POETRY AND LONDON LEARNING:

CHAUCER, GOWER, USK, LANGLAND AND HOCCLEVE

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ABSTRACT

POETRY AND LONDON LEARNING:
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Medieval London, unlike medieval Paris, did not have a university. The absence of a
dominant local institution that regulated intellectual innovation in a historical moment
that sees the collapse of distinctions between clerical and lay presented an opportunity for
the poetic appropriation of the academy’s disciplines in Latin and in Middle English.

“Poetry and London Learning” presents London as a center of English, intellectual
culture, on par with Oxford and Cambridge. I argue that late medieval London poetry
constitutes a coherent, innovative intellectual movement. London poets Geoffrey
Chaucer, John Gower, Thomas Usk, William Langland, Thomas Hoccleve, and the
anonymous Mum and the Soothsegger-poet present poetry as local scholarship that is
affiliated with the City and the nearby jurisdictions of Southwark and Westminster rather
than the academy. These poets redefine medieval academic disciplines to make them
immediately available, comprehensible and useful to a London reading audience.

Chaucer narrates the history of alchemy; Gower revises late-medieval historiography;
Usk makes a London ethics out of the materials of theology; and Langland narrates a
common origin for poetry and natural philosophy. In the process of revising academic disciplines for the City, these poets present poetic, pedagogical narratives that intend to generate models of urban intellectual subject formation.

Every chapter describes London, a community and a place experienced differently by each poet, and explains how each poet’s specific location, career, and affiliations produced singular revisions of institutional, pedagogic tradition. Each chapter also presents the long histories of the disciplines concerned in order to describe how these poets’ contributions become implicated or marginalized in English intellectual history.

Hoccleve’s invention of Chaucerian science contributed to sixteenth-century antiquarians’ claims regarding the genealogy of an ancient urban, poetic scholarly tradition in spite of the continued absence of a university in the City. Gower’s idiosyncratic performance of Latin history alienates his poetic production from the longer tradition of historical writing about the City. “Poetry and London Learning,” therefore, refuses to narrate a history of English poetry periodized by regnal period, but insists upon imagining the place of London’s late-medieval poets in the longer history of English scholarship.
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Chapter One

Putting London in its Place:

London’s Poets and Late Medieval English Intellectual History

The Bishop and the City’s Clerks

Puerulus lacrimosus capitalium litterarium non diretur imagines, ne manu fluida polluat pergamenum; tangit enim illico quicquid videt. Porro laici, qui libros que respiciunt resupine transversum sicut serie naturali expansum, omni librorum communione penitus sunt indigni.

—Richard of Bury, Philobiblon

In a chapter that prescribes how scholars should treat books in the Philobiblon (1344), Richard of Bury (1287-1345), Bishop of Durham, immediately follows a prescription that scholars should wash their hands after meals before touching books with the injunction that neither children nor the adult laity should touch books at all. Children touch the illuminations that accompany capital letters because they touch whatever they see. Adult laity are not permitted any communion with books since they are unfit (indigni). Their unfitness for study, for reading, for even the touching of books comes from what Richard of Bury presupposes is an almost natural illiteracy. The laity hold books upside-down as they imitate the clergy. Because they cannot read, they are likely to mishandle books and damage them by holding them incorrectly. Their inexpert hands, like children’s wet hands, are likely to damage parchment. Scholars who touch books with dirty hands are like tearful children and illiterate laity and should not be allowed further access to books until they mend their ways. Richard of Bury’s treatise, an ode to books and the bequest of his personal library to an unidentified Oxford hall, imagines an
intellectual culture that is exclusively professional. Clerics, in all their diversity (parish priests, monks, students, friars), are extolled to preserve, read, write, and copy books. Others, such as children and the laity, must be presumed to have no rightful relationship with books or the learning they contain.

The medieval intellectual—an anachronistic category that modern scholars of the Middle Ages have tried with great difficulty to describe—tidily coincides with an actual medieval category: for Richard of Bury all clerics are morally and professionally obliged to participate in a culture of book-based learning. Intellectual life begins at the birth of the Church’s sons when chosen, promising boys begin elementary learning of the trivium and quadrivium. Professional development continues at the university where knowledge of books of theology confer the privilege of the clergy: access to the books of the intellectual Latin traditions and of sacred literature is identified with tonsure and the legal benefits of belonging to a clerical class. Books and the learning they preserve confer privilege but also establish responsibility and identify intellectual labor as crucial to diverse clerical vocations.

Books are not only crucial to students: teaching from books, preaching from books, writing books, and preserving books are activities that remain central to clerical life after the period of formal study. Indeed, Richard of Bury and the very distinguished members of his household or his familia (which included, at various points, Thomas Bradwardine, Walter Burley, Walter Seagrave, John Maudith, Richard Bentworth, Richard Fitzralph, Richard Kilvington, and Robert Holcot) model how clerics might continue to learn beyond the years of formal study. Richard of Bury describes clerical
culture, ideally and in his own practice, as continued reading and learned conversation in
the company of the other clerics ("viris litteratis et librorum dilectoribus delectaremur
habere"). To be a cleric implies a lifelong commitment to learning, modeled in practice
in the fourteenth century by Richard of Bury and his friends and in history by the ancient
philosophers who studied to their old age.

The *Philobiblon* announces a commitment to the continued training of young men
who are preparing for the clerical profession. But the *Philobiblon*, which presents a
model (Richard of Bury himself) for clerical intellectual life, also presents a model for
Latin, prose composition and was used as an exemplar like the letters compiled in
Richard of Bury’s formulary (*Liber epistolaris quondam Ricardi di Bury*, ca. 1324).
Much more can be known about the afterlife of the *Philobiblon* as a model for Latin
composition and grammar then remains known about the afterlife of Richard of Bury’s
personal library. Some manuscripts from the fifteenth century, such as British Library
Additional 24361, testify to the treatise’s use in clerical life. In Additional 24361, the
work we know as the *Philobiblon* is bound alongside Alan of Lille’s *De Planctu Naturaef*
but also with an art of letter-writing (“Regule dictaminis edito a magistro T. Mark”) and a
treatise on sermon composition (“Tractatus de sermonibus faciendis”). The composition
of sermons and of letters, modeled upon the grammar and style of Alan of Lille and of
Richard of Bury, is compiled alongside an additional aid that presents the bible versified
by a monk. This manuscript presents itself as an aid to a preacher and a bureaucrat, a
manuscript for someone who writes sermons as well as administrative and diplomatic
letters. The Philobiblon, in this manuscript, remains part of the clerical culture that Richard of Bury was so deeply part and hoped to revive and maintain.

