Negotiation of Work in the Medieval Town', *Past and Present* 154 (1997): 9-11.
[98] Orme, *Exercises*, 109.
[99] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 84.

In the Royal *vulgaria* a boy complains that he has been beaten so badly about the head and face that he is unable to sleep because of the pain. His injuries are so severe that he threatens to leave the school:

> Ye ma se how my hede is fowle, how blacke and blew my chekes be, and if ye fynd not remedi for this mater it is tyme for me to goo hense for good and all.[100]

It is worth noting that the Royal text does not contain vivid depictions of the schoolmaster beating children, and the graphic description of peer-group violence thus stands out as particularly shocking. The short and long-term effects of such treatment on children should not be underestimated. A modern study of peer abuse found that this type of maltreatment was more frequently recalled by adults than maltreatment by their parents and also more frequently described as having had lasting detrimental consequences.[101]

Physical violence against boys by their peers may be understood within the broader context of a medieval culture within which martial prowess was held up as a masculine ideal. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by an example in the Royal *vulgaria* in which a schoolboy offers this challenge to his fellows:

> let me se this day wich of you dar feght with me hand to hand. I am cum here owt to feght with one of you ... let on what sumeuer [whosoever] he be cum owt to assa what his manlynes can doo. If he haue the better of me let him punyse me to the vttermost – I beshrowe hym if he spare – but and if he fortune to haue the worse a shrinke, let hym be ware, let hym not trust to skape vnpunysshid.[102]

It is striking here that the issuing of a challenge which would not be out of place in a chivalric romance combines both the ideology of masculinity or 'manliness' with the language of punishment and discipline reminiscent of the schoolroom. In the classroom, the ability to inflict physical punishment appears as a masculine ideal embodied by the schoolmaster himself. In romance, defeating one's enemies in combat is an essential marker of knightly masculine identity. Here, medieval children are portrayed adapting and acting out these ideas within their own social context.

One further example from the Royal *vulgaria* also serves to draw together cultural discourses and practices with the maltreatment experienced by children in medieval peer groups. A boy is

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[100] *Ibid.*, 139.
[101] Anne-Marie Herbert, 'A Qualitative Study of Peer Abuse and Its Effects: Theoretical and Empirical Implications', *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* Vol.56, no. 1 (1994): 119-30.
[102] Orme, 'Schoolbook', 146.

described as being beaten by a group of his fellows in the context of what appears to be a schoolboy game in which one boy plays the lord and the others are made to serve as members of his household. The fact that a child is unwilling to cooperate with the game leads to his maltreatment:

> This boye playd the lord yester-day a-mong his companyonce, a-poyntyng euery man his office. Oon he mayd his carver, an-other his butlere, an-other his porter, an-other bi-cause he wold not do as he commandyd hym he toke and [made] all to bete hyme.[103]

Another reference to boys 'playing the lord' in the Arundel *vulgaria* lends support to the hypothesis that these texts may preserve a schoolboy game.[104] Sullivan sees these passages as scripts which, when recited, taught schoolboys to aspire to a higher social rank.[105] However, this may be to take a too teleological view of children's socialisation. From the point of view of the young participants in such games, their ambitions in terms of acquisition of status may have been far more immediate. Alison James argues that children use play as a means of negotiating status and hierarchy within their peer groups with significant consequences for participants:

> Children's games are ... simultaneously the vehicle for more consequential games of social status, often played for high stakes. Children whose performances become discredited or who are denied for whatever reason the opportunity to participate, risk more than the loss of the game: they may seriously diminish their social standing, acquire signs of an unwelcome identity and place their personhood in doubt.[106]

In 'playing the lord' then, children drew upon the wider medieval cultural framework to construct their own status hierarchies and to negotiate power relations within their peer group, excluding and victimising certain members. The lessons children learned from observing society around them were not always the lessons they were intended to learn, but they nonetheless had significant consequences in their lives.

The investigation of child maltreatment as it appears in *vulgaria* illustrates some of the ways in which cultural values and practices played out in the particular social context of the grammar schools and affected the experiences of individual children. Individual schoolmasters within the community, informed as they were by broader discourses on childhood, socialisation, education and punishment as well as Christian and classical models of virtue and training, could inflict great suffering or act to protect and nurture children (or some combination of the two)

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[103] *Ibid.,* 142-43.
[104] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book,* 84.
[105] Sullivan, 'Playing the Lord'
[106] Allison James, *Childhood Identities: The Self and Social Relationships in the Experience of the Child* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 184.

depending on their own wishes, desires, backgrounds and psychologies. Competing ideas about what constituted child maltreatment among parents, schoolmasters and the children themselves meant that the boundaries of acceptable conduct for both masters and pupils were subject to discussion and negotiation both at the level of individual master-student relationships and as a result of collective efforts on the part of pupils. Within medieval households, the chain of authority often ended unambiguously with the male head of household; the *paterfamilias*. Within medieval grammar schools, authority was far more uncertain. Children were subject to their masters, to creansers, to ushers, to their parents and 'friends', and to whatever authority could be grasped and maintained by other boys within the peer group. These authorities did not speak with one voice and children could and did manipulate this fact in order to benefit themselves and one other. Being placed together with a group of boys of their own age in what were often by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries increasingly insular school communities may have facilitated the development of distinctive elements of peer culture and perhaps even something of a sense of collective identity. This brought with it the benefits of social support, sometimes modelled on the masculine ideals of the urban societies in which grammar schools existed and from which many of their pupils were drawn, which could mitigate against some of life's difficulties, allow children to build lasting supportive relationships, and perhaps offer occasional protection from the master's birch. This also brought the risk of victimisation and abuse within the peer group as individual boys jostled for social position and tried on future social roles both real and imagined, again drawing upon the various cultural discourses and social practices with which they came into contact.

Children's Perspectives

As I have argued, the ways in which medieval schoolboys were treated varied significantly according to the relationships they formed with their individual schoolmasters, their parents, friends and peers. Yet the way in which they experienced and reacted to that treatment depended also upon the way in which they conceptualised their schooling on an individual level. Thus far, the schoolbooks I have examined have been largely the productions of schoolmasters. Whilst as I have shown they give access to a range of childlike perspectives, they do not permit individual children's voices to be discerned from amongst the clamour. In this section, I hope to reconstruct something of the voices of individual children from those school exercises which are preserved in manuscripts that were written by children themselves. I will examine four texts produced in the early to mid-fifteenth century which were compiled by individual children during their schooling. As such, they hold the tantalising promise of reflecting the concerns and perspectives of their compilers. Children almost certainly had an influence on the sentences which were used in the classroom, and in some cases may well have had license to compose

their own examples for translation.[107] In addition, they exerted an influence as compilers in selecting material for inclusion in their schoolbooks; most of the exercises under discussion show evidence of being copies made for reference rather than working notes in everyday use.[108] Just as scholars have been able to make some inferences about the perspectives and interests of adult compilers based on the texts they copied, so too it may be possible to discern something of these children's perspectives and identities from the material they chose to preserve in their schoolbooks.[109]

I hope to show that children's manuscripts vary considerably in their outlook and interests, and it is possible to untangle coherent patterns and perspectives from amongst the exercises they preserve. Indeed, this variation between manuscripts is greater than the variations within them. This may reflect differences in teaching style, but I will argue that it also reflects differences in the subjective experiences of individual children and the meanings they attached to aspects of their education, including physical punishment. Naturally, 'the compiler' whose voice emerges is also a narrative fiction whose relation to the child who compiled the manuscript cannot be straightforwardly inferred. However, while the 'John Hardgreve', 'Walter Pollard', 'William Berdon' and 'John Claveryng' whom I will discuss may or may not bear some relation to the boys who wrote their names in their manuscripts, they are no more constructions than well-known adult compilers such as 'Robert Thornton' or 'Richard Hill'.[110] They are every bit as much a product of fifteenth-century culture, and as such their perspectives and understandings formed part of the social fabric out of which medieval children formed their identities.

John Hardgreve

Cambridge University Library MS Additional 2830 contains a collection of sentences in Latin and English which appear to have been copied by a pupil at the grammar school at Beccles, Suffolk in the early 1430s.[111] Alongside the schoolroom exercises discussed below, the manuscript contains works on Latin grammar, several of which are said to have been composed by John Drury who seems to have been the schoolmaster at Beccles in this period.[112] Nicolas Orme has argued that the volume was primarily meant for Hardgreve's personal use given the

[107] Orme, 'Introduction', 10-15.
[108] *Ibid.,* 15-20.
[109] See, for example, David R. Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London: An Examination of BL MSS Egerton 1995, Harley 2252, Lansdowne 762, and Oxford Balliol College MS 354* (Oxford: University Press of America, 1998); Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston, ed., *Robert Thornton and his Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts* (York: York Medieval Press, 2014).
[110] See Fein and Johnston, ed. *Robert Thornton*; Parker, *The Commonplace Book.*
[111] Orme, *Exercises,* 70.
[112] *Ibid.,* 71.

inclusion of the school exercises and the frequent appearance of his name in the manuscript. He suggests that 'the generally careful script and the choice of texts imply that he was in his mid- or late teens at the time, and that he had a serious and long-term interest in Latin grammar'.[113] Orme also suggests that the exercises are examples of classroom work and that the sentences were either composed by Hardgreve himself or copied by him from examples created by the master or other pupils.[114] Here I will argue that within the examples a fairly clear perspective on medieval schooling and punishment emerges which, if it cannot be said with certainty to be Hardgreve's own, is certainly coherent and plausible in the context of fifteenth-century English education, and explores some of the possible meanings which children could attach to these aspects of their socialisation in fifteenth-century England.

Beating itself does not feature prominently in Hardgreve's school exercises. Out of the 145 exercises which he copied into his manuscript, only seven make reference to physical punishment. In contrast, references to food and eating stand out as particularly prevalent in comparison to other collections, and indeed form the most common theme of this text with 19 of his sentences mentioning these topics. In light of the emphasis on this subject, it is reasonable to conjecture that the following example comes close to expressing Hardgreve's own perspective: 'Now that my reading assignments are read and my book is shut, it is time for dinner, and to dine at the right time comforts my heart'.[115] He seems to have had a particular liking for herrings, which uniquely appear in no less than four of the exercises in his manuscript: 'Two red herrings are a fine meal for poor clerks'; 'Fellow, provide me with a pennyworth of herrings and whatever you pay I will return to you'; 'Of all the fish of the sea, the herring is the most eatable of fishes…'; 'Because onions are the sharpest of all foods, having met in the street the servant of my father who is being served with red herrings at his dinner, he and I are buying a bushel full of them'.[116] The dislike of onions which is apparent in the final example is also evidenced by a strikingly personal passage in which a sense of childish frustration at being forced to eat an unpleasant food is palpable:

> John Hardgreve loves delicious dishes and not raw onions to cool his hot blood, and especially he dislikes thirst and hunger. May he come more slowly to old age on account of his good diet.[117]

The slightly mocking tone of this passage combined with the use of the third person invites the speculation that this was an invention either of the master or of another pupil which Hardgreve

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[113] *Ibid.,* 72.
[114] *Ibid.,* 73.
[115] *Ibid.,* 98 (2.130). All translations Orme's.
[116] *Ibid.,* 81 (2.47); 95 (2.117); 96 (2.121); 91 (2.100).
[117] *Ibid.,* 89 (2.93).

chose to copy into his manuscript. It is also tempting to read a reference to an angry outburst on Hardgreve's part in the suggestion that more favourable dishes would 'cool his hot blood'. And it is not only foods themselves which come under criticism in his manuscript but their purveyors. A bitter complaint is expressed against innkeepers who hike their prices at the time of fairs: 'it belongs to the consciences of devious innkeepers and cooks who are selling victuals dearly that they weep for their faults'.[118] While Hardgreve is clearly capable of expressing resentment and feelings of injustice, his schoolbook gives the impression that he was far more concerned with the adequate fulfilment of his gastronomic needs than the frequency or severity of his physical punishment.

Perhaps, as one of the exercises expresses, he avoided punishment by applying himself to his schooling: 'I have undertaken to learn rather than be beaten by the master'.[119] Certainly, where beating is described in his manuscript, it is generally portrayed happening to other pupils rather than Hardgreve: 'My schoolfellow is playing truant because he will be beaten'; 'Of the two boys rioting in the school, the master will beat one and the usher the other'.[120] In fact, the manuscript gives the impression of a relationship between schoolboy and master which was largely positive. Three passages portray pupils working in the master's garden, a particular idiosyncrasy of this manuscript: 'twenty-one scholars have made twenty-three flat spaces in our master's garden for twenty-three letters of the alphabet'; 'Wedis plukkyd out of þe maysteris gardine, it xal be-fallin me his seruaunt to castyn <out – *deleted*> ouer þe hegh'.[121] It is easy to imagine that the latter activity, throwing weeds over a hedge, could have given adolescent schoolboys a degree of pleasure. It is likely that some of the grammar school pupils, perhaps even Hardgreve himself, boarded in the master's household, since another sentence references this arrangement: 'Who are fitting but scholars to be the master's household?'[122] The impression of positive relationships between master and pupils at Beccles is further reinforced by personal tone of this injunction, recognisable to parents and children down the ages: 'Boys, go out of the door and play in the garden'.[123] The complaints and expressions of dislike toward the master which are common in other schoolbooks are conspicuously absent in Hardgreve's text. Indeed, Nicholas Orme has suggested that he may have received permission from John Drury to copy his grammatical treatises because he wished to become a schoolmaster himself, and was encouraged by Drury

[118] *Ibid.,* 96 (2.119).
[119] *Ibid.,* 97 (2.125)
[120] *Ibid.,* 76 (2.7); 80 (2.39).
[121] *Ibid.,* 94-5 (2.112); 85 (2.78); see also 89 (2.93).
[122] *Ibid.,* 78 (2.27).
[123] *Ibid.,* 81 (2.50).

in this respect.[124] A consistent picture thus emerges of a boy for whom, by virtue of a positive relationship with his master, beating was largely something which happened to other people.

Another striking if far from unique feature of the portrayal of beating in Hardgreve's manuscript is the fixation on the backside as the site of punishment. One example states that scholars should abstain from misbehaviour, 'for it is well fovnden þat hosumeuere he [the master] fynde cvlpabil, he payit hem trewely on þe toote'.[125] Another asks mockingly, 'Haddistu nouth to-day a good stourid ars?'.[126] In medieval fabliau, physical pain inflicted upon the arse is a narrative trope commonly used for comedic effect, as for example in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* or the comedic birching of Hawkyn in the *Digby Magdalen* in which his master declares: 'Stryppys on þi ars þou xall have'.[127] The humorous nature of all things gluteal for English schoolboys down the ages is well attested to, and we should not overlook the possibility that some would have treated this aspect of corporal punishment with similar amusement, particularly when they themselves were not the unfortunate recipient. The comedic value of the act of punishment is explored elsewhere in the sentence 'Myn ars comyng to scole xal be betyn'.[128] This is part of a group of sentences which Orme identifies as deliberate mistranslations based on common mistakes that elementary learners would have made. Many of these also evidence 'schoolboy' humour: 'I saw a nakyd man gaderin stoonys in hys barn', and 'I saw þe drunkyn whil þu were sobere'.[129] In the example which discusses beating, the humour is achieved by disconnecting the site of physical punishment from the self, which renders the English sentence nonsensical. 'My arse' cannot come to school and be beaten unless 'I' am also present. The physical act of punishment is thus isolated from the feeling subject in a way which makes it a fitting topic for classroom humour. It requires no great leap of faith to suggest that this was one way in which many medieval schoolchildren may understood the master's birch, particularly those who managed, for the most part, to avoid it.

Walter Pollard

Walter Pollard was a student at a grammar school in Exeter in the mid 1440s when he compiled his collection of Latin exercises. He seems to have been the son of John Pollard of Plymouth

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[124] *Ibid.,* 72.
[125] *Ibid.,* 87 (2.86).
[126] *Ibid.,* 85 (2.72)
[127] 'Mary Magdalen', in *The Digby Mysteries,* ed. Frederick Furnivall, Shakespeare Society Series 8 (London: Trübner, 1822), 99-102.
[128] Orme, *Exercises,* 83 (2.57).
[129] *Ibid.,* 82 (2.55; 2.56)

who was mayor of the town in 1461.[130] Orme suggests Pollard's irregular script and rather convoluted Latin 'suggests the work of a persevering rather than brilliant adolescent schoolboy'.[131] His manuscript also contains extracts from Latin grammatical texts, a collection of proverbs and a set of riddles in Latin and English which were also likely copied by Pollard during his schooldays.[132] The manuscript may, like the that of William Berdon discussed below, have been produced at the High School in Exeter under the mastership of John Borryngton.[133] Pollard continued to use the manuscript throughout his life (at least until 1482) as a personal notebook, and its contents indicate that he embarked on a successful commercial career either by joining his family business or serving an apprenticeship.[134]

Pollard's exercises give an impression of greater hostility between himself and his master than Hardgreve's. One sentence complains that, 'it tires us to wish for license [to leave] from the master, for the bolder we are to persuade him, the angrier he becomes towards us'.[135] Another complains that the master's return from a long absence is unpopular with boys who 'do not like [him]'.[136] This perspective is consistent throughout the manuscript, including in the only exercise out of the 24 preserved which discusses beating:

> If they are defective in the eight parts of speech at present, they will be defective in the future, and they will repent because the teacher warned all the pupils by saying that such an enormity would be stopped at the first along with very cruel punishment.[137]

In contrast to Hardgreve's text in which beating is meted out for activities such as truancy and 'rioting', here it is portrayed as a response to the lesser offence of grammatical mistakes. Whether or not this reflects actual differences in how punishment was assigned at their respective schools, the fact that Pollard chose to compose or include this example may reflect a difference in the way he perceived physical punishment. The description of the offence of failing to memorise the eight parts of speech as an 'enormity' (*enormitate*) may perhaps be taken as a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that the punishment was unjust or excessive, a reading which is bolstered by the its characterisation as 'very cruel' (*crudelescima*).. In choosing to portray beating

[130] *Ibid.,* 108.
[131] *Ibid.,* 110.
[132] *Ibid.,* 110-111.
[133] *Ibid.,* 109.
[134] *Ibid.,* 109.
[135] *Ibid.,* 114 (4.7).
[136] *Ibid.,* 112 (4.3).
[137] *Ibid.,* 115 (4.9).

in this way, Pollard may perhaps be seen to question the authority of the schoolmaster to administer physical punishment.

Far outstripping the interest in beating in Pollard's manuscript is an evident enthusiasm for the pleasures of the grape. In fact, 8 out of the 24 exercises mention wine and ale, and bear a striking resemblance to traces of mercantile drinking culture which appear in medieval household manuscripts. Thus for example one passage reads 'Bring us drink, O generous butler, in a clean wine ladle, that is to say do not dip the whole way, and to just one measure from the wine-jar'.[138] By way of a parallel, Richard Hill's commonplace book contains several drinking songs, one of which ends every stanza with the refrain 'Fill þe boll, butler, & let þe cup be rowght'.[139] It is thus likely that Pollard's interest in this topic was related to his social position. In his manuscript, the above sentence is followed by four more examples which discuss drinking, including one which originates in Horace's *Epistles*: 'What man has not been made eloquent by brimming cups?'[140] This suggests that Pollard was selecting material that interested him from the texts he was exposed to during his schooling. The particular emphasis on the etiquette of drinking hints that Pollard perceived and experienced his school education as about more than the acquisition of Latin grammar. The lessons he particularly valued and recorded in his manuscript were those which provided him with the socialising experiences necessary to take his place as a member of bourgeois society.

This is also evidenced by the large collection of 101 proverbs in Latin and English which Pollard recorded while at school. Proverbs were commonly used in the medieval classroom, but his decision to devote such a large part of his manuscript to collecting them may indicate that it was the repository of social knowledge they provided which particularly interested Pollard. Richard Hill's manuscript contains a similar list of English and Latin proverbs and maxims.[141] Beginning to compile a manuscript in his schooldays which shared features not only with schoolbooks but with the household books of adult compilers in his social milieu was an aspirational act, and further supports the idea Pollard viewed his education partly as a means of achieving social status. Social aspiration may also be read into the collection of Latin riddles which Pollard's manuscript preserves. Orme suggests that these hint at 'the attractiveness of Latin as a cryptic language, whose adepts acquired knowledge beyond that of ordinary folk'.[142] Finally, that Pollard

[138] *Ibid.,* 116 (4.14).
[139] Roman Dyboski, ed. *Songs, Carols and Other Miscellaneous Poems from the Balliol MS. 364, Richard Hill's Commonplace Book,* EETS, E.S. 101 (London: Trübner, 1870)*,* 118-9.
[140] Orme, *Exercises,* 116 (4.18); see also (4.15, 4.16, 4.17); 116 n. 26.
[141] Dyboski, *Songs,* 128-34.
[142] Orme, *Exercises,* 111.

perceived his education as primarily a means of acquiring a social and commercial identity is attested to by his manuscript itself as a physical object, which preserves his school exercises alongside additions that he made later in life including English literary texts and documents and memoranda relating to his life in commerce. Evidently Pollard valued this object with its repository of social wisdom created during his youth and maintained a relationship with it throughout his adult social life. Perhaps the hostility towards his master which Pollard expresses in his Latins should thus be placed in the context of an awareness that his own social status would go on to outstrip that of his schoolmaster. Certainly Pollard's interest in social etiquette suggests an active participation in a youthful masculine identity, and serves as a reminder that childhood and youth were not just social categories but social identities which were lived and experienced by young people and as such were closely intertwined with gender and social status.

At the same time, there is also something of a challenge to both the authority of the master and the more sober and serious voices in bourgeois society implied in Pollard's emphasis on drinking. The five examples which I have discussed are bookended in the manuscript by two other exercises which are far more redolent of conduct literature than of drinking songs. The first references a fairly common trope in school exercises, the statement that excessive drinking harms pupils' ability to learn:

> Wine and ale drunk at night are what make scholars dull on their arrival [*or* in their fasting?] when they have to get up in the early morning...[143]

The second extolls the benefits of early rising.[144] The injunctions to arise early in the mornings and not to stay up late in the evenings are common in didactic literature aimed at youths. *Wise Man* for example admonishes the son not to sit up drinking late at night but to go to bed early.[145] By placing such sober advice alongside descriptions of drinking, Pollard articulates some of the contradictions at the heart of youthful male identity, where injunctions to avoid drinking, dicing, the tavern and the company of women sat rather incongruously alongside ideas that young men's heat made such behaviour natural. The intrusion of young mercantile drinking culture into a school manuscript thus plays with and challenges the concept of 'learning', raising the question of what messages precisely Pollard ought to be taking from his educative experience. Should he be learning *not* to drink or *how* to drink? That drinking dulls the wits as his schoolmaster would have it, or makes one eloquent as Horace stated? Overall, then, the manuscript suggests a schoolboy who was acutely aware of his youthful bourgeois identity and

[143] *Ibid.,* 115-16 (4.13).
[144] *Ibid.,* 117 (4.19).
[145] Fischer, *Wise Man,* 30 (lines 76-80).

the contradictions inherent in his socialisation, and who regarded the master and his birch with a degree of hostility and perhaps some sense of injustice.

William Berdon

Like Walter Pollard's manuscript, Cambrige, Gonville and Gaius College MS 417/447 contains a miscellany of school texts which were copied at Exeter around the year 1450.[146] In it, William Berdon copied sixty-nine exercises in his own hand alongside various other grammatical texts, two of which were written by John Boryngton who was the master of the High School of Exeter until at least 1448.[147] Given that Walter Pollard's manuscript also originated in Exeter during the same period, it is entirely possible that both Pollard and Berdon were pupils at Exeter High School under Boryngton's mastership since there was no other officially recognised grammar school at this time.[148] The fact that both pupils make reference to acting in the capacity of parish clerks may provide some support for this idea, as does the fact that both Pollard and Boryngton appear to have a connection to Plymouth.[149] The clear and marked differences between their exercises in both subject matter and outlook may thus reflect the different interests and perspectives of their compilers rather than differences in teaching style. In the absence of clear evidence linking Pollard's manuscript to the High School, however, this must remain somewhat speculative.

The coincidences of time, place and possibly school are practically the only things which unite the manuscripts of Pollard and Berdon. In contrast to the youthful bourgeois outlook of Pollard's manuscript, Berdon's Latin exercises are unmistakeably pious in tone. Positive references to drinking are entirely absent, replaced by more sober sentiments: 'Being a scholar who loves virtues and hates vices, I shall fast today on bread and water in honour of the blessed Virgin Mary mother of God, hoping through her to please God and become a cleric'.[150] Another passage extolls the virtues of the contemplative life: 'Of all the ways of life that people live in this world, the contemplative life is the best'.[151] Yet another warns against avarice and the accumulation of worldly goods.[152] The virtues of the saints discussed: 'The blessed martyr Vincent endured great torments in his body for the love of Christ and the catholic faith; now

[146] Orme, *Exercises,* 148.
[147] *Ibid.,* 148.
[148] *Ibid.,* 108-9.
[149] *Ibid.,* 109.
[150] *Ibid.,* 154 (5.8).
[151] *Ibid.,* 153 (5.6).
[152] *Ibid.,* 158 (5.24).

he is rewarded with the prize of heavenly glory'.[153] In fact, eighteen of the sixty-nine Latins in Berdon's hand betray clear pious or clerical interest, forming the major theme of his exercises.[154] These include two which fantasise about success with grammar: 'I am acknowledged for my grammar in the universities on both sides of the sea – Paris and Orleans, Oxford and Cambridge – in which hitherto I have never set foot'; 'I am talked of throughout the region as a notable and famous cleric'.[155] It would be easy to ascribe this piety and the expressions of long-term interest in Latin to the influence of the schoolmaster were it not for the fact that Berdon himself went on to a clerical career, becoming ordained as an acolyte at Chudleigh (Devon) in 1453 and going on to become a subdeacon at Exeter in 1456.[156] The outlook of Berdon's school manuscript, therefore, is very much compatible with his eventual career.

In common with the manuscripts of Hardgreve and Pollard, beating does not feature heavily in Berdon's exercises. It is referenced in only four of the sixty-nine Latins, one of which refers only euphemistically to scholars furtively sneaking out of the door to avoid 'a settling of accounts' with the master.[157] Where beating is portrayed, however, it is generally in approving terms, even in cases which are harsh in comparison to other schoolbooks:

> The scholars did not come to school from their lying and lurking places until it was scarcely seven o'clock, which was late indeed, so the master, who rose early and forestalled them to catechize them, beat them severely with blows, giving them a lesson in getting up early.[158]

In similar vein, another sentence describes one of his schoolfellows slipping on the stones in the lane and hurting his knee, in response to which 'the master, on account of his carelessness seized and beat him, making him an example about being careful in such matters'.[159] In contrast to Hardgreve's matter of fact and jocular portrayal of beating and Pollard's characterisation of cruelty and injustice, Berdon appears to approve of physical punishment, to believe that it is well deserved, and to understand it as a useful pedagogical tool.

While it is easy as modern readers to assume that such an attitude must have originated with the schoolmaster, such a perspective is very much consistent with the pious tone of Berdon's exercises. It was not only schoolmasters whose prerogative it was to administer physical

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[153] *Ibid.,* 168 (5.55).
[154] *Ibid.,* (5.6, 5.8, 5.9, 5.11, 5.15, 5.18, 5.23, 5.24, 5.25, 5.26, 5.30, 5.34, 5.38, 5.41, 5.47, 5.55, 5.60, 5.71).
[155] *Ibid.,* 156-7 (5.18); 155 (5.11).
[156] *Ibid.,* 149.
[157] *Ibid.,* 153 (5.4).
[158] *Ibid.,* 156 (5.17).
[159] *Ibid.,* 157 (5.19).

punishment but older boys acting in the role of 'custos', and some embraced their responsibilities enthusiastically: 'While the master is continually enquiring among us for [someone to be] custos, no one has pity on me, all accusing me and willing me to be beaten, by right or wrong'.[160] Berdon's manuscript serves as a reminder that it would be wrong to assume a simple dichotomy in medieval society between adults who approved of beating and children who did not, particularly since this would require a universal reversal of opinion at around the age of social maturity. Just as many adults probably never came to embrace the idea of beating children, some children probably did conceptualise the punishment of their fellows and as useful and deserved. Some may even have extended the same beliefs to their own punishment.

A change of tone is evident, however, in the single example which discusses beating in the first person:

> I have acquired three hard beatings on the buttocks this cold morning to warm me before I get completely cold, hoping that a gracious fortune will strike me on this day: it is a good omen to receive at the beginning of my labour, which may God perfect and finish!

While passages in which other children are the victims of the master's birch portray their beatings as both harsh and deserved, in this passage its author makes light of his punishment, while still maintaining an approving attitude towards its appropriacy and efficacy. This appropriacy, however, is transformed from a response to a misdemeanour to a response to the cold weather, its corrective potential from modification of behaviour to a humorous warming of the buttocks. It may perhaps be read as Berdon's attempt to reconcile the contradiction between a belief that beating children is both necessary and deserved, appropriate to his pious understanding of the social world, with his own social position as a schoolboy which could entail being subjected to this treatment.

Berdon's exercises also betray a particular concern with appearances and a desire to establish and maintain sober and serious position in adult society. Several examples reference the importance of a good reputation among his peers and among adults in the community. In one example, he boasts that his humility and manners are recognised:

> I have been accepted among men of honour and virtue, which accords well with my character, being that of a benign, humble, and well-mannered young man...[161]

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[160] *Ibid.,* 226 (6.105a).
[161] *Ibid.,* 153 (5.7).

Although youth is part of the social identity articulated here, the qualities of humility and good manners serve to demonstrate a level of social competence required to take up a place in adult society. Perhaps this desire to build a reputation within the community may be taken as an indicator that Berdon was slightly older at the time he compiled his manuscript, and indeed one exercise refers to being 'well grown up' but 'not yet nineteen as can be seen from my face, which is smooth and beardless like a boy's'.[162] While Pollard's manuscript appears to embrace youth as part of a masculine bourgeois identity, Berdon appears intent on leaving it behind. Youth in Berdon's manuscript is portrayed negatively and is contrasted with his own status as a budding and ambitious scholar:

> I will take my coat, which was torn in the collar by bad and violent youths, to the dressmaker to be repaired, for it is unsightly and incongruous for any scholar to wear torn clothes.[163]

The 'bad and violent youths' in this passage function as 'other' against which Berdon articulates his own social identity as a scholar, and in doing so he rejects not only their immorality but their youth as markers of difference. Youth, then, for Berdon, was a condition which needed to be overcome in order to achieve the goal of establishing himself within the adult social world. In light of this, we may perhaps be permitted the speculation that the amused detachment with which Berdon describes his own beating, in contrast to that of his peers, can be read rather as a mask for shame and humiliation than real indifference. For schoolboys seeking to traverse the boundary between life stages and assume a position within adult society, beating was no doubt a painful and humiliating reminder of their continued subordinate status.

John Claveryng

The final manuscript I wish to discuss here is also that in which beating features most prominently. Orme has dated the school exercises, which appear in the hand of John Claveryng, to c.1450-70 and suggests that he may perhaps have been a pupil at the grammar school of the hospital of St Anthony, London. Orme speculates that this may be the same John Claveryng who graduated as an MA at Oxford in the mid-1480s and who also held various benefices in London between 1482 and his death in 1513-14.[164] Uniquely amongst schoolbooks the manuscript preserves two versions of every exercise, the first of which appears to represent the work of either Claveryng or a boy from whom he copied, and the second the work either of the master or a star pupil selected by him.[165] This interpretation is supported by a series of mistakes

[162] Orme, *Exercises,* 163 (5.40).
[163] *Ibid.,* 155 (5.14); for further disparaging of youthful vices, see *Ibid.,* 158 (5.23).
[164] *Ibid.,* 179.
[165] *Ibid.,* 180.

in the second passages which bear the hallmarks of mishearings of dictation rather than mistranslations.[166] Orme suggests this reconstruction of the teaching method:

> The master announced a verb or theme upon which the pupils had to write in Latin. They then produced their work, perhaps repeating it aloud to him. Later, he dictated a model version or invited a skilful pupil to read out his own composition.[167]

If Orme is right, we may say with some confidence that the original composition reflects the work of Claveryng himself, and the subtle differences in language between the first and second versions may be indicative not only of differences in linguistic competence but of differences in perspective between Claveryng and his master. As I shall argue, the way in which beating and indeed children themselves are portrayed in the different versions of each exercise very much supports this interpretation.

Claveryng's collection displays the greatest focus on beating of any surviving late-medieval latins or vulgaria, and by some margin. Indeed, as Orme notes, 33 of the 129 exercises either imply or refer directly to the practice.[168] It is also notable that, with the passages which reference beating included, 50 of the exercises either criticise children directly or portray them in a negative light, a remarkable figure.[169] Even Robert Whittinton's collection of vulgaria, notable for its cruel and sadistic portrayals of physical punishment, does not contain the same systematic, sustained, and contemptuous criticism of children in evidence here.[170] Of these critical passages, fully 16 characterise children as idle and/or complain about their late arrival at school, and a further 5 accuse them of letting down their friends and family who support them in their education.[171] The following example, which brings together all three themes, may thus be considered fairly typical:

> Although the whole intention of our friends seeks [for us] to be increased in knowledge, they are outmanoeuvred in this in vain, however, since, coming late every day without fear of beating, we are shamefully deficient in our replies.[172]

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[166] *Ibid.,* 180.
[167] *Ibid.,* 180.
[168] *Ibid.,* 181.
[169] *Ibid.,* (6.5, 6.7, 6.8, 6.10, 6.12, 6.13, 6.17, 6.19, 6.21, 6.24, 6.28, 6.30, 6.31, 6.32, 6.35, 6.36, 6.37, 6.39, 6.40, 6.41, 6.44, 6.45, 6.46, 6.50, 6.52, 6.59, 6.61, 6.66, 6.67, 6.68, 6.73, 6.75, 6.77, 6.80, 6.82, 6.83, 6.85, 6.89, 6.90, 6.93, 6.95, 6.97, 6.98, 6.108, 6.110, 6.112, 6.113, 6.119, 6.120, 6.124).
[170] See above, 87-89.
[171] For idleness see (6.21, 6.28, 6.30, 6.36, 6.41, 6.44, 6.52, 6.59, 6.63, 6.80, 6.82, 6.90, 6.95, 6.108, 6.110, 6.113); for letting down friends and family see (6.32, 6.44, 6.46, 6.89, 6.98).
[172] *Ibid.,* 200 (6.44).

By contrast, a mere two examples portray children receiving praise from their schoolmaster.[173] In fact, there are hints that physical punishment may have been an almost daily occurrence for some pupils; one sentence refers to 'the master who supplies me every day with a harsh birch rod before I may please myself to drink or eat'.[174] If its emphasis in the manuscript is any guide, beating thus seems to have formed a major part of Claveryng's school life, seen by his master as a corrective to the almost universal deficiencies of his young charges.

Hints at a difference in perspective between Claveryng and his master in the way that beating was understood are apparent in several passages. Compare, for example, Claveryng's version with that of his master in this case:

> Any one of us not responding directly to the master's proposition is more easily to obtain for himself three whippings than twenty pounds, *because it is the procedure for a child of dull disposition to be invigorated with a harsh rod.*
>
> Anyone can very easily obtain for himself three whippings if in any apposition his response is not given to the proposition, *because every reason indicates that a child is usually invigorated more with rods whose ability is very dull* [emphasis added].[175]

The master's 'official' or 'sanctioned' version of this exercise turns a matter of fact statement about school procedure ('it is the procedure…') to a justification for beating ('every reason indicates') and a claim for efficacy ('a child *is* invigorated'), elements which are absent from Claveryng's composition. Perhaps the master felt it necessary to justify beating in these cases because, while beating children for lack of application seems to have been fairly common, few other school exercises portray beating as a remedy for lack of ability. Indeed, as I have discussed above, the Arundel *Vulgaria* explicitly refer to the master adjusting his expectations for children who experienced difficulties learning rather than punishing them:

> The maister knoweth what a slowe wytt I am of, for howbeit I profytt but litell, yf I kepe well in remembrance such thyngs as I have lurnede I shall content hym.[176]

It is worth pausing here to reflect on the fact that learning difficulties which we now understand as dyslexia, while their causes may be partly social, also have a genetic origin and have been shown to relate to specific differences in neurological function.[177] Some medieval children likely experienced problems reading and writing that were similar, although these were liable to be

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[173] *Ibid.,* 6.61, 6.64.
[174] *Ibid.,* 188 (6.15a).
[175] *Ibid.,* 184 (6.8a, 6.8b).
[176] Nelson, *Fifteenth Century School Book.,* 36.
[177] Sarah Jane Blakemore and Uta Frith, *The Learning Brain: Lessons for Education* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 86-93.

conceptualised as dullness of wit by their schoolmasters. While some schoolmasters evidently accommodated students' different paces of learning, what is being described in Claveryng's text looks, to modern eyes, like the institutionalised abuse of children with disabilities, along with those who for whatever reason struggled with the demands of a medieval education. This appears to have been atypical even by medieval standards, and Claveryng's focus on procedure may hint that he resisted characterising such treatment as either justified or efficacious.

Similar differences between Claveryng and his master in the meanings attached to physical punishment are evident in other examples. While the former is more likely to refer to 'beating' with its focus on the physical act, the latter employs the term 'correction' with greater frequency, a word which contains within it an implied justification and claim for efficacy. Thus in one exercise Claveryng refers to those who fail to meet the required standard 'being beaten harshly' where the master's version refers to them being 'corrected without favour'.[178] Similarly, another of Claveryng's Latins mentions boys being 'beaten daily by the master' where his master's speaks rather of them being 'justly punished by the hand of the master'.[179] In another, 'having never been constrained by any beating' compares with 'having been constrained by no kinds of corrections', and same pattern is also apparent here:

> The master, by whom *we are beaten* for various transgressions of which we are accused, punishes lies more gravely than other offences…
>
> Lying is *corrected with sharper beatings* than any other transgressions of which we are rebuked [emphasis added].[180]

In a final example, the emotive 'the pain that we suffer from our beatings is soon over' is rendered in the master's version as 'The pain of the master's correction soon passes from memory'.[181] It is important to note that this is a general pattern rather than a hard and fast rule; on occasion both Claveryng and the master's version refer to beating and, in three examples both refer to 'correction'.[182] There are, however, no examples in which the variation is the opposite way around, suggesting that while the master was more likely to see physical punishment as an act which remedied children's defects, children themselves were more likely to characterise it as beating to be suffered.