But a similar manuscript is bequeathed, not by a cleric in the sense of university-trained servant of the Church, but by the Common Clerk of the City of London at his death in 1442. John Carpenter, Common Clerk of London (1417-1438), was a chandler and a lawyer. His responsibilities included creating and keeping the City’s records as well as the legal records of the mayor’s court. John Carpenter was prominent, well-respected, and well-remunerated: he was repeatedly elected to his post by the Common Council over a period of twenty-one years and received special rewards for compiling the Liber Albus, a compilation of City law and custom. He was, as Caroline Barron argues, a professional administrator and he had a chamber of junior clerks in his charge. In his will, a prosperous, book-collecting John Carpenter bequeaths various books to his friends and fellows and to Guildhall library. He bequeathed a manuscript containing the Philobiblon, De Planctu Naturae, and a Tractatus Dictaminis to one of his former clerks, Richard de Lafeld. In this manuscript, two books, the Philobiblon and De Planctu Naturae, dedicated to the description of clerical intellectual formation have clearly become crucial to the training of the city’s lay administrators.

This surprising movement, indeed the translation, of two Latin works that describe clerical formation and clerical culture to an administrative but decidedly lay sphere testifies to the rapid “clericalization” of the laity that Ann W. Astell describes so well in Chaucer and the Universe of Learning. But this seeming radical and rapid development might also testify to the fantastic nature of Richard of Bury’s description of
what kinds of persons participated in intellectual and administrative culture in the early fourteenth century. Richard of Bury, a dedicated lifelong examiner of the students at King’s Hall in Cambridge, imagines places (such as courts populated by clerical advisors, Episcopal households such as his own, fraternal convents, monastic houses, and university halls) that are more or less exclusively clerical as the only possible sites of intellectual formation, intellectual exchange, and even of literate culture. He omits all mention of the city in which he resided—he spent most of his days as the Bishop of Durham, particularly his years as Keeper and Treasurer of the Royal Wardrobe (1328-1329) and Keeper of the Privy Seal (1329-1333), in residence at Durham Palace in the Strand in London—as a site of intellectual exchange and formation and as a site of teaching. Richard of Bury overstates his case in an attempt to revive what he presents as degenerating clerical traditions and what he proposes, a program of lifelong dedication to study, is intended to revive that culture. But Richard of Bury was also protecting clerical privilege. Intellectual culture—which includes poetry—belongs to a professional class, according to the Philobiblon. This class has a proprietary relationship with intellectual traditions and also exclusively holds the keys to bureaucratic and administrative offices in the Church and the realm by virtue of both its members’ literacy and their learnedness.

By the first half of the fifteenth century, during the period of John Carpenter’s office, London already had a thriving intellectual culture in which guildsmen were bequeathing books to a newly established civic libraries attached to chapel schools founded by the city’s guilds. John Carpenter’s personal collection of books testifies to a range of intellectual interests. His reading extends beyond the vernacular romances and
devotional writing that Ralph Hanna has demonstrated were the primary materials of London reading culture in the fourteenth century up to 1381. Carpenter’s collection was primarily devotional but he also collected books that were guides to his profession, such as books of accounting and letter-writing, as well as manuals of advice to princes and Roger Dymok’s “Contra doudecim errores et hereses Lollardorum.” This bequest describes a learned, intellectual civic environment distinct from the institutions of clerical life and, indeed, already being associated with the institutions of civic life (e.g., the library at Guildhall). John Carpenter’s will reveals a wider range of interests: government, ethics, heresy. It also demonstrates a desire to associate his public and legal identity (“I John Carpynter junior, citizen of London) with a bookish legacy: his books constitute a large portion of his professional and pedagogical bequest. These books will be as crucial to his junior clerks’ professional development as Richard of Bury’s books will be to students in Oxford. Carpenter’s will identifies him as a professional civic bureaucrat, a former clerk of the city, whose legacy benefits and remains crucial to the formation of his junior clerks and the students at the school attached to the chapel at Guildhall.

The historical and literary trajectory that I present does not open with an exclusively clerical intellectual culture represented by Richard of Bury and end with John Carpenter’s appropriation of clerical institutional and pedagogical formations (e.g., the establishment of libraries and schools) for the benefit of the civic community. Instead, this opening juxtaposition of Richard of Bury and John Carpenter exposes Richard of Bury’s image of an exclusive clerical, intellectual culture as a fantasy. I argue that the
divisions between lay and clerical, between intellectual and non-intellectual, were far more permeable in the later Middle Ages, particularly in urban centers such as London and its environs (especially Southwark and Westminster), than the picture that Richard of Bury presents. It is crucial that we not only imagine John Carpenter as an intellectual figure attached to the city, but also that we imagine that the life of Richard of Bury and his clerical fellows happened in London and not in isolated clerical enclaves. Clerics did not spend their entire lives in association with each other: they resided in and belonged to local communities. Their lives were available as models not only to young clerics and students, officially speaking, but also to the larger community.

Clerics, such as Richard of Bury and the members of his household, were very visible in the City. Thomas Bradwardine, briefly Archbishop of Canterbury (1348-1349), was particularly visible in London in the role of Chancellor of St. Paul’s Cathedral (1337-1349). He preached at St. Paul’s, taught theology at St. Paul’s, and administered to the demands of his urban ecclesiastical community from St. Paul’s. His renowned scholarly career—he was an Augustinian theologian, as Chaucer reminds us in The Nun’s Priest’s Tale—was not distinct from his career as an administrator, a preacher, a public figure, and a member of both the royal and ecclesiastical administrations. To imagine clerics distinct from the rest of the community, to imagine Bradwardine divorced from Londoners such as Chaucer, would be to mistake the trajectory of most medieval clerical careers. Unlike Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) who spent many of his years at the University of Paris and John Wycliffe (d. 1384) who spent most of his life in Oxford, few clerics, even the most renowned of theologians, spent the majority of their lives in universities.
Some of them rose in the ranks of ecclesiastical administration, but many of the most renowned, such as John of Salisbury (1120-1180), worked as administrators in courts or, like Thomas Bradwardine, as public figures associated with a parish or ecclesiastical jurisdiction as well as with an order or a school. Therefore, to imagine that intersections and interactions between clerical and lay transpired only in known institutional spaces (a church, a court, a schoolroom) and to succumb to Richard of Bury’s fantasy of a hermetically-sealed clerical intellectual English culture would be to mistake the value of intimate urban space as another site of exchange and intellectual interaction.

In London, lay literate culture is generally attested by the rise of the guilds and of civic governments, by forms of association that led to record-keeping and bureaucratic cultures that demanded the training of growing numbers of literate men in places such as the university and the schools attached to town cathedrals. The rise of the intellectual, as Jacques Le Goff taught us so long ago, coincided with the emergence of the medieval town or the medieval urban center in the twelfth century. But the emergence of a bureaucratic class in England, while initially related to the emergence of bureaucrats trained in and around the university (many of whom, as Piers Plowman attests so ably, were clerics) does not account for the emergence of all the literary and literate laymen in the city attached to civic government in the fourteenth century. The guilds and mercantile culture in general produced their own brand of learned men, mostly participants in civic association with intimate knowledge of civic forms that intersected with the practice of the law. The law, in poetry and in Richard of Bury’s Philobiblon, is rhetorically a kind of instrumental, professional, and profitable literate practice that is
different from the abstract knowledge of the liberal arts. But the legal profession produced its own intellectual classes, particularly in urban contexts such as London. Knowledge of the law, in addition, coincided with knowledge of the practices and privileges that defined a community: to be a practitioner of law, civic or royal, requires a coherent sense of the identity of a community and its aspirations. It presupposes, therefore, an attachment to a community and a sense of attachment to a place and its history antithetical to the universal concerns of an imagined, intellectual, transnational clerical community.

Even prior to the composition of the Philobiblon, Andrew Horn (1275-1328), fishmonger and Chamberlain of London (1320-28), produced important manuscripts compiling and documenting the laws and customs of the City. His works included compilations which he bequeathed to the Guildhall in his will including the Liber Horn (which included Charters of the City, various other royal statutes, guilds and writs relating to London), the Liber Legum Regum Antiquorum and the Modus et Ordo Placitorum Apud Turrim Londonarium (which together constitute Horn’s customals, known as the Liber Custumarum), and the Annales Londoniensis (a history of the city during the reign of Edward II). Aside from his crucial role in establishing conventions for London book-making which was dedicated primarily to “production of large legal books for local use,” Horn’s role—as Chamberlain he was responsible for collecting city revenues and, at the time, responsible for the records of the city (a task that would later belong to the Common Clerk)—was very public. He was not simply a recorder, but also a publisher of the law. He made certain that statutes and laws were widely
distributed and read aloud during gatherings at the Hustings and the folkmoot. The
*Annales Paulini*, in fact, records an instance in which Andrew Horn publicly pronounced
and translated the new Charter of Liberties granted by Edward II to the city.25

On the one hand, the production of useful books that served as references and
guides to London’s messy and complicated ad hoc collection of letter-books might be
considered distinct from the clerical culture Richard of Bury describes in spite of the use
of innovative, clerical literate technologies. Mercantile literacy has its own history: civic
servants and merchants acquired Latin and Anglo-Norman literacy for business and
administrative purposes. But it is also quite clear that it was possible, even prior to the
composition of Richard of Bury’s *Philobiblon*, for the laity to imagine their public
legacies in terms of their literary and intellectual identities and to think of their public
roles in terms of pedagogy. Andrew Horn was remembered because of the books he
produced which taught its readers about how to make books, how to compile books, how
to compose narratives of law, and how to navigate archives. The books that once
constituted his private collection of muniments eventually constituted his public legacy
and, in fact, established the standard method and format for collecting and organizing the
city’s records and laws.26 Andrew Horn imagined it possible to leave behind a legal,
intellectual and literary legacy that was attached to his identity as a citizen of London.

These bequests—John Carpenter’s will, Andrew Horn’s will, Richard of Bury’s
*Philobiblon*—identify professions with books that had been crucial to these men’s
formation and their public performance of their vocations. Poets, such as Geoffrey
Chaucer (d. 1400) and John Gower (d. 1408), are less likely to identify themselves with
place as clearly as the civic servants Andrew Horn and John Carpenter. They are also less likely to identify their profession with the City (poet, being far less official a civic role than, for example, Chamberlain or fishmonger). Neither can we narrate the trajectory of the pedagogical and scholarly career of a poet as easily as we can narrate the career of a renowned bishop or a celebrated theologian. But Chaucer and Gower also leave behind catalogues of their work that constitute their bequests to their reading communities.

Chaucer’s Retractions jokingly revoke some of his major works (“my translacions and enitynges of worldly vanitees),” but they also catalogue his literary production and provide his career with a narrative trajectory. In the Retractions, a career that has been besmirched with vain writing is redeemed by devotional, moral, and philosophical writing. The Latin colophon (Quia vnusquisque) that ends some of the manuscripts of John Gower’s final major work, the Confessio Amantis (First Recension 1386 ; Second Recension 1390-1392), encapsulate his career as a tri-lingual poet and also name his major poems. Poetic production is imagined, on the one hand, as property to be bequeathed and, on the other, as testament to his vocation of providing instruction (“doctrine”) to others. Teaching, therefore, narrated in the Philobiblon as the presentation of a model life and identified with a role in the formation of a class of men affiliated with particular literary traditions and professions, was not in practice a clerical privilege. Many kinds of men—civic bureaucrats and poets, sometimes both of these at once, among them—usurped the role of teacher by identifying books (sometimes of their own composition and translation) that were crucial to the public performance of a
profession or vocation and crucial to their pedagogical, intellectual bequests to a community.