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[178] *Ibid.,* 189 (6.29a); 190 (6.19b).
[179] *Ibid.,* 200 (6.45a; 6.45b).
[180] *Ibid.,* 207 (6.64a, 6.64b); 235 (6.124a, 6.124b).
[181] *Ibid.,* 209 (6.69a, 6.69b).
[182] *Ibid.,* 222 (6.97); 186 (6.12); 191 (6.24).

Even in the cases where the corrective value of beating is articulated in Claveryng's examples, there is often a clear difference in perspective in evidence again.

> The master is about to chastise [me] daily for one offence about which I have been many times reproved, *until it may be plainly perceived that I am of better condition [and] have laid aside my insolences.*
>
> *In order that the correction of my circumstances will wholly blot out all my insolence,* the master's rod is about to chastise [me] with daily beatings on account of a single crime, for which he has given me frequent reproofs [emphasis added].[183]

In addition to the insertion of the justificatory 'correction' here, we see the language of improvement ('until … I am of a better condition') replaced with the language of destruction ('wholly blot out'). Insolence for Claveryng is conceived of as something which is carried temporarily and may thus be laid aside, rather than something intrinsic which must be forcibly eradicated as his master portrays it. Indeed, these passages bear witness to a master who sought not only to correct children's grammar but to correct their self-perception:

> Virtuous men will dislike students of *insolent conditions* … who *in no way exhibit diligence in learning* nor attend to their companions instructed in school.
>
> Men distinguished with virtues are *rightly* strong in accounting the *detestable conditions* of those who nowadays practice studying, [yet] who *are of no value in esteeming learning* [and] by no means attend while their companions are trained in school [emphasis mine].[184]

Here, in addition to transforming students' insolence into a justification for hatred, a statement about the conduct of certain schoolboys ('in no way exhibit diligence') becomes a statement about their intrinsic worth ('are of no value'). The extent to which Claveryng and his fellows internalised this correction of their self-perception is difficult to guess. Perhaps some did, although the subtle differences in outlook between Claveryng's and his master's version suggest that the latter was not wholly successful in persuading his young charges that they were either worthless or inherently defective.

Quite how children reacted to and understood the severity of their treatment is difficult to ascertain. They were certainly encouraged to view their punishments as harsh; the master's version of one passage states that 'the master has acquired for us very harsh rods so that we

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[183] *Ibid.,*196 (6.35a, 6.35b).
[184] *Ibid.,* 185 (6.10a, 6.10b).

may feel their daily harshness'.[185] They were also encouraged to respond to the master's rod with fear: 'Scholars above all things are to fear the master's rod which it behoves to be used every morning'.[186] In reality, children likely needed little such encouragement under the circumstances. The desire to instil a fear of the rod was explicitly linked to the dominant religious discourse surrounding physical punishment:

> The master's rod, which is feared more than all the weapons that are made from iron and steel, is what will urge ill-disposed boys, who shall in no way be spared, for "he who spares the rod hates [his] child."[187]

Fear of the rod was conceived of, at least by this schoolmaster, as a corrective to children's inherent deficiencies, and instilling this was thus not only a social but a religious duty. It is likely no exaggeration, then, to suggest that Claveryng and his schoolfellows lived their lives in fairly constant fear. Indeed, one passage talks of fear of the day's beatings to come that was so severe that it renders the child unable to eat breakfast in the morning: 'I have no appetite because of the fear which long since now has come upon me'.[188] Although such treatment may have fallen within medieval discursive and legal frameworks, it was nonetheless tantamount to abuse in that it would have been regarded as cruel and excessive by many in medieval society. Indeed, to suggest otherwise would be to ignore the very real fear and anguish expressed in passages such as these, and would risk relegating the feelings of children themselves to secondary importance behind the norms and practices of medieval adult society.

'Are They Not Human?': The Psychology of Abuse

It is worth moving on to examine the perspective of the schoolmaster whose voice is also very much present in Claveryng's text and to consider the question of what factors lay behind the harsh (to use his own word) treatment of children. There are hints in this manuscript that something beyond the fulfilment of a social or religious duty lay behind the evident enthusiasm that this schoolmaster felt for corporal punishment. In his perception, children's very humanity is called into question. The emotional diversity and complexity of the children whose voices call forth from the pages of the Arundel and Royal *vulgaria* are replaced with homogenised representatives of an evil conditioned social group who are held in line only by fear of violence. These are understood to embody essential characteristics which make them bestial rather than

[185] *Ibid.,* 208 (6.66b).
[186] *Ibid.,* 233 (119b).
[187] *Ibid.,* 213 (6.77a).
[188] *Ibid.,* 212 (6.75a).

rational, a wild force that represents a threat to the social order to be abolished or tamed and thus brought under social control:

> Wild beasts which were never accustomed to human hands are tamed many times with blows and labour; in a similar manner a boy full of wildness becomes tame enough with the master's rod, whose harshness passes to the interior of the heart.[189]

There is something truly sinister to modern eyes in the metaphor of the rod's harshness passing to the interior of the heart, a way of expressing perhaps that this medieval schoolmaster well understood that the scars inflicted by beating are emotional as much as physical, and that he understood this to be an advantage rather than a disadvantage of the practice.

Tellingly, it is in Wittington's collection of vulgaria that the same conflation of children with animals is in evidence, in this case particularly with domestic animals. Those who stand still while reciting their lessons are compared to asses.[190] Less able pupils are compared to sheep, and Whittinton complains bitterly about being asked to teach them: 'Whan a chylde is sende to schole to the entent to lerne as well maners as connynge / it is dyshonesty to the mayster. yf he be rude and can noo moore good than a shepe'.[191] Those children who, in Whittinton's eyes, have not had a sufficiently harsh upbringing are disparaged as 'cokneys' [effeminate, weak or pampered children] and 'tytyllynges' [a variety of small stockfish] who have been 'wantonly brought vp'.[192] It is made clear to any such pupils that they are not welcome in the school: 'It is more pleasure for a master to see foure suche neuer thryftes go out of his schole than se one to come into it'.[193] The worst however are those pupils whom Whittinton considers to be of evil habits, who are construed as a poisonous or diseased presence which must be eradicated from the school community: 'The conuersacyon of one vnthryfte is as poyson to a hole schole. for one scabbed shepe (as they saye) marreth a hole flocke'.[194] Again, certain children's inherent qualities mark them out as a dangerous corrupting influence which must be eradicated for the good of the collective. In her 2003 monograph *From Boys to Men,* Ruth Karras contrasts artisanal masculinity which, she suggests, was defined in opposition to youth, with a clerical masculinity among university scholars in which man is defined by his separation from beasts.[195] While passages such as these provide some broad support for her ideas, the conflation of youth with bestiality in evidence here suggests that such a clear cut distinction may not be so easy to draw.

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[189] *Ibid.,* 215 (6.83a).
[190] White, *Vulgaria*, 114.
[191] *Ibid.,* 117.
[192] *Ibid.*, 118.
[193] *Ibid.,* 118.
[194] *Ibid.,* 116.
[195] Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

Rather, as I argued in Chapter 1, childhood, youth, the bestial, and even the sinful, the demonic and the monstrous are all implicated in the construction of one another. They converged into an amorphous category of the 'other' into which children occasionally had the misfortune to stray. This process of conflation is perhaps most evident in the figure of Gowther who is simultaneously human, animal, demon, child and youth.

Although the children portrayed in school exercises are not represented as demonic like Gowther, they are certainly ungodly, and this ungodliness is conflated with their bestial nature and status. Claveryng's master, for example, had his students compose sentences upon this theme:

> We ought to love God, the founder of all, with all the attention of the mind, having nothing except by his grace, which if it is lacking to us, we shall be judged to be worse than an unreasoning creature.[196]

Any behaviour displayed by pupils which implied a lack of grace was thus liable to mark children out as also less than fully human and undeserving of human treatment. It is made clear that failing to memorise grammatical texts constituted evidence of a lack of grace:

> Those unthrifty boys who are never seen to render Donatus without a fault are justly punished by the hand of the master, for they, as it truly appears, serve neither God nor the most holy Mother of God.[197]

In a medieval cosmic hierarchy which placed the animal, the demonic and the sinful at the bottom, the human in the middle, and sanctity, purity and divinity at the top, the boy who will not or cannot learn his grammar is imagined on the lowest rungs of the moral order.

The child's deficient body in the text functions as the ultimate source of their shortcomings; as the master remarks: 'Idleness is strongly rooted in the bodies of boys'.[198] Thus it is their bodies upon which 'corrective' punishment is enacted, and it is by virtue of this physical deficiency that the master claims authority over boys' bodies.[199] Indeed, it is a particular feature of Claveryng's manuscript that the body is repeatedly emphasised as the site of punishment: 'the master's hand in no way spares our bodies';[200] 'a worthy punishment is reckoned for my body'.[201] In a telling

[196] Orme, *Exercises,* 201 (6.48b).
[197] *Ibid.,* 200 (6.45a, 6.45b).
[198] *Ibid.,* 194 (6.30b).
[199] For discussion of this in relation to pedagogic discourse, see Parsons, *Punishment,* 112-23.
[200] *Ibid.,* 207 (6.63b).
[201] *Ibid.,* 217 (6.85b).

and, to modern eyes, disturbing passage, schoolboys' attempts to protect themselves from the master's birch are described:

> If it happens that the bodies of boys are subjected to beatings several times, those will be favoured from any correction who endure the rod without protection [and] with patience, rather than those who protect their bare parts with hand or clothing.[202]

In this passage, the master's power over the bodies of his pupils is established as absolute, even to the extent of denying children any possibility of protecting themselves from his punishment. Indeed, the care and protection of children's bodies is portrayed as relevant and necessary only inasmuch as this aided their learning. One passage observes that richer boys nourished with more substantial foods are not only very tractable in nature but are able to learn faster than those whose diet was poorer.[203] In similar vein, it is stated that boys should ensure that they have sufficient warm clothes for the winter, 'because the preservation of the body from the injury of cold makes for a good disposition to learn'.[204] The master's assertion of authority thus extended even to the most fundamental of his pupils' physical requirements, conceived of not as the personal needs of autonomous subjects but as necessary maintenance of boys' bodies as physical objects. Through the medium of their school exercises, Claveryng and his fellows were taught to regard even the everyday necessities of feeding and clothing themselves not as autonomous acts but as duties which they owed to their schoolmaster, rendering them subordinate to their him in almost every aspect of their lives.

It will by now have become apparent to the reader that the way in which children were conceptualised by those in medieval society who demonstrated the greatest propensity to commit violence towards them bears striking resemblances to the ways in which other oppressed groups have been portrayed in other historical periods. In his book *Less than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others,* David Livingstone Smith argues that there are several common features shared by instances of dehumanisation across place and time.[205] Particular groups are understood to have essential qualities which make them in some way less than fully human and thus exempt them from empathy. They are compared to wild or domestic animals, seen as a threat which needs to be contained if the social order is to be preserved, conceived of as having wild or unrestrained passions: 'They may look like humans and act like them, but inside – where it matters – they are not at all like humans … they lack that inner spark

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[202] *Ibid.,* 198 (6.40b).
[203] *Ibid.,* 185 (6.9).
[204] *Ibid.,* 205 (6.57b).
[205] David Livingstone Smith, *Less than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave and Exterminate Others* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011).

or soul that only humans possess'.[206] Nick Haslam similarly links dehumanisation to essentialist thinking and makes a distinction between what he terms 'mechanistic' and 'animalistic' dehumanisation, the latter embodying a perception of amorality, lack of self-restraint, irrationality, instinct and, instructively, 'childlikeness'.[207] Medieval people too recognised a connection between child abuse and a failure to recognise children's essential humanity. In Eadmer's *Life of St Anselm,* the saint makes this emotive plea to a violent abbot who terrorises his pupils with threats and blows: 'Are they not human? Are they not of the same nature as you?'[208]

Smith's articulation of the concept of dehumanisation attempts to bridge the gap between cognition and culture. He argues that 'dehumanisation is a joint creation of biology, culture, and the architecture of the human mind'.[209] He argues that dehumanising discourses are not simply degrading metaphors but are underpinned by cognitive processes. 'Dehumanisation isn't a way of talking. It's a way of thinking – a way of thinking that, sadly, comes all too easily to us'.[210] He explains the persistence of this process of categorisation across time and place with recourse to Lawrence Hirschfeld's concept of a 'folk sociology' module in the mind: the idea that human beings have an inherent tendency to divide the human world into different 'kinds' and to attribute essential properties to them. Hirschfeld argues that this is an inherent feature of our cognitive architecture, but stresses that this produces only *susceptibility* to such thinking rather than its inevitability.[211] Congruent with constructivist perspectives, this model is most commonly used to investigate the persistence of racial categories but has also been adapted to consider issues of social class.[212] It may be adapted here to consider medieval age categories as well, with the important qualification that these socially-stable categories were only *temporarily* occupied by individuals. For Livingstone Smith, it is this tendency toward essentialist social

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[206] *Ibid.,* 157.
[207] Nick Haslam, 'Dehumanization: An Integrative Review', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 3 (2006): 252-64.
[208] [Nonne homines, nonne ejusdem sunt naturae cujus vos estis?] Eadmer, *The life of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury,* ed. R. W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 38
[209] Smith, *Human,* 4
[210] *Ibid.,* 13.
[211] Lawrence Hirschfeld, 'Who Needs a Theory of Mind?' in *Biological and Cultural Bases of Human Inference,* ed. R. Viale, D. Andler and L. A. Hirschfeld (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006); 'On a Folk Theory of Society: Children, Evolution, and Mental Representations of Social Groups', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 5, no. 2 (2001): 107-117;'The Myth of Mentalizing and the Primacy of Folk Sociology', in *Navigating the Social World: What Infants, Children, and Other Species Can Teach Us,* ed. Mahzarin Banaji and Susan Gelman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 101-6.
[212] Lawrence Hirschfeld, *Race in the Making: Cognition, Culture and the Child's Construction of Human Kinds* (Cambridge: MA, MIT Press, 1996). For adoption in the study of marginalisation in the Indian caste system see Ramaswami Mahalingham, 'Essentialism, Power, and the Representation of Social Categories: A Folk Sociology Perspective', *Human Development* 50 (2007): 300-19; 'Culture, Power, and the Psychology of Marginality', in *Social Categories, Social Identities, and Educational Participation,* ed. A. Fulgini, (New York: Russell Sage, 2007), 42-65.

categorisation which – combined with the socio-cultural construction of certain groups as essentially subhuman – enables violence towards them by placing them in a cognitive category removed from empathetic consideration.

The attempt to understand how discourse impinges upon the maltreatment of individual children requires some concept of mind, since ideas cannot act upon children's bodies in and of themselves. Whether dehumanisation grounded in 'folk sociology' will ever be proven to relate directly to the cognitive architecture of human brains or whether it remains a metaphor, it provides a useful way of conceptualising social patterns of behaviour at the individual level. It offers a social cognitive framework through which to understand the maltreatment of medieval children. Insofar as evidence of the cognitive processes can ever be forthcoming for the medieval period, I would argue that the school exercises contained in Claveryng's manuscript and Whittinton's *Vulgaria* provide it. The evil 'condition' or essence of children means that they require correction. Children are homogenised – treated as representatives of a social category rather than individuals with particular needs or perspectives – and their category membership is seen to exert a deterministic influence over their behaviour. They are treated as spiritually and morally inferior, wild and wanton, unreasoning and feeling only basic emotions and libidinal drives. They do not really suffer, they simply fear and resent, and their impotent fears and resentments are construed as humorous. Their bodies are worthy of care and protection only insofar as they provide a vehicle for the forcible inculcation of correct behaviour. They are compared to low and inferior animals such as asses and sheep as well as wild and unreasoning beasts, lacking in god's grace. At best, they are susceptible to 'taming' but at worst they are 'diseased', 'poisonous', or morally polluting and must be expunged from the school community to stop their contagion from spreading.

How might the cognitive categorisation of the child as a subhuman 'other' have been produced and reproduced in the context of medieval grammar schools and indeed in wider society? As well as the discursive construction of childhood which I discussed in Chapter 1, part of the answer may lie in the very processes of intergenerational maltreatment to which many children were subjected. After all, schoolmasters themselves were once schoolchildren, and while in some masters this evidently produced an ability to empathise with and relate to their pupils, in others it may have had the opposite effect. Childhood is a time when social categorisations are formed, and a childhood spent being forcibly and brutally drilled in one's own essential deficiencies as a 'child' may well have helped to foster the kinds of animosity towards children which Whittinton and Claveryng's master display. We do not know about the schooling of Claveryng's master but Whittinton was likely educated under Stanbridge whose *Vulgaria*

survives. Stanbridge's exercises are shorter and simpler than Whittinton's and do not contain the overt examples of dehumanisation which characterise his successor's writing, but the cultural construction of the wild and wanton child lashing out physically and verbally at all around him is very much present: 'Thou stynkest', 'Hys nose is lyke a shoynge horne', 'He is redy to fyght', 'He plucketh me by the nose', 'He clypped me about þe myddle', 'Syt awaye or I shall gyue the a blowe'.[213] Indeed, Stanbridge's negative characterisation of his pupils is so stark that it led Beatrice White to suggest that they must have been 'dirty and ill-mannered young gawks' who were 'in the mass, untamed and violent' so that 'perhaps, after all, the schoolmaster may have had no alternative but the rod to enforce discipline'.[214] Whittinton was thus likely raised in an environment in which the essential deficiencies of childhood were strongly emphasised and highly salient.

Other psychological processes may also be implicated in the perpetuation of child abuse in medieval culture. There is widespread evidence that being subjected to abuse during childhood may increase the probability that one will become an abusive adult, a phenomenon known as the intergenerational cycle of violence.[215] It is at least possible that the treatment that Whittinton meted out to his own pupils mirrored that which he himself experienced during his schooling. Beating is certainly a prominent theme in Stanbridge's *Vulgaria*: 'I was beten this mornynge', 'The mayster hath bete me', 'Thou art worthy to be bette'.[216] What is more, boys are taught to 'fear the mayster', and the euphemistic metaphor for beating as 'marrying the master's daughter' which has been associated in Whittinton's *Vulgaria* with the eroticised portrayals of beating is also present in that of Stanbridge.[217] Of course, none of this proves that Whittinton was necessarily subjected to such treatment himself as the particularities of his own childhood are unknowable. However, this example does serve to highlight the general point that the intergenerational transmission of abuse is highly plausible within the cultural framework of late-medieval English grammar schools. It is perhaps to the growth of grammar schools in the Middle Ages that we should look for the origins of the early modern trope of the violent and sexually abusive schoolmaster.

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[213]White, *Vulgaria,* 17; 19; 25; 16; 15.
[214] White, 'Introduction', in *Stanbridge and Whittinton,* xiv.
[215] C.S. Widom and H.W. Wilson, 'Intergenerational Transmission of Violence', in *Violence and Mental Health*, ed. J. Lindert J and I. Levav (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 27-45; For a recent meta-analysis, see Mark Assinka, Anouk Spruita, Mendel Schutsa, Ramón Lindauer, Claudia E. van der Puta, and Geert-Jan J.M. Stams, 'The Intergenerational Transmission of Child Maltreatment: A Three-Level Meta-Analysis, *Child Abuse and Neglect* 84 (2018): 131-45.
[216] White, 15; 24
[217] *Ibid.*, 20; Stewart, *Humanism,* 98.

Indeed, if we accept the principle that some part of the explanation for the occurrence of child abuse in the population may be explained by processes of intergenerational transmission, and that rates of abuse are subject to vary across time and place, then the dramatic increase in grammar schooling in the fifteenth century may perhaps have contributed to a general increase in the physical and sexual abuse of boys late-medieval and early modern society. In the Middle Ages as today, physical and sexual abuse were most visible in institutional contexts such as schools and monasteries, no doubt partly because such contexts permitted individual abusers access to large numbers of children in the absence of parental oversight. The widening of access to grammar schooling in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries placed an ever-increasing proportion of the young male population into such institutional contexts where they were at greater risk of abuse, and thus at greater risk of becoming abusers later in life. It is therefore at least conceivable that the increasing attention to the problem of the 'foul abuse' of boys in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – centred around the figure of the simultaneously violent and sodomitical schoolmaster – reflected a real increase in the prevalence of physical and sexual abuse brought about by the institutionalisation of education.[218] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to do more than speculate about this possibility, but in the context of a discussion about the influence of children's formative experiences on cultural norms it is certainly a possibility that is worth highlighting. Social continuity and change may be brought about not only by 'top down' structural and discursive processes but also by the interaction of socio-cultural ideals and practices with developing minds and bodies.

Conclusion

Within the institutional frameworks created by medieval schools, discourses about childhood, education, socialisation and physical punishment were subject to interpretation, negotiation, assertion and challenge by individuals and groups, and a variety of treatment regimes emerged which were understood and experienced by different children in different ways. When or indeed whether this treatment should be characterised as 'abusive' is a difficult question to answer from a modern perspective. When identifying child abuse and neglect cross-culturally, Jill Korbin suggests a helpful distinction between, on the one hand, practices viewed as acceptable by one culture but as abusive or neglectful by another and, on the other hand, departure from the realm of behaviour which is considered acceptable within the culture under analysis.[219] Helen

[218] *Lex forcia : being a sensible address to the Parliament for an act to remedy the foul abuse of children at schools, especially in the great schools of this nation*, (London: Printed for R.C. and are to be sold by Eliz. Whitelock, 1698); See C. B. Friedman, 'The Children's Petition of 1669 and its Sequel', *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 14, no. 2 (1966): 216-23

[219] Jill Korbin, 'Introduction', in *Child Abuse and Neglect: Cross-Cultural Perspectives,* ed. Jill Korbin (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 1-12.

Kavapalu has further argued that 'however much practices "make sense" in their particular contexts, their impact at the level of subjective experience must also be considered'.[220] That much of the treatment portrayed in medieval English schoolbooks would qualify as child abuse today goes without saying. However, there are also instances such as those portrayed in Whittinton and Claveryng's texts which, even if they fell within the legally-defined boundaries of acceptable conduct, certainly went far beyond the norms of social practice as evidenced by other sources. There is evidence that many within medieval society, not least the children who were themselves subjected to such treatment, would have understood this as cruel and unacceptable. In light of this it may justifiably be understood as child abuse.

Although as I have argued there was considerable variation in the ways in which children were understood and treated, there is no denying that medieval children as a group were systemically treated in ways which would not have been accepted ways for adult males to treat one another. This is not the same as the claim of 'barbaric past' narratives that children's lives were a 'nightmare'. As feminist scholars have shown, medieval women too were systemically subordinated within medieval culture but this does not mean that all women were subjected to abuse or that medieval men were incapable of loving their wives. Just as women's treatment in medieval culture may be conceptualised via the idea that medieval society was patriarchal – structured in such a way as to maintain men's power over women – so too may it be understood, to borrow Chris Jenks's term, as 'gerontocratic' in that it systemically maintained children's subordinate status.[221] Within household, school and community contexts, this generalised subordination of children and the discourses which maintained it could lead all too often to dehumanisation and violent abuse. In the following chapters, I will move on to examine the ways in which patriarchal and gerontocratic discourses intersected in the conceptualisation and treatment of medieval girls.

[220] Helen Kavapalu, 'Dealing with the Dark Side in the Ethnography of Childhood: Child Punishment in Tonga', *Oceania* 63 (1993): 315.
[221] Jenks, *Childhood*; for a neutral distinction between 'gerontocratic' and 'neontocratic' cultures see Lancy, *Anthropology of Childhood,* 3.

CHAPTER 3:

THE NATURE OF MAIDENHOOD

It is tempting to preface scholarly discussion of female childhood with an admission that it is a subject about which the medieval sources do not allow us to say very much. While, as I hope to show in this chapter, this is overly pessimistic, it is certainly the case that an adult male bias both in terms of what evidence survives and in terms of the perspective this evidence offers renders female children one of the most elusive groups in medieval society. 'Ages of Man' literature tends to concern itself, as the phrase implies, exclusively with men.[1] The only Middle English texts which treat the Ages of Woman are the various translations of the *Secreta Secretorum* and the four-stage scheme propounded does not give specific attention to childhood as a phase of life. The first image of a woman's life it offers, aligned with the springtime, is of a girl already of marriageable age; 'a faire spouse and a full specious [beautiful] damysell arraied with broches, and clad with many-fold coloures that she may appere to me in the day of hir mariage'.[2] This is followed by Summer when the world is like a wife, 'complete of body and of perfyte age', Autumn as a woman of full age whose youth has departed, and Winter as an old woman near to death.[3] Female childhood thus appears at first glance to have attracted little interest in the later medieval period.

The surviving body of medieval conduct literature appears to confirm this picture. Courtesy texts addressed to younger children such as *Urbanitatis* and *Stans puer ad mensam* tend – as the '*puer*' in the title of Lydgate's offering makes clear – to be aimed ostensibly at boys rather than girls. Of course, this does not preclude girls from having read these texts, or from having had the poems read to them, but it does make it difficult to ascertain exactly how and indeed whether their gender would have impacted the way in which they might have read them, and makes using these texts to draw specific conclusions about medieval girlhood even more difficult. The medieval English conduct texts which do address themselves to young women, such as the Middle English *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter, The Goodwife Wold a Pilgrimage* and the Middle Scots *The Thewis*

[1] For discussion of the ages of woman's life, see Mary Dove, *The Perfect Age of Man's Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 20-25.
[2] M. A. Manzalaoui, ed., *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions,* Vol. 1, EETS, O.S. 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 56.
[3] *Ibid.,* 153-5; 57-8.

[Manners] *of Good Women,* appear to focus more on the concerns of adolescent girls than children – or, at least, the concerns of those responsible for adolescent girls. This has led Felicity Riddy to suggest that in the fifteenth century such texts served a purpose among adolescent servants and their mistresses in urban households as repositories of bourgeois values, specifically as texts for the 'embourgeoisiement of servants'.[4] Although many of these servants would have been young enough to be considered children today, their status in the Middle Ages was more ambiguous, as the majority would have been over the age of twelve and thus able to marry according to canon law. It is thus easy to come away with the impression that medieval culture only became interested in girls with the onset of puberty.

To some extent, this absence of female children is reflected in the historiography. Historians of medieval childhood, although they frequently take account of differences in the experiences of boys and girls, tend not to make gender a major pillar of their analysis.[5] These accounts are primarily interested in age as a category of analysis, and so in elucidating first and foremost the things that both sexes shared in common as children and only secondarily those which divided them as girls and boys. Where gender is the primary factor of analysis this has sometimes been seen as in conflict with an aged childhood identity rather than complementary to it. James Schultz has argued that in Middle High German texts there was no equivalent to our modern ideas of 'boy' and 'girl', only the gender-neutral *kint*. Where sex was specified, Schultz argues, it did not specify a type of child but a type of man or woman, with the terms for female childhood such as *maget* [maiden] implying virginity, and the terms for male childhood implying the masculine ideal of knighthood. He goes on to speculate on how this would have affected medieval children's self-perception: 'A *maget* is not a kind of child but a kind of female, and a child who thinks of herself as a *maget* thinks of herself not as one kind of child, the other being boys, but as a kind of female, the other being *wip,* wives or women who have had sexual experience'.[6] Schultz's assumption of a straightforward correspondence between medieval language and cognition – in other words, that linguistic idiosyncrasies map unproblematically onto the ways in which individuals within medieval cultures identified themselves and others – is a questionable one, and has the effect in this case of rendering female childhood more rather than less elusive.[7] Gender is understood by Schultz as primarily a facet of adulthood rather than childhood; to the extent that children take

[4] Felicity Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text', *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 85.
[5] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990); Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).
[6] James A. Schultz, 'No Girls, No Boys, No Families: On the Construction of Childhood in Texts of the German Middle Ages', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 94, no. 1 (1995): 63.
[7] For criticism of Schultz's argument and an examination of the Middle English evidence, see P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Childhood and Gender in Later Medieval England', *Viator* 39, no. 1 (2008): 249-62.

on a gendered identity, they are taking on an identity which looks forward to their future selves, and locates them in relation to the community of adults rather than the community of their peers.

A similar idea of maidenhood as a gendered identity distinct from childhood is proposed by Kim Phillips in her book, *Medieval Maidens*. Phillips characterises maidenhood as a phase of life 'beginning with puberty and intellectual development around twelve to fifteen, and ending with "full" marriage or the age at which it might be expected'.[8] Although Phillips sees maidenhood as a liminal phase, she focuses on maidenhood primarily as the dawn of adulthood rather than the twilight of childhood – a process of orientation towards marriage and the social role of wifehood rather than the gradual phasing out of the behaviours, perspectives, and relationships associated with childhood. As Phillips puts it, when she became a maiden, a girl 'entered a phase of moral and intellectual development which marked her out as adult'.[9] Phillips also argues on the basis of linguistic evidence that children were considered to be relatively genderless, pointing out for example that in the romance *Lay le Freine* the heroine is referred to with the neutral pronoun 'it' until the age of twelve.[10] It is from the end of childhood at around the age of twelve that gendered identification began in earnest and adolescent maidens entered 'a period of intense socialisation in femininity and in roles appropriate to their status'.[11] The general picture which emerges from the scholarship, then, is that medieval girls were considered children until around the age of twelve during which time their gender was of little (or significantly lesser) importance. Gendered socialisation is understood to have taken place primarily during adolescence rather than during childhood. 'Female childhood' in this scheme becomes something of an oxymoron; to be a 'child' was to attach little importance to gender, to be considered or to consider oneself 'female' was to have progressed – or at least to be in the process of progressing – into an adult gendered identity.

Setting aside the medieval evidence for a moment, however, there are good reasons to doubt that this model truly represents female children's experience of gender in the Middle Ages. Children today are highly sensitive to the gender norms of society, and as far as researchers have been able to ascertain they begin distinguishing typically male and female faces and voices even during the first months of life.[12] It is a well-documented phenomenon that, far from being indifferent to gender, children today develop very strict gender stereotypes at around the age of five or six and

[8] Kim Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 42.
[9] *Ibid.,* 42.
[10] *Ibid.,* 9.
[11] *Ibid.,* 61.
[12] Carol Lynn Martin, Diane N. Ruble, and Joel Szkrybal, 'Cognitive Theories of Early Gender Development', *Psychological Bulletin* 128, no. 6 (2002): 903–33.

only begin to relax these as their childhood progresses. The process we observe in many modern cultures is not a gradual increase in the importance of gender as children reach adolescence but rather the opposite; children's ideas about gender roles and attributes go through a period of extreme rigidity before increasing in flexibility as they get older.[13] As Carol Martin and Diane Ruble put it, 'Most children pass through a phase of believing that it is morally wrong for a boy to wear nail polish or a girl to play football but this typically ends by early elementary school'. [14] As well as holding stereotyped views, children also display a very strong tendency to self-segregate along gender lines in their play, even where this is against the wishes of their caregivers. This process is so marked that some researchers describe boys and girls as growing up in separate cultures.[15]

Precisely why children act in this way is a matter of debate. Grounded in the assumption that children actively and intuitively search for ways of making sense of the social world, cognitive theories suggest that children to a large extent 'self-socialise' into gendered identities based on the information they glean from the society around them: 'Self-socialisation perspectives posit that children actively seek information about what gender means and how it applies to them and that an understanding of gender categories motivates behaviour such that, in essence, they socialise themselves'.[16] Eleanor Maccoby argues that direct parental socialisation has only a limited effect on children's acquisition of a gendered identity: 'children's behaviour is governed not only by what they have been directly taught but also by what they have inferred through observing the culture around them. Certain cultural views about gender are embodied in myths, plays, and stories as well as in everyday life. They are "in the air," and can be picked up by children from a host of sources'.[17] In addition, sociological accounts have emphasised the ways in which children socialise one another within their peer groups. Thus Allison James offers the intriguing suggestion that stereotyped views of gender should be viewed partly as a facet of children's peer culture, which is passed through generations of children often despite adult attempts to promote greater equality: 'the culture of childhood itself may, through its mode of transmission from child to child,

[13] Carol Lynn Martin and Diane N. Ruble, 'Children's Search for Gender Cues: Cognitive Perspectives on Gender Development', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13, no. 2 (April 2004): 67–70.
[14] Carol Lynn Martin and Diane N. Ruble, 'Patterns of Gender Development', *Annual Review of Psychology* 61 (2010): 353–81.
[15] Eleanor E. Maccoby and Carol Nagy Jacklin, 'Gender Segregation in Childhood', in *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, ed. Hayne W. Reese, vol. 20 (JAI, 1987), 239–87.
[16] Martin and Ruble, 'Patterns'.
[17] Elanor E. Maccoby, *The Two Sexes: Growing Up Apart, Coming Together* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 151-52.

act as an influential and conservative force in shaping children's consciousness of Self and Others'.[18]

While medieval children cannot be assumed *a priori* to have followed the pattern observed in modern Western societies, the apparent sensitivity of modern children to the gendered expectations of their society does raise the burden of proof somewhat for the argument that gender was relatively unimportant for medieval childhood or that, in contrast to modern societies, socialisation into gender roles took place primarily during adolescence. At the very least, the modern evidence should cause us to question two fundamental assumptions about childhood and gender in the Middle Ages. Firstly, we cannot assume that children's adoption of gender roles required an active process of 'socialisation' by adults, so a lack of evidence of gendered socialisation during childhood does not necessarily imply that it did not take place. The fact that there are no texts teaching younger girls how to be girls, for example, does not mean they could not have worked it out for themselves through observation of medieval society. Secondly, we cannot assume that children's ideas about gender were precisely the same as those of their parents or caregivers, even if they were drawing on a shared cultural discourse. As a corollary, we cannot assume, as Schultz does, that children's self-identification should be reflected in the linguistic evidence of sources written by adults. We should at least consider the possibility that children's experience of medieval culture may even have been more rather than less gendered than that of older people.

There is in fact some evidence which points to parallels between medieval and modern children's gendered identities. Surviving accounts of children's play suggest that gender differences were apparent from a young age. Describing his childhood, Froissart recalls being at school and meeting little girls of his own age: 'I, innocent as I was, gave them pins or an apple or a pear or a little glass ring, and it seemed to me wonderful when they were pleased'.[19] He also recalls playing games which evoked future gender roles: 'We used to make helmets of our caps; and often, before the girls, we beat one another with our caps'.[20] Deborah Youngs argues Froissart's account demonstrates that 'gender differences were becoming apparent even while boys and girls played together'.[21] Jeremy Goldberg has found a similar picture from his analysis of English coroner's rolls, assigning a central role to the peer group in children's socialisation: 'Late medieval English

[18] Allison James, *Childhood Identities: Self and Social Relationships in the Experience of the Child* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 186.
[19] Edith Rickert, ed., *Chaucer's World* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 97.
[20] *Ibid.*, 97.
[21] Deborah Youngs, *The Life Cycle in Western Europe c.1300-1500* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 56.

children appear to have been socialised from an early age as much by their siblings and peers as by their mothers or fathers'.[22] He argues gender differences during childhood were negotiated during play, and that as children grew older they played preferentially with children of the same sex. As well as play, the evidence of children's work in peasant society points to a gendered experience of childhood: 'The division of labour by sex ... began very early in a child's life and was part of their early identification with the roles of their parents'.[23]

For children of wealthier families, the experience of education was also gendered, with boys and girls commonly educated separately from the age of seven, an age by which most modern children are already acutely aware of societal gender norms. In the romance *Emare,* the socialisation of the female protagonist is described in some detail in a passage that is worth quoting at length.[24] The young Emare, whose mother dies during her infancy, is sent as a child to a lady called Abro who is responsible for her nurture. There she learns the necessary skills and attributes of a lady, including courtesy and good manners as well as the ability to sew in gold and silk, which she learns 'among other maidens'. Now a 'small maiden', so presumably not yet fully-grown, Emare learns what probably amounted to table manners – the nurture that men used in hall – while she was 'in her bower', suggesting that the young maiden was probably acting as a chambermaid or personal servant to the lady Abro:

> The chyld, that was fayr and gent [noble],
> To a lady was hyt sente,
> That men kalled Abro.
> She thawghth hyt curtesye and thewe [manners],
> Golde and sylke for to sewe,
> Amonge maydenes moo [other].
>
> Abro tawghte thys mayden small,
> Nortur that men useden in sale [hall],
> Whyle she was in her bowre. (54-63)

This passage is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it portrays learning about gender roles as very much a feature of childhood rather than adolescence. Secondly, it portrays female children being educated in same-sex groups, suggesting that although the ultimate responsibility for maidens' socialisation may have lain with older women like Abro, girls may in fact have learned much of

[22] Goldberg, 'Childhood and Gender', 261.
[23] Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 157.
[24] Edition cited throughout is Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, ed., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995).

what they needed to know from other members of their peer group, particularly perhaps those who were slightly older.

In Middle English romance, it is comparatively rare to see the term 'child' applied to young females, despite the term being ubiquitously applied to young men. The fact that the archetypal romance 'childe' is usually male, however, does not mean that there are no female children in romance – they are commonly referred to not as 'child' but as 'maid' or 'maiden'. Thus, the young Helen in *Sir Tryamour* is referred to as a 'may' (665) and as 'Maydyn Elyn' (751) although she is only seven years of age (626).[25] In *William of Palerne* the Emperor's daughter and eventual love interest of the hero, Melior, is introduced as a 'dere damisele' and a 'menskful [noble, courteous] mayde' (405), despite the fact that she is the same age as William (403), who continues to be referred to as a 'child' (409) and a 'barn' (397) and who is young enough to have been playing in the forest with other children immediately prior to his discovery by the Emperor.[26] Are we really to assume that Melior is old enough to be considered a type of woman while William is still chasing rabbits around the forest with the other 'ȝong bold barnes' (187)? That this is not the case is suggested by her initial description, which emphasises that she was particularly courteous and intelligent for her age: 'a more curteyse creature . ne cunnyngere of hire age, / Was nouȝt þanne in þis world' (405-406). It is rare to see adult women being praised for their 'cunnynge', but the epithet is more frequently to be found applied to children, for instance in surviving schoolbooks. The Middle English narrative of the early life of Mary similarly stresses the precocious intelligence of the child during her schooling.[27] Although never referred to explicitly as a 'child' but rather as a 'maiden', the impression given by her description then is that Melior is currently receiving her education and is a 'clever girl for her age' – well-mannered and attentive to her lessons.