Multiple kinds of men who spent time in the City of London, not just clerics, imagined their lives and their legacies in terms of their bookish production, their bookish bequests, and the imperative to instruct. Richard of Bury, imagines that his bequest would belong to the clergy exclusively and in perpetuity: students at Oxford who will belong to the intellectual, clerical class are asked to take an interest in the books he has collected and studied over a lifetime. Andrew Horn and John Carpenter bequeathed their books to Guildhall and to their professional associates in the City. They imagine an alternative but similarly bookish civic culture and the possibility that such a culture might produce its own learned, or at least literate, cadre of men who make use of their knowledge to govern and to work in and for the civic community. Chaucer and Gower, the most canonical poets featured in this dissertation, craft literary identities in catalogues that resemble bequests. Their poetic labors constitute their intellectual and scholarly bequests to their communities: Chaucer’s Retractions and Gower’s Quia vnumquisque narrate these poets’ public, literary, and intellectual identities but also identify these poets’ roles in the intellectual formation of their readers.

The title of this dissertation, “Poetry and London Learning,” identifies poetry—a genre that has always imagined itself as public or, at least, as “capable of being popular” as representative of London’s learned culture. The writing of most of the late fourteenth century’s canonical poets—Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and Usk—testify to the emergence of a London-based, poetic intellectual culture. Poetic intellectual culture
was, I argue, opportunistic: London poets insisted that there was a need for renewed
learning in the city and suited their writing and their teaching to what they present as the
immediate and urgent needs and demands of the local reading community. London
poems, as I will discuss shortly, reinvent specific academic disciplines. Andrew Horn and
John Carpenter address the needs of the polity by assembling books of law: the poets
compose, translate, and assemble books of academic knowledge particularly suited for
local use and present them as addresses to immediate local concerns in poetry, defined
broadly here as figurative writing rather than as verse. For example, Thomas Usk’s *The
Testament of Love* (1385-1386) does not simply present an ethics but a London ethics in
the aftermath of a destructive factional crisis. His ethical treatise is not only peculiarly
suitable for immediate application in London but also composed as an address to
members of the City, an address that makes use of legal genres and vocabularies that
render Boethian philosophy comprehensible locally. Poets borrow materials from
academic disciplines traditionally associated with the clergy, but they render them (at
least, imaginatively) local and immediately useful. These poems are often similar to
academic production by virtue of the fact that they are often translations—Thomas Usk’s
*Testament of Love* (ca. 1385) translates a Latin theological tract by Anselm of
Canterbury—but sometimes even Latin works, such as John Gower’s *Vox Clamantis* (ca.
1381, revised in 1400), can be identified with local, London intellectual culture.

This dissertation presents London poetry as specifically and recognizably
composed with the city in mind and I argue that the poems in this study constitute a
particular, specific London learning. Unlike both clerical and official civic cultural
writing, however, London poetry tends to present itself as unaffiliated with institutions, as somehow of the city but not quite part of public, official culture (that is, until the writing of John Lydgate, 1370-1451). Readerships, therefore, for London poetry are rarely identified with the city (although many fifteenth-century owners of Chaucer manuscripts were London guildsmen) because their careers do not provide us with an easy affiliation: clerics write for clerics and civic servants for other civic servants. Poets, like clerics and civic clerks, may narrate their intellectual careers in terms of their bequest to community but are less likely to identify that community with institutions. Each chapter of this dissertation, therefore, explains how each of these poets imagine a London reading community and how they each imagine their poetry’s pedagogical roles. While London, as a place, might be very easy to define according to its borders and administrative, legal jurisdictions, it is only with greater difficulty that I explain what the idea of London implies and how many permutations of “London” appear in the work of London’s poets. Nevertheless, every poet implicated in this study presents the general geographic area of London as particularly conducive and receptive to new kinds of teachers and in desperate need for a new kind of teaching, a teaching that can opportunistically be represented in poetry.

The rest of this introduction lays the ground for my revision of medieval English intellectual history. I restore London’s poets to their rightful place as contributors to intellectual, urban culture. I revise London intellectual history and comment, briefly, on the many ways on which these intellectual histories have been tied to the institutions that have created models for intellectual transmission and formation without taking account of
the ad hoc pedagogical project of London’s poets, their singular narratives of knowledge-formation, and their revisions of academic disciplines. The dissertation revises too how we might think of the ways in which intellectual careers are narrated and how communities of intellectually-engaged men associated with each other, spoke with each other, and wrote in response to each other in the City and its environs.

Revisions to Medieval Intellectual History and the Place of London

In the anonymous, alliterative late fourteenth-century poem *Saint Erkenwald*, the London bishop Erkenwald or Erconwold (d. 693) is commemorated with an anti-intellectual celebration of his extraordinary devotion. The London-born saint of the moment was actually the martyred Thomas Becket (d. 1170) whose cult is celebrated in a pilgrimage from late medieval London’s most famous poem, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. But Erkenwald was both a London bishop and a London saint, someone whose cult was not shared with another, competing English center of devotion and ecclesiastical administration (Canterbury). In order to celebrate the local bishop, the author of *Saint Erkenwald* distinguishes Erkenwald from the men around him by presenting him as a devout, prayerful man who looks directly to God for knowledge. Rather than resort to human means of discovery in order to uncover the mystery behind a recently exhumed and miraculously preserved ancient body, Erkenwald spends the night in prayer and then speaks directly to a spirit that moves the corpse. In conversation with Erkenwald, the corpse reveals that he had been a pagan administrator of the law (“‘Neuer kynge ne cayser ne ȝet no knȝt nothyre,/ Bot a lede of þe laghe þat þen þis londe vsit’” [199-200]).
Prior to the Bishop's return from Essex, the people of London try to discover the corpse's identity with attempts to interpret the mysterious runic writing on his "toumbe" (46; "Mony clerkes in pat close wy crownes ful brode/ ber besiet hom about no3t to brynge home in wordes" [55-6]). When Erkenwald first looks at the body, the Canon of the Cathedral announces that a dedicated search through the archives of the Cathedral have produced no trace of the corpse's identity: "And we haue oure librarie laitid þes longe seuen dayes/ Bot one croncile of þis kynge con we neure fynde" (155-156). Erkenwald describes earlier attempts to uncover history through human, clerical, and intellectual efforts (attempts at translation, researching through archives) and the announcement of their failure as a sign that the men of London must turn directly to God: "þere-as creatures crafte of counselle oute swarues,/ J>e comforthe of the creatore byhoues t>e cure take" (167-168). Erkenwald identifies his devotion and his direct address to God and corpse as antithetical to intellectual effort ("creatures crafte"). When human efforts fail to discover history or truth, an anti-intellectual "fastynge of 3oure faithe and of fyne bilue" (173) still provides answers.

The poem, which opens and begins with gatherings that picture the diverse London community at St. Paul's Cathedral, celebrates an anti-intellectual (rather than an anti-clerical) saint even as it proposes to answer a crucial theological question: can pagans be saved? The miracle that Erkenwald performs—he baptizes the pagan man of law with his tears and, thereby, allows the ancient Londoner to partake of salvation—demonstrates rather than debates the answer to the question. *Saint Erkenwald* celebrates the history of a city, a renowned London cleric, and one of the most ancient and sacred
sites of the city by insisting upon the centrality of an anti-intellectual event. The community comes together in prayer and in devotion—Saint Erkenwald opens with a miracle and ends with a mass. Intellectual culture and intellectual work play no role in conjuring a community.

But the major canonical poets of London, including William Langland, were not, in fact, anti-intellectual in impulse and the ways in which they have been excised from larger intellectual histories (as opposed to studies of their local and particular debts to clerical academic culture; i.e., discussions of what they read or translated) has had much to do with the ways in which we narrate intellectual histories as scholars of the Middle Ages. In the same way that the poet of Saint Erkenwald marginalizes London’s intellectual history and culture from his celebration of the cult of Erkenwald, of St. Paul’s, and of London, we have marginalized London in our accounts of fourteenth-century intellectual history. In no small part, this omission emerges from the fact that London, unlike Paris, did not have a university. We think of the clerics who resided and wrote in the city according to their other affiliations (with their house, with their order, with the university in which they trained) and yet still oddly think of poets as marginal to London intellectual culture. Paris and London were radically different places—Paris was much larger and more prosperous. But Paris also had a university and we assume that when Richard of Bury favorably compares England’s position in the intellectual firmament to that of Paris, he refers to Oxford and Cambridge rather than to London.30

The narrative of intellectual movements, or of the renaissances and renewals of scholarship, in the Middle Ages is often narrated as histories of institutions.31 Teaching
occurs most commonly in institutions or, in its intimate early stages, in preparation for training in institutions.\textsuperscript{32} Even the most charismatic and belligerent of teachers, such as Abelard, were committed to establishing and maintaining schools rather than to occasional teaching.\textsuperscript{33} We, scholars of the Middle Ages, have also been committed to narrating intellectual renaissances as institutional histories. For example, Stephen Jaeger’s influential \textit{The Envy of Angels} introduces us to the rise and transformation of Cathedral schools in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These schools have bequeathed us with written legacies, for example Hugh of St. Victor’s \textit{De institutione novitiorum} and his \textit{Didascalicon}, which document the teaching of “mores and letters” in Cathedral schools and the crucial role of the school in the formation of young men. Jaeger continues his history with the movement of the training of Cathedral schools, which had eroded in influence by the late twelfth century, to the courts. Jaeger, therefore, explains the relative demise of the Cathedral school and the emergence of courts, imagined as Episcopal as well as regal and baronial, as alternative educational institutions.\textsuperscript{34}

As we look specifically to intellectual histories of England in the Middle Ages, we notice that Beryl Smalley’s intellectual histories focus on the arrival of various intellectual groups—classicizing friars, for example—and their role in transforming the intellectual landscape by introducing generations of clerics to humanist educational training.\textsuperscript{35} For Smalley, whose work began to explain the value of classical thought to medieval hermeneutic practice, the friars, in spite of differences between orders, constituted a singular body of men who transformed an intellectually backwards England. The friars bring about a renaissance or renewal of humanist thought in England,
particularly in the universities. Later in her career, Smalley’s summary of the intellectual
trends of the Middle Ages brings institutional intellectual history to the forefront: she
writes a study of medieval intellectual trends that begins with Abelard, a charismatic
teacher who is the founder of schools, and ends with Wycliffe, a thinker who, rather
anomalously, spent most of his career at the University of Oxford. Histories of
universities are even more isolated events—often multi-volume projects—that imagine
universities in no larger context than conflict between town and gown.

Institutions, primarily because they are the best makers and keepers of manuscript
traditions, have been crucial to re-imagining the emergence of vernacular poetry. As
Christopher Canon demonstrates, the archival impulse of monastic institutions can be
made to account for almost all of medieval English literary history. In the eighties and
nineties, the role of academic productions became crucial to how we conceived of both
poetic authority and for the intellectual and literary formation of poets. Under A. J.
Minnis’ and Rita Copeland’s guidance, we have come to understand how our poets’
literary and scholarly authority were deeply indebted to scholastic authorial forms or even
to the history of particular institutional disciplines such as grammar and rhetoric. Scholars such as Marjorie Curry Woods have since demonstrated how texts were taught,
used, and imitated in institutional settings and how crucial such pedagogical practices
were to the composition and reception of medieval poetry. Even intellectual studies of
Lollardy, a movement critical of clerical institutions and their privileges and the
distinctions they made between the lay and the clergy, focus on their imitation of the
forms of institutional instruction. They established, as Rita Copeland has so ably
demonstrated, pedagogical forms of their own as substitutes for academic narratives of intellectual formation: the life narrative, the confessional text, and the prison narrative assume the status of a catechism, enacting persecution as instructional opportunity while simultaneously acting as an alternative schooltext. Even more revealing, schools for Lollards emerged, grammar schools that taught hermeneutics in Latin as well as in England’s two vernaculars that resembled, in practice, traditional grammar schools. In institutions have also been crucial to the narration of intellectual histories of dissent. Lollardy, imagined as an extramural intellectual movement, emerges from the University of Oxford, finding much of its inspiration and authority imaginatively (if not always in fact) in the writing of John Wycliffe. Even as we narrate the story of the movement of clerical learning from institutions to a wider public, we often imagine that public as an alternative, emergent intellectual institution (e.g., the Lancastrian court or a Lancastrian bureaucracy). To imagine a non-institutional audience for the learning affiliated with the intellectual strands of institutions often implies exercises in anxiety, in subversion, in vernacular translations that appeal to the heretical or to the otherwise marginal and “lewd.” The model I describe comes from Fiona Somerset’s influential book Clergial Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England, which imagines appeals to clerical discursive structures in non-institutional vernacular writing as almost naturally illicit. Vernacular discourse imagines translations of academic forms as occasions for polemic. In Somerset’s late medieval England, all translations that recreate clerical modes of argumentation are potentially dangerous since they automatically undo a natural and crucial division between clergy and lay. Somerset imagines an England
where the clergy did not, in fact, take part in the confused state of affairs by seeking patronage and laboring in secular offices. For Somerset, William Langland cannot, because divorced from institution, embody the role of the intellectual precisely because the very act of using clerical discourse as a non-cleric subverts the social order. To speak in identifiably intellectual discourse, especially in the vernacular, is necessarily dangerous.  