On other occasions the terms 'child' and 'maid' or 'maiden' are used interchangeably in romance to refer to girls up to the age of twelve. In *Havelok the Dane,* for example, the two murdered sisters of the protagonist are referred to as 'maydnes' (467) and then a few lines later as 'children' (474).[28] *Emare* as we have seen is referred to variously during her childhood as a 'chyld', a 'mayden' and a

[25] Edition cited throughout is Harriet Hudson, ed., *Four Middle English Romances: Sir Isumbras, Octavian, Sir Eglamour or Artois, Sir Tryamour* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006).
[26] Edition cited throughout is Walter W. Skeat, ed., *The Romance of William of Palerne,* EETS E.S. 1 (London: Trübner, 1867).
[27] 'The Nativity and Early Life of Mary', in *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, ed. David Burnley and Alison Wiggins (National Library of Scotland, 2003), http://auchinleck.nls.uk/ [accessed July 30, 2019], f.67r, lines 110-112.
[28] Edition cited throughout is Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, ed., *Four Romances of England* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

'mayden small'. The young heroine of *Lai le Freine* is similarly called a 'child' (145), a 'litel maiden' (139), and a 'litel maidenchild' (214) during her infancy.[29] In *Floris and Blancheflour,* the daughter of a Christian servant and the son of a pagan queen are raised together and develop an enduring love for one another which begins as a childhood friendship and grows into a romantic partnership.[30] Resistant to attempts to separate them at the age of seven, the children are educated together for five years until aged twelve, when the king decides that they must finally part as he is concerned that their love may not diminish 'when they were of age' (37). This phrase suggests Blancheflour was not considered an adult woman aged twelve when she could contract a canonically-valid marriage. Floris and Blancheflour are again referred to as 'children' (80) several lines later, despite the fact that Blancheflour is also repeatedly referred to as a 'mayde' (47, 54, 59, 62) or 'mayden' (58, 76) in the intervening time. The inescapable impression is that a 'maiden' could indeed be, in Schultz's formulation, a 'type of child'. Indeed, when Floris is sent away to be educated with his aunt, the reader is informed that two types of children are also present: 'There as other children wore, / Both maydons and grom [boys]' (110-11). It also seems clear that that a maiden did not necessarily cease to be a child and become an adult woman on her twelfth birthday.

This impression is confirmed outside romance. In Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* the daughter of Griselda is referred to as a maiden from birth – a 'litel yonge mayde' (567) – but thereafter as a 'child' (574, 583).[31] Twelve years later, when she reaches marriageable age, Griselda's daughter is brought home by her father Walter under the pretence that he will marry her, yet she and her brother are still referred to as 'noble children tweye' (982) even after Walter's matrimonial intentions are known. The girl is then referred to as a 'mayde' (1023) and a 'tendre mayden' (1039), but she and her brother are still seen by their mother as 'yonge children' (1081, 1093) when she is subsequently reunited with them. Even marriage did not necessarily guarantee that a maiden would be seen as fully mature.[32] In 1392 the middle-aged Ménagier of Paris wrote a letter of instruction to his young wife which began with an acknowledgement of her youth:

> My dear, because you were only fifteen years old the week we were married, you asked that I be indulgent about your youth and inexperience until you had seen and learned more ... Your youth [*jeunesse*] excuses you from being always wise... Understand that it doesn't displease me, but rather pleases me, that you tend roses, raise violets, make

[29] Edition cited throughout is Laskaya and Salisbury, ed., *Breton Lays.*
[30] Edition cited throughout is Erik Kooper, ed., *Sentimental and Humorous Romances* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005).
[31] Edition cited throughout is Larry Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer,* 3rd Edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[32] For discussion of this in a Venetian context, see Stanley Chojnacki, 'Measuring Adulthood: Adolescence and Gender in Renaissance Venice', *Journal of Family History* 17, no. 4 (1992): 371-395.

> garlands of them, and also that you dance and sing ... it is only natural and appropriate that a girl spend her adolescence [*adolescence feminine*] in such pursuits.[33]

The text portrays a bride who sees herself, and is seen by her husband, as still young and lacking in experience. The text also portrays certain behaviours, both desirable and undesirable, as typical for a young woman of her age and therefore by implication less appropriate for older women. As we shall see below, the description of the young woman tending flowers in the garden resonates across portrayals of female childhood in romance and beyond, demonstrating that even marriage to a mature man did not necessarily guarantee that a young woman would be seen as entirely mature herself.

With these insights in mind, this chapter will examine the portrayal of young maidenhood in romance. Rather than limiting the discussion to maidens to whom the term 'child' is specifically applied, I will broaden the scope to include examples where it may be inferred from context that the maiden is either a child or occupying a 'childlike' role, where I believe a discourse of female maturity/immaturity is evident. The first two sections will parallel the previous discussion of male childhood by examining maidenhood in a state of nature and the intersection of ideas about maidenhood with discourses of the supernatural. I will argue that in contrast to male children, female children are portrayed as naturally good, aligned with the positive aspects of nature such as beauty and tranquillity. The wildness, inhumanity and the malevolent supernatural which permeate discourses of male childhood are positioned instead as external threats to this ideal state. Following Kim Phillips, I will argue that the story of female development was one of decreasing rather than increasing perfection, but that this perfection was associated not only with the adolescent body but with the maintenance of the psychological characteristics associated with childhood. The final section will consider the implications for the question of maidenhood and desire, arguing that the construction of maidens as 'desired' and 'desiring' was generally contingent upon physical qualities which were associated with greater maturity, and conversely that the desire of adults for children was closely bound up with the construction of illicit or monstrous desire. I will nonetheless point to ways in which the pervasive construction of young maidens as the objects of desire remains a deeply problematic aspect of medieval culture.

I hope in the course of this discussion to challenge two of the prevailing trends in scholarly understanding of female childhood. The first is that maidenhood as a phase of life began at puberty and therefore that children under the age of twelve were not considered to be maidens. I do not wish to imply thereby that maidenhood was synonymous with childhood or that

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[33] Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose, ed., *The Good Wife's Guide (Le Ménagier de Paris): A Medieval Household Book* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 49.

adolescent or even socially 'adult' women could not also be maidens. Rather, I will argue that maidenhood was a phase of life which encompassed female childhood *as well as* adolescence and young adulthood, and that young maidens are portrayed in romance as recognisably childish in contrast to older maidens. My aim is thus to add to rather than to contradict the picture of adolescent maidenhood articulated by Kim Phillips. Indeed, as will become clear, the idea that maidenhood was a phase of life associated with female perfection which Phillips identifies has its origins in a particular conception of female childhood. The second idea I wish to challenge is that young women were no longer considered children from the age of twelve but were instead understood to be 'adult'. Although Phillips' own analysis is considerably more nuanced than this, it is a view not uncommonly expressed in scholarly discussion of medieval maidens.[34] For instance, Henry Kelly has objected to Jeremy Goldberg's description of the (at most) twelve-year-old Alice de Rouclif as a 'child', suggesting that she should instead be considered 'a woman of marriageable age'.[35] I suggest that a broader understanding of maidenhood as encompassing both childhood and adolescence obviates the need for a clear cut-off point and allows for greater flexibility in understanding maturity and immaturity, a flexibility more in line with that which has already been recognised for male childhood.[36] Instead of using the ambiguities of medieval terminology to place limitations on the discussion of female childhood, I aim to show that a broader and more contextualised view of the terminology can in fact open up new avenues of inquiry. In the process I hope to demonstrate that medieval romance has a wealth of information to offer about female childhood.

Maidenhood in a State of Nature

In the Middle English *Lybeaus Desconnus,* the narrative pauses to allow a young maiden to tell her story to the romance hero.[37] The story she tells begins yesterday evening, when she went into the forest to play. The precise nature of her 'pleyng', she does not elaborate – perhaps she is to be imagined gathering flowers or weaving a garland like the young wife of the bourgeois of Paris; perhaps she skipped through the undergrowth leaping over branches and balancing on fallen trees; perhaps she was in more whimsical mood and imagined herself in the role of one of the heroines of the stories she heard in her father's hall where she lived just a short distance away. Thinking that nothing was amiss, she wandered alone past a dense thicket where the branches grew tightly together, obscuring what lay on the other side. Even today, this story of a young girl

[34] See for example Peter G. Beidler, 'Medieval Children Witness Their Mothers' Indiscretions: The Maid Child in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review* 44, no. 2 (2009): 186–204.
[35] Henry Ansgar Kelly, '*Communal Discord, Child Abduction, and Rape in the Later Middle Ages*, Jeremy Goldberg', *Speculum* 84, no. 2 (April 2009): 440.
[36] See for example Phyllis Gaffney, *Constructions of Childhood and Youth in Old French Narrative: Writing the Medieval Child* (Farnham, UK: Routledge, 2011).
[37] Edition cited unless otherwise specified is George Shuffleton, ed., *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008).

wandering alone in the forest is sufficient to conjure up associations of impending disaster. The motif is deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness, countlessly told and retold in a huge variety of forms and contexts. Whether in children's fairy tales or horror movies aimed at adults, girls who go into the woods alone inevitably come to grief. So it proves for this unfortunate young maiden, as concealed in the thicket is a giant of foul demeanour, black as pitch and loathsome to behold. The giant springs out of the thicket, takes up the maiden in his arms and carries her to his fire where another giant awaits. Fearing for her life and her honour, she is fortunately rescued by the heroic actions of the Fair Unknown. The maiden informs her rescuer that her name is Violet and she lives with her father in a nearby castle.

In some respects, Violet's story mirrors that of the romance hero himself. Lybeaus' adventures too began when he was playing in the forest alone at the beginning of the romance. As we have seen, Lybeaus' play is described more specifically. The reader is informed that he is violent among his fellows and does them harm (20-21) and that on the day in which his adventures began, he was playing among the wild deer in the forest (32-33). As I have argued above, the portrayal of Lybeaus playing violently among the wild animals is illuminating of the ways in which male childhood was conceptualised in medieval society as a period during which natural inclinations to wild and antisocial conduct needed to be tamed and controlled. For Lybeus, the forest is a playground for the id, a place where his wild/childish/animalistic drives can be safely unleashed, but it is also a place of opportunity, self-fulfilment and adventure, where he can learn to control those drives, prove himself in combat, and become a man. Unlike Violet, Lybeaus' play in the forest does not end with an encounter with a dangerous representative of the wilderness – instead, it is the 'tame' forces of civilization which he discovers, as Lybeaus comes across the body of a dead knight in armour, who, the reader is informed, has been 'sleyn and made full tame' (36). For Violet, on the other hand, the forest is a threatening place where dangers lurk behind every bush. Although her story too begins with a foray into the forest, her narrative is the opposite – her innocent childish play brings her into fearful contact with the wild external forces opposed to the civilised human world.

Just as Lybeaus' narrative is indicative of a male developmental trajectory from wild and unreasoning boy to self-governing rational man, from threat to society to proud defender of the social order, so too I will argue is Violet's developmental trajectory contained in her narrative. Female childhood in medieval society was much more likely to be conceptualised as a period of innocence and virtue and of physical and moral purity, which came under ever increasing threat as childhood faded into adolescence. Unlike male childhood, the threats to female childhood were seen to be primarily external rather than internal, although the vices of mature womanhood too

were seen to encroach upon maidenly virtue with the passage of time. Female childhood in a state of nature was aligned not with the dangerous and antisocial forces of the wilderness but with the natural beauty of the trees and flowers. I do not wish to imply that male and female childhood were always seen as entirely opposite in the Middle Ages, that boys were never seen as innocent or that maidens never seen to misbehave. Their shared identity as children did have some significance and there were points of overlap between them. Nonetheless, I do suggest that these two opposing narratives represent the dominant paradigms of psycho-social development for boys and girls in late-medieval England. A wild maiden playing rough and tumble games with the deer on the forest floor was scarcely thinkable in medieval culture. It was generally daughters rather than sons who were the object of giants' rapacious desires.

How old is Violet at the time when she is attacked by the giant? Are we justified in seeing her as a child rather than an adolescent or a young woman? The romance gives us a hint in the form of her own admission that she was captured 'Yesterdey in the evyning, / As I went on my pleyng' (721-22). The word 'playing' could have multiple meanings which need not necessarily imply childhood, but it certainly could. The precise phrase 'As I went on my playing' symbolises the age of childhood in *This World is But a Vanity*.[38] Beginning during play, Violet's narrative also resembles the accounts of children's deaths found in late-medieval coroner's rolls. Jeremy Goldberg has found that 'narrative after narrative explains that accidents befell children when they went out to play'.[39] Moreover, in the context of a romance where the hero is a child – Lybeaus is eleven years old at the start of the narrative according to the version of the text preserved in Ashmole 61 – the word inevitably takes on childish connotations.

The idea of children's play and its intersection with the world of chivalric romance forms an important theme which runs through the narrative. When Lybeaus' abilities as a champion are questioned by Elyn and the dwarf on the grounds that he is too childish to deliver manly blows, the child defends himself by saying that 'Somwhat have I lernyd / To pley with a swerd' (208-09). On one reading this phrase implies a claim to martial prowess, but in the mouth of an eleven-year-old it conjures up images of wooden swords and hobby horses which may confirm rather than assuage the fears of his detractors. The same connection between children's play and fighting is made immediately after Lybeaus sees Violet in the clutches of the two giants, when it is remarked that fighting the two giants together will be far from 'child's play': 'To fyght with them in same / It was no chyldys game' (642-43). Again, the comment is ironic both because the hero

[38] Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *Hymns to the Virgin and Child: The Parliament of Devils, and Other Religious Poems,* EETS, O.S. 24 (London: Trübner, 1867), 83-85.
[39] Goldberg, 'Childhood and Gender', 258.

himself is a child and because, as we soon learn, the whole episode in fact began during Violet's 'pleyng'. Even more ironically, the fight between a child and two giants to rescue another child – which we are told is *not* child's play – may in fact bear more than a passing resemblance to the games of actual children. It is very common for children to act out and adapt their favourite stories during play, assuming the roles of their favourite characters.[40] Medieval depictions of children's play describe them imagining a stick to be a white horse and a ragwort stalk to be a spear, and making a comely lady out of cloth decorated with flowers.[41] Tales of giants threatening maidens and being defeated by knights formed a very visible narrative in medieval culture; so visible, in fact, that many young damsels in distress continue to be rescued across gardens and playgrounds today.

A comparison of Violet with the portrayal of other maidens in the same romance bears out the impression that she is best understood as a child rather than a young adult. Certainly Violet does not appear to be the same kind of maiden as Elyn who insults Lybeaus at the beginning of the narrative. Although she too requires the hero's aid, Elyn actively seeks it out and is not shy about voicing her discontent when she feels her champion does not meet her expectations. Unlike Violet, Elyn no longer lives at home with her father, but is in service with the lady of Synadoun. Given that life-cycle service was a reality for many young women at this time, often beginning in early adolescence, this fact adds to the picture of Violet as 'childlike'. Moreover, Elyn clearly does not see herself as a child; indeed, she displays a contempt for childhood when she disparages Lybeaus as a child who is witless and wild. Perhaps her sharp tongue and her sour demeanour may be taken to indicate that she has already begun to manifest the vices associated with adult womanhood in medieval discourse.

In addition to the connotations of childhood conjured up by the image of Violet playing, there is the size discrepancy between the maiden and her attacker. Certainly the image of a young girl being carried in the arms of a much larger male cannot help but conjure up associations of childhood, even where the male is a giant. The Ashmole version of the text informs the reader that 'The blake gyant held in his arme, / A feyre mayden by the arme' (621-22). The impression given is of the maiden dangling childlike by her arms from the giant's grasp. The version preserved in London, Lambeth Palace, MS 306 portrays the scene slightly differently: 'The black helde in

[40] David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings,* 2nd Edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[41] G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 34; See also Orme, *Medieval Children,* Ch. 5.

his arme, / A mayde, i-clypped [clasped to] his barme [bosom]' (607-09).[42] Characteristically, the Ashmole version avoids the more overt sexual connotations which this phrase implies. This image is to be found paralleled in accounts of child marriage: when the young Elizabeth Clifford was married to Robert Plumpton, the surviving testimony notes that 'the same day one John Garthe bare her in his armes to the said chappell', a fascinatingly emotive interjection into an otherwise matter-of-fact account.[43] Indeed, that the witness thought this fact worthy of recording at all suggests that the image of the child being carried in this way may have resonated within late-medieval culture as a symbol of tender age. In the mid-sixteenth century an uncle similarly testified that he carried in his arms the three-year-old groom John Somerford at his wedding to the two-year-old Joan Brereton, the bride herself being carried by one James Holford who 'held her still in his armes'.[44] The image of Violet borne forcibly away in the arms of her captor fearing that she will be 'schent' [dishonoured/killed] (726) is a dramatic and disturbing inversion of such accounts.

Violet's story also contains echoes of that of the Giant of Mont St. Michel, perhaps the most widely known example of a giant abducting a maiden in medieval literature. There are many versions of the narrative, but several portray the maiden in terms which suggest that she is a child, including perhaps the most widely circulating version of the tale, the fifteenth-century Middle English translation of the Brut Chronicle. In the story King Arthur's knights come upon a widow weeping beside a tomb, who informs them that the incumbent is Elyne, niece of the King of Brittany, 'þat to me was bitaken to norisshe' [nurse]. The maiden and her nurse had been abducted by the giant who then attempted to rape Elyne. She died before he could carry out his wishes because the fact that she was so young and the giant so large made her unable to withstand the attack. The nurse informs the King that the giant, 'wolde haue forleyn þis maide þat was so ȝonge & tendre of age, but she myȝt hit nouȝt soffren, so grete and so huge þe Geant is'.[45] Elyne's exact age is not given but is hardly the point; her youth and physical immaturity are her salient characteristics in the narrative. The precise cause of death is ambiguous, but the obvious if horrifying reading is that the young maiden was so small that she was fatally injured by the giant's attempted rape. Certainly this reading is in line with the Wace version of the Anglo-Norman text:

> The giant would have had to do with the maiden, but she was so tender of her years that she might not endure him. Passing young was the maid; whilst he, for his part, was

[42] 'Lybeaus Desconus (Lambeth Palace, MS 306)', in *Lybeaus Desconus,* ed. Eve Salisbury and James Weldon (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013).
[43] Thomas Stapleton, ed., *The Plumpton Correspondence,* (London: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1990), lxiv.
[44] Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *Child Marriages, Divorces, and Ratifications &c. In the Diocese of Chester, A.D. 1561-6,* EETS, OS 108 (London, 1897), 26.
[45] Friedrich W. D. Brie, ed., *The Brut, or The chronicles of England,* EETS, O.S. 131 (London: Trübner, 1906), 85.

> so gross and weighty of bone and flesh, that her burden was more than she could bear. For this the soul departed from her body.[46]

The image of the small Violet hanging doll-like from the arms of an enormous giant, then, foretells an impending fate that is grim to conceive, but which would have been well-known at least to adult readers of *Lybeaus.* As well as a printed edition produced by Caxton in 1480, the Middle English translation of the Brut Chronicle survives in over 170 manuscripts, second in number only to the Wycliffite translations of the Bible, suggesting that it enjoyed wide circulation in fifteenth-century England.[47]

Interestingly, in the Robert Mannyng's version of the story, which he tells in his lengthy verse Chronicle *The Story of England*, it is the emotional rather than physical consequences of the attack which prove fatal. In an otherwise fairly faithful rendering into Middle English verse of the Wace version of the *Brut,* Mannyng inserts a line which informs the reader that Elyne died of a broken heart, perhaps suggesting an unease on the part of the author with the brutal violence of his source material:

> Eleyne he wold haue furlayn, [raped]
> But sche ne myghte nought wyþ [withstand] þat payn;
> He was so huge, ouer mesure,
> & scheo so ȝong, þat myght nought dure [endure]
> Þoruw gret destressse hire herte brast, [broke]
> In his armse scheo ȝald þe gast [yielded (i.e. gave up) the ghost] (12,271-276).[48]

The final image – which also appears to be unique to Mannyng – of the young maiden dying in the arms of her monstrous attacker is a particularly poignant inversion of the common pathetic trope of a beloved child dying in the arms of her father or mother and resonates again with the image of Violet in the giant's arms portrayed in *Lybeaus.* The designation of the giant as 'ouer

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[46] Eugene Mason, ed., *Arthurian Chronicles: Roman de Brut by Wace* (London: Aeterna, 2011), 87. The oldest surviving Anglo-Norman version of the *Brut* is very similar to the English text in that it is ambiguous but leaves open the possibility that it is the attempted rape which kills the maiden. In the *Historia Regnum Brittanie* Eleine dies of fear before she can be violated, see Julia Marvin, ed., *The Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose Brut Chronicle: An Edition and Translation* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 173, 317; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth,* ed. Neil Wright and Julia C. Crick (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985-1991), Book X, Ch. 3. The story is perhaps best known today for its inclusion in the *Alliterative Morte Arthure,* and here a precise age is given. The nurse describes herself as 'her foster moder, of fifteen winter' (983) implying that the maiden is at least fifteen years of age. Larry D. Benson, ed., *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English* Stanzaic Morte Arthur *and* Alliterative Morte Arthur (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1986).

[47] David Ruddy, 'About the Brut Chronicle and University of Michigan MS 225' (1996), http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/brut/about/ [accessed July 7, 2019].

[48] Robert Mannyng, *The Story of England by Robert Manning of Brunne, A.D. 1338,* ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, (London: H.M.S.O., 1887).

mesure' is also worthy of note, referring both to his physical size and his deviation from normative expectations of 'measured' – i.e. restrained and courteous – masculinity.[49] Male childhood's lack of 'measure' in the form of Perceval has been discussed above, but here where maidenhood encounters a lack of measure it is in the form of an external threat rather than an internal deficiency.

Like Violet, Elyne is never referred to specifically as a child but rather as a 'maiden'. However, her childishness is central to her characterisation by the weeping woman, who informs Arthur and Bedevere that she weeps 'for a maydens myshap / Þat whilom y norisched at my pap, / & souke y gaf hure of my brest' (12,259-261). The reader is invited to view Eleyne not through the eyes of a knight as a potential partner but through the eyes of her nurse, as a small and vulnerable child taken from the world before her time. Her childhood indicates not deficiency or deviance like that of Perceval or Gowther but an unspoiled innocence which exists in stark juxtaposition to the wild and 'unmeasured' world outside the boundaries of human civilisation. Where ideas about maidenhood intersect with the natural world, the monstrous other is not projected inward onto the maiden's own psyche but outward onto her body, as an external threat to her tender physical and psychological state.

Young maidens, then, are constituted as psychologically as well as physically vulnerable to the wild and uncontrolled monstrosity of the external natural world. Like male children, they represent a potential rupture or point of weakness in the boundaries of the human world, a point where the fixed border between human and inhuman is under threat of violation. Yet in contrast to the demonic child/youth Gowther whose violent rape of a convent of nuns was discussed in the previous chapter, the monstrous violation of humanity is visited upon rather than through the bodies of female children. Female childhood too, then, is deeply embedded in the medieval construction of humanity, and this takes on an added significance in a chronicle which articulates essentially the foundation myth of late-medieval English culture. As well as constructing humanity, this well-known tale is implicated in the construction of a national identity, and the young Eleyne is thus engaged in the same work as the young heroes of romance such as Perceval and Bevis in their battles with Saracens, beasts and giants.[50] It is no coincidence that it is King Arthur, the archetypal force of triumphant English order pitted against chaos, who ultimately slays the offending giant. Arthur's Britain – and its legitimate successor – is a place where the wild

[49] For the relationship of giants to masculinity see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
[50] On the connection between the Giant of Mont St. Michel and British identity, see Cohen, *Of Giants,* 29-61.

forces of nature have been beaten back, where maidenly innocence is preserved, and where young girls can grow up safe in the knowledge that they need never come into contact with the terrifying and monstrous dangers that lurk without its borders.

This same construction of female childhood as a time of natural purity is to be found in medical and philosophical writings. Bartholomaeus Anglicus emphasises the qualities of purity, chastity and 'cleanness' in his discussion of female children:

> A maiden childe and a wenche hatte [is called] *puella,* as it were clene and pure as þe blake of þe yȝe [pupil of the eye], as seiþ Isidre [Isidore of Seville]. For among alle þat is iloued in a wenche chastite and clennes is iloued most.

Like boys, girls are described as hot and moist in complexion, but the attributes they display differ in important ways, in keeping with their gentler nature. Maidens are 'tendre, smal, pliaunt, and faire of disposicioun of body; schamefast [modest/shy/timid], fereful, and mury [merry], touchinge þe affeccioun'.[51] They do not appear to display the 'iuel maneres and tacchis [vices]' which Bartholomaeus attributes to their brothers.[52]

Although he does not specify the age of the young women under discussion, it seems clear that Bartholomaeus intended his chapter on *puellae* to be a counterpart to his discussion of *pueri* which immediately precedes it and which specifies an age range of between seven and fourteen years. This reading was clearly adopted in the fourteenth century by John Trevisa, who uses the term 'maiden childe' as an English translation for *puella,* presumably as a means of specifying that his remarks applied to girls aged seven and above. Interestingly, however, the ambiguity around the status of female childhood which, as I argued in the introduction to this chapter, is present in both medieval sources and modern historiography, is also found here. The term 'maiden childe' embodies a recognition both that 'childe' in isolation generally implied maleness – as indeed it does in Trevisa's translation of the chapter *De puero* – and that 'maiden' alone could signify not only childhood but also adolescence. Moreover, Trevisa's translation uses two terms where Bartholomaeus only has one, adding the word 'wenche' which he presumably intended to signify *puellae* who are old enough that they would no longer be considered children. This reading supports the thesis that maidenhood was a broad category including girls considered to be

[51] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum,* Vol. 1, trans. John Trevisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 301.
[52] *Ibid.,* 301.

children as well as adolescents or unmarried women, but that the former were understood to be distinct from the latter.

While this may seem frustratingly vague to modern eyes, such a categorisation of maidenhood is in fact consistent with medieval understandings of girls' different developmental trajectory. Like boys, girls were not immune from developing vices in adolescence: as well as having 'li3t witte and hede', Bartholomaeus notes that *puellae* are 'enuyous, bittir, gileful [deceitful], and abil to lerne, and hasty in likinge of Venus'.[53] It is their deceitfulness and weakness for Venus which causes the *Good Wife* to declare that young women should be married early, noting that 'Maydens ben fair & amyable, / But of her loue ful vnstable' or, in another version, 'Maydonys be louely, but to kepe þey be vntrusty'.[54] Their propensity to fall in love in particular may be viewed as a counterpart to the sexual excesses associated with male youth, and will be discussed below in the section 'Desiring Maidens'. In the main, however, the vices which maidens were seen to develop are represented not as the temporary excesses of youth but the gradual encroachment of mature femininity. As Kim Phillips points out, one of the qualities that Bartholomaeus assigns to maidens is a lack of 'feminine passions'.[55] Bartholomaeus ends his discussion of maidenhood with an exposition of what they can expect from the next phase of life in which the vices which began in adolescence are fully realised: 'malice of soule is more in a woman þan in a man, and sche is of feble kynde, and sche makeþ mo lesinges' [tells more lies].[56] Generally, then, the philosophical literature, in common with romance, presents the narrative of girls' development in opposing terms to that of boys. In simple terms, boys were inherently bad but would come good with the appropriate training and self-mastery; girls were inherently good but were liable to become bad unless carefully monitored and protected from evil influences. Where the wantonness, license and excesses of male childhood and youth required careful demarcation in order to maintain their clear separation from mature, perfected masculinity, female development consisted in the dutiful preservation of the qualities of childhood – of purity, innocence, modesty, honesty, deference and pleasant demeanour – which obviated the requirement for a clear boundary to be articulated and maintained.

It is important to note here that male and female childhood were not always conceived as complete opposites in medieval discourse, and that in the interest of highlighting clearly those points where the two diverge I am omitting some of what they held in common. Although they

[53] *Ibid.,* 302.
[54] Furnivall, *Babees Book,* 46 (lines 199-200).
[55] Phillips, *Medieval Maidens,* 6-7.
[56] Bartholomeus, *Properties of Things,* 302.

differed according to gender, they shared an identification as children and as such their characteristics were sometimes seen to overlap. For example, Bartholomaeus attributes to boys too the quality of *puritas,* which he follows Isidore of Seville in associating with the etymology of *puer,* and this ideal of childhood is also to be found in the Boy Bishops' sermons, in which the imagined young orator exhorts his audience to return to a state of innocence associated with childhood.[57] However, while purity is an attribute sometimes associated with children of both genders, it is only for girls that Bartholomaeus describes it as their most *valued* ('iloued') quality. Moreover, Bartholomaeus tempers his discussion of boys' purity and innocence with an emphasis on correction which is entirely absent from his discussion of girls, writing that from the age of seven the young boy should be 'compelled to fonge [receive] lore and chastisinge'.[58] Girlhood it seems did not require, at least in principle, such firm corrective treatment.

The same discourse of female childhood is found even more clearly articulated in medical treatises. Bernard de Gordon, whose somewhat pejorative views of male childhood I discussed above, has this to say on the subject of female children:

> Girls should be instructed first in chastity, then in humility and next in piety, but foremost and especially in taciturnity. They should also be natural (woodsy, sylvan: *silvestres*), for we see that all wild animals have a more beautiful fur than domestic animals, because they are not touched by humans. Girls should not at all let men touch them, nor should they even look anyone directly in the face, so that they may render themselves entirely unspoiled (*silvestres*). They ought never to leave the house to roam about unless they are properly chaperoned.[59]

Where girls in particular – as opposed to children in general – are associated with wild animals, it is not for the unreasoning stupidity and wilful pleasure-seeking associated with their so-called 'bestial life'. Rather, it is for their natural beauty, their freedom from the taint of human handling, the everyday rituals of production, reproduction and consumption associated with domesticity of wives and 'tame' animals. Like wild animals, maidens should shy away from human contact and remain an ideal of unattainable perfection; unlike boys and wives, maidens are not to be tamed

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[57] J. Nichols, ed., *Two Sermons Preached by the Boy Bishop* (London, 1903, repr. 1967). See Shulamith Shahar, 'The Boy Bishop's Feast: A Case-Study in Church Attitudes Towards Children in the High and Late Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History* 31 (1994): 243-60; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 13-44; N. Mackenzie, 'Boy into Bishop: A Festive Role Reversal', *History Today,* 37 (1987): 10-16; Eve Salisbury, '"Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child": Proverbial Speech Acts, Boy Bishop Sermons, and Pedagogical Violence', in S*peculum Sermonis: Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Medieval Sermon,* ed. Georgiana Donavin, Cary J. Nederman and Richard Utz (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 141-55.
[58] Bartholomeus, *Properties of Things,* 300.
[59] Quoted in Luke Demaitre, 'The Idea of Childhood and Child Care in Medical Writings of the Middle Ages', *The Journal of Psychohistory* 4, no. 4 (1977): 481. Translation Demaitre's.

but simply to be admired. 'Naturalness' in girls is thus conceived as a positive rather than a negative quality – the youthful female nature is aligned with the unspoiled, unthreatening and aesthetically pleasing side to the natural world as opposed to the untamed and threatening wilderness. For Bernard, too, a maiden's ideal developmental pathway is not to overcome childhood but to preserve its innocent state for as long as possible into psychological and sexual maturity.

Bernard's characterisation of maidenhood as a time of 'sylvan' innocence finds a literalised analogue in *Lai le Freine,* versions of which circulated in both France, where Bernard was writing, and England in the later medieval period. 'Le Freine', the Middle English text informs the reader, means 'ash' in French, and the association of the tale's young heroine with the tree forms an important theme which runs through the narrative. Born one of two identical twins – the other being 'Le Codre' or 'hazel' – Le Freine's is abandoned by her mother out of fear that the multiple birth will be interpreted as evidence of adultery. Taken by a maid to a nunnery, the 'seli innocent' infant is wrapped in an embroidered cloth and left in the hollow of an ash tree. She is found and taken to an abbess who christens the infant 'Freine' after the place of her discovery. Here too, as in the above passage from Bernard, the dangers of maidens' premature contact with men become the device upon which the developmental narrative hinges. A knight named Sir Guroun, impressed by the beauty of the now twelve-year-old maiden, becomes a 'brother' of the house in order to gain access to her. Let down by those who were supposed to shield her from such encounters, the young maiden acquiesces to Guroun's desires, living with him as if she were his wife but remaining unmarried. After some time, Guroun is persuaded to marry legitimately in order to produce an heir and, in an ironic twist, settles on le Freine's twin sister as his prospective bride. Le Freine accepts the news and agrees to act as a servant at the marriage ceremony. However, in the process of making up the marriage bed, she covers it with the embroidered cloth in which she was wrapped as an infant, ostensibly in order to make it more comfortable. This is often read as an act of meek submission, but assuming that her erstwhile lover was familiar with her single prized possession, could equally be an audacious act of self-assertion, inserting a forceful reminder of her presence into the marriage bed of the newlyweds. In the event the situation is averted: the mother of the twin girls recognises the cloth, the identity of Le Freine is revealed, and Guroun marries her instead, remarking ironically that 'ash is better than hazel' (346). The maiden's developmental pathway which ran off course has been righted; her natural youthful innocence has not been left permanently marred but instead her body has been legitimately incorporated into the adult world via marriage. Le Freine – the maiden of the ash tree – has progressed to the next stage of her life and a new identity as a wife.

Maidenhood and the Supernatural

The same narrative of child and adolescent development is thrown into even sharper relief where discourses of maidenhood encounter the threat of the malevolent supernatural. Perhaps the best example of this in Middle English romance is to be found in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* which recounts the events leading up to Arthur's assumption of the throne.[60] Children feature so prominently in the narrative that Nicole Clifton has gone so far as to suggest that the romance represents the first known example of Arthurian children's literature in the English language.[61] Clifton's discussion focusses on the childhoods of Arthur and Merlin, the two male protagonists, but it is Merlin's young mother and the circumstances leading up to the birth of Merlin – whose supposed kinship to Gowther was noted in the previous section – which are most interesting from the point of view of this discussion. Indeed, the narrative of Merlin's birth, in which we see supernatural forces interact with female childhood, provides a particularly useful point of comparison to *Gowther* given that, as Corinne Saunders notes, the writer of the latter text clearly draws on the influential tradition of the former.[62] Since this romance is not especially well-known and has so far received little scholarly attention, it is worth summarising briefly the events as they unfold.

The part of the romance which recounts the circumstances of Merlin's birth opens with an exposition of the way in which demons first came to earth via the fall of Lucifer. This signals to the audience that the following section of the narrative, whilst it is ostensibly about the story of Merlin's conception, is also a tale of the supernatural and the ways in which it interacts with humanity, an illustration of the workings of the devil in the civilized world. As such, it bears more than a passing resemblance to treatments of the subject in sermons and in penitential literature. It is said that demons are powerful and cunning; they live in the air but are able to assume corporeal form, to descend among mankind and 'tyse [entice] men to dedly synne' (L 616), although as we shall see it is women rather than men who prove most susceptible to demonic influence. Knowing that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary in order to save the world, the fiends decide to find a maiden and beget a child in her that will bring the world to woe. To this end, the fiend descends to earth and begins to work his influence upon a good woman who has a son and three daughters. Having great power 'in hire body', the fiend causes the woman to quarrel and fight, and curse her children in anger as if she were mad (L 641-44). The woman curses her young

[60] Edition cited throughout is O. D. Macrae-Gibson, ed., *Of Arthour and Merlin,* Vol. 1, EETS, OS 268 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). As in edition, L refers to London, Lincoln's Inn Library MS Hale 150 and A refers to National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck Manuscript).
[61] Nicole Clifton, 'Of Arthour and of Merlin' as Medieval Children's Literature', *Arthuriana*, 2003, 9–22.
[62] Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001), 223.

son to the devil, who enters her house by night and strangles the child where he lies. His mother hangs herself in remorse and his father dies of sorrow. Such cautionary tales about the dangers of adult women cursing children would likely have been familiar to readers of *Arthour*; a very similar narrative appears as an illustrative *exemplum* in Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* in which a mother's curse leads to her daughter being struck mad.[63]

The narrative now turns to the fate of the three orphaned daughters, who are found by a hermit and taught by their benefactor how to serve God. The fiend, however, has other ideas, and sets out to corrupt the sisters one by one. He first approaches an old woman whom he bestows with riches in exchange for persuading the oldest daughter to have sex with a young man, a crime for which she is subsequently executed according – it is explained – to the laws of the time. The fiend then causes the middle daughter to fall in love with a young man so she too falls into sin. She only avoids her sister's fate by becoming a prostitute and thus exempting herself from the law against fornication. Distraught at the loss of her family and in danger of falling into 'wanhope' – the sin of *acedia* – the youngest daughter approaches the hermit who again sets her on the right path. He teaches her to protect herself from supernatural threats by locking her doors and windows at night and making the sign of the cross before going to bed. Unfortunately, however, an altercation with her older sister – now a whore – leaves her so distressed that she forgets this basic act of protection. The fiend enters her room at night and rapes her in her sleep, begetting the child Merlin in the process.

The narrative of female development from innocent child to imperfect woman underpins the entirety of this part of the romance. In the case of the middle sister, it is the fact that she is, in Trevisa's words, 'hasty in the likinge of Venus' that proves to be her undoing, as her adolescent propensity to fall too quickly and too recklessly in love provides the mechanism for her journey from godly maiden to diabolical whore. The same narrative of the corrupting influence of age is literalised in the intervention of the old woman, whose moral weakness in the form of a desire for riches is exploited by the fiend in order to destroy the oldest sister. The 'olde quene' [crone] (L 707) displays the very qualities of malice, guile and deceit with which Bartholomaeus characterises those of her age and sex. She flatters the young maiden's appearance, telling her that it would be a shame if her beautiful body were not the object of a young man's affections, and speaking too of the great joy and mirth that may be found in the act of physical union. Time and

[63] Robert Mannyng, *Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne,* ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, O.S. 119 (London: Trübner, 1901), 46-47, lines 1255-1306.

again, the vices of mature femininity thus encroach on and corrupt the maiden, leading to her downfall.