Even as we have revised intellectual histories, we have continued to imagine changes in intellectual culture as the effect of institutional culture. Poetry is simply one kind of writing by which we gauge the response to, for example, pronouncements issued from various councils instituted to respond to often imaginary threats of heresy. Even when we change our discussion of the effects of clerical legislation against vernacular writing, imagined as either theology or philosophy, we are not necessarily imagining that poetry is more prominent or at the forefront of an intellectual movement. We simply imagine that poetry responds, for example, to the Council at Blackfriars in 1382 instead of imagining that the interests of poetry became narrower after the institution of Arundel’s Constitutions in 1409. Poetry, therefore, becomes one species of writing among many by which we measure the effects of official legal pronouncements. Figurative, intellectual writing also becomes contextualized in terms of medieval genres that are radically different from poetry. For example, Thomas Usk’s *The Testament of Love* becomes easier to understand in terms of the history of legal writing in London rather than in terms of the shared history of intellectual, poetic London production. In order to give London poetry a history, we seek to affiliate poetic writing with either
institutional writing, institutional history, or bureaucratic and legal genres and because we do so, we relegate poetry to the margins or, at least, to the later chapters of our books.

In privileging institutional production when we speak of intellectual, literary innovation, we relegate our subject—late medieval poets and poetry—to marginal roles in English intellectual history. And, in doing so, we have also ignored the crucial place of the London as a place conducive and responsive to intellectual innovation. Because our intellectual histories revolve around institutions, we find the most opportune moment to talk about poetic pedagogical ambitions in London poetry in texts such as Book VII of John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. Book VII most clearly resembles an institutional production because it outlines a curriculum, in the form of a reinvented trivium and quadrivium, that mimics the outlines of Brunetto Latini’s curriculum in his encyclopedic *Tresor.* In the relationship between Genus and Amans (priest and penitent) in Book VII, we find a double of the relationship between Alexander and Aristotle and thereby understand that penitential forms are pedagogical forms. In addition, we recognize that pedagogy resembles the forms of political counsel from iterations of the *Secreta Secretorum.* We feel comfortable discussing the intellectual and pedagogical ambitions of a text when we can recognize that its form and materials coincide with institutional practice. Gower here makes us sit through a course in the trivium and the quadrivium as if we were inhabiting a medieval schoolroom.

But the City of London was not marginal to English intellectual history nor was it a marginal place in English institutional intellectual history even if it was not the site of a university. Clerics and scholars traveled through London and resided and worked in
London for extended periods of time. Nearby Cambridge and even-closer Oxford may have been the designated English centers of advanced education and intellectual exchange, but the city was by no means a site devoid of intellectual institutions. Friars, who came to define university life in Paris and Oxford (as well as Cambridge, to a lesser degree) for extended periods in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, also resided in London. The Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans all had houses in London and educated many young students in their convents, often in preparation for university. These convents supplied homes not only for the students but also for their teachers. William Ockham (1285-1348), born near London, spent an extended period of his career in the Franciscan convent near Newgate prior to his exile. In all likelihood, he composed his most controversial political writings in the city’s Franciscan convent. In addition to being hospitable residences for the most controversial of schoolmen, these convents were also the sites of theological, public disputations featuring men such as Walter Burley (d. 1344) and, again, William Ockham.

The Dominican convent in London, although smaller than the one in Oxford, had the status of a studium provinciale: it was the school not only for London but for the entire Dominican “province” of England. The Austin Friars ran an international pedagogical institution—partially because they were less likely to be subject to royal restrictions that intermittently prohibited the training of foreign students in the Franciscan and Dominican convents: Italian and German would-be Austin friars trained in London. All these mendicant houses lay within the gates of the city. By the 1320s, London was home to Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite, Austin and Crutched Friars Convents as well
as a convent for Franciscan Minoresses (Aldgate). The relationship between the friars and
the aristocracy are well attested, but the friars also maintained relationships with the
members and government of the city they inhabited. They needed to appeal to
representatives of civic government in order to move, to expand, to build additions and
they often appealed to wealthy, merchant citizens in the later fourteenth century for
donations for improvements to their buildings and lands.

In addition, monks and canons maintained libraries and scriptoria in the
Benedictine Abbey (Westminster), in the Augustinian Priories in Holy Trinity (Aldgate)
and in St. Mary Overy’s (Southwark). These three constituted the oldest monastic houses
of the urban area that included London. London would, in addition, see the later
foundation of Cistercian (1350) and Carthusian (1371) monastic houses, long after
monastic houses ceased to be established in the rest of the country. As pedagogical
institutions, in spite of the foundation of a school at Westminster Abbey, these
monasteries were certainly less notable than the mendicant convents. But these abbeys
also housed libraries and these libraries admitted citizens who wanted to use books. John
Gower resided with the canons of St. Mary Overy’s Priory and is famously buried in
Southwark Cathedral. He certainly had access to the library and might have used their
scriptorium to oversee the production of many elegant manuscripts. It is impossible to
imagine that there should be no intellectual exchange between the monks and the laity of
the City, Southwark, and Westminster: the citizens and residents of London were often
engaged in commercial, legal, civic, and charitable transactions with the members of
local monastic houses.
London had three grammar schools affiliated with three of the city’s oldest churches: St. Paul’s Cathedral (including a separate Almonry school), St. Martin-le-Grand, and St. Mary Arches. None of these grammar schools dominated the intellectual landscape like the grammar schools at Hertford, Lincoln, York, or Northampton. London’s schools were not simply song schools and grammar schools, but also intermediate schools that prepared students for university education. It was likely that the curriculum at St. Paul’s included the beginnings of the university curriculum in logic and natural history. Furthermore, the chancellor of St. Paul’s school, always a Doctor of Theology and often responsible for theological instruction, was often a well-renowned cleric such as Thomas Bradwardine.

The historical accident that resulted in the absence of a university in London does not imply that the city was intellectually backwards and bereft of scholars, nor did this absence imply that academic texts of the best, most recent, and most controversial kinds were not available to the laity and clergy of London and its environs. It only means that the city’s intellectual culture could not be identified with a single institution or embodied by a single person, such as the head of the Master’s Guild or a chancellor of a university. The absence of one dominant studium generale whose character could be dictated by a chancellor who embodied the will of a guild, produced a city that was the site of studia. In Paris, in the early fifteenth century, even debate about the poetic quality of the Roman de la Rose, instigated by Christine di Pizan and conducted extramurally, could be regulated and effectively ended by a sermon by Jean Gerson (1363-1429), Chancellor of the University of Paris. In fourteenth-century London, the word of the Chancellor of St.
Paul’s School, prominent though he may have been, would not have the same power to silence critical clerical and lay engagement. Medieval London featured multiple pedagogical and intellectual institutions— not even counting the libraries and resident scholars at the various inns inhabited by multiple bishops’ households and aristocratic households in the city. The presence of Episcopal households, aristocratic households with growing libraries, monasteries, schools, and mendicant convents created a variety of opportunities for exchange between clerics proper and an increasingly clericalized laity.

The relationship between lay Londoners and the clerics who lived amongst them must have been intimate. John Gower, literally, lived with monks. Thomas Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes* begins with a long, intimate, and surprising dialogue with a person who looks suspiciously like a Carmelite Friar. William Langland presents a city overrun with bishops, parsons, and parish priests (to speak of the clergy in terms of their offices) or bachelors, masters, and doctors (to taxonomize them according to their academic attainment). Langland’s complaints about the clergy allege that many so-called clerics performed no valuable teaching in the city and their failure to uphold their professional duties becomes the occasion for his appropriation of a cleric-like persona. The arrival of bachelors, masters, and doctors and the presence of friars might have alleviated the situation: as preachers and teachers, they should have filled the city with edifying, salvific and crucial instruction. Instead, Langland criticizes these men for choosing profitable professions in the service of crown and city. These men, for Langland, are no longer fulfilling their roles as clerics and his protagonist, therefore, seeks an ethical imperative that allows him to redefine the idea of what kind of person/parson constitutes
a model teacher. Langland models a new idea of clergy, by divesting both the office and the knowledge associated with institutions of institutional affiliations and writing in a genre that he understands to be capable of inaugurating changes in learning, poetry.54

_Saint Erkenwald_, written in an alliterative form not associated with London (i.e., it does not sound like Langland’s poetry), makes the case that London emerges as a community only in devotional contexts.55 Miracles and masses bring the diverse peoples of the city together. But the poem’s critique of Londoners’ misplaced faith in intellectual endeavor, their investment in “creatures crafte” rather than in prayer, suggests that London actually had an all-too-healthy intellectual culture. _Saint Erkenwald_ traffics in nostalgia: it longs for a return to an ancient age, the seventh century, when bishops and the people around them trusted in miracles and devout prayer. Fourteenth-century London was, in contrast, a place where intellectual cultures thrived and collided, where the clergy and the laity were constantly reinventing knowledge and imagining new forms and uses for academic learning in the immediate context of the City, Southwark, and Westminster. When we write medieval intellectual histories of England that marginalize London and London intellectual production (often poetry), we also imply that London’s poets did not think that their writing could conjure a community. But it is precisely through the invention of a London learning, in our study of the ways in which London’s poets invent new disciplines, that we can imagine how the poets’ imagined their communities and addressed their community’s desires and needs for knowledge.

_London Poets and their Disciplines_
In this introduction, I have defined some of the primary stakes of this dissertation. I revise medieval English intellectual history in order to restore London to its rightful place in the constellation of late medieval learning through the assertion that its poets participated in recognizably intellectual careers. I argue too that London’s poets are at the very forefront of the reform of academic culture, as they revise academic disciplines in order to respond to the needs of England’s largest urban community. This introduction acts as a necessary prelude to discussing the very specific stakes of each poet and each poet’s very specific revision of an academic discipline. Academic genres follow a set form: academics in the course of their training produced commentaries on Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* and more established teachers such as Thomas Aquinas participated in disputations and wrote commentaries that were then transcribed, copied, and distributed. After Andrew Horn established a model for compiling and arranging the city’s custom books, London civic writing too followed set forms and formal conventions. London poems, because not affiliated with institutions, differ radically from each other and can only really be grouped together because they make use of figurative language and translate institutional disciplines for a readership imagined primarily as a London readership.

London means different something different to each poet. London, for a poet, does not necessarily coincide with the City as imagined by civic writing. Furthermore, since London poetry is deliberately unaffiliated with institutions, none of these poets attempt to establish a specific genre or style, a specific format, for English urban poetic production whether imagined as a material book or a definitive poetic style. Imitation,
such as Hoccleve’s imitation of a Chaucerian poetic style, becomes one means by which we see how London poetry begins to constitute a learned tradition. But, I argue too that imitation does not imply that London poets were presenting their work necessarily as formal models so much as they are clearly presenting models for intellectually-engaged urban and lay lives dedicated to the cultivation of study for the benefit and reform of self and community. Each chapter, therefore, begins by locating each of these poets in a London context—particularly crucial in the cases of Chaucer and Gower who are rarely conceived of as London poets—before explaining how all of the poems I discuss in these chapters revise medieval disciplines as academic institutions defined them.