An analogous anxiety about the morally corruptive influence of mature femininity on young girls may be traced elsewhere in medieval literature. It is particularly evident, for example, in Chaucer's *Shipman's Tale,* in which the wife of a merchant offers herself as a sexual partner to a monk in exchange for one hundred franks. When the wife first meets with the monk and reveals her proposal, she is accompanied by a young girl about whom we are told very little except that she is a 'mayde child' (95) who is 'yet under the yerde' (97). The only other fact of which we are aware is that the older woman is supposed to be responsible for her governance and moral guidance (96). This becomes ever more salient throughout the scene as the maiden stands in mute witness to the indiscretions of the wife. Despite her cursory introduction the young maiden remains uncomfortably present as the narrative unfolds, observing the wife's greedy desire for greater riches as well as her guileful plan to deceive and cuckold her husband, hovering in the background as a reminder of the consequences of entrusting to mature femininity the nurture of childhood innocence. In *Arthour,* the malevolent supernatural forces appear as an external threat to this maidenly innocence, aligned not with the child herself but with the nature of the mature woman which eventually usurps and destroys – with diabolic assistance – the child's ideal nature. This represents an inversion of the narrative of *Sir Gowther,* in which demonic influence is aligned with the corrupt nature of the child, which is eventually triumphantly overcome in the passage of maturity.

What basis do we have for understanding Merlin's mother to be a child rather than an older maiden? She is certainly not a young child since she is capable of bearing a child herself. However, the biological ability to conceive is not sufficient today to indicate that one is no longer considered a child, nor was there any such straightforward equation in medieval discourse. The language used to describe the diabolical plan to impregnate her is instructive. At the outset, the Auchinleck version of the text announces the demons' intention 'To ligge bi a maidenkin / And biȝeten a child her in' (A 671-72). The terminology used here is highly unusual. It is rare to find the diminutive 'maidenkin' in Middle English, and indeed the corresponding lines in the L text use more conventional language: 'To neyȝe in eorþe a maide mylde / And byȝete on hire a childe' (L 621-22). The only other occurrence of 'maidenkin' listed in the Middle English Dictionary is in the *Promptorium Parvulorum,* a fifteenth-century bilingual dictionary aimed, as the title suggests, at boys learning Latin.[64] Here, the term is listed as the headword 'Maydkyn, or lytyl mayde' and the

[64] MED, 'maidenkin (n.)'.

translations offered are *puella, puerula,* and *Iuuencula.* The text goes on to list separate entries for 'maydon, in clennys of lyve' which is translated as *virgo,* 'maydon seruante' as *ancilla,* and 'Maydynhode' as *virginitas.*[65] It is clear, then, that the author of the *Promptorium* considered the diminutive form to denote a particular type of maiden – those who were maidens by virtue of being young and of small stature rather than by reason of virginity or social status. The use of such an uncommon term in the A text of *Arthour* indicates a clear desire on the part of the author to emphasise this particular aspect of maidenhood juxtaposed with malign supernatural forces; this narrative is to be about the corruption of childhood as much as the corruption of virginity. It is telling that when Merlin's mother is hauled before the judge to explain her pregnancy the judge continues to refer to her as a 'maiden' despite his conviction that she has taken a human lover and is thus no longer a virgin.

The same desire on the part of the A text to portray the maiden as childish is clearly evident in the way in which the two versions of the narrative describe the events immediately preceding her rape. In the L text, the girl goes to the tavern where she spends the day drinking with neighbours. That this is a cause for disapproval is clearly indicated: 'Longe heo sat and dude mys / Þat heo was dronkyn ywis' (L 811-812). Indeed, her behaviour contravenes directly the advice of conduct texts such as *Good Wife* to drink 'mesurely' and to avoid drunkenness.[66] When her older sister, by now a whore, comes and insults her, she is unable to restrain herself because of her drunkenness but responds in kind: 'And heo was dronkyn soþ to seyn / And mysseide hire aȝeyn' (819-820). Her chiding so outrages her sister that the whore punches the maiden in the face, causing her to go home, weeping uncontrollably 'as heo were wood' (836), and therefore to forget to protect herself with the sign of the cross before falling asleep. The L text thus implicates the maiden at least to some extent in her own fate; had she heeded the *Good Wife*'s advice, she would never have come to grief.

In the A text, however, the tavern does not feature. Rather, the whore simply approaches her sister and attacks her, accusing her of having stolen her inheritance before beating her sorely. Instead of her culpability and her temporary lack of restraint, it is the maiden's innocence which is emphasised: 'Þis sely [innocent] þing was al day wroþ / Hir own liif was hir loþ' (A 835-36). Again, the language used denotes her young age – the word 'sely' collocates strongly with 'child' in Middle English. It is used, for instance, to refer to the murdered sisters of Havelok as 'seli

[65] Galfridus Anglicus, *Promptorium Parvulorum,* ed. A. l. Mayhew, EETS, E.S. 102 (London: Trübner, 1908), 278-79.
[66] Tauno F. Mustanoja, ed., *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter & The Good Wyfe Wold a Pylgremage & The Thewis of Gud Women* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948), 163.

children' (499). So too the word 'þing' used to refer to a person strongly implies childhood, and particularly childhood vulnerability. In Robert of Gloucester's fourteenth-century chronicle, the threatened young children of King Edmund are described as 'seli ȝonge þinges' (6446).[67] Alongside *Arthour* in the Auchinleck manuscript, the term appears frequently in the account of the early life of the Virgin Mary, who is often termed a 'ȝong þing' (105, 108, 112) during her childhood.[68] It is used by the elderly Joseph to express his reluctance to marry Mary as a way of emphasising that her youth makes the union inappropriate. He complains that 'sche is a ȝong þing; þerfore it is a sinne / make ous togider come' (172). The Auchinleck version of *Arthour* then, places a strong emphasis on the youthful innocence of Merlin's mother. Maidenhood – and especially *young* maidenhood – emerges as the ultimate prize of demonic forces, that which the devil most desires and that which human society must strive at all costs to protect.

In contrast to the violent physicality of the assaults by giants described above, the rape of Merlin's mother is accomplished by magical trickery. The fiend enters through a locked door and assaults the girl while she sleeps. Despite the text's insistence on the corporeal or 'flescheliche' nature of the attack, she only becomes aware of what has happened when she awakes to find that she is no longer wearing all the clothes in which she went to sleep:

> To þis maiden sikerliche
> He com þo and lay flescheliche.
> Þis maiden sone þat hye awaked
> Feld hir legges al naked
> And feled also bi her þi
> Þat sche was yleyen bi
> Sche ros and fond hir dore loke
> And nothing no was tobroke (A 846-54)

Unable to attribute any human cause to her misfortune, the maiden concludes that her attacker was a 'Foule Wiȝt' (A 855). In this case, then, the supernatural rape does not stand in for a 'natural' or human threat but rather as a microcosm of a much larger conflict with the forces of evil bent on destroying the world. Maidenhood thus emerges as a key battleground in the ongoing contest between the divine and the diabolical; chosen as the site of the divine miracle, maidenhood is also here imagined imbued with the power to conceive the antichrist. Guardianship of maidenhood is imagined not only as a moral or chivalric duty but as a theological necessity.

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[67] Robert of Gloucester, *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester,* ed. William Aldis Wright (London: H.M.S.O, 1887), 468.
[68] David Burnley and Alison Wiggins, ed., *The Auchinleck Manuscript* (National Library of Scotland, 2003), http://auchinleck.nls.uk/ [accessed July 30, 2019].

At the same time as her body is dehumanised as a vessel for supernatural reproduction, the account of her assault humanises the maiden via a vivid description of her emotional pain upon discovering what has befallen her:

> Sche was aferd, sche nist nat wat to do,
> Hirselue sche vbeete and gan to tere
> Wiþ boþ honden hir ȝalu here [yellow hair]
> And wepe al niȝt wiþ gret sorwe. (A 856-59)

Possessed of a body which is both an object of supernatural fascination capable of birthing a miraculous infant and simultaneously a body capable of feeling and expressing in the most profoundly corporeal sense the powerful emotions of fear, pain and sorrow, the maiden treads the borderline between the human and the divine. It is notable that the Auchinleck manuscript contains alongside *Arthour* and *Degaré* the lives of Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret, young women who endured bodily torment in order to preserve their holy state and received the ultimate spiritual reward for their endeavours.

Like male childhood, then, maidenhood fulfils a discursive function in demarcating the boundaries of the human, yet unlike male childhood, it is the upper rather than the lower border which young girls find themselves called upon to maintain. This discourse is clearly visible in *Piers Plowman* in which the dreamer has a vision of the Tree of Charity. The tree bears three kinds of fruit corresponding to different states of mankind, the lowest of which is matrimony, in the middle widowhood or continence and at the top of the tree virginity (C-text) or maidenhood (B-text) which is described as 'euene [equal] with angelis'.[69] Although virginity was a state of humanity available to both genders, it was associated most strongly with girls and young women in medieval discourse. So too in *Piers Plowman,* which goes on to associate the maiden's body with the divine miracle, a place worthy for God to reside: 'To a mayde that hihte [was called] Marie, a meke thyng withalle, / That oen Iesus, a iustices sone, moste iouken [sleep/rest] in here chaumbre'.[70] The maiden's already perfected state means that her pathway to adulthood is necessarily different from that of boys and young men. If the narrative of male child development is conceptualised in *Gowther* via the paradigm of redemption or conversion, that of female development is aligned in *Arthour* with the opposite paradigm of corruption or a fall from grace. Yet this idealisation and objectification of maidens is no less a form of dehumanisation than the wild and animalistic

[69] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions,* Vol. 1, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London and New York: Longman, 1995)*,* 621, C XVIII 90.
[70] *Ibid.,* 623, C XVIII 125-26.

characterisation of their brothers, an idealisation which at its most extreme may perpetuate and justify extreme forms of control, an objectification which may slide all too easily into the very sexualisation and assault which it was ostensibly the primary duty of civilized men to prevent.

These twin processes are explored in what is perhaps the most-studied encounter between a maiden and an otherworldly being in Middle English romance: that which is found in the story of *Sir Degaré*.[71] A king of Brittany has a daughter and brings her up alone after his wife dies in childbirth. When his daughter is 'of age', the king refuses to allow any suitor to marry her unless he can first defeat him in combat, a fact which as Margaret Robson notes means that the princess 'remains, symbolically, a child' at the beginning of the romance.[72] During a procession in memory of her dead mother, the king's daughter stops to answer a call of nature and, having entered the woods to relieve herself, becomes separated from her two female companions. The narrative thus begins in by-now familiar fashion with a young maiden wandering alone in the forest.

In common with Bernard de Gordon's characterisation of female childhood, the princess is aligned with the unspoiled, beautiful and tranquil aspect of the natural world. She gathers wild flowers and listens to the song of the wild birds rather than romping with the wild beasts: 'She wente about and gaderede floures, / And herkenede song of wilde foules' (77-78). Indeed, the wild beasts which were the playfellows of her male counterparts are here constituted as a threat to her survival as the maiden laments:

> Nou ich wot ich am forloren!
> Wilde bestes me willeth togrinde [will eat me]
> Or ani man me sschulle finde! (86-88)

The final line of the maiden's speech is particularly interesting as it permits two readings: on the one reading, preferred by Robson, men and beasts are both imagined as threats and the maiden is aware of the danger she faces if found wandering alone by a man, i.e. she is afraid of being found by *either* wild beasts *or* any man. Robson reads this as evidence of the princess's emergent knowledge of sexuality: 'this child, picking flowers in the woods, is also represented as thinking like an adult woman, for she is not only afraid of wild animals harming her, but of men doing so'.[73] The other reading, however, suggested by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury in their 1995 edition, understands 'or' to mean 'before' (i.e. the maiden is afraid of being eaten by beasts before

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[71] Edition cited throughout is Laskaya and Salisbury, ed., *Breton Lays*.
[72] Margaret Robson, 'How's Your Father? Sex and the Adolescent Girl in *Sir Degarre*', in *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain,* ed. Amanda Hopkins and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 85.
[73] *Ibid.,* 86.

anyone finds her).[74] The effect of this reading is the opposite – it emphasises the maiden's childlike innocence in the face of a threat which will be obvious to any audience familiar with romance tropes. The princess may naively believe that being found by a man will be her succour; her audience will be all too aware that this could equally prove her undoing. The deliberate ambiguity of the phrasing is very much in keeping with the overall tone of the following episode, which blurs and explores the boundaries between natural and supernatural threats to maidenhood, between the innocence of childhood and the desires of adolescence, between courtship and sexual violence, between paternal protection and incestuous desire.

The princess's hopes for male assistance are apparently answered when she sees a knight coming towards her. He is handsome and courteous, fair of face and possessed of a shapely body, in every way the embodiment of the chivalric ideal which any maiden might aspire to meet:

> Gentil, yong, and jolif man;
> A robe of scarlet he hadde upon;
> His visage was feir, his bodi ech weies; [in every way]
> Of countenaunce right curteis;
> Wel farende [shaped] legges, fot, and honde:
> Ther nas non in all the Kynges londe
> More apert [attractive] man than was he. (91-97)

The handsome knight however turns out to be a fairy who rapes her with psychopathic indifference to her feelings. The audience is left in no doubt as to the maiden's resistance to the encounter:

> Tho nothing ne coude do she
> But wep and criede and wolde fle;
> And he anon gan hire at holde
> And dide his wille, what he wolde. (109-112)

In a world where threats to young maidens typically come in monstrous and easily discernible form – giant, 'unmeasurable', loathsome, blackened, bristled bodies – the shapely body of the fairy knight stands in incongruous juxtaposition to the extremely vivid – by romance standards – depiction of the crying and struggling maiden. Although maidens are known to struggle in the arms of giants, they should not struggle in the arms of handsome knights. Indeed, the knight later claims to be a giant slayer and thus by implication a protector as well as a defiler of maidens. The effect of the fairy knight's description here is to shake the complacent dualism which the romance

[74] Rachel Moss also suggests that the princess is unaware of the danger she faces, *Fatherhood and its Representations in Middle English Texts* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 137.

genre seeks to construct between the forces of civilisation protective of maidens and those opposed to it which seek maidens' destruction. The monstrous may not always appear so, and the threat to maidenhood which is so conveniently externalised elsewhere is here brought uncomfortably close to home, perhaps literally, since more than one modern commentator has identified the figure of the fairy knight with the maiden's jealous and possessive father.[75]

The same effect is achieved through the knight's speech, which matches his noble appearance. Before assaulting her, he greets the maiden courteously, bidding her welcome and informing her that he is a fairy. He even tells her twice not to be afraid, casting himself in the role of her supernatural saviour come to preserve her from harm:

> "Damaisele, welcome mote thou be!
> Be thou afered of none wighte: [no man]
> Iich am comen here a fairi knyghte;
> Mi kynde is armes for to were,
> On horse to ride with scheld and spere;
> Forthi [Therefore] afered be thou nowt. (98-103)

This mismatch between appearance and reality is a feature commonly associated with supernatural threats, particularly to women, which often achieve their ends through trickery. Thus the demon who fathers Gowther has sex with his mother whilst assuming the likeness of her husband. However, it was also associated with the threat to maidenhood posed by young men, whose sinister intentions are also construed as lurking behind a courteous and disarming façade, made up of precisely the kind of language which the fairy knight employs. Advising her not to acquaint herself with men she meets in the street, the *Good Wife* warns her daughter that men's intentions are not always what they seem: 'al is no3t trewe þat faire speket'; or in another version, 'alle men ben not trewe / Þat kunne fair her wordis schewe [that know how to proffer fair words]'.[76] The *Good Wyfe Wold a Pylgremage* offers similar advice to avoid men's company because their fair words may disguise malicious intentions: 'Syt not witt no man aloune, for oft in trust ys tressoun [betrayal]. / Thow þou thenk no þenke [nothing] amyse, 3ett feyr wordys be gayssoun' [deceitful].[77] The effect of this ambiguity is to humanise rather than to dehumanise the threat to maidenhood; after all, we have only the knight's word for the fact that he is a fairy, and, as we know, his fair words cannot be trusted. Indeed, without this single sentence claiming supernatural origins the entire scene would be scarcely thinkable within the framework of late-medieval literary

[75] Cheryl Colopy, 'Sir Degaré: A Fairy Tale Oedipus', *Pacific Coast Philology* 17, no. 1/2 (1982): 31–39; Margaret Robson, 'How's Your Father?', 82-93.
[76] Mustanoja, *Good Wife,* 162; 199.
[77] *Ibid.,* 174.

culture; brave and courteous knights who slay giants and father heroic offspring do not rape vulnerable maidens in medieval romance, although the reality with which their female readers had to contend may have been rather different.

Up to the point at which his sinister intentions are revealed the knight's conduct is indiscernible from courtship. After greeting her in the manner illustrated above, he confesses his love for her and tells of his desire to be her lover:

> Iich have iloved the mani a yer,
> And now we beth us selve her,
> Thou best mi lemman ar thou go. (105-107)

Such sentiments would not be out of place in the mouth of any romance paramour, and the princess's consent to the union could be safely assumed by an audience well-versed in romance tradition. As Corinne Saunders notes, romances frequently present desire from a male viewpoint and courtship often consists simply of ladies being informed that 'thou shalt be my lemman', or 'I shall thee wedde', even where the subsequent union is predicated upon the woman's consent.[78] It is only with the final line of the fairy knight's speech then that he deviates from normative expectations and thus the danger he poses becomes apparent: 'Whether the liketh wel or wo' (108). The narrative then moves very quickly, taking only five lines to describe the rape of the maiden where the knight's opening speech ran to eleven; thus almost as soon as the princess, and the audience, realises the danger, the whole episode is over and the knight stands up as if nothing untoward has happened and resumes his courteous speech, calling her again his 'lemman' and telling her that she will bear his child and that it will be a boy, leaving unacknowledged the manner by which the child was conceived:

> He binam [took] hire here maidenhod,
> And seththen [soon after] up toforen hire stod.
> "Lemman," he seide, "gent and fre,
> Mid schilde [With child] I wot that thou schalt be. (116-16)

The maiden's rape in the forest thus creates a violent rupture in an otherwise seamless narrative of the meeting between a courteous and noble knight and his 'Lemman', opening up a discursive space in which profound questions and anxieties may be exposed.[79] Is courtship in which maidens are 'pursued' and 'won' really all that distinct from sexual violence? Or has the fairy knight simply

[78] Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment,* 194.
[79] For the functions of narrative rupture in romance, see Elizabeth Allen, 'Episodes', in *Middle English,* ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 191-206.

taken a courtship narrative which only ever seems to require maidens' assent rather than their consent to its logical conclusion?

It is not only the narrative of courtship which is disrupted and troubled in this way before being uneasily resumed, the narrative of paternal protection receives similar treatment. The princess conceals what has happened from her father who, once the she is found and they are reunited, resumes his battle to preserve his daughter's now-lost maidenhood from all comers until he is finally unseated by his grandson Degaré. When the young princess falls pregnant as the fairy knight had prophesied she expresses her concern that people will assume the baby is the product of an incestuous union with her father:

> Men wolde sai be sti and strete
> That mi fader the King hit wan [begot]
> And I ne was never aqeint with man! (167-69)

The king's jealous protection then has brought nothing but suspicion of his own sexual designs upon his daughter. It is worth noting that a similar suggestion of incest is present in the relationship between Perceval and his overprotective mother with whom he continues to share a bed at fifteen. Indeed, the parallel runs deeper: Perceval's mother wishes to protect her son from the fate which befell his father, and the King's desire to shield his daughter from suitors may similarly be read as an attempt to prevent her sharing the fate of her mother who died in childbirth. In both cases, hindering the young in their progression to the next stage of life is shown to be a fruitless and ultimately damaging endeavour.

What are we to make of the knight's statement that he has loved the princess for many years? After all, the reader is very much aware that the maiden is only just of marriageable age. Perhaps this may lend some support to readings which identify the fairy knight with her father, either literally or in the form of wish-fulfilment, as an embodiment of the daughter's Oedipal desire. Yet the effect of the phrase too is to universalise the threat to young maidens by implying that he has been watching and awaiting his chance throughout her childhood. Her rape is thus constructed not as a product of specific circumstances but as the outcome of a looming threat which has hung over her for many years. The ambiguity of the knight's status – is he a supernatural being? a human knight? her suitor? her father? a projection of her own conscious or unconscious desires? – shakes any complacent confidence in the ability to solidify, define and externalise this threat. Indeed, a parallel emerges between the position of the father/fairy knight and that of Bernard de Gordon, the voice of medieval paediatric discourse whose pronouncements upon the correct treatment of young maidens were quoted above. Like the father/fairy, Bernard observes the

maiden in her sylvan innocence. The reason he does not touch her or wish her to be touched is not simply the best interests of the maiden but in order to preserve his own voyeuristic pleasure; the 'wild' and untouched maiden is more beautiful than the maiden who has not remained 'unspoiled'. Protection of maidens is presented as a deferral of male pleasure rather than its negation. The goal of female socialisation is construed not as the production of restrained and reasoning subjects but as the production of perfected objects – yet as *Degaré* highlights, this production always implies the ultimate purpose which is that these perfected objects will one day be passed on to new owners.

The romance of *Sir Degaré* thus disturbs not only the cultural narratives of courtship and of paternal protection, but of the child's ideal psychosocial development from unspoiled, innocent, happy, trusting maiden picking flowers in the woods to mother and wife. Where the majority of romances present threats to maidenhood as unambiguously external to civilized society, the depiction of the fairy knight resists this simplistic exorcism, implicating suitors and even fathers themselves as dangers to young girls. The violence of the princess's rape creates a rupture in the narratives of paternal protection and patriarchal courtship, a rupture which as Robson notes is facilitated by the maiden's own assertion of her bodily requirements. The futile battle her father continues to engage in to protect the illusion of her sexual innocence calls into question the ultimate purpose for which such actions are pursued, opening up a discursive space to ask not only who or what it is that maidenhood needs preserving *from* but also who or what maidenhood needs preserving *for*. The idealisation of maidenhood as a perfected state of humanity is thus exposed as disguising a claim to dominion over maidens' bodies, a claim which is revealing of the ways in which attitudes to child protection were gendered in late-medieval England. Child protection always involves control over children – it is impossible to protect children who are allowed the agency to take risks – and modern legislators and policymakers consciously grapple with the need to balance children's rights and individual freedom against their safety.[80] If medieval boys in romance were entrusted with far greater agency than their modern counterparts at the expense of the notion of protection – indeed, where protection was thought to be required it was generally protection *from* the 'little monsters' themselves – medieval girls were sometimes liable to be guarded to the point of virtual, and sometimes literal, imprisonment. This was a symptom of a deep-seated cultural paranoia about their fragility, their desirability and their susceptibility to malign influence, whether this came from the natural, the supernatural or even the human world.

[80] Martin Woodhead, 'Psychology and the Cultural Construction of Children's Needs', in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood,* Classic Edition, ed. Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Routledge, 2015), 68-69.

Desiring Maidens

The broad argument I make in this chapter is that maidenhood was a concept which encompassed childhood as well as adolescence/youth in late-medieval England. In making this argument it is necessary to confront the uncomfortable fact that maidens – even young maidens – are so often depicted as the objects of sexual desire in romance. What are we to make, for example, of the fact that the seven-year-old Helen in *Sir Tryamour* is described in terms which appear to denote sexual attractiveness and availability?

> Sche whyte os blossom on flowre,
> Mery and comely of colowre,
> And semely for to kysse (628-30)

From Violet in *Lybeaus* to the young and frail Helen in the story of the Giant of Mont St. Michel, from the princess in *Degaré,* to Le Freine and Blancheflour, the depiction of young women – who today at least would be considered children – as the objects of desire is deeply troubling to modern readers.

One solution to this troubling issue is to project the modern antithesis between childhood and sexual desire back onto medieval culture. To the extent that young women were desired, they could not have belonged to the category 'child' in the eyes of medieval people; to the extent that they were children, they could not have been construed as objects of desire. On this view, examples from the medieval record which appear to contradict this principle are evidence only of our own misunderstanding, not that the application of the principle to medieval culture should be re-examined. Le Freine, Blancheflour, Helen et al. may appear childlike to us but that is because we view their stories through a modern lens; we fail to leave our contemporary cultural baggage at the door when assessing the medieval evidence. For medieval people, on this view, girls from the age of twelve were no longer seen as children but as women of marriageable age. Medieval people may have drawn the boundary between 'child' and 'woman' differently to us, but they otherwise closely mirrored our modern sensibilities surrounding sexual desire and childhood.

This approach neatly sidesteps the problem and renders paedophilia reassuringly invisible in medieval discourse: as soon as a maiden is the object of sexual desire she may be disqualified from having been considered a child. In the rare cases, such as the legal records, where paedophilia can be shown indisputably to have existed, it may be understood as purely a matter of individual pathology. However, while this approach has the merit of leaving intact a can of worms which we might with some justification feel should remain unopened, the lamentable side-effect is to let

medieval (and indeed modern) culture off the hook. Researchers across disciplines now recognise that sociocultural factors play a role in the aetiology of child abuse, and these must necessarily be historicised and contextualised to be fully understood. Of course, individual psychological factors remain an important component, but laying the problem entirely at the door of 'monstrous' individuals is an abdication of our collective responsibility to ensure that we are not unwittingly contributing to a cultural framework which facilitates or encourages the abuse of children. If, then, as I have argued in this chapter, young women such as Violet, Helen, Le Freine or Blancheflour would have been considered children in the Middle Ages as well as today, it is imperative to tackle the question of desire in relation to medieval childhood in a careful and nuanced way.

Perhaps some scholarly avoidance of the issue can be put down to the recent movement towards viewing categories such as 'child', 'adult', 'woman', 'man', 'desire' etc. as the products of a largely arbitrary process of sociocultural construction.[81] This has undoubtedly made a beneficial contribution to the liberation of many people and groups from the oppression which have resulted from modern cultural assumptions about what was 'natural' or 'unnatural'. However, it is certainly legitimate to worry that the application of similar ideas to the taboo subject of sex between adults and children could be made to serve the interests of those who would want that taboo broken rather than the interests of children themselves. If the prohibition of paedophilia turned out to be nothing more than an arbitrary product of modern Western culture, could it go the way of taboos such as 'miscegenation' and 'sodomy'? I believe that this concern is unfounded for multiple reasons. Firstly, as I argued in greater detail in the introduction to this thesis, I do not believe that childhood can meaningfully be referred to as a sociocultural construct in the same way as, say, race or gender. Secondly, our cultural prohibition of adult-child relations should not be grounded in our ideas about what is 'natural' as opposed to 'cultural' – and hence in the naturalistic fallacy – but in the overwhelming evidence of the physical and emotional harm which has been, and continues to be, done to children who are subjected to sexual abuse. Finally, as I will argue in this section, the medieval evidence does not in fact support such an interpretation.

In this section, then, I will examine the thorny question of desire in relation to medieval maidenhood via the story well-known in the Middle Ages of Apollonius of Tyre. This story, in which the daughter of the King of Antioch is repeatedly raped by her father, existed in several forms in the later medieval period, including a romance version which survives only as a fragment

[81] See e.g. Allison James and Alan Prout, ed., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Childhood,* Classic Edition (London: Routledge, 2015).

of around 300 lines in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 216.[82] Given the incomplete nature of the romance version I will make use of Gower's retelling of the narrative in Book 8 of his *Confessio Amantis*.[83] I will argue that Gower's text presents two contrasting images of maidenhood which are associated with two opposing constructions of desire. The one, childlike, physically frail, and emotionally vulnerable, is the object of illegitimate, monstrous or illicit desire. The other, youthful, physically and socially mature, is both desired and desiring; capable of expressing her own wishes, she is the subject of legitimate desire. It is with this latter maiden that I will begin.

'Fresh and Fair': Desiring Youth

The 'worthi maide' (VIII. 807) in question is the daughter of King Artestrathes and is certainly a young woman who knows her own mind. Her introduction to the narrative comes at the point where Apollonius, having been spotted wrestling naked with the other 'yonge lusti men' (673) by her father the king and having impressed with his physical prowess, has been introduced to the court. When the courteous newcomer shows the unmistakeable signs of possessing a heavy heart, the maiden is sent by her father to cheer him up. She is soon so impressed by his musical abilities with the harp that she asks her father to enlist him as her tutor, and bestows on the mysterious stranger gold, silver and fine clothes. She soon falls deeply in love with Apollonius. Although the age of this maiden is not given, her position as subject to both father and tutor indicates that she cannot be much older than her late teens or early twenties. However, the language that is used to describe her is instructive in how medieval audiences would likely have perceived her. She embodies a vision of youth rather than childhood, and one which is characterised as fair and 'fresh': 'This yonge faire freissche may' (816).

The term 'fresh' has multiple senses in Middle English which have a bearing upon the way in which this maiden is depicted. Used to describe people, the term 'fresh' could imply both youth and vigour as well as denoting a lively, joyous or lusty character.[84] Used of food such as bread it implied that it was both ready to eat and at its best, fully prepared but not yet stale or aged, a point which takes on greater significance given the interconnection of physical and carnal appetites in medieval thought – a point to which I will return below. The term could also be applied to the forest or garden, where it denoted plants which were unfaded or unwithered, a connotation which calls to mind the association between maidenhood and natural idyl in medieval discourse.

[82] Nicola McDonald, ed., *The Database of Middle English Romance* (York: University of York, 2012), https://www.middleenglishromance.org.uk/mer/7 [accessed July 30, 2019].
[83] Edition cited throughout is John Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* Vol. 1-3, ed. Russell A. Peck (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004-2013).
[84] MED, 'fresh' (adj.)'.

Elsewhere in his *Confessio Amantis,* Gower uses 'freysshe and faire' in this sense to refer to fresh flowers in full bloom. (I. 2355). Finally, 'fresh' could apply to the seasons, denoting the characteristics of springtime and collocating particularly with the month of May, a sense which Gower also employs on two occasions which both refer to people in the flush of youth as 'lich unto the fresshe Maii' (V. 4172, 6736). Although springtime was sometimes associated with the age of childhood in medieval discourse, on one of these occasions – the renewal of the youth of Eson, father of Jason – Gower gives the young man a specific age: he is 'Lich unto twenty wynter age' (V. 4170). In the 'yonge faire freissche may' who falls in love with Apollonius, then, we may imagine May, the blushing bride of the *Secreta Secretorum* with whom I began this chapter, 'a faire spouse and a full specious [beautiful] damysell arraied with broches, and clad with many-fold coloures that she may appere to me in the day of hir mariage'.[85] The idea of maidenhood she embodies is one associated with adolescence or youth, and with the licit desire of the young for one another. The 'yonge man of Tyr' (VIII. 821), himself a 'yong, a freissh, a lusti knyht' (379) meets the 'worthi yonge lady' (824) who will be his bride.

The 'freshness' which makes the maiden irresistible to Apollonius also renders her unable to resist her own feelings. Her youthful frailty is associated here as it is in the writings of Bartholomaeus Anglicus with a propensity to fall in love, and makes her a slave to the passion that overwhelms her.

> Bot as men sein that frele is youthe
> With leisir and continuaunce [persistence]
> This mayde fell upon a chance, [change of fortune]
> That love hath mad him a querele, [made himself quarrel]
> Agein hir youthe *freissh and frele,*
> That malgré wher [whether] sche wole or noght,
> Sche mot with al hire hertes thoght
> To love and to his lawe obeie. (834-41, emphasis added)

Freshness then is a quality which makes youth both desirable and prone to uncontrollable desire. This desire is so strong that it produces physical symptoms akin to fever, as the princess oscillates between being hot and cold, flushed and pale:

> Hire herte is hot as eny fyr,
> And otherwhile it is acale; [chilled]
> Now is sche red, nou is sche pale

[85] M. A. Manzalaoui, ed. *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions,* Vol. 1, EETS, O.S. 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 56.

Riht after the condicion
Of hire ymaginacion. (846-50)

These feverish symptoms also include a loss of appetite for food – the princess's obsessive, 'hungry' thoughts of Apollonius override all her desires to the extent that she 'thinks her fill' (861) rather than eating her fill.

The symptoms which youthful desire produces reflect the supposed constitution and humoral balance of young people. Competing theories existed in the Middle Ages as to which humours were associated with which stages of life, but perhaps the most common tradition characterised youth as hot and dry, associated with the element fire, and shaped in temperament by red choler which made young people quick-tempered and assertive.[86] The princess's feverish response to falling in love – her fiery heart and flushed appearance – may thus be regarded a product of her youthful nature. Neither a child, whose predominance of blood gave her the sanguine (cheerful, merry) temperament described by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, nor an older woman whose natural heat had dissipated would be expected to manifest such symptoms. The effect of this is to 'naturalise' youthful desire in the sense of making it normal and expected and, thus to relinquish the young of some of the responsibility for actions committed while under its influence.

The term 'fresh' is associated too with eagerness, boldness or fierceness – in light of medieval physiological theory perhaps 'hot-headedness' – and collocates particularly with being 'fresh to fight'.[87] Lybeaus, for example, is described in these terms: 'Full fresshe he was to fight' (1814).[88] In *Guy of Warwick,* a group of barons are described as fresher 'þen any lyons' (8078).[89] As Artestrathes discovers in the course of the narrative, this quality of 'freshness' is very much present in his daughter. When three princes approach Artestrathes seeking the princess's hand, the king asks that each young man draw up a document declaring all his goods. With a medieval father's clearheaded propensity to see suitors as financial assets, and apparently beholden to the wrongheaded assumption that his daughter's desires mirror his own, Artestrathes presents these inventories to his daughter, convinced that they will equip her with all the information she needs to choose a life partner. He quickly discovers his error when he receives a letter stating in no uncertain terms that she will marry only Apollonius:

[86] J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 12.
[87] MED, 'fresh (adj.)'.
[88] 'Lybeaus Desconus (Lambeth Palace, MS 306)', in *Lybeaus Desconus,* ed. Salisbury and Weldon.
[89] J. Zupitza, ed., *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, EETS, E.S. 49, 59 (1887, 1891; reprinted as one vol. 1966).

Bot in writinge it mai be spoke;
So wryte I to you, fader, thus:
Bot if [Unless] I have Appolinus,
Of al this world, what so betyde, [whatever happens]
I wol non other man abide.
And certes if I of him faile, [fail to have him]
I wot riht wel withoute faile
Ye schull for me be dowhterles. (896-903)

In the hands of a 'fresh' maiden of choleric temperament, the 'frailty' of youth is transformed into a rhetorical strategy in an act of audacious assertion of desire. And it is an act of which the poet clearly approves, describing the eventual consent of the parents as 'a dede wonderfull' (938). Perhaps, after all, the 'fair' young maiden demands only that which should be hers by right – the ability, conferred by her advancing years, to shape her own destiny.

Importantly, the physically and psychologically feverish symptoms which the princess manifests are alleviated by the satisfaction of her desires, and the licit desire between female and male youth is constructed as mutual and sustaining, both personally and socially.

[Appollonius went] to bedde with his wif,
Wher as thei ladde a lusti lif,
And that was after somdel sene,
For as thei pleiden hem betwene,
Thei gete a child between hem tuo. (969-73)

The fevered desire which made her defy her father having been fulfilled, she now epitomises the qualities of ideal femininity, being transformed from a 'fresh' young maiden into a 'yong wif' (1035), 'The which was evre meke and mylde' (1030). Allowing youthful desire to run its 'natural' course is thus presented as a socially positive force, resulting in the reinforcement of social roles, the upholding of societal values, and the production of legitimate offspring. Importantly, their licit desire for one another is also open and readily visible, there for all to see in the fruit of their union.

'Tender and Soft': Desiring Childhood

Turning now to the second, and more famous, maiden whose encounter with desire is portrayed in *Apollonius,* it is clear that the way in which her narrative is constructed is manifestly different. Born the daughter of King Antiochus, the princess who is 'pierles / of beauté' (286-87) is brought

up by her father alone. Gradually, Antiochus develops a carnal desire for the young maiden who dwells in his chamber and, blinded by his lust, he resolves to sexually assault his own daughter. Gower leaves the reader in no doubt as to both the maiden's young age and her lack of consent. Weeping, but deserted by those who should protect her, she is depicted as too weak to fight off her father's attack:

> With strengthe, and whanne he time sih, [saw]
> This yonge maiden he forlih. [raped]
> And sche was tendre and full of drede,
> Sche couthe noght hir maidenhede
> Defende, and thus sche hath forlore
> The flour which sche hath longe bore.
> It helpeth noght althogh sche wepe,
> For thei that scholde her bodi kepe
> Of wommen were absent as thanne, (299-307).

The emotional effects of the traumatic incident are described in vivid detail when the young princess is asked by her nurse why she appears sad and withdrawn. She is scarcely able to speak for shame, but when pressed she does reveal the details of the incident, before swooning and exhibiting symptoms of breathlessness which might today be associated with an anxiety attack:

> With that sche swouneth now and eft,
> And evere wissheth after deth,
> So that wel nyh hire lacketh breth. (332-34)

Her father, meanwhile, having taken such pleasure in the attack that he is convinced it cannot have been sinful, continues to rape his daughter repeatedly for some time. When suitors eventually come seeking her hand he guards her jealously, forcing them to attempt to answer a riddle in order to win the princess and killing those who answer incorrectly until his battlements are resplendent with the severed heads of unsuccessful applicants. The story ends tragically for the maiden as both she and her father eventually die as a result of the wrath of God.

The plot gives several clues to the reader that the daughter is understood to be a relatively young child at the time of her sexual assault by her father. In the first place, the character of the nurse implies childhood, placing the princess's search for comfort in the context of a dependent relationship. She evokes the nurse who guards the tomb of the murdered Elyne in the story of the Giant of Mont St. Michel, whom, I have argued, is similarly portrayed as a child at the time when she is attacked in some versions. In the second place, the fact that the princess does not get pregnant despite being repeatedly raped is suggestive of her physical immaturity. Despite the

presence in some medieval sources of the idea that pregnancy was only possible if the woman took pleasure in the act of copulation, in the context of romance pregnancy almost always follows sex even where it is clearly portrayed as non-consensual – the conceptions of Degaré and Merlin being two prominent examples. Finally, there is the fact that the princess only begins to receive suitors some time after the incestuous relationship with her father has been established. By way of contrast, in *Sir Degaré* where the daughter is young but of canonical age, the emergence of suitors precedes her rape by the fairy knight.

Although she is characterised as 'peerless of beauty', the language used to portray the daughter of Antiochus is very different from that depicting the daughter of Artestrathes. Rather than 'fresh and fair' she is described as 'tendre and softe' (290), and it is these qualities which are presented as prompting or producing her father's monstrous desire. This phrase has very different connotations to those which I have outlined above. 'Softness' implies yieldingness or malleability, qualities which were strongly associated with childhood in medieval discourse.[90] Children, for example, are often described as akin to green saplings or wax which may be trained, moulded, or shaped during their early years. The quality of 'softness' was most present in infants, who were bound in swaddling clothes under the (erroneous) impression that their soft limbs were liable to become misshapen unless carefully trained. In his *Siege of Thebes,* Lydgate credits softness with infants' inability to walk during their 'tender' age:

> Is every man in this world yborn,
> Which may not gon (his lymes be so softe),
> ...
> And after that he gynneth forto crepe [crawl]
> On foure feet in his tendre youth.[91] (700-705)

'Tenderness' too was a quality associated with childhood far more than it was with adolescence or youth, the phrase 'of tender age' often implying the early years of life. Lydgate's *Life of Margaret* for example depicts the 'mayde' (85) being 'baptised in hir tendre age' (88). It could be used to imply not only young age or immaturity but also physical weakness, vulnerability, fragility or susceptibility to injury.[92] In Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale,* Griselda's infant daughter is described as a 'child softe' (583) and, when she is forced to give up the child, she asks that she be treated 'With alle circumstances tendrely' (584). Later in the tale, when Walter announces his intention to conduct a sham marriage with his twelve-year-old daughter, Griselda pleads emotionally with him

[90] MED, 'soft (adj.)'.
[91] John Lydgate*, Lydgate's Siege of Thebes*, ed. Eilert Ekwall and Axel Erdmann, EETS, E.S. 108 (London: Trübner, 1911).
[92] MED, 'tender (adj.)'.

not to torment this 'tender' maiden because her 'tender' upbringing would make her unable to endure such adversity (1038-43). In presenting 'softness' and 'tenderness' as the qualities which attract Antiochus to his daughter, then, Gower presents his desire not as a natural response to youthful beauty but as a perversion of parental affection for a vulnerable child.

Like 'fresh' the term 'tender' could also be applied to food, where in Middle English as today it implied that food was easy to chew or digest.[93] The anxiety that children's 'tenderness' made them desirable objects for gastronomic consumption is also prevalent in medieval literary culture. In romance, the motif of the infant abducted by wild animals intent on eating them appears relatively frequently, for instance in the romance *Octavian* where two young children are borne away by a lioness whose initial intent is to feed them to her own whelps.[94] Returning to the *Clerk's Tale,* Griselda expresses her concern that her infant son's 'tender' and 'delicate' limbs should be kept from wild beasts because of their gastronomically desirable appearance, petitioning the sergeant to keep 'His tendre lymbes / delicaat to sighte / Fro foweles and fro beestes to saue' (682-83). As well as the consumption of children by wild beasts, children's 'tenderness' was implicated in their consumption by ethnic others, as in the late-medieval metrical translation of John Mandeville's travels: 'A childe that is tendir and fatte, / Anone forth right thei eeten thatte' (2003).[95] This same sense of the princess's 'tenderness' provoking a desire for illicit consumption is present in Gower's text, which uses cannibalism as a metaphor to portray the act of incestuous rape: 'The wylde fader thus devoureth / His oghne fleissh, which non socoureth' (309-10). As with the daughter of Artestrathes, the act of eating is implicated in sexual desire, but unlike the former princess whose thoughts of her lover satisfy her physical appetites, the daughter of Antiochus is imagined not as the *consumer* of desire but as the *consumed,* her flesh devoured by her father like a beast devours a tender morsel. Significant too is the final phrase which draws attention to the fact that her father's monstrous actions left the maiden without hope of succour. If, as I have argued above, the rational human world is predicated upon the protection of innocent maidens, then Antiochus's crime represents a dereliction of duty of the worst possible kind.

In the discursive world constructed by medieval romance, concepts are best understood not by the way in which they are delineated but by the company they keep. In other words, romances are not in the business of separating and categorising but rather they articulate meaning and explore social issues via conflation and equivalence. The way in which paedophilia is depicted in

[93] MED, 'tender (adj.)'.
[94] Hudson, ed., *Four Middle English Romances.*
[95] M. C. Seymour, ed., *The Metrical Version of Mandeville's Travels from the Unique Manuscript in the Coventry Corporation Record Office*, EETS O.S. 269 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

this text and in the other texts I have been discussing places it firmly within the broad category of illicit or monstrous desire. Indeed, paedophilia is an important and often-overlooked component of the medieval construction of monstrous desire. It is aligned with wild, bestial, unreasoning or uncontrolled desire; with sinful desire; with hidden or unspeakable desire. It is associated with acts of incest and with rape, and it is equivalent to the desire to consume human flesh. The figures which embody and act upon these desires are monstrous ones – it is significant that the Giant of Mont St. Michel too is associated in different versions of his tale both with the cannibalism and the rape of children. Jean Gerson too taps into this discourse when he offers this explanation of the sexual abuse of children by their parents: 'When they are at leisure or are partying, they are made into beasts, such as those of whom the Satirist spoke: For how can drunken Venus care about the genitals and the head when she knows no distance between them?'[96] For Gerson, the sexual abuse of children by adults was so inhumane as to disqualify one from humanity. Those who practiced it must have been somehow rendered inhuman, even if only temporarily.

Conclusion

This discursive work of 'othering' paedophilia in which romances engage masks the deeply problematic way in which medieval society construed its duty to protect female children primarily in sexualised terms. There is an obvious parallel between the possessive actions of Antiochus and the jealousy which characterises the father-daughter relationship in *Sir Degaré*, one which has led many commentators to read this story too through the lens of incest. As I argued above, there is also more than a hint of Antiochus in the voice of medieval paediatric theory embodied by Bernard de Gordon or Bartholomaeus Anglicus. As I will argue in Chapter 4, it is present too in the voice of paternal instruction represented by the Knight of the Tower. In all these writings, child protection is conceptualised as the preservation not only of physical maidenhood (i.e. virginity) but the psychological characteristics of 'maidenhood' (i.e. childhood) beyond physical childhood and into social maturity. The characteristics which are associated with ideal femininity – meekness, humility, deference to authority, a cheerful rather than a sour or argumentative demeanour – are not those which are developed in adolescence or adulthood but are those listed by Bartholomaeus Anglicus as characteristic of *puellae*. Moreover, this model of carefully-protected maiden in her 'sylvan' innocence who was meek and mild as well as virginal aligned with a widespread ideal of what constituted female desirability. This was not the only such ideal to exist in medieval culture, as for example the assertive daughter of Artestrathes or the skittish Alison in the *Miller's Tale* can attest, but it was pervasive nonetheless. Child protection in late-

[96] Jean Gerson, *Jean Gerson Early Works,* ed. and trans. Brian Patrick McGuire (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 244.

medieval English culture then contained within it a deeply troubling undercurrent of sexual desire which should not remain unacknowledged.

In her reading of *Sir Degaré,* Rachel Moss has suggested that the romance may be understood via Judith Herman's concept of the 'seductive father' outlined in her now-classic book *Father-Daughter Incest.*[97] The concept refers to men who demonstrate sexually motivated behaviour toward their daughters that stops short of actual sexual contact, including privileging their daughter as the most important person in their lives, expressing jealousy or resentment if they feel this special status is challenged, and becoming violent or controlling if their hegemony is threatened. In the jealous desire to preserve physical and psychological 'maidenhood' into social maturity, the prevailing social attitudes toward child protection in late-medieval England appear themselves to fall foul of this definition. Where protecting male children was barely acknowledged as necessary, protecting female children was seen as essential and primarily a matter of guarding sexual innocence. Indeed, the privileged relationship between medieval society and its 'little princesses' was such that preserving maidenhood was, as I have argued, a central constituent of medieval chivalric identity. Little wonder then that the figure of the 'seductive father' appears again and again in various guises throughout medieval culture. It may thus be no exaggeration to say that, from the perspective of girls growing up in late-medieval England, a figure resembling Herman's 'seductive father' was the 'pater' who characterised medieval patriarchy.

[97] Judith Lewis Herman, *Father Daughter Incest* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1981); see Moss, *Fatherhood,* 130-31.

CHAPTER 4:

THE TREATMENT OF MAIDENS

In the preceding chapter I argued that the prevailing discourse of maidenhood was in many ways the polar opposite of that of childhood which I identified in the first half of this thesis. Where male children were liable to be seen as incomplete, deficient, animalistic or even monstrous or demonic, maidenhood was equated with a state of moral and spiritual perfection, and maidens themselves were associated with prelapsarian innocence and beauty, in need of careful protection to preserve them from the corrupting and defiling influence of the very animalistic, monstrous, demonic forces with which their brothers were so detrimentally elided. In the medieval conceptual schema which imagined the universe on an axis of high/low, with heaven and holiness at the top and the monstrous and demonic below, the developmental trajectory of the male child can be conceived as broadly beginning low and progressing higher with encroaching maturity, whereas the maiden's developmental trajectory tended instead to begin high and then to descend as the vices of adult womanhood encroached. Whereas male children began in a state of mental and physical incompleteness and gradually became more complete as they grew towards a perfect middle age, maidens began in a state of completeness, both physically in terms of their intact virginity and psychologically with their cheerful and compliant demeanour, only to lose both in the course of typical development as it was imagined in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question: what were the consequences of this developmental paradigm for medieval maidens? How did this cultural discourse impact the lives, the experiences and the perspectives of girls growing up in England in the later Middle Ages? In its broad aims, this chapter will thus mirror the concerns of Chapter 2 which examined how the discourse of male childhood as 'wanton and wild' led to dehumanisation and extreme physical violence in the institutional context of late-medieval grammar schools. In line with Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model which has informed the discussion of the aetiology of child maltreatment throughout this thesis, the ways in which the relationship of discourse to individuals was mediated through families, social networks and institutions will be an important focus. Since medieval maidens did not usually attend grammar schools alongside their male

counterparts, I have chosen to focus instead on the household and on the various institutions which together made up the late-medieval legal system.

The first part of the chapter will examine the surviving court records, primarily petitions to the Chancellor but also records of the royal, ecclesiastical and borough courts, to assess the prevalence of different forms of the abuse of girls in medieval culture. Estimating the prevalence of crimes against children in the Middle Ages in terms of absolute numbers has so far proven to be a thankless task for historians. Given the limitations of the evidence, both in terms of the underreporting of crimes and the incomplete survival of court records from the period as well as the apparently haphazard approach to recording the ages of victims, it will likely never be possible to know just how likely it was in statistical terms that a medieval child, male or female, would be a victim of some form of child abuse. However, by delineating the records by gender it is possible to compare the different abuse profiles of boys and girls, and this should at least allow us to understand something of the *relative* prevalence of different forms of abuse between the two groups. It will thus be possible to assess whether and to what extent the profound differences between boys and girls at the level of cultural discourse translated into different (mal)treatment at the hands of parents, caregivers and institutions. I do not attempt an exhaustive quantitative analysis of the sources, which would be both time consuming and relatively meaningless given the shortcomings of the evidence, but it is nonetheless easy to discern a clear pattern: boys are overwhelmingly represented as the victims of physical abuse; girls as the victims of sexual abuse. With the appropriate caveats, I will suggest that some proportion of this variance can be explained with reference to the prevailing cultural discourses that I have identified. I will argue that the medieval conceptualisation of maidenhood as pure and innocent acted as a protective influence, reducing girls' chances of being the victim of physical abuse. At the same time, however, the medieval elision of the qualities of maidenhood with the qualities of feminine desirability left girls at greater risk than boys of rape and sexual abuse.

The second part of the chapter will examine the cases of the rape of young girls in detail in an attempt to reimagine the relationship between young maidens in danger of rape and the institution of the courts, whose role it was to protect maidens by deterring offences against them, as well as to provide recourse to justice where this protection failed. This relationship between young victims of rape and the courts has been variously characterised by different historians. Alan Kissane has argued that prosecutions for the rape of underage girls were motivated by genuine concern for their welfare and a desire to protect them from physical

harm.[1] Kim Phillips suggests a different motive of financial self-interest behind the added legal protection which maidenhood attracted in medieval England, pointing out that it aligned with the interests of noble fathers whose daughters' virginity was a financial asset in the marriage market.[2] Barbara Hanawalt argues that an element of sexual voyeurism and titillation was present in one legal account of the rape of an eleven-year-old girl in 1320, suggesting that this points to a legal system which appropriated the narratives of child rape victims for its own purposes. She notes however that the telling of the tale and potential thereby to discredit her attacker may have provided some compensation to the victim.[3] Although all three of these motivations are discernibly present in the legal discourse, I will draw on recent social-psychological and anthropological research to suggest that the clearest and most prevalent motivation for the legal protection of young maidens – and thus perhaps the most easily overlooked – was disgust at the nature of the crimes committed against them. I will suggest that the idealisation of maidenhood as the embodiment of purity in medieval culture resulted in a conceptualisation of their rape not in terms of the harm and suffering caused to girls as autonomous subjects but the pollution and defilement of their bodies as sacred objects. I will also consider the consequences of this for maidens themselves and for the perspectives of child-victims.

In the previous chapter I suggested two potential consequences which arose from the predominant cultural concept of maidenhood which I identified. The first was that idealisation could lead to sexual objectification in the manner which I explore in the first two parts of this chapter. The second was that maidens' conceived need for protection could produce extreme forms of coercion and control. In the final part of this chapter, I will set out to examine this latter thesis, moving away from the courts and into the noble household via a reading of *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*. This text embodies in many ways the discourse of the 'seductive father' which I discussed in the preceding chapter, placing the Knight's daughters' sexual conduct and the preservation of their virginity front and centre of its didactic efforts. The text displays a clear interest in imposing stringent restrictions on young maidens, attempting to direct their movements and social associations as well as controlling their dress, speech, physical demeanour and gestures. However, I will argue that by reading against the Knight's book, it is possible to discern a very different picture of the daughters to whom his work is implicitly addressed, daughters who are certainly not the compliant, docile subjects that the text ostensibly

[1] Alan Kissane, "'Unnatural in Body and a Villain in Soul": Rape and Sexual Violence Towards Girls Under the Age of Canonical Consent in Late Medieval England, in *Fourteenth Century England X,* ed. Gwilym Dodd (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2018), 89-112.
[2] Kim Phillips, 'Written on the Body: Reading Rape from the Twelfth to Fifteenth Centuries', in *Medieval Women and the Law,* ed. Noël James Menuge (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 125-44.
[3] Barbara Hanawalt, 'Whose Story Was This? Rape Narratives in Medieval English Courts', in *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England,* ed. Barbara Hanawalt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 124-41.

aims to produce. In so doing, I hope it may be possible to reconstruct something of the interests and perspectives of noble girls in late-medieval England.

Gender and the Prevalence of Abuse

As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, the extent to which children in the Middle Ages were subjected to abuse has been one of the primary points of contention in the last fifty years of research into medieval childhood. Although scholars working in this area have been sensitive to the impact of gender on children's lives and experiences, the extent to which the prevalence of different forms of child abuse varied by gender has not been one of the primary questions which they have addressed. It has generally been noted that cases of sexual abuse are most prevalent, or at any rate most visible, involving girls rather than boys. Thus Nicholas Orme, in his discussion of child sexual abuse, notes that the violation of virgin girls attracted particular disapproval among church writers.[4] From her analysis of London court records, Barbara Hanawalt suggests that young female servants were at particular risk of sexual exploitation by their masters and sometimes their mistresses acting in the role of procuratrices: 'In addition to the other vulnerabilities that female servants faced, they were subject to the threat of sexual assault. One is tempted to respond that surely young boys were equally vulnerable, but homosexuality does not appear in the records'.[5] The temptation to assume gender parity in the prevalence of abuse to which Hanawalt alludes is understandable given the increasing visibility of the sexual abuse of boys in today's culture. However, it does necessitate finding some other explanation (or explanations) for the fact that the medieval evidence is so skewed in one direction, which so far has not been forthcoming.

This temptation to assume parity is equally marked when it comes to scholarly assessments of the prevalence of physical abuse. Although a significant majority of the victims of physical abuse in the surviving court records are male, they have generally been treated by scholars as representative of the experience of children in general. Thus Nicholas Orme's brief discussion of physical abuse in his monograph *Medieval Children,* for example, notes that schoolmasters were often at fault, but does not comment on the fact that the examples he discusses all involve boys.[6] Barbara Hanawalt, in her discussion of violence between masters/mistresses and apprentices, gestures toward the gender discrepancy in the rates of physical abuse by drawing an equivalence between physical and sexual violence: 'For female apprentices, physical violence

[4] Orme, *Medieval Children,* 103.
[5] Hanawalt, *Growing Up,* 247.
[6] Orme, *Medieval Children,* 101.

sometimes took the form of rape or prostitution'.[7] However, as I will suggest, the aetiology of these different forms of violence may have been markedly different even if their manifestations shared features in common. From her examination of didactic literature, Shulamith Shahar has found that texts aimed at boys placed a far greater emphasis on beating as a pedagogical necessity than similar texts aimed at girls, and that 'beating was intended mainly for boys'.[8] She suggests that girls were seen as 'frailer and less rebellious than their brothers', and also notes that beating was commonly part of a Latin education from which girls were excluded.[9] However, she does not go on to explore how this translated into social practice, or whether it might have affected the rates at which boys and girls were subjected to physical abuse. This is perhaps because, as I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, Shahar views child abuse primarily as a form of individual psychopathology.

Given the problematic nature of the medieval evidence, it is easy to understand scholarly reluctance to make firm generalisations about relative rates of child abuse between gender groups on the basis of what survives. Indeed, the question of what to make of these apparent gender discrepancies in the rates of different forms of abuse cuts to the heart of the basic assumptions which we must all make as medievalists. Do we assume that child abuse has cultural causes and is liable to vary both qualitatively and quantitatively across time and place? Or, alternatively, do we assume that the causes of child abuse are largely trans-historical and that societies will differ only in the ways in which they conceptualise and deal with the problem? The possible interpretations of the evidence of the rates of child abuse in later medieval England fall between these two poles. At one (imaginary) pole lies uncritical acceptance that the discrepancy in the sources reflects a real discrepancy in medieval abuse rates. This interpretation is compatible with (although need not logically follow from) a radically constructivist view of the aetiology of child abuse. At the other pole is a 'steady state' theory of society in which abuse rates remain more or less constant and universal, and all apparent evidence to the contrary must thus be explained by other means; for example, incomplete record survival, differing likelihood of prosecution, or biases in record keeping. This interpretation is compatible with universalist (i.e. human-level) or individual-pathological explanations for the aetiology of child abuse.

Most historians of childhood, including those I have cited above, position themselves somewhere on the long continuum between these two extremes. My own starting point, while by no means radically constructivist, is perhaps a little further toward the constructivist end of

[7] Hanawalt, *Growing Up,* 214.
[8] Shahar, *Childhood,* 174.
[9] *Ibid.,* 175.

this continuum than historians such as Hanawalt, Shahar and Orme. In accordance with social ecological theory (and indeed the work of many other social theorists), I start my investigation of the medieval evidence from the position that the way in which societies conceptualise childhood at a discursive level, while by no means the sole determinant of the treatment of children, certainly has the potential to impact child abuse both qualitatively and quantitatively. In light of the gendered nature of the discourse which I have argued for above, this section will re-evaluate the available evidence of child abuse through a gendered lens, entertaining seriously the proposition that the discrepancies which emerge from the court records may, at least in part, reflect real discrepancies in the prevalence of different forms of abuse in medieval society.

Physical Abuse

The available records certainly suggest that extreme physical abuse in isolation (i.e. unconnected to sexual abuse) was a phenomenon more likely to be experienced by boys in later medieval England. Edmund Pellet, for example, alleged that when he was still an apprentice 'of tender age', his master had 'put a sharp nedill [needle] through his thomb'.[10] He further alleged that his master's wife had treated him cruelly when he was too young to seek restitution in the courts, claiming that she 'continuelly bete the seid Edmond not beying of power at that tyme nor discrecion to sue his remedie therfor after the course of the lawe'. The latter sentiment should alert us to the fact that the majority of boys and girls who were subjected to such treatment may have found it extremely difficult to pursue justice through the courts, and that what we are able to see is far from the complete picture. Edmund's case has only come to our attention because he ran away from his master and began studying to become a priest. Some time later, his master perceived that he was within the city of London and purchased a writ against him according to the Statute of Labourers which resulted in the erstwhile apprentice languishing in prison, whence his petition to the chancellor was directed. Edmund's allegations were thus not made during his 'tender age', but were a retrospective attempt to justify having left his master. Had this not come to a head later in his life, the vicious abuse which he alleges would have left no trace upon the historical record.

Given that men appear to have had more frequent interaction with the courts in later medieval England, it might be supposed that cases of physical abuse which were sometimes coincidentally recorded in this way should have come to light more often where they involved boys. William Waleys, for example, alleged that one Edward Randolf had tortured his apprentice, 'a chielde of his tendre age', in an attempt to extract from him an allegation that his master had been hunting.

[10] C1/155/43.

Having imprisoned both William and the child at Cranbourne in Dorsetshire, the plaintiff alleges that Randolf 'pit the seid chield into a depe pit and ther honged hym by a rope by the mydell to that entent to make hym vntruly sclaundre hise maistre of huntyng'.[11] The child was only released when it became apparent that he knew nothing of the matter. Again, the torture of the unnamed child is only recorded as part of an ongoing dispute between two men, and it is Waleys' own imprisonment and continuing dispute with Randolf which resulted in the creation of the record. The child's gender is significant however in that the testimony of a young girl, however it was extracted from her, would not have been permissible evidence which Randolf could have used to convict Waleys in a court of law. Moreover, it might be expected that a male apprentice would be privy to secrets of his master's affairs which a daughter or a female servant would not be assumed to have been able to pronounce on. Certainly this is the impression which can be gleaned from reading late medieval conduct literature with a bourgeois outlook, which, in line with similar instructions in apprenticeship indentures, commonly urged boys (but not girls) to keep the secrets of their masters.[12] In these ways, social and institutional expectations about boys and girls may have somewhat contributed to the child's torture in this case, albeit indirectly. Moreover, zooming out to the discursive level, it is worth considering whether the torture of a maiden of tender age in such circumstances might have been less likely in a culture which constituted the protection of young maidens as a hallmark of masculine identity.

While differences in recording physical child abuse may partly result from greater male interaction from the courts in general, this does not seem sufficient to account for the entirety of the observable gender discrepancy. Nor does this explanation appear to fit every case. In the late fifteenth century, Margaret, wife of John Hilton alleged that one John Carron, apprentice at that time to John Stirlond, London baker, had beaten her five-year-old child to death. Margaret herself had been in service with Stirlond at the time, when she claims that Carron 'sore beet a child of your seid suppliaunt beynge with in thage of v yer thurgh which betyng the seid child within ij dayes after descessid'.[13] A similar case of a boy being beaten to death appears in a coroner's account from 1324. John, son of William de Burgh, also aged just five years, died as a result of having been struck by Emma, wife of Richard le Latthere. The record states that Emma, 'chastising him, struck the said John with her right hand under his left ear ... so that he cried', and that the child later died of the blow.[14] His mother Isabella raised the hue and cry and Emma fled, before later surrendering herself to the prison of Newgate. No indictment was brought,

[11] C1/74/93.
[12] See for example Tauno Mustanoja, 'Myne Awen Dere Sone', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 49 (1948): 158, lines 285-90.
[13] C1/142/18.
[14] Reginald R. Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Coroners' Rolls of the City of London, A.D. 1300-1378* (London: Clay, 1913), 83.

presumably because the child died during the process of chastisement, and the coroner's roll notes that he 'died of the blow and not of any felony'.[15] Are we really to expect that such cases would not have come to court if the victims were female; that mothers such as Margaret and Isabella would have been less inclined or less able to pursue justice on behalf of their daughters? If this seems unlikely, we must consider alternative explanations for the relative absence of such cases involving young maidens.

Perhaps some explanation can be found in the fact that the deaths of both William de Burgh and the unfortunate child of Margaret Hilton both occurred in circumstances which, had they not proved fatal, would have been entirely normal. Beating at the hands of masters, older adolescents, or adults who felt wronged in some way was certainly part of the day-to-day lives of medieval boys, as has been explored above in Chapter 2. It is in this process of 'correction' that the majority of the cases of physical abuse in the records arose. In a touching case, John Webbe, an apprentice, appealed to the chancellor on behalf of his brother who was himself apprenticed to Thomas Coleman, a butcher of London.[16] Webbe alleges that his brother Thomas was suffering abuse at the hands of his master, who 'aynst all lawefull punnysshment smot the said brother of your suppliant on the hede with a staff which made hym fall to the ground'. John Webbe intervened, telling Coleman that he was misadvised to beat his apprentice so cruelly, whereupon Coleman 'of grete fury and cruelte ran to his said apprentice with the said staff by lyklyhod ne had not your said oratour ben present he wold a maymed or slayne the said Thomas'. According to John Webbe's testimony at least, Thomas was fortunate to escape the same fate as William de Burgh, yet his allegation is not that such violence was inherently wrong but that it was unreasonable and therefore unlawful: 'aynst all reson and lawefull correction'. A certain amount of physical violence against boys was thus justified and lawful because it was considered 'reasonable'. This was grounded in the assumption that mature men possessed a unique capacity for reason which children and women lacked, and it was this which justified their status as head of urban households.[17] According to the narrative which Webbe's account constructs, by submitting to fury and thus losing his grip on his emotions, Coleman had forfeited his claim to be acting in the service of manly reason. Had Coleman held back a little

[15] Hanawalt, *Growing Up,* 97.
[16] C1/66/236.
[17] See Shannon McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity in Late Medieval London Civic Culture: Governance, Patriarchy and Reputation', in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West,* ed. Jacqueline Murray (New York and London: Garland, 1999), 259-64; 'Jurors, Respectable Masculinity, and Christian Morality: A Comment on Marjorie McIntosh's *Controlling Misbehavior*', *Journal of British Studies* 37, no. 3 (1998): 269-7; Derek G. Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

and controlled his temper, striking his apprentice with a staff would perhaps have attracted little comment or censure.

The idea of 'reasonable and lawful correction' having been violated appears as a common motif in cases involving the physical abuse of boys in the late medieval Chancery petitions. Edmund Pellet, whose graphic depiction of a needle being forced through his thumb has already been elaborated, claimed that the act was 'ayens all reson and lawefull demeanyngg'. The continuous beatings he received at the hand of his mistress he also depicts as being 'without any resonable cause'.[18] So too the petition of Oliver Randy, a skinner's apprentice who describes himself as a young and poor child, far from his friends, who is being 'vnlaufulli chastisid' by his master. Randy's narrative characterises his master as an abusive drunk, who would come home late at night with his dagger drawn and beat his apprentice 'in his nakid bed', despite instructions that he should teach his apprentice adequately and subject him to 'non but resnab[ull] chastising'.[19] Randy alleges that he also mistreated his wife and his other servants to the extent that the latter departed his service. Like Thomas Webbe, he thus characterises his master as a man whose unreasoning conduct called into question his legitimacy to rule over his own household. The same motif appears again in the account of John Hewett, who petitioned the Chancellor to contest an accusation that he owed a debt to the master of one Thomas Lincolne for taking away his apprentice on the grounds that his master had subjected him to 'vnresonable entreatinge' and 'onreasonable betynge'. Hewett alleges that Lincolne's master beat him with 'tonges of iron and oder vnresonable wepons' so that, motivated by fear of his life, Thomas had sought out his help.[20] Despite its ubiquity in cases involving male children, the motif of 'reasonable' beating is rarely invoked in relation to female children in medieval discourse.

The use of weapons against children can perhaps be connected to the fact that boys were sometimes accused of such violent conduct themselves. In the late fifteenth century, two brothers who describe themselves in their petition to the Chancellor as both being within the age of twelve years, protested their innocence of the charge of having broken into the house of one Richard Bolte armed with knives and other weapons and having 'bete ij of his seruantz' and caused financial damages.[21] Their defence is that although they did go to the house in order to deliver a quart pot belonging to their father, they had not broken into the house but had simply quarrelled with one of the servants 'with their fistes and no nothir harms done'. Bolte's narrative

[18] C1/155/43.
[19] C1/107/27.
[20] C1/342/12.
[21] C1/64/912.

of two boys of this age housebreaking and beating servants with weapons, at least as it is retold in the boys' petition, seems implausible to modern eyes (and may indeed have been intended to seem so to medieval ones), yet it does align with the stereotypical child cast in the *Mundus et Infans* mould who was discussed above in Chapter 1. It is certainly difficult to imagine such allegations being made against two girls under the age of twelve in late medieval English culture, although in purely physical terms at least it should strike us as no more unlikely, since significant differences in size, body composition, and physical strength do not emerge between the sexes until the onset of puberty.[22] It is possible therefore that boys were seen not only as more inclined towards violence themselves but also as more physically robust than girls and thus able to withstand harsher punishment. This may have been one contributory factor to the increased instances of physical abuse in the records.

The justification for 'reasonable' beating (presumably with reasonable weapons) was the notion that children were inherently defective and predisposed to bad behaviour that needed to be corrected. Thus John Roberdson, a chaplain, appealed to the Chancellor to contest an allegation, which he alleges was financially motivated, that he had 'sore bete and hurte a chylde' who he was responsible for teaching. The father of the boy had apparently made the allegation in the course of a dispute over an unpaid loan to which Roberdson protests his innocence, arguing that he 'neuer hurt ne bete the seid child but as a child aught to be chastised for his lernyng'.[23] As I have argued in the preceding chapters, however, the idea that a child 'ought to be chastised' was not seen to pertain equally to both genders. Male children were seen as inherently more disposed towards violence and antisocial behaviour, and were thus susceptible to dehumanising treatment in the name of correcting this tendency. Moreover, 'correction' implies movement from a state which is considered problematic towards one which was held to be more desirable, a concept which makes far greater sense in light of medieval understandings of the male developmental trajectory from low to high, subhuman to human, than the female one from high to low. 'Reasonable' beating was thus beating in the service not only of deterring bad behaviour on behalf of the community but also the cultivation of reason in the child himself. Given that girls were not considered capable of developing reason to the same extent, and were largely thought to be free of the character defects which affected their brothers, the rationale for such corrective treatment is more difficult to tease out of medieval discourse. Indeed, the prevailing discourse called for the protection and preservation of young maidens from threats which came from without, rather than the correction of faults which lay within. This is not to say, of course, that girls were never beaten; merely that to the extent that discursive understandings of

[22] Jonathan Wells, 'Sexual dimorphism of body composition', *Best Practice & Research Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 21, no. 3 (2007): 415-430.
[23] C1/46/162; for a similar case see C1/61/390.

childhood impinged on the prevalence of child abuse, the construction of maidenhood may have acted as a protective influence against the extremes of physical chastisement, whereas the construction of male childhood likely had the opposite effect of exacerbating the problem.

Another related possibility is that responsibility for beating girls fell to mothers and mistresses rather than fathers and masters. Indeed, the only allegation of the excessive beating of a maiden which I have been able to discover in the Chancery petitions is in the petition of John Langrake, where he states that a girl of twelve told him that 'her maistresse had beten her oute of the hous'.[24] Joan had also alleged sexual abuse at the hands of Langrake himself which is why her allegation is preserved in the record, and the case will be discussed in further detail below. However, it is worth noting for now that whether the story is true or whether it was invented by Joan, or indeed if it was invented by Langrake in the course of creating his petition, the narrative of a young girl beaten and turned out of doors by her mistress seems perhaps to have been more credible in medieval culture than the same allegation laid at the feet of her master. In another reference to the excessive physical punishment of a female apprentice it is again a mistress rather than a master who is assigned responsibility. In an entry to the Plea and Memoranda rolls from 19 July 1364 it is recorded that Agnes, wife of John Cotiller, should instruct her apprentice Juseana in a proper manner, feed her appropriately, and that she would not beat her with a stick or a knife.[25] The specificity of the weapons cited here hints that the entry in the court record may have been a response to a complaint by Juseana that her mistress had been mistreating her. In 1373, Denise Bray too alleged that her mistress had committed assault against her while she was serving in the office of maid to William and Joan Atte Hall. They defended the charge on the grounds that Denise had called her mistress a liar during a heated exchange, and that Joan had therefore struck Denise on the jaw with her hand 'for the purpose of correction'.[26] It is certainly possible that the discursive positioning of mature masculinity in relation to young maidenhood in the role of protector rather than corrector translated into the social practice of delegating responsibility for the chastisement of daughters and female servants to the mistresses of medieval households. Given the fact that women were generally less likely to commit violent crimes in medieval society, this too may have acted to protect girls from some of the more extreme punishments meted out to their brothers.[27]

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[24] C1/64/1158.
[25] A. H. Thomas and P.E. Jones, ed., *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls 1324–1482,* 6 Vols. (Cambridge, 1924–61), I, 274 (hereafter *CPMR*).
[26] Morris S. Arnold, ed., *Select Cases of Trespass from the King's Courts, 1307-1399,* Vol. 1 (London: Selden Society, 1985), 14.
[27] Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: The Local Courts in Kent 1460-1560* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 63-69; Judith Bennett, *Women in the Medieval Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock Before the Plague* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39; Barbara Hanawalt, 'The Female Felon in Fourteenth Century England', *Viator* 5 (1974): 253-68; Marjorie McIntosh,

Indeed, it is possible that there was something of a social taboo against mature men beating young girls even for the purposes of correcting bad behaviour. In 1380, Adam de Durham faced an allegation of assault by his stepdaughter Joan Say, who had been 'of tender age' at the time that he had married her mother and had since been 'under their nurture' for fifteen years, acting as their servant. According to Adam's defence, Joan was disobedient and behaved badly towards her mother Cecily on a daily basis, as well as intentionally wasting three quarters of Adam's malt in brewing. On this particular occasion when Cecily had attempted to correct her daughter, Adam alleged that Joan had taken her mother's left thumb between her teeth and bitten it almost in two. Cecily feared she would die and raised the hue and cry. Responding to his wife's call and perceiving that Joan was continuing to injure her despite her being in peril of death, Adam claimed he had:

> immediately snatched the said Joan from her aforesaid mother; and in rescue of his aforesaid wife and for the purpose of correction, while thus snatching her away, he struck her with a stick which he had in his hand and specifically at the request of the aforesaid Cecily her mother under whose nurture, and the same Adam's, Joan was at that time.[28]

According to the Adam's narrative, it appears to have been Cecily who took primary responsibility for physically chastising her daughter. Adam takes pains to stress that he only struck Joan at the specific request of her mother, which implies that even under such extreme circumstances he felt the need to justify meting out physical punishment with a stick. Despite the severity of Joan's misdemeanour, Adam also appears to feel that the defence that he intervened for the 'purpose of correction' is insufficient, and he adds the reference to the rescue of his wife from a threat to her physical safety apparently to bolster his position. Adam thus attempts to cast himself in the role of protector while displaying a marked ambivalence about his role as corrector. This is suggestive of a social context in which the beating of maidens by grown men was justified only as a last resort.

A similar ambivalence toward the physical chastisement of maidens by mature men is apparent in the case of Isot Kirby, who alleged assault against her master John Raven in 1381 while she was 'of tender age'. In his defence, Raven claims that Isot was in danger of sliding into immorality: 'Isot was often drawn to boys and company unsuitable for her station and would

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Authority and Community: The Royal Manor of Havering, 1200-1500 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 210.

[28] Arnold, *Select Cases,* 24.

not comply with moral ways'.[29] He too is thus able to portray himself in the role of guardian and protector of maidenhood from the immoral influences external to the household, claiming that he 'reproved the same Isot for the purpose of correction and instruction and to draw her away from such company'. Raven admits that he 'chastised her on various occasions' but claims that he did so with 'small rods' (*parvis virgis*) which implies an unease with the admission of using weapons. This is a far cry from John Roberdson's defence discussed above, that all children 'ought to' be chastised in the course of their learning. Although the truth of Raven's and Adam's narratives is highly suspect and they are clearly designed to exonerate their tellers, the ways in which they are constructed are revealing. A cultural discourse which positioned the mature male as the protector of young maidens translated into a social practice which placed women in charge of disciplining female children and made it harder for men to justify physically abusing maidens before the courts.

This is not to say of course that such abuse never took place or that such elaborate justifications are necessarily to be believed. In 1376, William de Latchford defended an allegation that he had committed assault against his stepdaughter Matilda, who was 'at that time under age'.[30] He claimed that he had administered nothing more than 'a slap for the purpose of correction' in response to serious wrongdoing on the part of Matilda, who had 'wickedly' delivered his goods and chattels to various men. However, upon later examination of Matilda's wounds, including the maiming of her little finger on her left hand, the justices decided in her favour and even increased the damages which he owed her by ten marks above the twenty pounds which had previously been assessed by the jurors, bringing the total awarded to forty marks.[31] Clearly in this case the account offered by Latchford was not to be believed. There are many other legal accounts which allege the assault on female servants which do not provide enough detail to judge what might have happened. John Steel, for instance, complained that Richard Wydurley 'with force of arms (a staff) made an assault on Joan his daughter and servant, beat and maltreated her so that he lost Joan's service for a long time'.[32] Alice, daughter of Roger of Fillingham alleged that on 31 December 1354 Alice, wife of William of Radford of Nottingham, 'wounded, beat, and maltreated her against the peace so that she despaired for her life'. [33] Alice pled by her guardian which suggests young age, but there is no indication as to whether the assailant was her mistress, acquaintance, or a stranger. However, the surviving cases do illustrate

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[29] *Ibid.,* 26.
[30] *Ibid.,* 22.
[31] *Ibid.,* 23-24.
[32] *Nottingham Borough Court Rolls 1303-1457* (University of Nottingham), www.nottingham.ac.uk/ucn/onlinesources/index.aspx [accessed July 30, 2019], CA1340, no. 189. Hereafter *NBCR.*
[33] *NBCR,* CA1266, no. 126.

the complex mix of factors at different levels of the ecology which interacted in order to both contribute to and mitigate against the physical abuse of maidens. These included the behaviour of the child herself; familial circumstances such as step-parent families; wider networks of relationships; legal institutions and legislative frameworks; social norms; and cultural conceptions of gender and childhood.

Another context in which physical abuse of maidens was alleged was that of disputed marriage cases appearing in the church courts. In 1488, for example, Margaret Heed was beaten by her father and called a 'whore' because she appeared reluctant to marry William Hawkyns and had apparently secretly professed her love for another man.[34] Despite her father's violent intervention, her stepmother deposed that at the time of her beating Margaret said, 'I will never have Hawkyns'.[35] Margaret's precise age is not recorded; she must have been at least sixteen years old because Gregory Brent, ironmonger, testified that he had known her for that amount of time, but she may not have been much older.[36] Even more extreme physical violence was threatened against Alice Bellamy in York in 1361/2, whose great uncle told her he would put her down a well if she refused to marry in line with his wishes.[37] Where abuse arose in such circumstances, it is probably best explained at the level of familial circumstances and the desire of parents to force their offspring to conform to their wishes, rather than in terms of legitimate correction and the discursive constructs of childhood and maidenhood. Both boys and girls could be subjected to coercion in the making of marriages, particularly if they were underage as in the case of William Crane, whose aunt Elizabeth Crane threatened to cut off his ear if he failed to marry Alice Draycote.[38] However, given that young men probably enjoyed greater freedom than young women to contract marriages free from parental interference, it is likely that maidens faced a correspondingly greater threat of physical abuse in the service of coercion.

Both boys and girls also appear in the records alleging that they had been falsely imprisoned. In the later fifteenth century Joan Style, described by her mistress as 'a may child' of the age of seven years, petitioned the chancellor stating that Thomas Waferer had had her arrested and held in prison for eight days because of the 'malice and euyll wille' that he bore against her

[34] LMA, DL/C/A/001/MS09065B, 13v-14r. Accessed online at Shannon McSheffrey, ed., *Consistory: Testimony in the Late Medieval London Consistory Court* (University of Concordia), http://consistory.cohds.ca/ [accessed July 30, 2019]; For fuller discussion see Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 74-77.
[35] LMA, DL/C/A/001/MS09065B, 12rv, ed. McSheffrey, *Consistory*.
[36] LMA, MS DL/C/A/001/MS09065B, 14v-15r, ed. McSheffrey, *Consistory*.
[37] BIHR, CP.E.85.
[38] BIHR, CP.E.23.

mistress.[39] Apparently Thomas had caused an Alderman of the city to lay his commandment against her so that she was not able to be released on bail. Johanne's petition was evidently successful and she was released, but her mistress herself was subsequently imprisoned by the same Thomas whence she too petitioned the Chancellor for her release.[40] Joan's case is particularly interesting as it is the only case of a young girl petitioning apparently on her own behalf, although the circumstances surrounding the creation of the record are of course impossible to ascertain. John Pye relied on his mother to appeal on his behalf when, at the age of fourteen, he was kept in prison in Newgate by his master for a period of half a year. The language of his mother's petition clearly attempts to cast him in the role of an abused child despite his relatively advanced years: 'th[e] childe is naked nat hauyng mete or drinke almost and nerehande vterrly destroid'.[41] The petition also alleges that he was enrolled by his master in the gild hall whilst he was underage, and attempts to portray him as helpless and alone, begging the Chancellor to consider 'howe the seide child hathe no ffader liffyng ne frendes to helpe hym'. Given that negotiating service and apprenticeship contracts featured in the lives of many boys and girls at one time or another, the potential for abuse to occur as a result of relations turning sour was something about which children of both genders needed to be wary.[42]

Sexual Abuse

Extreme physical violence against maidens appears most commonly in circumstances which suggest that sexual abuse rather than chastisement or anger was the motivating factor. Isabel, servant of George Isebare of London had her master imprisoned because she claimed 'that he shuld with force offende ayenst hir', a phrase which does not strictly allege rape but certainly implies it.[43] Agnes, daughter of Emma Godwyne de Westhorp was the victim of even more extreme violence at the hands of Richard, son of Richard Herbet in July 1315. Her appeal states that Richard 'trampled the aforesaid Agnes with his feet and knees in the Vill of Westhorp and he wanted to lay with her if he could but the said Richard could not violate the said Agnes because of her young age'.[44] Attempted rape also seems the likely motive for the attack which took place on Edith Clerkes, aged 11, in Dorset in 1363 by John Samwell of Whitchurch. The record alleges that Samwell 'seized' (*rapuit*) Edith against her will, beat and wounded her and evilly dragged her away' and 'inflicted other enormities' on her so that she 'despaired of her

[39] C1/46/64.
[40] C1/46/84.
[41] C1/19/466.
[42] For another example involving female servant coerced into signing an apprenticeship contract under threat of beating, see *CPMR,* Vol. 4*,* 53-54.
[43] C1/46/24.
[44] JUST 1/850, m. 2.

life'.[45] Other cases in which the rape of underage maidens was completed depict even more extreme violence being visited upon their bodies. Alice Ambroys, for example, was raped in 1308/9 by a certain Menaldus de la Port of Bordeaux. The record states that he 'threw the same Alice onto his bed and because of the young age of the same Alice the same Menaldus vilely broke her limb and fractured her back, of which breaking and fracturing of the back the aforesaid Alice died within fifteen days'.[46] If the physical abuse of boys ever arose in similar circumstances, the true nature of these crimes has left no trace upon the historical record. It seems implausible that such extreme crimes could have been overlooked which may suggest that they occurred with a lower frequency, although it is of course possible that they were prosecuted instead as assaults or murders, with the sexual details either missed or intentionally omitted due to the fact that there was no legal concept of the rape of boys.

Attempting to assess the real prevalence of sexual violence against young girls is likely a thankless task, but the relative frequency with which such cases came to the attention of authorities in comparison to boys in this period is striking. Alan Kissane has identified fourteen cases of rape involving girls under twelve from the period c.1235 to c.1435, drawing primarily upon sources from the various royal courts.[47] To this may be added a case from the Canterbury ecclesiastical courts of 1532 in which John Lambrest alias Hammon was cited for adultery with the seven-year old Thomasine Stone as well as another unnamed girl of the age of twelve.[48] In other cases, girls are at or near the age of canonical consent yet their ages were still thought notable enough to be recorded by the scribes. Agnes, formerly servant of Robert Dyon of Laiceby was violently raped aged twelve in 1380 and Katherine, daughter of Margaret More, was raped whilst under the age of thirteen in Fraunkeley, Worcestershire in 1477/8.[49] Joan, servant of William West, also alleged that she was sexually assaulted by John Langrake in London at the age of twelve, and one Henry Drables was tried for the rape of Denise Bryde 'aged under thirteen' (*infra etatem tredecim annorum*) in 1537.[50] Above the age of consent but nonetheless young enough to have been considered physically and socially immature, Agnes Neilesone and Isabel Gregesone, were raped in Yorkshire in 1334, both at the age of fourteen.[51]

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[45] JUST 3/150, m. 4d.
[46] JUST 1/547A, m. 1.
[47] Kissane, 'Unnatural in Body', 91.
[48] KHLC, PRC.3.8 fol. 30r.
[49]Elisabeth G. Kimball, ed., *Some Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire,1381-1396,* Vol. 2. (Hereford: The Lincoln Record Society, 1962), 152-3 (no. 412); Bertha Haven Putnam, ed., *Proceedings Before the Justices of the Peace in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, Edward III to Richard III* (London : Spottiswoode, Ballantyne & Co, 1938), 429.
[50] C1/64/1158; CCA, CC/J/Q/336 fol. 1r.
[51] JUST 3/81/2.

As other scholars have pointed out, these cases which came to court likely represent only a small fraction of the total number of cases of child sexual abuse in the period.[52] Two of the perpetrators were apparently Gascon merchants, Menaldus de la Porte who is discussed above and Raymond of Limoges who was accused of the rape of Joan le Seler (Saddler) in 1320. Given that both of these cases apparently occurred within ten years of one another in the same Ward (Vintry) in London, it is possible to speculate that both may have been connected to some form of organised child sex trade catering to merchants. In Menaldus's case at least, this is suggested by the involvement of Agnes la Rousse who led Agnes to the chamber in which she was raped, and who Kissane suggests may have been 'a procuress catering for those whose sexual tastes ran to the very young'.[53] However, is also highly likely that cases involving foreign perpetrators were more likely to be believed and thus to attract prosecution.[54] The overrepresentation of French merchants in the surviving record even though they must have represented a relatively small proportion of the actual perpetrators of rape against children provides further evidence that the real figures for such crimes were far higher.

Assessing the extent to which girls were at risk of sexual abuse is further complicated by the fact that medieval scribes apparently took a somewhat inconsistent approach to the recording of ages in cases relating to the rape of maidens. While it seems that they were more likely to note the age if the girl was young, this was not always the case, as in the case of Alice Ambroys who is described only as being a minor (*minorem etatem*).[55] Where the maiden was at or near the age of consent, her age was sometimes recorded, as in the cases of fourteen-year-old Agnes Neilesone and Isabel Gregesone, but there is every reason to suspect that age was sometimes omitted by court clerks in similar circumstances. There are many more cases involving girls whose age is not given, but who were clearly in a socially immature position and may well have been considered children by some in medieval society. Robert and Isabel Trenender of Bristol, for example, pled for a writ of *sub poena* to be issued against Philip Rychard who had defiled their daughter Agnes and then failed to settle upon her the agreed sum toward her marriage in compensation.[56] Agnes is certainly identified as a type of child (daughter) rather than a type of woman in the petition, and her socially immature position is evident in the fact that her parents took up the matter on her behalf. As well as the seven-year-old Thomasine Stone in ecclesiastical court records of Canterbury we find the rape of Margaret, daughter of John Childnell, the rape

[52] Kissane, 'Unnatural in Body', 91-2; Martin Ingram, 'Child Sexual Abuse in Early modern England', in *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland,* ed. M. J. Braddick and J. Walter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 64.
[53] Kissane, 'Unnatural in Body', 100.
[54] For further examples of rape by French men, see Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime,* 80-1, and KB 27/47, m.22d.
[55] JUST 1/547A, m. 1.
[56] C1/45/24.

of a servant (*puella*) of John Grene and the attempted rape of another, as well as the attempted rape of the daughter of William Harris. Although no specific ages are given in these cases, Karen Jones interprets these too to have been 'young girls'.[57] In other cases there is some circumstantial evidence which is suggestive of a young victim. Elena Paternoster appealed Peter Gillingham, another Gascon Merchant, for rape in 1278, alleging that he had carried (*portauit*) her into a room and placed (*posuit*) her on a bed before raping her virginity.[58] These details may perhaps be taken to suggest that Elena was young, or at least of small enough stature to be carried in from the street by a grown man.

Despite numerous cases involving underage girls appearing across various court records, I have been unable to turn up a single prosecution in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries which records the sexual abuse of a young boy. As I have argued above in relation to maidens and physical abuse, this does not imply that such problems never took place as it is clear from other sources that they sometimes did. As I suggested above in Chapter 2, the problem seems to have been particularly associated with institutional contexts in which paedophiles could gain access to large numbers of children with relatively little oversight. The records of religious communities for example regulate contact between monks and young boys, presumably in an attempt to prevent such abuse from occurring, and monks had a reputation for pederasty which goes back at least to the twelfth century.[59] The register of Merton College, Oxford records a case from 21 July 1492 in which one Richard Edmund was accused of sexually abusing boys or young men. The charges of which Edmund was accused include that he 'incited and provoked various and diverse youths to sin against nature, and even more that [he] wretchedly abused certain of these in the same sin at various times to the great peril of [his] soul and the great scandal and no little infamy of our college'.[60] It appears however that such cases rarely came before the courts in late medieval England.

There are multiple possible reasons why the sexual abuse of girls was prosecuted relatively widely in comparison to that of boys. Some of these are particular to medieval culture. The shame attached to homosexual acts and the fact that they too would be implicated as participants in the sin of sodomy may have deterred victims from reporting their crimes, although shame

[57] Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime*, 80.
[58] KB 24/47, m. 22d.
[59] Orme, *Medieval Children,* 104.
[60] Rev H. E. Salter, ed., *Registrum Annalium Collegii Mertonensis, 1483-1521* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 162 [varios & diversos juvenes ad peccatum contra naturam incitasti & prouocasti, et eis vel saltem eorum quibusdam in eodem peccato variis temporibus miserabiliter abusus es in maximum tue anime periculum & in colegii nostri immensum scandalum & infamiam non mediocrem].

and social stigma were also factors which affected female victims of rape. Medieval English legal commentators such as Bracton defined rape as a crime specifically committed against women, and indeed it may not have been possible to prosecute the rape of boys as anything other than an assault in the secular courts, or a sin in the ecclesiastical courts which would implicate both parties.[61] As Kim Phillips has pointed out, the value of female virginity in the marriage market created a financial incentive to prosecute the rape of girls, and this was absent in the case of boys. However, it is also likely that the higher number of prosecutions is evidence that girls did in fact face a higher risk of sexual abuse than boys in late medieval England. Some of the reasons for this disparity may be transhistorical; across the world, girls today report higher rates of childhood sexual assault than boys, for reasons which can have little to do with the peculiarities of medieval culture.[62] However, cultural factors can certainly impinge on the prevalence of abuse; for example it is relatively uncontroversial to say that pederasty was more common in Ancient Greece due in part to the cultural construction of the pubescent male as a desirable sexual partner for an older man. In medieval English culture, the boy was less likely to be held up as a sexualised ideal – characters such as Lybeaus and Perceval loom large over the discourse of medieval boyhood and one would have to squint hard in order to imagine them as the epitome of sexual desirability. In the case of girls, it is likely that the elision of the qualities of childhood with the qualities of desirable femininity, and particularly the sexual attractiveness of virginity and the notion of purity that female childhood represented, created an increased level of attraction to young girls compared to young boys in medieval England, and that this contributed to some extent to their elevated risk of abuse.

Support for this view comes from one of the few contemporary attempts to understand the aetiology of child sexual abuse: Gower's discussion of rape in his *Mirour de l'Omme.* For Gower, the desire to rape a woman is synonymous with the desire for virginity. He characterises the male rapist as 'a sinner of evil habits, for he desires no woman unless she is a virgin'.[63] He goes on to locate the primary motivation for the rape of young girls precisely in the desirability of virginity:

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[61] *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England,* Vol. 2*,* trans. Samuel E. Thorne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 414-18.

[62] Sherry Hamby, David Finkelhor, and Heather Turner, 'Perpetrator and Victim Gender Patterns for 21 Forms of Youth Victimization in the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence', *Violence and Victims* 28, no. 6 (2013): 915-939; Nadeeka K. Chandraratnea, Asvini D. Fernandob, and Nalika Gunawardena, 'Physical, Sexual and Emotional Abuse During Childhood: Experiences of a Sample of Sri Lankan Young Adults', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 81 (2018): 214-24.

[63] John Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme,* trans. William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), 120.

> Less intelligent still, I am certain, is the man who goes seeking in a young virgin what he has not been able to do previously because her tender childishness was inadequate. He who commits lechery with such a girl is unnatural in body and a villain in soul.[64]

In Gower's understanding, the attraction of the rapist is to female virginity in the abstract; no distinction is made between pre- and post-pubescent girls, and indeed it is only the maiden child's physical unsuitability for intercourse that prevents the villainous rapist from fulfilling his desires sooner. And it was female virginity specifically which attracted both the strength of desire and the concomitant strength of social taboo. Gower makes only a brief and mocking assessment of the foolish 'old hag' who 'adorns herself and makes herself dainty' in order to entice a male youth and have his 'first fruits'. She is hardly a dangerous or villainous threat. The rape of maidenhood on the other hand is conceptualised as a manifestation of bestial, predatory, unreasoning desire. If the rapist fails to convince the maiden with sly words to submit to his desires then, 'in a rage like a wild beast when hunger oppresses it and it is famished for his prey, he forces her virginity'.[65] Gower's evocation of a gustatory metaphor in order to express revulsion at the rape of young maidens is noteworthy as it is by no means unique in medieval culture. Indeed, in the following section, the metaphor of wrong eating will be shown to play a crucial role in the conceptualisation of the rape of young girls in late-medieval England.

Rape Narratives in the Courts

In London in the second half of the fifteenth Century, Richard Roberd, a priest and a bachelor of law, petitioned the Chancellor to contest an action of trespass brought by one John Nele. Motivated, according to Richard's testimony, by the desire to 'opteyne a lucre' [monetary gain], Nele had alleged that the priest had 'defloured his doughter of the age of 5 yere to abbhomynably to speke of'.[66] Whether the allegation was in fact true or whether it was false, as Roberd protested, the language he used in his petition is instructive of the way in which the rape of young maidens was conceptualised within the various institutions which constituted the late-medieval legal system. The crime of deflowering a five-year-old girl was 'abhominable', a word which bore two important and interconnected connotations in Middle English. Perhaps most commonly, 'abhominable' could be used to describe things that were morally wrong, detestable or odious.[67] Thus Gower's *Confessio Amantis,* recounting the deeds of King Siculus, describes tyranny and cruelty as 'abhominable' to God.[68] However, the word could also be used in a more

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[64] *Ibid.,* 120.
[65] *Ibid.,* 120.
[66] C1/66/233
[67] MED, 'abhominable (adj.)'.
[68] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* Vol. 3, ed. Russell A. Peck (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), Book 7, line 3337.

visceral sense to describe the physically disgusting loathsome, repulsive, or nauseating, and carried connotations of wrong eating and of revulsion at rotten food.[69] Thus Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* informs the reader that, 'Stynkynge þinges beth horrible to þe tast and abhominable to the stomak'.[70] The physically and morally foul was closely associated with the monstrous; John Walton's translation of Boethius describes the defilement of virtue by sin as 'Abhominable and verrey monstruouse'.[71] In his *Festial* sermon collection, John Mirk recounts a somewhat bizarre *exemplum* from the *Legenda Aurea* which neatly encapsulates the salient features of the 'abhominable' in late-medieval thought. The Emperor Nero, having killed his own mother and cut her open to examine her womb, is overtaken by a sudden desire to become pregnant himself. With the help of his physicians, he drinks a potion containing a frog which he nourishes and grows in his belly. When the pain of his grisly cargo becomes too great, his physicians give him another potion which causes him to vomit up the frog in a gross inversion of the natural birthing process. The resultant 'foule chyld' which emerges is described as 'lappyd [enveloped] in glette [slime] and fulthe, and abominabull forto loke on'.[72] As Mirk's *exemplum* makes clear, the abominable could imply more than simply moral evil. It was a concept which encompassed that which was against God and nature, animal/human hybridity, the filthy and foul, the violation of human corporeal integrity, and the oozing and slime of bodily processes.

The connection between the visceral sensation of rejection experienced with wrong consumption and the ethical condemnation of the rape of young girls is also present in the petition to the Chancellor of John Langrake, citizen and barber of London. Langrake tells a somewhat confusing story in which, returning home, he found Joan, the seven-year-old servant of William West, sitting alone in a doorway 'quakyng and chyverryng for colde'.[73] Langrake claims he took pity on Joan, brought her into his house, fed her supper, and returned her home the next morning, only to discover ten days later that she had made an allegation of rape against him. Again, irrespective of whether Langrake's account represents (as he portrays it) the indignant and forthright defence of an innocent man, or the carefully constructed lie of a child rapist confident in his ability to discredit the only witness to his crime, the terms in which the allegation is portrayed are instructive. According to Langrake, it was alleged that he had 'devoured' the said Joan. Like the Giant of Mont St. Michel who raped young maidens and

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[69] MED, 'abhominable (adj.)'.
[70] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum,* Vol. 2, trans. John Trevisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1339.
[71] *Boethius: De Consolatione Philosophiae,* trans. John Walton*,* ed. M. Science, EETS, O.S. 170 (1927; reprint 1971), 214.
[72] John Mirk *, Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus*, ed. T. Erbe. EETS, E.S. 96 (London: Trübner, 1905), 194.
[73] C1/64/1158; for discussion see Hanawalt, *Growing Up,* 183-4.

'clenly deworyd' the 'knaue childyre', or King Aestrathes who devoured his own daughter's flesh, Langrake presents the rape of a child in terms which evoke the violation of gustatory as well as sexual taboos.[74] The uncultured, animalistic, inhuman mode of eating implied by 'devoured' is combined with the idea of breaking the fundamental prohibition against perhaps the most 'unnatural' act of them all: the cannibalisation of one's own young. The maiden's body is imagined not only as sexually violated but as torn apart as if by wild animals, chewed, mixed with saliva, rendered oozy and slimy and greedily incorporated into the body of an 'other', to be subjected to the vile indignity of digestion. Like Richard Roberd, John Langrake attempts to distance himself from the crime by evoking the sensation of bodily revulsion and sickness associated with consumption that is foul and forbidden. To translate the concept into modern parlance, these two men portrayed the rape of children as disgusting.

The emotion of disgust has witnessed an explosion of interest in recent years. As Nina Strohminger puts it, 'Disgust is the unlikely academic star of our time. In just a few years it has gone from black sheep to hot topic'.[75] Scholars working across a range of disciplines have noted the role that disgust plays in structuring social life, in the formation of moral judgements, and in the cultural production of socio-moral taboos. In this section I will analyse the surviving accounts of the rape of young girls in light of the recent theoretical advances which have been made in this field. I will begin by briefly sketching out the relevant anthropological and social psychological literature on disgust and the related concepts of pollution, contamination and purity. In light of this, I will then move on to an analysis of the narratives of child rape that are constructed in the medieval court records, and the ways in which they relate to the broader discourse of maidenhood which was the subject of the preceding chapter. I will argue that the primary means by which the rape of young maidens was conceptualised in the medieval courts was disgust at the violation of the cultural ideal of purity which they represented rather than the physical and emotional harm inflicted upon the victims as autonomous individuals. I will also consider the implications which this had for the maidens themselves and the ways in which they may have processed the crimes which had been committed against them.

Purity, Pollution and the Disgusting

Much of the groundwork for contemporary interest in disgust and its role in the construction of social norms and values was laid in the field of anthropology, and in particular by Mary

[74] Valerie Krishna, ed., *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition,* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1976), lines 851, 850.
[75] Strohminger, 'Disgust', 478.

Douglas's pioneering 1966 study *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Purity and Taboo.* Douglas argued that cultural ideas about 'clean' and 'unclean' are more than simply issues of hygiene and sanitation but are fundamental to much human thought, underpinning the ways in which cultures construct and maintain boundaries between the centre and the margins, order and disorder, the sacred and the profane.[76] As I argued in the previous chapter, maidenhood was deeply intertwined with the construction of these very boundaries in late medieval England, fulfilling a discursive function to symbolise that which the monstrous, the demonic, and the devil most desires and which human society must strive at all costs to protect. According to Douglas' structuralist account, notions of 'pollution' arise out of this process of ordering and systematising matter; the dirty, dangerous and contaminating are associated with things which do not fit into these ordering structures but resist the systematizing process and remain anomalous: 'Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter'.[77] For Douglas, this process of social construction is arbitrary: there is no 'absolute dirt' but rather that which is dirty, dangerous, or contaminating should be best understood as 'matter out of place'.[78]

More recently, Richard Shweder and his colleagues have proposed that notions of purity and pollution underpin many of the ethical judgements which societies make about transgressions of accepted norms of behaviour. They suggest that at least three important ethical discourses are employed in the policing of moral transgressions, which they term the 'Ethics of Autonomy', the 'Ethics of Community' and the 'Ethics of Divinity'.[79] The first of these, autonomy, relies on concepts such as harm, rights and justice to protect the ability of individuals to make free choices. The second, community, employs the concepts of duty, hierarchy and interdependency to protect the integrity of social and community structures. The final ethic, that of divinity, aims to protect the soul as well as natural, spiritual and moral order from degradation, and is regulated via concepts such as the natural order, sanctity, sin and pollution. These three ethics are grounded in subtly different concepts of the person: a free individual (autonomy), an interdependent group-family-community member (community), and a creature close to God bearing a soul (divinity). Building upon Shweder's work, Jonathan Haidt has shown that modern, educated Westerners tend to place a near-exclusive emphasis on the ethics of autonomy and on concepts such as harm, rights and justice when forming moral judgements. In a cross-cultural

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[76] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1966]).
[77] *Ibid.,* 44.
[78] *Ibid.,* 50.
[79] Richard Shweder, Nancy Much, Manamohan Mahapata and Lawrence Park, 'The "Big Three" of Morality (Autonomy, Community, Divinity) and the "Big Three" Explanations of Suffering', in *Morality and Health: Interdisciplinary Perspectives,* ed. Allan Brandt and Paul Rozin (New York: Routledge, 1997), 119-69.

study of the ways in which different social violations are conceptualised and moralised, Haidt demonstrates that this Western pattern is in fact unusual and that people in most cultures make use of a broader range of ethics in policing moral violations.[80] He proposes an expanded typology of intuitions which guide moral judgements, subdividing Shweder's ethics of autonomy and community into Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity, In-group/Loyalty and Authority/Respect, but retaining the ethics of divinity under the heading of Purity/Sanctity.[81]

In line with Haidt's findings, our modern Western concept of Child Abuse is fundamentally grounded in Shweder's 'ethics of autonomy'. The concept of 'the child' upon which it is based is an autonomous individual possessed of certain rights, who must be protected from harm and to whom society owes a duty of care. Thus in the UK Child Abuse is defined by the NSPCC as:

> any action by another person – adult or child – that *causes significant harm* to a child. It can be physical, sexual or emotional, but can just as often be about a lack of love, care and attention [my emphasis].[82]

The ethic of autonomy and the prevention of harm is also codified in international child-protection legislation, for example the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The latter stresses each individual child's right to be protected 'from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse'.[83] For modern lawmakers, judges, and childcare professionals, the moral and legal prohibition of the abuse of children is first and foremost a matter of protecting vulnerable individuals from being harmed. Sexual abuse is conceptualised as a form of violence or injury, both mental and physical, which violates their right to bodily autonomy. Given the findings of researchers such as Haidt, however, it is important to bear in mind that our own moral intuition to conceptualise child sexual abuse in this way may not have been shared by people living in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.

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[80] Jonathan, Haidt, Silvia Helena Koller, and Maria G. Dias, 'Affect, Culture, and Morality, or Is it Wrong to Eat Your Dog?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65, no. 4 (1993): 613-28.
[81] Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph, 'The Moral Mind: How Five Sets of Innate Intuitions Guide the Development of Many Culture-Specific Virtues, and Perhaps Even Modules', *The Innate Mind: Foundations and the Future Volume 3 (Evolution and Cognition),* ed. Peter Carruthers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 367-91.
[82] NSPCC, 'Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect', https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/ [accessed May 5, 2019].
[83] Unicef UK, 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/ [accessed July 30, 2019].

Social psychologists have sought to understand the connection between the different forms of moral judgement which anthropologists such as Shweder and Douglas have identified and the so-called 'moral emotions' of contempt, shame and disgust. Particularly influential in this area has been the work of Paul Rozin, who has argued for a corresponding emotional component to Shweder's three ethics; violations of the ethic of autonomy tend to arouse anger, violations against the community are more likely to arouse contempt, and actions which violate the ethic of divinity, purity or sanctity are associated with an emotional response of disgust.[84] Disgust has been shown to play an important role in policing the boundaries between the pure and polluted, the sacred and profane, the divine and the diabolical. Although the particular actions which are considered morally impure or corrupting vary considerably across cultures, the tendency to describe these kinds of immoral acts as disgusting is a ubiquitous tendency.[85] In contrast to Douglas's account which sees the moralisation of purity and impurity as arbitrarily constructed, Rozin notes the marked tendency of different cultures to construct similar categories of things as disgusting. These include certain foods; animals such as cockroaches; bodily extrusions such as faeces, snot, semen and menstrual blood; taboo sexual acts (in particular incest); and violations of the body envelope such as mutilating injuries or infected wounds (i.e. gore). He suggests that one feature which unites these varied elements is that they violate the boundary which cultures tend to construct between humanity (possessed of a divine soul) and other living creatures, and serve as reminders to human beings of their animal nature.

In much the same way as medieval discourse connected physical revulsion with moral abomination, Rozin argues that oral and moral disgust originate in the same physiological and psychological mechanisms. He and others have proposed that the emotion of disgust originally evolved as a form of 'intuitive microbiology' to protect the human body from the contaminating influence of poisonous or decaying food.[86] This so-called 'core disgust' was later harnessed to play a wider role in policing social norms as culture played an ever-increasing role in our evolutionary history:

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[84] Paul Rozin, Laura Lowery, Sumio Imada and Jonathan Haidt, 'The CAD Triad Hypothesis: A Mapping Between Three Moral Emotions (Contempt, Anger, Disgust) and Three Moral Codes (Community, Autonomy, Divinity)', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76, No. 4 (1999): 574-86.
[85] Jonathan Haidt, Clark McCauley and Paul Rozin, 'Individual Differences in Sensitivity to Disgust: A Scale Sampling Seven Domains of Disgust Elicitors', *Personality and Individual Differences* 16, No. 5 (1994): 701-713; Jonathan Haidt, Paul Rozin, Clark McCauley and Sumio Imada, 'Body, Psyche, and Culture: The Relationship between Disgust and Morality', *Psychology and Developing Societies* 9, No. 1 (1997): 108-31; Robin L. Nabi 'The Theoretical Versus the Lay Meaning of Disgust: Implications for Emotion Research', *Cognition & Emotion*, 16, No. 5, (2002): 695-703
[86] Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: Norton, 1997), p. 383; see also Paul Rozin and April E. Fallon, 'A Perspective on Disgust', *Psychological Review* 94, no. 1 (1987): 23-41.

> Core disgust may have been preadapted as a rejection system, easily harnessed to other kinds of rejection. This harnessing, or accretion of new functions, may have happened either in biological evolution or cultural evolution.[87]

While the evolutionary origins must necessarily remain somewhat speculative, a growing body of research now bears out the hypothesis that the connections between oral and moral disgust are more than linguistic and metaphorical. Inducing people to feel disgust, for example by exposing them to a bad smell, showing a disgusting video or asking them to recall a disgusting experience has been shown to increase the severity of the moral judgements they make. So too with gustatory experiences; consuming a bitter-tasting drink has also been shown to induce people, on average, to judge moral transgressions more harshly than a control group who consumed only water. Moral and physical disgust also elicit a similar physiological response in that they have been shown to activate the same facial muscles and brain regions. In the USA, sensitivity to disgusting stimuli has been shown to correlate with political beliefs, with high disgust sensitivity associated with more socially conservative views on socio-moral issues.[88] We should therefore take seriously references to disgust and conflations of the oral and moral in accounts such as Roberd's and Langrake's as more than simply window dressing in a legalistic narrative. Instead, the metaphorical understandings they evoke may be deeply revealing of the ways in which the immorality of the rape of young girls was conceptualised within medieval society, processed in courtrooms, and experienced at an embodied emotional level by medieval people including girls themselves.

Rozin's work has proved highly influential with scholars interested in theorising disgust and illuminating its role in the construction of social and legal power structures. Martha Nussbaum has critiqued the role of disgust in the modern legal system, arguing that although disgust can offer some limited guidance about acts which should be criminalised, it is a dangerous force in that the notions of purity and contamination which it supports are highly conducive to the political subordination of vulnerable groups. She notes, for example, that 'the *locus classicus* of group-directed projective disgust is the female body', and disgust properties such as sliminess, bad smell, decay and foulness have throughout history been associated with marginalised groups and ethnic 'others'. As Nussbaum puts it: 'next door to the fantasy of a pure state is a highly dangerous and aggressive xenophobia'.[89] William Miller also places the 'us' versus 'them' distinction at the centre of his 'anatomy of disgust', arguing that disgust plays a key role in the

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[87] Jonathan Haidt, Paul Rozin, Clark McCauley and Sumio Imada, 'Body, Psyche, and Culture: The Relationship between Disgust and Morality', *Psychology and Developing Societies* 9, No. 1 (1997): 124.
[88] For an overview of this research, see Strohminger, 'Disgust Talked About', 484-85.
[89] Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 111; 107.

production of hierarchical social and moral categories. He notes that in the Middle Ages, disgust was frequently focussed on groups such as Jews, lepers, heretics and women, pointing out, for example, that Jews were associated with excrement and menstrual blood and that Jewish men were believed to menstruate: 'Jewish men were thus feminized and all women were thus Judaized to make both more disgusting, more dangerous than they had been before'.[90] Miller is perhaps better disposed towards contempt and disgust than Nussbaum, arguing that 'these emotions provide us the basis for honouring and respecting as well as for dishonouring and disrespecting'.[91] Nonetheless, he too argues that disgust is a dangerous emotion in a socio-moral context because, unlike contempt, it necessitates the eradication of perceived contaminants: 'hierarchies maintained by disgust cannot be benign; because the low are polluting they constitute a danger; a policy of live and let live is not adequate'.[92] More recently, Alexandra Cuffel has demonstrated how the language of disgust pervades constructions of the 'other' across medieval Christian, Jewish and Muslim polemical writers.[93] All of these groups, she argues, characterise their own in-group as a domain of purity in contrast to the impure, polluted and disgusting out-groups. Like Nussbaum and Miller, she draws attention to the fact that the female body too was liable to be seen as disgusting, particularly due to the perception in medical discourse that menstrual blood was filthy and polluting.[94]

Drawing explicitly upon the work of Shweder and Rozin, Martha Bayless argues that the ethic of divinity, and associated disgust, was central to medieval understandings of the cosmos: 'Medieval ecclesiastical and theological culture interpreted human activity through the ethic of divinity and championed this ethic as the preeminent mode of interpretation'.[95] The human body was understood as a moral system which formed a microcosm of the cosmos itself in which God in his heaven was high and the devil in hell was low: 'The upper half, crowned by the head, is the realm of reason, elevation, and purity; the lower half of the body is the realm of animal desire, baseness and filth'.[96] The former was associated with sweet odours, cleanliness, and perfumes, the latter with stench, filth, excrement and other bodily effluvia. Bayless argues persuasively that references to such excreta are not mere crudities but rather were deeply meaningful to medieval people. Although scatological references could be humorous, they were also expressive of the ways in which medieval people conceptualised their place in the cosmic

[90] William Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 155-6.
[91] *Ibid.,* 202.
[92] *Ibid.,* 251.
[93] Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
[94] *Ibid.,* 100.
[95] Martha Bayless, *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 18.
[96] Bayless, *Sin and Filth,* 72.

and moral order, and signified amongst other things the corruptibility of earthly life and the distance of humanity from the divine:

> These disparate kinds of expression are not inexplicable vulgarities, but witnesses to a common understanding of the essential relation of physical realities to abstract moral qualities, and of corruption, sin and excrement as important witnesses to the human condition.[97]

In the following section, then, I will examine the references to disgust, contamination, cannibalism, pollution and filth in legal narratives of the rape of young girls in late medieval England, treating them as meaningful indicators of the ways in which medieval people conceptualised the immorality of child sexual abuse.

'As if she were some horrible monster': The Rape of Maidens

In Canterbury in 1532 John Lambrest, alias Hamon, was cited in the ecclesiastical courts for raping the seven-year-old Thomasine Stone. In support of his case against Lambrest, Thomasine's father Martin Stone called as a witness one Joan Nele, who testified before the court that Thomasine had been 'polluted' (*polluta*) by Hamon.[98] What are we to make of Nele's statement as it has come down to us? Is the language she used really representative of how she, Martin and even Thomasine herself might have perceived the attack? Or does it represent a translation of her actual words into a Latinate, legalistic discourse on the part of a clerk?[99] The language of pollution, corruption and defilement is certainly pervasive in legal accounts of the rape of young girls in late medieval England. In their petition to the Chancellor, Robert Trendender and his wife Isabel complain of the 'deffuylynge' of their daughter.[100] So too in the case of Piers Godard, who as we have seen alleged that William Rydmyngton had 'defilyd' his servant Joan.[101] This echoes the language of legal treatises such as Bracton, which defines the 'defilement' or 'corruption' (*corruptione*) of a virgin as a felony punishable with loss of member and testicles.[102] Indeed, the very ubiquity of this language means that it may be easily overlooked as a formulaic feature of such narratives. Yet at the same time this language is deeply meaningful and evocative within the cultural framework of late medieval England, signifying the encroachment into Christian society of sin, dirt, corruption, putrefaction, profanity and evil. It

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[97] *Ibid.,* 28.
[98] KHLC, PRC, fol. 30r.
[99] For discussion of the interpretation of witness depositions in relation to ecclesiastical courts, see P. J. P. Goldberg, *Communal Discord: Child Abduction and Rape in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33-44.
[100] C1/42/24.
[101] C1/1/92.
[102] *Bracton*, 414-15.

is therefore highly significant that it is this language which provided the moral and legal lens through which medieval society came to terms with such acts. The job of the institution of the court and of the associated legal discourse was to process and categorise these violent acts, to subject them to inquiry, to establish truth and falsity, render the unknown known and disorder into order. Whether or not Joan Nele really spoke those words, what she said was subject to the systematising influence of the medieval courtroom, and to the process of recording and thus rendering legible and comprehensible within medieval culture an act which may otherwise have resisted classification and remained anomalous.

Joan Nele's recorded testimony also includes the statement that she had seen Thomasine in the aftermath of her rape, and that the young girl appeared 'bleeding and violently ruptured' (*apparuit sanguinolenta et violanta rupta*). Alongside the language of defilement, such explicit descriptions of bloody violence are another common feature in narratives depicting the rape of minors in medieval England.[103] This statement is open to interpretation via two of Shweder's three ethics discussed in the previous section. On the one hand this statement clearly serves to demonstrate the real and life-threatening harm which Hamon's actions had inflicted upon the victim of his brutal attack. As such, it provides evidence to bolster Alan Kissane's assertion that the narrative accounts preserved in late medieval court documents demonstrate 'a real concern over the welfare of girls under the canonical age of consent'.[104] Kissane interprets such depictions of bloody violence as a straightforward reflection of the perceived physical unreadiness of underage girls for sexual experience, suggesting that the royal courts 'often used unambiguous language to describe the unsuitability of young girls to have full intercourse due to a lack of physical development'.[105] Such language is, however, perhaps not as unambiguous as it may appear at first glance. Nele's description of the violence inflicted upon the body of Thomasine is provided in the narrative not as evidence to support a claim that she has been *harmed* but as evidence to support the claim that she has been *polluted.* As Rozin and other theorists have pointed out, violations of the bodily envelope, in particular of the genital area, can act as powerful elicitors of disgust in many cultures. The effusion of blood from the body is associated in medieval discourse not only with harm but with sickness, sin and corruption. As such, Nele's statement is equally open to interpretation via Shweder's ethic of divinity, as evidence that purity has been violated and a cultural taboo has been violently broken.

[103] Kissane, 'Unnatural in Body', 109.
[104] *Ibid.*, 110.
[105] *Ibid.,* 109.

The brutal depictions of violence which characterise legal narratives of the rape of young maidens are sometimes explicitly paired with language that implies disgust or revulsion at the episodes they describe. Thus the account of the rape of Alice Ambroys in 1308/9 which was discussed in the preceding section describes how Menaldus threw her onto his bed (*supra lectum suum proiecit*) and 'disgustingly' or 'vilely' broke her limb and fractured her back (*viliter membra sua disrupit et dorsum suum fregit*).[106] In 1283 Agnes de Enovere appealed Hugo son of Thomas le Tenur of Flamsted of *raptus*, describing how he threw her to the ground and wanted to have sex with her, grasping her so hard that blood burst forth from her mouth and nose (*adterram periecit et vicum ipsa concubuisse voluit et ipsam ita vehementer strixit quod sanguis exiunt per medium os et nares ipsius Agnetis*).[107] Hugo then attempted to rape Agnes but was unable to do so because she was only seven years old, so he inserted himself as far as he could and 'treated her disgustingly' (*in quantum potuit se inde intromisit et ipsam viliter tractauit*). The language of disgust was not a necessary component of an appeal as it is set out in template form in Bracton, whose treatise suggests the use of the word 'wickedly' (*nequiter*). In deviating from this template, medieval courtroom officials worked revulsion into the legal discourse surrounding the rape of young girls. In this context, the effusion of blood from the mouth and nostrils serves to highlight the disgusting, abominable and unnatural nature of the attempted crime as much as the real injuries which Agnes received. Indeed, it is possible that this trope was particularly associated with the rape of underage girls in legal discourse. A similar case from Wiltshire records how Philip de Wyxsy raped Edith, daughter of William de la Cote on 7 August 1261, alleging that he 'threw her to the ground and squeezed her so that she bled from the mouth and nostrils, and then raped her of her virginity'.[108] Edith's age is not recorded but Philip's defenders stated that he had not raped her but had simply thrown her to the ground 'when playing', a claim which hints that she too was underage or at least relatively young.

Another narrative feature apparently associated with sexual abuse of young maidens was the cutting of the genitals with a knife as a precursor to rape. Three cases from late-medieval England describe this grisly act, of which two certainly involved girls who were at or under the canonical age of consent; the other identifies the victim only as a 'daughter'. In 1355, the local justices at Lincoln heard the case of Agnes de Cloworth, who had been raped at the age of eight around ten years previously. According to the record, Hugh de Outhorp of Lincoln woke her in her chamber at night and 'attempted to contaminate and deflower her' (*eam contaminare et*

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[106] JUST 1/547A, m. 1; *viliter* more usually has the meaning of 'cheaply' or 'worthlessly' but this does not appear to fit this context. I thus follow Kissane (p. 99) in translating this as 'disgustingly' or 'vilely'.
[107] JUST 1/328, m. 6.
[108] Brenda Farr and Christopher Elrington, ed., *Crown Pleas of the Wiltshire Eyre, 1268* (Chippenham: Wiltshire Record Society, 2012), 82.

deflorare conavit).[109] Unable to do so on account of the fact that she was underage and tender (*propter minoritatem et teneritatem*), he 'savagely cut her with a knife and wounded her' (*cum uno cultello attrociter cidit et vulneravit*), then held her violently and raped her (*deforciavit et defloravit contra voluntatem suum*). This brutal and disturbing account is echoed in a case heard in Lincolnshire in 1381, which records how a certain Robert, servant of the rector of Aylesbury took the twelve-year-old Agnes, the former servant of Robert Dyon of Laiceby and cut her with his knife (*secuit eam cum cultello suo*) before raping her.[110] These accounts clearly describe acts which are harmful yet they do so in terms which also evoke disgust and the threat of contamination. As William Miller puts it, 'some sights simply evoke disgust: gore and mutilation, the effects of violence upon the body, especially when these are inflicted cruelly without justification'.[111] The physical and moral disgust which such accounts may have provoked in medieval audiences are easy to overlook because they align with our own, yet they are nonetheless an essential feature of the construction of these narratives.

A similar tragic story took place in Canterbury in 1511 involving Margaret, daughter of Nicholas Graunt. Her attacker thew her to the ground with the intent of raping her and cut her genitals with a knife so that blood came forth (*rapiend intendens ad terram proiecit et ipsius Margarete secreta carnalia quod cultello scidit* [sic] *et sanguinem de ea extraxit*).[112] Anthony Musson has described the details which are recorded in late-medieval rape cases as 'gruesomely frank' and interprets them as an attempt to make such accounts more believable to medieval jurors.[113] Frankness and truthfulness however seem inadequate expressions of the meaning conveyed by such accounts as these. The narratives may indeed reflect the real physical horrors of child rape, but they also do important discursive work, structuring the boundaries between purity and pollution, between holy maidenhood and disgusting sin. The gruesome act of slicing renders corporeal the spiritual contamination of the girl's body; the effusion of blood from the genitals is a gory echo of the process of menstruation, itself a powerful elicitor of disgust in the Middle Ages and associated with unholiness and corruption. The inclusion of such grisly detail in the legal narrative thus renders intelligible and legible within medieval cultural discourse the maiden's premature and enforced transition to the more conventionally mature status of the sexually experienced woman. Rather than await the effusion of blood which was the natural result of menarche and was held to signify the beginnings of the maiden's readiness for sexual intercourse, these vile

[109] JUST 1/526, m. 2d; transcribed as an appendix in Kissane, 'Unnatural in Body', 110-11.
[110] Elisabeth G. Kimball ed., *Some Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire,* Vol. 2, (Hereford: The Lincoln Record Society, 1962), 152-52, no. 412.
[111] Miller, *Disgust,* 82.
[112] CCA, CC/J/Q/310, fol. 18r.
[113] Anthony Musson, 'Crossing Boundaries: Attitudes to Rape in Late Medieval England', in *Boundaries of the Law: Geography, Gender and Jurisdiction in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* ed. Anthony Musson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 92.

attacks have forcibly subverted the process via unnatural means. In the construction of the legal narrative, the unspeakable violence of the crime has been, to borrow the metaphor employed by Kim Phillips, 'written' onto the body of the raped maiden.[114]

The reading that disgust rather than harm is the central concern of these narratives is borne out by the medical discourse surrounding sex with underage girls in late medieval England. One of the few medical texts written on the subject of women for a largely female audience, the late-medieval gynaecological treatise known as *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing,* discusses the dangers of early sexual intercourse which it considers deleterious under the age of fifteen. According to the treatise, the maiden who has sex before this age can expect three consequences to befall her. The first is that she shall be barren, the second is that 'here breth shal stynke and haue an ylle savour', and the third is that 'she shal be lavy [unruly] of here body'.[115] The text asserts that the first two of these symptoms may be treated with medicines, but that the third is 'in-curabylle'.[116] Even consensual underage sex was thus understood to have profound consequences for the bodies of young maidens, but these consequences cannot be straightforwardly interpreted through the ethics of autonomy. What connects sex with underage girls with foul and stinking breath is not the fact that both are depictions of harm which elicit concern and sympathy but that both are depictions of pollution which elicit disgust and rejection. In medieval culture, the smell which was emitted from bodily orifices was highly significant, symbolic of the state of purity which that body enjoyed. The bodies of sinners were compared to stinking vessels of dung, whereas saints' bodies were often thought to remain sweet-smelling after death, and the bodies of virgins were likened to vessels of myrrh or balsam.[117] The thirteenth-century English *Holy Maidenhood* explains:

> as that sweet and most precious of all ointments that is called balm keeps the dead body that is smeared with it from rotting, so virginity keeps the virgin's living flesh without corruption.[118]

Those who submitted to fleshly lusts on the other hand, the text informs the reader, rotted in their dung like beasts.

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[114] Phillips, 'Written on the Body', 126.
[115] Alexandra Barratt, ed., *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material Derived from the Trotula and Other Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 59.
[116] *Ibid.,* 58.
[117] Bayliss, *Sin and Filth,* 115.
[118] Bella Millett, ed., *Hali Meiðhad*, EETS O.S. 284 (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 6; trans Bayless, *Sin and Filth,* 116.

The foul and stinking breath of underage girls who had sexual intercourse was thus a sign that they had been transposed in the symbolic order from embodiments of purity and divinity to pollution and sin. As such, they constituted a dangerous influence which threatened the maintenance of social order. Disgust is thought to operate according to the laws of sympathetic magic: the perceived power of polluted things to contaminate that with which they come into contact does not cease once they have been sterilised.[119] What's more, the power of the corrupted to pollute far outweighs the power of the clean to purify. Rozin quotes a Nebraska car mechanic in order to illustrate this point: 'A teaspoon of sewage will spoil a barrel of wine, but a teaspoon of wine will do nothing for a barrel of sewage'.[120] A similar metaphor is to be found in medieval canon law. Originating in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, it is used specifically to refer to the corrupting influence of sinners upon the wider community: 'A small amount of yeast spoils the whole batch and one rotten member corrupts the whole body'.[121] The raped maiden was thus not only corrupted herself but an intolerable corrupting influence on those around her. As *The Knowing of Women's Kind* puts it, she was 'lavy' – an uncommon word in Middle English which signified unruliness, noisiness, wildness and an unwillingness or inability to submit to proper instruction. The early fifteenth century *Master of Game* uses the word to describe hounds who have not been properly chastised: 'Whan þei ben yong and bene not chastised þerof, þey shul euyr more be lavey and wilde'.[122] Underage sex thus rendered young maidens into unruly bodies which had deviated from their proper place in the cosmic order and threatened to infect others with their deviance. They were, to borrow a Douglasian phrases, 'bodies out of place': they had fallen from the pinnacle of human purity, the innermost sanctum of human society which must be protected at all costs, to being aligned with the external forces of wildness and animality which, like disgusting things, must be resisted from incorporation into the body politic. Whilst physical harm may be healed with time, this socio-moral taint could not be reversed, but remained incurable.

What were the consequences of this discourse for maidens themselves? Returning to take up the case of the eight-year-old Agnes de Cloworth provides perhaps the most vivid illustration of this theme. The narrative goes on to account for the aftermath of the brutal attack upon her

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[119] Paul Rozin, Linda Millman, and Carol Nemeroff, 'Operation of the Laws of Sympathetic Magic in Disgust and Other Domains', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50, no. 4 (1986): 703-12.
[120] Paul Rozin and April E. Fallon, 'A Perspective on Disgust', *Psychological Review* 94, no. 1 (1987): 23-41.
[121] Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum*, part 14, chap. 77 (PL 161: col. 846); For discussion of sin and contamination, see Susan R. Kramer, 'Understanding Contagion: The Contaminating Effect of Another's Sin', in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 145-57.
[122] Edward of Norwich*, The Master of Game by Edward, Second Duke of York,* ed. W. A. Baillie-Grohman and F. Baillie-Grohman (1904), 110-111.

in which Hugh de Outhorp had brutally cut open her genitals and forced himself upon her. Despairing of her daughter's life, Agnes's mother carried her into the hall of pleas at Lincoln and displayed her before the mayor and bailiffs of the city, one of whom was John de Outhorp, brother of the man accused of her rape. The narrative records how her mother showed the body of Agnes to the open court, 'contaminated, ravished and wounded as if she were some horrible monster' (*contaminatam defloratatam et vulneratam et quasi quoddam orribile monstrum in plena curia ostendens*).[123] While contemporary readers may share medieval disgust with the crime and may be inclined to ascribe monstrous qualities to the perpetrator, the projection of disgust onto the young victim is far more alien to modern sensibilities. In the medieval cosmic ordering system however Agnes was a body out of place which resisted categorisation; she was no longer a virgin but neither was she a wife or a widow, the three most commonly represented stages of the female life course.[124] Neither could she be conceptualised, like prostitutes, via the paradigm of the 'fallen woman' because, as an innocent and clearly resisting child, she could not be held responsible for her own destruction.

Agnes' monstrosity was also in part a function of her wounded condition and no doubt bloodied and gory appearance. William Miller notes that acts which violate the corporeal boundary and expose the insides to corruption are particularly strong elicitors of disgust, a function of disgust's role in protecting the body from microbial threats: 'The disgust that arises when the body is sliced open with a knife or pierced with a bullet ... is a function primarily of the inappropriateness of destroying the integrity of the body's seal'.[125] The exposure of the 'inside' to the 'outside' induces the possibility of contamination which Miller suggests is one reason why bodily orifices are so often the locus of disgust. Yet in the case of Agnes de Cloworth this embodied metaphor may also be extended, as Bayless suggests, to the medieval cosmos. As I argued in the previous chapter, in medieval romance the maiden's body often fulfils a discursive role as the essential *locus* of the internal chivalric world which must be protected above all else. The destruction of maidenhood is thus associated with the monstrous intrusion of the external forces of demonic chaos into the internal world of order and civility. In the narrative of Merlin's birth, when the demons' attempt to insert themselves into Christian England in order to pollute and destroy it from within, they do so precisely by violating the corporeal integrity of a young girl and planting within her the monstrous seed of humanity's destruction. The display of Agnes's body in open court is thus the exposure of a rupture in the fabric of medieval society which threatens to bring about the spoilage and decay of social structures. The vile, sinful, destructive threat to

[123] JUST 1/526, m. 2d.
[124] Cordelia Beattie, 'The Life Cycle: The Ages of Medieval Women', in *A Cultural History of Women in the Middle Ages,* ed. Kim Phillips (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 15-37.
[125] Miller, *Disgust,* 58.

maidenhood which medieval discourse worked so hard to externalise has penetrated the very courtroom, and been shown to be inside rather than outside of patriarchal society; indeed to reside within the very family of the court officials. This grisly wound must be cauterised in order to prevent the contagion from spreading; rather than confront such a monstrous reality, the court officials project it onto the bloodied body before them. As far as it is possible to tell, Hugh de Outhorp was never brought to justice for the crime.[126]

Perhaps the best known and most discussed case of child rape from late medieval England is that of Joan, daughter of Eustace le Seler which took place in London in 1320. Three versions of the story exist: Joan's original appeal of 13 April made before the sheriffs of London, a second version which records an appeal Joan made before the coroner on 6 February 1321, and a final version which resulted from the case being heard before the justices of eyre later that year. This latter version came to be included in *Novae Narrationes,* a popular manual giving instructions in pleading which was read by generations of aspiring lawyers. The case has been subject to a detailed study by Barbara Hanawalt, in which she argues that the ways in which the narrative changed in the process of retelling reflect the priorities of the male court officials rather than the voice of Joan herself.[127] Pointing out that the final version which became the object of legal study added sexually explicit details of the assault, Hanawalt suggests that the 'titillation value' which this provided was the main reason for its continuing popularity. She thus characterises the narrative as 'a bit of fourteenth-century soft pornography for lawyers'.[128]

In light of the prevalent role of disgust in shaping legal discourse which this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, it may be possible to reassess the claim that the narrative of Joan's case can be read as a straightforwardly pornographic depiction of the sexual violation of an underage girl. Multiple scholars have drawn attention to the fact that disgust has the potential to attract as well as to repel, and that lurid depictions of physical and even sexual violence can thus thrill audiences even as they repel or horrify them. Modern horror movies frequently feature monsters, both human and inhuman, who mutilate and kill their victims; modern forensic and medical dramas depict mutilations and autopsies, and crime dramas tell lurid tales of sadistic murders and rapes. And such portrayals of the disgusting are by no means a quirk of modernity: Carolyn Korsmeyer has shown that depictions of the disgusting are pervasive across a variety of art forms spanning the centuries from antiquity to the present, including painting,

[126] Kissane, 'Unnatural in Body', 107.
[127] Hanawalt, 'Whose Story Was This?'
[128] *Ibid.,* 137.

sculpture, prose literature, poetry, theatre and even music.[129] Thinkers as disparate as Thomas Aquinas and Sigmund Freud have hypothesised that disgust stands in a symbiotic relationship with desire, and Jonathan Dollimore notes that this relationship is particularly marked, complex and contradictory in the realm of sexual desires and taboos.[130] It is possible, paradoxically, that the very abomination of the crime was part of what made it attractive reading for young medieval legal scholars; the potentiality of the narrative to titillate is matched at least by its capacity to fascinate and to horrify with lurid detail.

The case for disgust as an important constituent of the legal narrative of the crime is certainly easiest to make for the second version of Joan's account (chronologically speaking) which was created as a result of a gaol delivery session held in 1321. As Hanawalt notes, this records more detail than the original King's Bench appeal which closely followed Bracton's formula and was written in Latin. The King's Bench appeal describes how Raymond of Limoges came upon Joan standing 'hard by' her father's house and led her away by the hand 'by force of arms' and against her will to his room in the parish of St. Martin in the Vintry:

> And there flung her to the ground and lay with her against her will, feloniously as the Lord King's Felon, and utterly robbed her of her maidenhead, against the peace of the Lord King.[131]

The gaol delivery account, which purports at least to be a verbatim record of Joan's appeal and is written in French, expands significantly on this narrative.[132] The account alleges that Joan was carried off from 'two feet' outside her house by Raymund of Limoges and taken to his chamber, described as 'a solar in the upper story of a house in the parish of St. Martin in the Vintry in London'. It alleges that Raymond:

> kept the said Joan there all night, and there deflowered her ... and so vilely and cruelly (*ordement et haynousement*) handled her limbs that her life was despaired of, and still is, and she has lost all hope of recovering her health.[133]

The French retelling of the narrative not only adds the adverb *ordement* which implies that which is dirty, disgusting or repulsive; it also inserts a reference to the extreme mutilation of Joan's body in the course of the attack. As such, it shares common features with the accounts of child rape described above. In the course of sensationalising this tale, the features which have been

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[129] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savouring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 87-112; see also Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation,* trans. Howard Eiland and Joel Golb (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 25-50.
[130] Jonathan Dollimore, 'Sexual Disgust', *Oxford Literary Review* 20, no. 1/2 (1998): 47-77.
[131] Helen M. Cam, ed. *The Eyre of London, 14 Edward II, a.d. 1321,* Vol. 1, SSP, 85, 86 (1968), 91.
[132] Hanawalt, 'Whose Story Was This'.
[133] *Eyre of London,* Vol. 1*,* 90.

added are those which emphasise the length and sickening brutality of the attack, its horrific effects on the body of the child, and the moral revulsion which it elicits as a result.

The final version of the legal narrative certainly provides a far more graphic account of Joan's rape, and it is this text which ultimately came to be included in *Novae Narrationes* and to enjoy wider circulation. Language highlighting the cruel and disgusting nature of the crime is omitted from this retelling, which focusses instead on the details of the physical act. It narrates how Raymond took Joan:

> between his two arms and against her consent and will laid her on the ground with her belly upwards and her back on the ground, and with his right hand raised the clothes of the same Joan the daughter of Eustace up to her navel, she being clothed in a blue coat and a shift of light cloth, and feloniously ... with both his hands separated the legs and thighs of the said Joan, and with his right hand took his male organ of such and such a length and size and put it in the secret parts of the said Joan and bruised her watershed and laid her open so that she was bleeding and ravished her maidenhead.[134]

Is it plausible to suggest that the very court officials who were seemingly so revolted by the attack on Joan, and indeed similar attacks on other underage girls, can be reliably assumed to have been sexually aroused by this depiction? It is certainly possible that some of them may have read the text in this way, perhaps those whose sexual predilections already lay in that direction. Indeed, it is even possible that this was the intention of whoever authored the revised version of Joan's account. However, I do not think that this reading alone can account for the popularity of the tale in legal circles. If there are features which are suggestive of titillation, there are also features such as the image of the bleeding Joan 'laid open' by the monstrous male organ which have the potential to arouse revulsion rather than desire. Although, as I have argued, the elision of the qualities of childhood with the qualities of feminine desirability was a problematic undercurrent in medieval culture, the conception of paedophilia in this discourse was complex and paradoxical; indeed, too much so for this text to be read as straightforwardly pornographic.

Joan's case is an embodiment of the many contradictions which characterised young maidenhood in the medieval cultural imaginary, and the relationship of maidens to structures of patriarchal power. Indeed, in some ways it closely mirrors the story of maidens such as Violet in *Lybeaus Desconus,* seized from outside her father's house by a monstrous giant and carried

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[134] *Eyre of London,* Vol. 1*,* 88; Elise Shanks and S. F. C. Milsom, ed., *Novae Narrationes,* SSP, 80 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1963), 341.

away by the hand toward a fate worse than death. In this case, the encroachment of external chaos into the house of patriarchal order is represented by the Gascon merchant, who took Joan by the hand and led (or carried) her away to his rooms. On the one hand, the narrative takes pains to account for the failure of the guardians of maidenhood to protect their most cherished possession from the monstrous 'other'. Joan was taken from outside her father's house after curfew, but every narrative stresses the close proximity in which she stood to it when she was abducted. At a distance of two to three feet, she was not far enough away that her father was implicated in neglectfully allowing her to wander; nor was she inside the house where his abilities as protector would be called into question. Yet at the same time this implied responsibility for protection must be squared with the undeniable sexual overtones of the passage which describes Joan's rape. Her narrative certainly *is* appropriated by the legal system in a way which positions her at least as an object of lurid fascination and arousal, even if not of straightforward sexual desire. The institution of the medieval court, cast in the role of upholder of the King's peace and the ultimate protector of young maidens, thus itself comes to resemble the 'seductive father' whom I identified in the previous chapter. Like the princess's father in Degaré who jealously guarded his daughter's virginity only to be implicated in incestuous desire, or the voice of medical discourse which called for protection of maidens in order that their beauty may be preserved for his own pleasure, the legal discourse is simultaneously protective and invasive, paternalistic and voyeuristic. I suggest that it was precisely because it resonated so strongly with this dominant paradigm that Joan's narrative became (as far as we know) the most widely known rendition of the rape of a child in medieval legal discourse.

How would such a relationship with the legal institutions of medieval society have affected the experiences of girls themselves? According to Hanawalt, the female experience of the legal process was primarily one of humiliation, as court officials forced maidens to submit their bodies and their narratives to inspection, intrusion, distortion and appropriation.[135] Humiliation, however, implies the abasement of social status and a focus on the perceptions of others. As such, it belongs to Shweder's 'ethics of community'. Whilst I would by no means wish to deny this aspect of Joan's experience, it may be that a deeper, more visceral shame or self-disgust may be added to the picture, grounded in the ethics of purity and divinity. Indeed, Miller argues that allowing disgust to structure and order our moral lives is problematic for precisely this reason:

[135] Hanawalt, 'Whose Story Was This?', 138.

> We end up punishing the stigmatized, who may have no justifiable cause for feeling guilt for their stigma, although they often internalize the social judgments of their stigmatization as shame, self-loathing, self-disgust, self-contempt, self-hatred.[136]

Among modern survivors of child sexual abuse, disgust is associated more than any other negative emotion with the development of PTSD. Those who report feelings of disgust, dirtiness or contamination in relation to the crimes committed against them are more likely to have developed post-traumatic symptoms than those who report emotions such as anger, fear or sadness.[137] For girls such as Joan, one horrifying consequence of the medieval tendency to moralise their experience through the ethics of divinity may well have been that such shame and self-disgust was a common feature of their experience.

On 21 December 1364, John Marrays entered the chamber which the young heiress Alice de Rouclif shared with two other young maidens, daughters of the household in which she was living, and displaced Joan de Rollaston from the bed which she normally shared with Alice. According to testimony given before the ecclesiastical court at York, Joan told the Abbot of St Mary's how:

> she saw John and Alice lying together in the same bed and heard a noise from them like they were knowing one another carnally, and how two or three times Alice silently complained at the force on account of John's labour as if she had been hurt then as a result of this labour.[138]

The case in the ecclesiastical court arose because Alice was subsequently abducted from the house by the man who claimed her guardianship, and Marrays sued for restitution of his young wife.[139] He did so on the basis that Alice had previously consented to contract a marriage with him in the future, and under canon law such an agreement became a legally binding marriage if it was consummated at a time when Alice was of canonical age. Her guardian, Brian de Rouclif, argued that Alice had been only ten years old at the time the 'consummation' took place, and was thus unable to give consent according to canon law. Marrays argued that Alice had been eleven years old, and thus close enough to puberty for a legal exception to come into force

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[136] Miller, *Disgust,* 202.
[137] Christal Badour et al., 'Disgust, Mental Contamination, and Posttraumatic Stress: Unique Relations Following Sexual Versus Non-sexual Assault', *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 27, no. 1 (2013): 155-62; A. M. Finucane, A Dima, N. Ferreira and M. Halvorsen, 'Basic Emotion Profiles in Healthy, Chronic pain, Depressed and PTSD Individuals'*, Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 19 (2012):14–2; Eimear Coyle, Thanos Karatzias, Andy Summers, and Mick Power, 'Emotions and Emotion Regulation in Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: The Importance of "Disgust" in Traumatic Stress and Psychopathology', *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 5, no. 1 (2014): 23306.
[138] BIHR, CP.E89, trans in Goldberg, *Communal Discord,* 106; For the full testimony see Goldberg, *Women in England,* 62-3.
[139] For detailed discussion of the case, see Goldberg, *Communal Discord.*

which allowed marriage in the twelfth year if the girl was considered to be sufficiently physically mature. After hearing evidence from an extensive number of witnesses, the court eventually decided in Marrays's favour.

Alice's case may be somewhat atypical in the surviving records but perhaps less so in late medieval society. Jeremy Goldberg, who has conducted an extensive analysis of the case, argues that the case is 'less a freak record of entirely atypical circumstances than a rare record of a marriage that may have resonated with the experiences of numbers of other aristocratic girls and their families'.[140] Alice's case displays some features which connect it to the discourse of maidenhood which has been the subject of the latter half of this thesis. Unease at the physical discrepancy between the adult male and the young girl may perhaps be read into Alice's silent complaint, and her apparent pain at the force of John's labour. Similar acknowledgement of the inappropriate nature of a sexual relationship between the two may be found in the testimony of William Pottell, Marrays's man, who testified that he said to Alice, 'May you grow up sufficiently that he is able to do with you as is fitting'.[141] However, it is Alice's response which is perhaps the most interesting feature of the case, preserving as it does a snapshot of a young maiden's perspective in a medieval discourse in which such voices are otherwise absent. She is said to have replied, 'I am quite adequate to be his wife, but not his whore'.[142] As Goldberg points out, Alice apparently expressed a similar sentiment on two other occasions before different witnesses which makes it very plausible that she actually said them or something like them.[143] On one of these occasions, her words are rendered as, '"I am mature enough to be a true wife and not a mistress" – in English "lemman"'. In the other, her words are described as, 'I am old enough and mature enough to be his wife, but not his mistress'.[144] In Alice's view, in other words, she was old enough to enter into a socially sanctioned relationship which would have given her status as wife and mistress of a household. She was not old enough however to be a legitimate (or in Pottell's words, 'fitting') object of sexual desire for a man such as Marrays, or a consenting partner in illicit sexual activity. She was not old enough to fit into the social category of 'whore': the woman whose own sexual desires had corrupted her. As a child too young to give consent she would have been the victim of a contaminating and disgusting defloration which placed her in an anomalous, even monstrous social category with girls such as Joan le Seler, Thomasine Stone, Alice Ambroys and Agnes de Cloworth. Such an alternative, for a young maiden growing up in late-medieval England, must have been too terrible even to contemplate.

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[140] *Ibid.,* 116.
[141] Goldberg, *Women in England,* 70.
[142] *Ibid.,* 70.
[143] Goldberg, *Communal Discord,* 121.
[144] *Ibid.,* 69-70.

Governing Maidens: The Household and Social Control

In 1371 Geoffrey, Knight of La Tour Landry in north-western France, set out to write a book for his two daughters with the stated aim of instructing them in the conduct appropriate, in his eyes, to their gender and social position. The resultant *Book of the Knight of the Tower* proved to have far wider reach than its author likely anticipated, circulating not only in France but also in Germany and England during the fifteenth century and translated on at least two occasions into Middle English, once in a version which survives in MS Harley 1764 and again by William Caxton who published a printed edition on 31 January 1484.[145] In the prologue of the book, Sir Geoffrey describes the scene which first prompted him to undertake his authorial incursion into the realm of didactic literature for young girls. Sitting in his garden during the month of April, listening to the happy song of the thrush and the nightingale, he thinks on his youth and, in Caxton's version, on the passing of his beloved wife (in the French original, the lady he loved in his youth).[146] In his pensive mood, he observes his daughters coming towards him, whom he describes as 'yong & litil/ & dysgarnysshed of [lacking in] all wytt & reson', and he is overcome with a desire that they be 'taught & chastysed curtoisly by good ensamples & doctrines' so that they may grow up to lead good and virtuous lives.[147]

The image of his little daughters playing in the garden conjures in Geoffrey's mind remembrance of his own youth and his experience of his military service in Poitou. In particular, the image sparks his recollection of the treatment of young women by his fellow soldiers, who, despite their honest appearance and fair language, were immoral and shameless in their pursuit of sexual encounters:

> For they had neyther drede ne shame ... And were moche wel bespoken and had fayre langage ... And thus they doo no thyng but deceyue good ladyes ... Wherof there happed many tymes. Iniuryes and many vylaynous diffames ...And in alle the world is no gretter treson than for to deceyue gentyll wymmen.[148]

Fearing that some men continue to bring noble women to shame in this manner, and implicitly that his own daughters will one day be at risk from such men, the knight resolves to write a 'lytel booke' for his children. In it, he will recount by way of good example the good manners, deeds, lives and virtues of reputable women, and by way of bad example the vices and wrongdoings of

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[145] M. Y. Offord, ed., *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), xi.
[146] Burger, *Conduct Becoming,* 216 n. 42.
[147] Offord, *Book of the Knight,* 11.
[148] *Ibid.,* 12.

evil women which must be avoided. The book, he states, is a product of the great love he has for his daughters whom he loves 'as a fader ought to loue them'.[149]

Why should the sight of two children enjoying the springtime weather prompt recollection of the amorous misdeeds of soldiers? The garden fulfils a dual symbolic function in the scene: as a natural idyll it reflects the childlike innocence of the young maidens, themselves in the springtime of their lives, which is juxtaposed with their father's sad wisdom about the ways of the world. Yet it is also a place where lovers tryst and where young maidens may one day come into contact with potential suitors, either welcome or unwelcome. In *Floris and Blancheflour,* the young female protagonist's imprisonment in the garden of the Emir of Babylon signifies both a looming sexual threat from the Emir himself and a joyous union with her young lover Floris. The parallels between the image of the knight's daughters in the garden and the discourse of female childhood which has been a central focus of this thesis will be readily apparent. The natural setting of the garden replicates the flowers and birdsong among which Sir Degaré's mother wandered alone and vulnerable and similarly portrayed as motherless and naïve.[150] Like the romance princess, the knight's daughters are haunted even in their early childhood by the spectre of the 'gentil, yong, and jolif man' who knows how to proffer fair words but whose courteous and beguiling speech masks a more sinister intent. He is a figure who casts a long shadow over the childhoods of medieval girls. Like the princess's father, the knight is himself somewhat problematically aligned with this figure as his gaze directed at his daughters prompts both reminiscences on his own activities as a paramour as well as a desire to guard his daughters against the attentions of other men. With this in mind we may even be tempted to read a note of defensiveness into the Knight's claim that he loves his daughters only 'as a father ought to love them'.

There is evidence that the influence of this figure of the 'gentil, yong and jolif man' reached back even to the earliest days of infancy. A fragment of a lullaby sung, according to a fourteenth-century sermon writer, by mothers to children in the cradle, enjoins Annot or 'little Agnes' to guard herself against Walterot or 'little Walter' because of his dishonourable intentions. The sermon mentions women 'þat lulle þe child wyth þair fote & sinnges an hauld song, sic dicens' [saying this]:

> Wake [watch] well Annot,
> þi mayden boure;

[149] *Ibid.,* 13.
[150] See above, 152-3.

& get þe fra Walterot,
for he is lichure [a lecher].[151]

Nicholas Orme has argued that the little Agnes and Walter 'can hardly be characters in a lullaby. Rather, the words must be part of an adult song in which Agnes is seduced by Walter or is told that he has bad intentions towards her'.[152] However, given the evidence that the threat from lecherous 'little Walters' was projected back even into girls' childhood in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, I see no reason not to take the word of the sermon writer at face value. It is likely that this represents an intrusion even into children's lullabies of a pervasive discourse in medieval society which conceptualised female development and socialisation primarily in terms of preservation from corruption by young men.

What are the implications of this model of socialisation for young maidens? Unsurprisingly, it meant that considerable constraint was thought to be both necessary and justified, as male relatives and friends elevated themselves to the role of guardians of maidenly innocence, whilst simultaneously divesting themselves of responsibility when things went wrong. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Knight's retelling of the biblical story of Dinah, in which a young woman is raped while visiting a foreign land. In the Knight's version of the story, it is the follies of youthful femininity – here construed as a lack of seriousness and an attachment to fine clothes and the latest fashions – which are implicated in Dinah's downfall. The reader is told that the daughter of Jacob 'for lyghtnes and Iolyte of herte lefte the hous of her fader and of her bretheren for to goo and see the atoure [attire, manner of dress] or aray of the wymmen of another lande'.[153] As a consequence, a great lord of that land was attracted to her beauty, and he 'prayd her of loue/ in so moche he took fro her her maydenhode'.[154] Her twelve brothers, incensed at the shame that had befallen their sister, slew the lord along with most of his lineage and his people. The moral of the tale is hammered home: 'Now loke ye and see how by a foolysshe woman cometh many euyllis & domages/ For by her yongthe and by her lyght courage was made grete occysion and shedyng of bloode'.[155] Ostensibly this story aimed to discourage young women from youthful wrongdoings but the threat of sexual violence is never far away. The young man lurks in the background waiting to punish any misstep, and the best defence which girls are offered is never to absent themselves from the control of male guardians.

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[151] R. H. Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries,* 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), xxxix.
[152] Orme, *Medieval Children,* 134.
[153] Offord, *Book of the Knight,* 81-2.
[154] *Ibid.,* 82.
[155] *Ibid.,* 82.

The threat to maidenhood was seen to be so pervasive that even social situations in which their reputation could potentially be compromised were best avoided. This discourse is apparent in conduct literature which was more explicitly directed at a bourgeois rather than an aristocratic readership; young women are responsible not for avoiding wrongdoing but for avoiding the *appearance* of wrongdoing. 'Loke þat þou beere þee [conduct yourself] so þat men seie þee no schame', intones *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter.* Girls are taught not to control their own sexual desires, which remain unacknowledged in the poem, but rather to avoid situations in which they may come into contact with young men and which give the appearance of loose morals. Thus the poem admonishes young women not to go to wrestling or shooting at cock 'as it were [In the manner of] a strumpet or a giggelot'.[156] Similar advice can be found in *The Thewis off Gud Women,* in which women are warned away from bad companions and places which could cause them to fall under suspicion: 'Fle ill folk and susspekit place'.[157] This is a marked contrast with similar texts aimed at young men which are far more direct and explicit in their engagement with the subject:

> Be waar of usinge þe taverne;
> Also þe diis y þee forbede.
> And flee al letcherie in wil and dede,
> Lest þou come to yvel preef,
> For alle þi wittis it wole overlede [For it will overcome your reasoning abilities] (59-63).

For young men, the tavern, dicing and lechery are portrayed not as damaging to their reputations but as an impediment to their ability to make rational decisions. In keeping with the narrative of male development from wild and wilful childhood and youth to adult self-mastery, these places and activities hamper their mature ability to regulate their own behaviour. For young women, however, attending wrestling and shooting at cock impinges upon the potential for their behaviour to be regulated by others – how are respectable members of the community to tell the difference between virtuous and corrupt maidens if their conduct is not sufficiently distinct, or if the virtuous do not outwardly signal their impeccable character by avoiding any hint of association with vice?

There is an extent then to which the goal of masculine socialisation was conceived as the production of self-regulating subjects, whereas that of female socialisation was the production

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[156] Tauno F. Mustanoja, ed., *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter & The Good Wyfe Wold a Pylgremage & The Thewis of Gud Women* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran, 1948), 198; 199.
[157] J. Rawson Lumby, ed., *Ratis Raving, and Other Moral and Religious Pieces, in Prose and Verse,* EETS, O.S. 43 (London: Trübner, 1870), 105, line 67.

of externally-regulated subjects. Where male children were taught to exert mastery over what were seen as their innate tendency to wild and antisocial behaviour, female children were taught instead to manage their reputations and submit to the mastery of their parents and the wider community. This is in keeping with a discourse of female development which conceptualised female children as inherently innocent and good but prone to increasing corruption with their advancing age. The external regulation to which young maidens were subject is often seen as the preserve of older men, and indeed such men did have primary legal responsibility for controlling the behaviour of the young, a task they pursued with increasing fervour as the fifteenth century drew to a close.[158] However, the fact that the figure of the 'good wife' was thought by the writer of the eponymous didactic poem as an appropriate conduit for his advice suggests that the mistresses of the wealthier urban households also had some responsibility for the conduct of daughters as well as female servants and apprentices.[159] Moreover, unless the proclivity of bourgeois housewives for gossiping about their neighbours was entirely a figment of the medieval misogynist imagination, mature women too played a role in monitoring and policing reputations within the community, albeit in a less overt or legalistic manner. Hierarchies of age as well as gender are thus implicated to varying degrees in the societal regulation of female childhood and youth in late-medieval England.

The straightforward contrast between medieval conceptions of the two genders which I have sketched out is however only part of the story. Although the discursive ideal which the Knight's volume promotes is one of deference, humility, and dutiful obedience to authority, one does not have to scratch the surface very hard to find a richer and more complex picture of young femininity in the later Middle Ages. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the little-studied romance of *Sir Trymour,* likely composed in the northeast midlands in the late fourteenth century and, unlike the romances discussed in the previous chapter, not known to have descended from an earlier French source.[160] The romance tells the story of the son of a King of Aragon, who is exiled during his infancy as a result of the machinations of an evil steward and has various adventures during his childhood and adolescence before his eventual triumphant return. However, the romance is perhaps most remarkable for its portrayal of Helen, the seven-year-old daughter of the king of Hungary, who eventually becomes Tryamour's wife.

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[158] McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity; 'Respectable Masculinity'.
[159] Riddy argues that the writer was likely a male cleric; Felicity Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text', *Speculum* 71, no. 1 (1996): 66-86.
[160] Edition cited throughout is Harriet Hudson, ed., *Four Middle English Romances: Sir Isumbras, Octavian, Sir Eglamour or Artois, Sir Tryamour* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006).

In the first place, the fact that the young Helen is assigned an age at all is highly unusual. Where seven-year-old boys occasionally make an appearance in Middle English romance – Bevis and Florent, hero of the Northern *Octovian* spring to mind – I know of no other example of a seven-year-old girl in romance or indeed in Middle English literature being given more than a cursory mention. Blancheflour's seventh year, for example, is briefly mentioned but only in order to state that her education did not diverge from that of Floris as would have been usual at her age. Of even greater interest is that Helen is not merely present in the romance as a damsel in distress, but rather her actions, desires, and speech drive and shape the events of the narrative. When her father dies, war begins to spread in the kingdom and Helen is advised by her courtiers to take a husband to take over the rule of her lands. Despite being under significant pressure from her presumably older male councillors, the young princess stands her ground and refuses to marry anyone who is not worthy of her station:

> And sche answeryd them [her councillors] there on hye
> That the schulde faste [tie] hur wyth no fere,[mate]
> But [Unless] he were prynce or prynces pere [equal]
> Or ellys chefe of chyvalry (642-45).

As a result of her refusal, it is agreed that a tournament will be held in order to find for her a suitable partner. Whether the suggestion came from the princess herself or her advisers is left ambiguous – we are informed only that 'With them wolde sche assente [she agreed with them] / a justynge [tournament] for to crye' (647-48). Either way, this represents a deft political move by the princess, who is hemmed in on all sides by potential suitors, some of whom, as readers steeped in romance convention would be well aware, may be liable to use violence in order to obtain her hand. Helen thus overcomes her vulnerable state and retains as far as possible control over the process of acquiring a husband by invoking the chivalric framework of the tournament. This not only requires all parties to play by the rules, it also guarantees the princess a suitably heroic husband according to the logic of the romance world; evil or sub-par knights do not win maidens by fair means in Middle English romance.

Like the young ladies of the Knight's *Book,* Helen apparently enjoys the resultant spectacle. Clearly not a maiden of delicate sensibilities, she is so impressed to see young Tryamour strike a fellow combatant with such force that the blood bursts from his ears that she falls in love with him on the spot and determines that he is the only one she will marry. The young princess's resolve is again tested however when Tryamour cannot be found at the end of the tournament, having returned childlike to his mother to have his wounds tended. When the attendant knights present themselves to her and demand that she choose the best of them to be her husband, Helen states that her choice is the absent Tryamour:

Sche seyde, "Lordlyngys, where ys hee
That yysturday wan the gree?
I chese hym to my fere. (925-27)

When Tryamour cannot be found, the princess urges her barons to grant her two years' respite in which to find him, reminding them of the dictates of chivalry which must be abided by:

Sche seyde, "Lordlyngys, so God me save
He that me wan, he schall me have.
Ye wot wele yowre crye was so." (934-36)

The seven-year-old princess holds her ground by reminding her barons of the terms which they themselves officially proclaimed at the outset of the tournament. The impression the audience receives is of a young girl who understands not only the rules which govern knightly conduct but the rules which govern chivalric romance: a pledge made publicly must be honoured, a good knight or baron should not force a king's daughter to marry beneath her, and the young maiden should rightfully end up with the mysterious young stranger who has vanquished all comers in such bloody and spectacular fashion.

In this regard the young heroine bears some resemblance to another romance princess of Hungary, the young heroine of *Undo Your Door*. Pursued by an amorous young squire who has won her affections, the princess sets out to correct his lowly status which she imagines acts as a barrier to their marriage by providing him with the means by which he may win renown and thus be transformed into an acceptable suitor in the eyes of her father. This consists not only of the gift of a horse and armour along with a thousand pounds which the princess bestows on the squire but also of a long and detailed set of instructions in how to become a heroic knight. These instructions are clearly drawn from the princess's reading of romance, and include such tropes as riding through perilous and far-off places, sleeping under trees among the wild beasts, fighting three battles as a rite of passage, and visiting Jerusalem before returning seven years later to claim her hand. Indeed, later in the narrative the princess actually invokes an episode from *Lybeaus Desconus* as an exemplar for her prospective partner, making her a unique example of a character in romance retelling episodes from another romance.[161] The princess's attachment to the tropes of romance and the long and unrealistic set of expectations she places upon her paramour are perhaps intended parodically, but the effectiveness of such satire relies upon the audience being able to recognise the phenomenon which is being portrayed, namely, that young

[161] Nicola Macdonald, 'Desire Out of Order and *Undo Your Door*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34 (2012): 256.

women's engagement with the literary world of romance was liable to give them ambitious expectations for their future partners and leave them unafraid to articulate those expectations.

The coincidence of both Helen of *Sir Tryamour* and the assertive princess of *Undo Your Door* being princesses of Hungary may also have held some significance for audiences steeped in late-medieval literary culture. A conduct text written by a queen of Hungary for her daughters is mentioned by Sir Geoffrey in the prologue to his own work, and such a text is known to have existed in the later Middle Ages, written by Elizabeth of Bosnia (d. 1382) who was the wife of Louis I of Hungary and Poland.[162] The work sadly no longer survives, but is known to have circulated at least in France in the fourteenth century and possibly more widely. We may perhaps permit ourselves the pleasing speculation that Elizabeth's text, as one of the few medieval conduct texts written by a mother, may have carried some association with the production of assertive young daughters and thus that the portrayal of the young Hungarian princesses of *Tryamour* and *Undo Your Door* may owe something to this association. As we will see below, a critical reading of the Knight's book would also have been liable to produce similar results.

Similar kinds of engagement of young women with literary texts during their childhood have been observed in modern anthropological research. In *Braid of Literature: Children's Worlds of Reading,* Shelby Wolf and Shirley Heath present the results of a unique study which Wolf conducted over a period of many years into her own daughters' reading habits. Wolf observed a close relationship between the stories which her daughters read and heard and their engagement with the social world, particularly 'the way in which they used the rules and roles perceived in these stories to test, negotiate, control, and reshape their everyday world'.[163] Just like the princess's allusion to *Lybeaus* in *Undo Your Door,* Lindsey and Ashley Wolf frequently invoked the stories as justification for rule-making and rule-breaking in their everyday lives. As Wolf and Heath put it, they 'brought literature's scenes, beliefs, and rules for behaving into the daily negotiations of time, space and privilege'.[164]

Support for such a model of engagement of medieval girls with literary culture comes from the *Book of the Knight of the Tower*. Discussing women's reading, the Knight concludes that teaching girls to read is a positive thing as long as they read morally beneficial texts and do not 'rede and

[162] Offord, *Book of the Knight,* 195.
[163] Shirley Brice Heath and Shelby Anne Wolf, *Braid of Literature: Children's World of Reading* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994)*,* 1-2.
[164] *Ibid.,* 16.

studye the fables and lesynges / wherof no good ne prouffyte may come'.[165] The knight himself implicitly recognises that his daughters' literary tastes will affect their view of the social world and the way in which they identify and situate themselves within it. His dismissal of 'lies and fables', which probably included romances, begs the question of in what sense exactly he thinks the somewhat fanciful narratives which characterise his tome are 'true'. The answer is surely not in the literal sense that they all describe real events but rather in terms of the internal logic or rules which govern them. The knight claims to truly represent the social world as it is – or as he thinks it should be – from the perspective of a young fourteenth-century woman, even if the events he describes are largely or completely fictive. The knight hopes that his daughters will learn not the events themselves but the rules which may be inferred from them, and that they will transfer these rules into their everyday lives in ways which will colour their perception of, and interaction with, the social world – in other words, he hopes that his daughters will act in precisely the same way as Lindsey and Ashley Wolf. The problem for Sir Geoffrey is clear and it is one which he himself recognises: from the point of view of the child attempting to learn to operate within the rules of the culture in which she finds herself, a romance is at least as useful a repository of ideas as the conduct text.

Returning to *Sir Tryamour,* it is precisely Helen's knowledge of the rules governing the courtly milieu and her ability to articulate them which causes the barons to agree to her request for a two year period in which to search for Tryamour. The princess's speech convinces them that she is demanding only that which should be hers by right:

> The lordys assentyd wele ther tylle [thereto]
> For sche seyde nothynge but skylle [that which was reasonable, logical or appropriate]
> And that sche wolde no moo [she wished for nothing else]. (937-39)

This characterisation of the child's speech – that she said only that which was reasonable or appropriate – is all the more remarkable in a cultural context where children's talk was often treated with no such respect. The maiden's courteous language bears little resemblance for example to the uncouth utterances of Perceval of Lybeaus. The talk of young women in particular was often dismissed as idle chatter, and the *Good Wife* paints just such a picture of girls' speech when it enjoins young women not to talk in church:

> Make þou non iangelyng [prating, chatter] with fremed, ne with sibbe [relatives]
> Laughe none to skorne, nethir olde ne ȝonge.[166]

[165] Offord, *Book of the Knight,* 122.
[166] Mustanjoa, *Good Wife,* 159.

In contrast to the imagined daughter of the *Good Wife*, Helen is portrayed as reasoning, articulate and persuasive. Although necessarily bound by the social and cultural framework in which she finds herself, she shows herself to be an adept operator within the romance world. Children seeking to construct for themselves a young female identity out of the fabric of late-medieval English culture were thus not limited to the stifling monotony of moralistic discourse. *Sir Tryamour* consciously provides an alternative concept of young femininity, modelled not upon unquestioning deference to (male) authority but rather upon finding ways to articulate and fulfil one's own wishes as far as possible within the confines of a patriarchal culture.

Despite its moralistic tone, it is possible to find such ideas also embedded within the *Book of the Knight of the Tower*. The tenth chapter, for example, sets out to explain how good women ought to conduct themselves courteously, demonstrated by the example of the sparrowhawk which, the Knight informs his young readers, will come freely if called courteously but not if called rudely or cruelly: 'Thenne syth that curtosye vaynquysshyth a wylde byrde/ whiche hath in hym no reson'.[167] For maidens, courtesy is a means not of overcoming the wildness within but of taming the wilderness without. Dame Courtesy is possessed of something akin to a superpower, able to conquer all around her: 'she that vanquyssheth hye courages/ and that amolysshyth [appeases] thyre [the ire] and wrathe of euery creature'.[168] Courtesy is also portrayed as a means of maintaining the maiden's aristocratic social position. The knight enjoins his daughters to behave courteously toward 'mene and smal peple' for they will be all the more happy to receive it and will 'bere and doo the gretter reuerence' than the great.[169] The image of the gentle maiden as a shining beacon of courtesy subduing those around her with her fair speech clearly masks a paternal agenda of inculcating a form of discipline, but it is also to some extent an aspirational image for young girls. In common with *Sir Tryamour,* it projects the ideal of courtesy itself, rather than simply male authority, as the ultimate arbiter to which they must defer.

A similar compromise between deference and aspiration imbues the knight's exempla which discuss potential marriages. One such narrative tells how the daughter of the King of Aragon lost her marriage to the King of Spain. Desirous of marrying one of the King of Aragon's two daughters, the King of Spain disguises himself as a servant and goes with his ambassadors to meet them. The oldest daughter, although she is the fairest, is described as 'fyers [proud, lofty, arrogant] and of grete porte [haughty demeanour]'.[170] When the two sisters lose a game while

[167] Offord, *Book of the Knight,* 24.
[168] *Ibid.,* 24.
[169] *Ibid.,* 24.
[170] *Ibid.,* 28.

playing at tables with two knights, the oldest reacts badly, but the youngest makes no remark upon her loss but 'made as good chere/ as she had wonne'.[171] Teaching children to be good losers has clearly been a concern of parents across time and space. Beholding this, the king decides that he will marry the youngest daughter because of her courtesy and humility, and delivers the take-home message: 'none honoure/ ne beaulte. ne none errthely good may compare to bounte ne to good manners/ And in especial to humylte'.[172] The overall message is thus one of aspiration; a union with a King would be the ultimate prize in a competitive marriage market, and it is presented as within reach of all girls who are able to comport themselves correctly. Self-mastery may be ostensibly a male preserve, but a didactic reading of the narrative is predicated upon an appeal to the very reason and emotional control of which young women were supposedly incapable. Successful girls are able to restrain their feelings of anger or sadness and present a cheerful and humble countenance.

Again, the language of conquest is used to drive home the point; the exemplum ends with a summation that the younger daughter 'for hir humylyte and curtosye conquerd to be quene of spayne/ and took it fro hir older suster'. [173] Although the virtue being extolled is humble acquiescence, it is presented as a means to an end – humility is a method of conquest, and deference a strategy to be deployed in the service of ambitious self-advancement. Of course, the knight commits the common parental folly of assuming that his children's aspirations are coterminous with his own wishes – namely, a socially advantageous marriage – but the fact that he chooses to present the advice in this way is revealing of the way in which he views his daughters. Paradoxically, if medieval patriarchs wanted to produce outwardly docile female subjects, they found it advisable to appeal to their assertiveness, competitiveness, reason and ambition.

A similar logic imbues the knight's discussion of how to behave within marriage. In his chapter on 'How women ought not to be jealous', he tells the story of a wife whose jealous chiding led to a fight with a young damsel, the supposed object of her husband's affections. Having received a broken nose in the fight, the wife becomes disfigured which means that her fears become reality and her husband begins to consort with concubines. Instead of reproving her husband on the spot when she discovers his infidelity, she restrains herself and speaks to him sometime later, telling him calmly and humbly that she knows of his infidelities and promising to remain of good cheer towards him. She asks only that he does the same, and that he should continue

[171] *Ibid.,* 29.
[172] *Ibid.,* 29.
[173] *Ibid.,* 29.

to love her despite his extra-marital activities. The husband is so overcome with emotion at his wife's words that he remains faithful in the future:

> And truly by the softe and swete wordes that she said to hym/ his herte malte/ and wexe pytous/ and kept hymself from it ... And during her lyf by grete coutesye and humble obeysaunce she vaynquysshid hym.[174]

Yet again, we see humility and courtesy presented as a strategy and described in the language of conquest. This time the object of the campaign is to win sovereignty over one's husband – that which women most desire according to the Wife of Bath's famous tale. Rudeness and fierceness are condemned not because they are intrinsically wrong but because they are ineffective – the reader is told that men are of such temperament that chiding only makes them worse. The best way to 'ouercome' one's husband is with 'fayre and softe wordes'.[175]

This bears remarkable similarity to the way in which the same subject is treated in the fifteenth-century instructional poem *How the Wise Man Taught His Son.* This text also warns against jealousy, and in particular against revealing one's jealousy to one's wife, since to do so will only make her conduct worse: 'In despyte of thy fantesye, / To do the worse ys all hur lyste' (127-28).[176] Another stanza warns against beating one's wife, similarly on the grounds that it is an ineffective strategy. Beating her will not make your wife do as you wish, the son is told, it will only make her despise you, and he is encouraged instead to 'let feyre wordes be þy ȝerde' (142). Like the Knight, the Wise Man cautions against chiding one's spouse, indeed it presents such conduct as shameful: 'To calle hur foule hyt ys þy schame' (149). Again, 'Softe and feyre' (151) speech is the mandated approach. It is noteworthy then that differing concepts of male and female childhood did not always translate into differing approaches to advising them or even necessarily to different advice. While the headline narratives of gender development in boys and girls may have been diametrically opposed, there are notable points of coherence in the way in which the subjects of didactic texts are implicitly constituted.

The *Book of the Knight* then embodies a contradiction between the ideal of femininity which it dutifully espouses and the young feminine subjects to whom it directs its advice, themselves constructed within the text – perhaps even revealed by the text – as a result of its didactic enterprise. The Knight's daughters, like the Wise Man's son, are reasoning individuals who are

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[174] *Ibid.,* 33.
[175] *Ibid.,* 33; 34.
[176] Rudolf Fischer, ed., *How the Wyse Man Taught Hys Son. In Drei Texten* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1970 [1889]), 27-35.

ambitious for their future adult selves, think strategically about how to achieve their ambitions, and desire a good marriage in which they are treated fairly and able to influence their partner. It is these girls, rather than the humble and obedient maidens of moralistic discourse, who appear in romances such as *Sir Tryamour* and *Undo Your Door*.

Conclusion

The construction of female childhood as pure and innocent in medieval culture was anything but benign. It had profound consequences for the ways in which maidens were treated and the ways in which their abuse was conceptualised and processed within medieval society. These consequences were complex, multifaceted and varied according to specific social contexts and the networks of relationships in which maidens were embedded. In some situations, the idea that maidens were innocent, fragile and in need of protection probably exerted a protective influence against extreme physical punishment, both by rendering 'reasonable correction' a less pressing necessity and perhaps by creating a social taboo against adult males beating young girls. At the same time, the construction of female desirability as in some senses 'childlike' – young, innocent, docile, and good humoured – raised the probability that girls would be subjected to sexual violence. When this occurred, it was viewed with disgust, primarily at the violation of the ideal of purity which maidens represented. This meant that victims themselves were liable to be seen – and perhaps, tragically, to see themselves – as monstrous or polluted. In the household, the same concept of maidenhood meant that those responsible for their socialisation saw their role primarily as protective rather than corrective of girls, especially from sexual threats that would violate their innocence. At the same time, maidens themselves likely became adept exponents of the systems and structures in which they found themselves. Like the schoolbooks which were the focus of Chapter 2, the *Book of the Knight* embodies a compromise between instructor and instructed. The knight found it expedient to present his advice in terms that were amenable to his daughters, which appealed to their interests, desires and ambitions, and the resultant text still bears their imprint.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has not been to rehabilitate a 'barbaric past' perspective in which the history of premodern childhood is characterised as nightmarish. I have not sought to establish that medieval English people in general evidenced – in the words of the fifteenth-century Italian visitor with whose account I began – a 'want of affection' towards their children.[1] On the contrary, as others have shown, the medieval record is replete with examples of loving relationships between children and their parents and caregivers.[2] I have discussed several such examples of affective ties, from schoolmasters who demonstrated care and empathy for the boys entrusted to their tutelage, to writers such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus who viewed girls as 'tender ... shy ... merry, and touching the affection'.[3] I have however attempted to demonstrate that the ways in which childhood was conceptualised in medieval culture helped create a social environment in which abuse could and did occur. In other words, medieval ideas about what children *were* and their place in the natural, social and spiritual world profoundly affected the ways in which they were treated, and too often contributed to their suffering emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The effect of these cultural discourses was by no means deterministic or straightforward, and children's expectation of treatment or maltreatment depended upon a range of individual, situational and contextual factors. Nonetheless, it is possible to trace a clear connection between the discursive conceptualisation of children and the abuse to which they were subject. I hope I have shown that on those occasions where medieval people demonstrably *did* manifest a 'want of affection' towards their children, this cannot be put down simply to individual pathology but resulted at least in part from medieval conceptions of the child.

The ways in which children were conceptualised and treated varied significantly according to gender. Boys tended to be seen as naturally 'wanton' and 'wild'. The male child in the state of nature – signified in medieval discourse by characters such as Perceval, Lybeaus and Gowther –

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[1] Charlotte Augusta Sneyd, ed., *A Relation or Rather a True Account, of the Island of England. With Sundry Particulars of the Customs of These People, and of the Royal Revenues Under King Henry the Seventh, About the Year 1500*, Camden Society, OS xx (1847), 24.
[2] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1990); Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1993); Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).
[3] Bartholomeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum,* Vol. 1, trans. John Trevisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1988), 301.

was associated with the wild, untamed and threatening aspect of the natural world. Boys could be seen as unreasoning, bestial, brutish, even demonic or monstrous. In romances, male childhood aligned with the forces of external chaos which it was the job of courtly civilisation to defeat. In the medieval cosmic hierarchy which imagined the universe on a high/low axis with the monstrous, demonic world at the bottom and heaven, purity and sanctity at the top, the male developmental trajectory was frequently portrayed as a journey from 'low' to 'high', conceptualised via the paradigm of redemption. At times comic or ridiculous, male childhood was simultaneously disruptive and threatening and necessitated the exertion of social control. The developmental journey from unreasoning creature to rational man was seen by moralists to require significant input on the part of older male authority figures to 'correct' the inherent tendency of the young toward deviant behaviour. This 'correction' took physical form, exercised over the supposedly defective bodies of boys in order to excise from them their wild and wanton tendencies. Extreme punishment was by no means the norm for all medieval boys but it was a fact of life for many, and where it occurred the discourses which portrayed them as animalistic, unholy and lacking the qualities of full humanity are reliably present. Abusive adults viewed boys as brutish, diseased, corrupting, malign influences which must be 'tamed' for the benefit of themselves and wider society. 'Are they not human? Are they not of the same nature as you?' Anselm reportedly pleaded in response to extreme physical violence on the part of his fellow pedagogues. The answer was that, all too often, in the minds of medieval fathers and masters, they were not.

The conceptualisation of female childhood in medieval culture was very different. Girls were far more likely to be associated with the peaceful, beautiful, unspoiled aspect of the natural world. Maidenhood in a state of nature was symbolically associated with wild flowers and birdsong or, like the daughters of Geoffrey, Knight of La Tour Landry, with the tranquil idyll of the garden. Maidens occupied the opposite boundary of humanity in the medieval cosmic hierarchy; they began their developmental trajectory 'high' as symbols of angelic innocence, only to fall progressively lower as the vices of adult womanhood encroached. Unlike their 'wanton' and 'wild' brothers, maidens were 'tender' and 'soft'; they were frequently portrayed as under threat from monstrous or demonic forces. Their perceived fragility meant that they were probably less likely to experience extreme forms of physical punishment than their male counterparts. However, they were likely at greater risk of sexual exploitation, and this could sometimes be accompanied by brutal acts of physical violence. This was in part because the qualities of desirable femininity were often problematically elided in medieval discourse with those of female childhood. 'Freshness' and newness were considered sexually desirable alongside virginity. So too were docility, compliance, deference and cheerfulness. Indeed, in some ways the ideal medieval bride was one who managed to preserve the psychological qualities associated with childhood into physical and

social maturity. What is more, the fact that maidens were associated with purity and sanctity in medieval discourse meant that on the occasions where they were subjected to rape or sexual violence this was perceived as a violation of a moral ideal that maidenhood represented rather than of the maiden herself as an autonomous subject. In some cases, this led to girls who had suffered horrific attacks being themselves dehumanised and rendered 'monstrous' in the eyes of medieval communities. It is difficult to imagine the effects this had on child victims of sexual violence in medieval England, but it is likely that it both exacerbated the traumatic effects of abuse and deterred girls from instituting legal proceedings against their attackers. By modern standards, this represents a significant failure to protect the young, but even by its own standards, medieval society was failing to live up to the image of itself which it sought to construct: an England in which maidens were protected from ravishment by wild, monstrous and diabolical forces bent on their destruction.

In this thesis, I have attempted to bring together and synthesise ideas from a wide range of disciplines which offer different perspectives on childhood. I have drawn upon literary analyses of romances and the role that these played in the construction of medieval cultural ideals and discourses. I have also drawn upon traditionally historical approaches to the analysis of children's lives and contributed to the historical picture which has been built up by historians of childhood. This thesis has been deeply influenced by the important work that has been undertaken in the field of childhood studies since the 1990s, particularly by constructivist accounts of childhood in the work of sociologists and anthropologists. I have also made use of insights from cognitive, developmental and social psychologists who have approached questions of childhood and child abuse from a perspective that has been more traditionally individualist but which has in recent years placed increasing emphasis on the impact of socio-cultural factors. In so doing, I have been inspired by the calls for cross-disciplinary collaboration and the cross-fertilisation of ideas which, as I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, have grown in strength and number in recent years. My approach has aimed to be an exploratory one: in putting together ideas relating to childhood which are not always considered together, I have aimed not to provide a definitive methodology for reading historical or literary sources but rather to suggest possibilities, raise questions and, if this thesis succeeds in its goal, to provoke ideas and discussion amongst scholars interested in childhood across time and place. Indeed, I believe that one of the most fascinating aspects of childhood as a subject of study is that it permits collaborative analysis from such a broad range of perspectives across the social sciences and humanities. In the remainder of this conclusion, I will discuss the contribution I hope that this thesis might make to the wider discussion and suggest some possibilities for future research in the fields of medieval history and literature. I will then go on to consider some of the broader implications this may have for childhood studies more generally.

Historical Childhood

I hope this thesis will help stimulate medievalists to pay more attention to medieval childhood and to ask new questions of the sources. Like children themselves, I have shown that a concept of childhood was not simply an appendage to medieval culture that may be seen as either 'present' or 'absent' depending on where one focuses one's gaze. Concepts of childhood were integral to medieval culture: they were fundamentally intertwined with the discourses that lent shape to the natural and social world. Narratives of human development were deeply embedded in how medieval people understood and categorised their surroundings: nature, animality, divinity, purity, profanity, monstrosity, the demonic, the savage, the civilised, the body, the soul, the rational faculties, the seasons, the humours, the planets, as well as humanity itself. If one pulled the threads of 'childhood' which were interwoven through all these medieval concepts they would likely fall apart in one's hands. Yet in their justifiable eagerness to demonstrate that Ariès was wrong, medievalists have focussed their energies on proving the existence of a concept of childhood rather than attending to its particular character, its function in medieval discourse, and its relation to social structures, institutions and practices.

To indulge in a brief thought experiment, had Ariès argued that medieval people had no idea of 'male' and 'female', it is certain that scholars could have written any number of books demonstrating the existence of the categories 'man' and 'woman' in medieval culture and noting that in some important ways these resembled our own. Yet this diversion of energy would have left all the interesting work still to be done: interrogating gender categories; understanding their discursive function; their social and legal ramifications; their impact on the lives and experiences of everyday women and men; their relation to our own cultural ideas and biases; the imbalances in scholarship that these have produced. These and countless other fascinating and essential issues would remain to be investigated. I must therefore add my voice to those calling for a new paradigm in the study of historical childhood, one which finally shakes off the direct influence of Ariès. The history of medieval childhood must now move on to address such important questions.

In order to do so, I have shown that attending to research into childhood across disciplines can suggest new ways of interrogating and understanding medieval sources. Medievalists are rightly cautious about importing anachronistic concepts into the study of the past, especially when these are used to override the particularity of medieval culture or shoehorn medieval evidence into preconceived theories. But I hope I have shown that research from psychology, sociology and anthropology can be used to open up rather than close down debates in medieval historiography,

to provide new questions as well as new answers, and to stimulate discussion. Ecological systems theory offers scholars of childhood a means of integrating different disciplinary perspectives whilst respecting their unique insights, and perhaps seeing past some of the dichotomies between biology and culture, social structure and agency, discourse and practice which have troubled the field. The study of childhood is perhaps uniquely positioned to address these problems because childhood so often stands at their point of intersection. Children are, to paraphrase Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'good to think with'.[4] They offer a 'bottom up' perspective on medieval society, from which they illuminate and shed light on the workings of power in everyday interactions; on social, familial, community and legal structures; on discursive power and on the construction of identities.

Literary Childhood

The largest contribution I have made with this thesis is not to provide answers pertaining to the child in medieval literature but to have highlighted questions. This thesis has not attempted a complete and systematic study of childhood in Middle English romance; indeed, I feel I have barely scratched the surface of what is possible. There are many more children in romance than I had the space to discuss and no doubt the picture is richer and more complex than I have been able to elucidate. I have however demonstrated the potential which these sources offer to scholars interested in understanding the child in medieval literature. In considering romances alongside the texts on the theme of the Ages of Man with which they share the pages of household manuscripts, I have tried to show some of the ways in which romances such as *Perceval, Gowther, Lybeaus* and *Tryamour* engage with medieval discourses of childhood and youth, development and socialisation. They do so in ways that are sophisticated, innovative and at times – to borrow a term from Nicola McDonald – 'audacious'.[5] Further scholarship on the child in Middle English romance is urgently needed.

I have also suggested ways of imagining children as readers or consumers of Middle English texts. Children were a significant portion of the population in the Middle Ages, yet their numerical significance has not yet been reflected in the extent to which scholars have discussed their engagement with medieval literary production. Just as feminist scholars have demonstrated that work on medieval literature was incomplete without the consideration of women readers, so too is it possible that in neglecting the young, we may have missed an important influence on texts

[4] See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon, 1963), 89.
[5] Nicola McDonald, 'A Polemical Introduction', in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance,* ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 1.

and their reception in medieval culture. I have argued that children were active participants in the imaginary worlds that Middle English romances constructed; as characters, consumers and co-constructors. It is likely that children responded to the narratives contained in romances, conduct texts and indeed other genres in their own ways, and used them as models for behaviour and means by which they could conceptualise their own youthful identities and their place in the social world. I have shown how romances place children – both as characters and readers – in narrative and discursive contexts which allow a multiplicity of possibilities for imagining alternative childhoods to those which the stultifying precepts of didactic literature convey. Further insights into the relationship between the literary and social worlds of medieval childhood may await future researchers. What is more, the expectations of children and young people likely shaped the production of texts and the manuscripts in which they are found.[6] If we broaden our own cultural conceptualisation of the young reader beyond one who craves simple moral messages and easy enjoyment, we may yet discover that the 'sticky fingerprints' of children do indeed adorn medieval literary works.[7]

Childhood Studies

As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, the shadow of Philippe Ariès still looms large over the 'new sociology of childhood'. Even where in principle many scholars would likely accept that his sweeping conclusions about the lack of a 'sentiment' of childhood in the Middle Ages have now been shown to be incorrect, the field continues to be shaped by the paradigm that he established. Medieval childhood is rarely discussed other than in relation to Ariès's ideas, and the construct of 'the medieval' which thus emerges from the scholarly literature is one in which ideas of childhood were relatively embryonic, unformed and inconsequential, awaiting the innovations of Enlightenment thinkers for their full articulation. In this thesis I have captured some of the richness, variety and complexity of medieval ideas of childhood and added my voice to those who argue that a deeper understanding of the medieval roots of modern discourses are an important subject of study. The association of the child with the 'primitive' or 'savage', for example, took on new meaning and force in the nineteenth century as Chris Jenks has shown, but it is clearly

[6] Phillipa Hardman, 'Introduction', in *The Heege Manuscript: a Facsimile of National Library of Scotland Advocates 19.3.1,* ed. Phillipa Hardman, *Leeds Texts and Monographs,* New Series 16 (Leeds, 2000), 1-57; 'Popular Romances and Young Readers', in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance,* ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Corey James Rushton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 159-64; Mary E. Shaner, 'Instruction and Delight: Medieval Romances as Children's Literature', *Poetics Today,* vol. 13, no. 1 (1992): 5-15; Kim Phillips, 'Desiring Virgins: Maidens, Martyrs and Femininity in Late Medieval England', in P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy, ed., *Youth in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2004), 45-59; Nicholas Orme, 'Children and literature in medieval England', *Medium Aevum* 68, no. 2 (1999): 218-246.

[7] For the metaphor of 'sticky fingerprints' see Carenza Lewis, 'Children's Play in the Later Medieval English Countryside', *Childhood in the Past* 2, no. 1 (2009): 86-108.

present in some form in the 'savage' and 'uncouth' children who populate medieval romance.[8] Medieval texts too are liberally endowed with children as social actors possessed of agency whose perspectives are worthy of consideration, from the pupils of the anonymous author of the Arundel *vulgaria* to the governing princess Helen in *Sir Tryamour*. Indeed, dependent on gender and social position, medieval children may sometimes have found themselves with more autonomy than their modern counterparts rather than less, even if this came at the price of a lack of protection. It may be that in considering the medieval past we will find positive as well as negative lessons from which to construct and reconstruct childhood in ways which are conducive to children's flourishing.

There are other reasons too for jettisoning the Ariès paradigm which continues to underlie the field. By positing as its baseline assumption the idea that childhood is largely an arbitrary product of specific socio-cultural circumstances, this paradigm incentivises and amplifies perspectives which emphasise *between*-culture variation, and has the potential to blind scholars to the significant *within*-culture variation which exists. In other words, this paradigm suggests that concepts of childhood should be both unique to the socio-cultural circumstances in which they arise and broadly coherent or homogenous within the culture. In fact, the cross-temporal and cross-cultural picture of childhood which emerges from multidisciplinary research is just the opposite: one of general coherence in the ideas of childhood which are present within cultures across time and place, but of significant variation regarding which of these competing perspectives predominate and how they are articulated.[9] Certainly within medieval culture, ideas of childhood varied dramatically according to their social or discursive context. The pure and innocent maiden fulfilled a different discursive function to the wanton and wild child, the precocious ideal ruler to innocent victim of bloody violence, the malleable waxwork to the intransigent ass. Similar archetypes reappear across time and place, but their emphasis and articulation shifts and takes on unique features in particular socio-cultural circumstances. Chris Jenks suggests that the twin images of 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' childhood are present in Western culture and argues for a change in emphasis with modernity from the former to the latter.[10] In his survey of historical childhood, Heywood concurs the twin ideas of depravity and innocence have been present across European history.[11] From an anthropological perspective, David Lancy identifies similar images as present across cultures which he terms 'cherubs' and 'changelings', also adding a third category of 'chattel'

[8] Chris Jenks, *Childhood,* 2nd Edn. (London: Routledge, 2005), 4.
[9] Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times,* 2nd Edn. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), esp. 37-48; David F. Lancy, *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings,* 2nd Edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[10] Jenks, *Childhood.*
[11] Heywood, *History,* 37-41.

in which children are viewed in primarily economic terms.[12] This thesis has generally upheld the idea that competing ideas simultaneously idealised and denigrated childhood within medieval culture. As far as I have been able to ascertain however this thesis is original in positing that these images have a strongly gendered dimension.[13] This is perhaps more clearly evident in medieval culture than at other times and in other places, yet it may be that closer examination could reveal a similar pattern elsewhere. Even in more recent times children have been taught that boys are made of 'snips and snails and puppy-dogs' tails' whereas girls are 'sugar and spice and all things nice'.

This cross-cultural coherence in conceptualisations of childhood no doubt exists in part because different cultures at different times are responding to the same biological realities of human development. Yet it may also reflect cross-cultural continuities in the challenges of human social organisation. From the point of view of those interested in social change, innovation and progress, every child is like a blank canvas: a new and exciting opportunity to impart fresh ideas. Young minds do indeed demonstrate an adaptability and proclivity for learning which is the envy of many who have attempted to acquire a new skill later in life. For the moralist who sees the adult word as sinful or corrupt, the child is a perfect representation of innocence against which to set a narrative of corruption and social decay, for children certainly are born ignorant of the existence of evil. For the socio-political theorist who sees the adult world in Hobbesian terms as a fragile social contract upholding civilisation, children are liable to be viewed as every bit as 'nasty brutish and short' as 'uncivilised' life itself.[14] His or her world view may be bolstered by the fact that levels of violent behaviour during childhood are in fact often higher than later in life.[15] These issues are not particular to Western culture although I have explored its historical articulation of them; they are fundamental to social organisation. The balance of social stability and cultural innovation must be confronted in some form by all societies. Parental love may be culturally universal but so too is parental frustration with the physical and emotional labour of childrearing. Many, perhaps all, societies construct boundaries and hierarches between subordinate and superordinate, order and disorder, the centre and the margins, the pure and the polluted, sacred and profane. Age, like other social variables such as gender, class and ethnicity, must often find its place within such frameworks.

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[12] Lancy, *Anthropology*.

[13] Mary Dzon identifies the gendered nature of childhood 'wantonness' verses demureness in medieval discourse but does not tie this to broader cross-cultural perspectives. See Mary Dzon, Mary Dzon, 'Wanton Boys in Middle English Texts and the Christ Child in Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, MS Z822 N81', in *Medieval Life Cycles: Continuity and Change,* ed. Isabelle Cochelin and Karen Smyth (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 81-145.

[14] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), I. xiii. 9.

[15] Richard E. Tremblay, 'The Development of Aggressive Behaviour During Childhood: What Have We Learned in the Past Century?', *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 24, no. 2 (2000): 129-141.

ABBREVIATIONS

BIHR	Borthwick Institute of Historical Research
CCA	Canterbury Cathedral Archives
EETS O.S.	Early English Text Society, original series
EETS E.S.	Early English Text Society, extra series
EETS S.S.	Early English Text Society, supplementary series
KHLC	Kent History and Library Centre (formerly the Centre for Kentish Studies)
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
SSP	Selden Society Publications

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C1/19/466

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JUST 3/150, m. 4d.

Court of King's Bench, Coram Rege Rolls:

KB 27/47, m.22d.

Borthwick Institute for Historical Research

Cause Papers:

CP.E.85

CP.E.23

CP.E.89

Canterbury Cathedral Archives

Quarter Sessions Records:

CC/J/Q/310, fol. 18r.

CC/J/Q/336, fol. 1r.

Kent History and Library Centre (formerly the Centre for Kentish Studies)

Canterbury Archdeaconry Court Office Act Books:

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