Oddly, London’s poets who are particularly invested in the invention of specifically urban disciplines self-consciously refuse to make the duplication and recreation of a version of the curriculum for their urban reading publics central to their work as Dante Alighieri does in the Convivio (ca. 1304-1307). In the Convivio, Dante identifies himself and his poetry as an important bridge between the clerical and lay cultures. After Aristotle, Dante identifies knowledge as the most natural and urgent human desire. Since the possession of knowledge cannot be pursued by men of the world who are beset by family and civic responsibilities, Dante proposes to present a vernacular version of the most basic clerical curriculum—he presents a course through the trivium and quadrivium—through his exposition of his own vernacular canzone. He presents his work, his poetry and his commentary, as a version of the entire banquet of learning, condensed and simplified for men who have little time for study.
But Dante’s willingness to identify himself and his works as representative of clerical intellectual culture as a whole has as much to do with his place of exile and with the company he was keeping at the time of composition. In exile from Florence and incapable of participating actively in factional politics, Dante composed a vernacular curriculum for the benefit of his alienated community from the confines of the University of Padua. He reconstructs himself entirely for the benefit of his former community—the Convivio attempts to correct misinterpretations of his youthful poetic productions and to repair damage to his political reputation in the light of exile. Because he is writing from within the university, Dante can write as if representative of institutional, clerical culture for their benefit and, therefore, feels emboldened to translate what he presents as the entirety of a clerical curriculum for this bereft and alienated community of men. The London poets who are central to this dissertation never represent themselves as authoritative translators of clerical culture. Unlike Dante, they write in the City of London (or near the City of London) and are not imagining the civic community or their civic readership as an alienated and almost abstract entity. They respond to what they present as the immediate needs and even desires of their neighbors and readers. These needs are most likely met by revisions of specific disciplines or arts rather the reiteration of an institutional curriculum.

I open my first chapter, Chaucerian Disciplines: Chaucer, Hoccleve, and London Traditions, by establishing that Chaucer was a London poet and arguing that London was central to his intellectual formation. I argue that Chaucer is the poet most invested in describing how medieval sciences might be transformed in urban, non-academic contexts
when he, first, composes a scientific tract on astronomy and astrology in the vernacular in the *Astrolabe* and, second, when he imagines how the science of alchemy might be considered as an urban rather than an academic science in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. Instead of studying how Chaucer participates in academic culture as a layman, for example by studying his translation of Boethius’ *De consolatione philosophiae* (a work that reveals to us how capable Chaucer was of translating like an academic), I study Chaucer’s interrogation of the possibility that poetry might represent how arts might be teachable through urban models of pedagogy. What new models for the transmission of learning might there be? What is poetry’s role in imagining the possibilities and limitations of urban rather than academic contexts of instruction? What does a London scientific discipline look like? I end the chapter with a discussion of Thomas Hoccleve’s identification and appropriation of what he alleges is a Chaucerian discipline (moral philosophy, in general, and politics, in particular) and I explain too how Chaucer’s poetic productions become part of what Hoccleve already identifies as a learned, London poetic tradition.

The next three chapters present the work of the poets most deeply implicated in my project: John Gower, Thomas Usk, and William Langland. In chapter two, *John Gower and the Discipline of History*, I argue that John Gower’s *Vox Clamantis* and *Confessio Amantis* represent poetic revisions to medieval historical practice as well as respond to Chaucer’s Boethian influence. John Gower revises historical narration by refusing to submit “history” to a temporal narrative regime. Instead, he narrates historical events, historical progress, and historical exempla as if they determine the development
of a life and he, thereby, makes knowledge of history coincide with the moral
development of members of the representative model polity (London). For Gower,
history as a discipline and as a method becomes a means of speaking to the need to
dispose oneself well in order to become an effective actor in history. In chapter three,
*Thomas Usk and London Ethics*, I present another response to Chaucerian writing, *The
Testament of Love*, as a London ethics. For Thomas Usk, a beleaguered but ambitious
London scribe, the translation of a scholastic theological tract becomes an opportunity to
describe London's need for a local ethical model. Chaucerian figurative prose, combined
with the vocabulary of scholastic thought and legal London processes, are brought
together in order to articulate what ethics, as a discipline, means in the context of
London.

Chapter four, like chapter one, presents the work of two poets, William Langland
and the anonymous author of the fifteenth-century fragment *Mum and the Soothsegger*. I
argue that the contentious Langlandian word “kynde” or nature actually refers to what the
Middle Ages called natural philosophy or natural history. The study of animals was often
undertaken in order to provide similitudes or analogies for clerical teaching contexts such
as sermons. When Langland narrates a history of the study of nature in general and of the
study of animals in particular, he inaugurates English and London poetry as a genre that
makes use of the method and matter of the discipline of natural history. I then end the
chapter in which I describe the invention of London poetry with *Mum and the
Soothsegger* by demonstrating how Langland provided a model for both English, poetic
composition and for the poetic use of the materials of natural philosophy.
These chapters demonstrate how London learning, a learning not affiliated with academic institutions, is not marginal (at least, in its presentation of itself) in the history of English medieval intellectual culture. A poet such as John Gower, might conceive of his poetic voice as singular but he hardly thinks of himself as marginal: poets imagine themselves and the conversations in which they engage in as they respond to each others’ writing as integral to London’s formation as a community of readers, thinkers, and writers. Poetry, figurative writing, becomes a method affiliated with the city of London and with its increasingly prominent poetic practitioners. But as I make the case that these innovative poetic performances are central to London intellectual culture, I also implicitly argue that there are many means of appropriating academic discursive forms and academic materials and varied means of imagining pedagogy in the urban nexus that includes London. This dissertation, therefore, will not insist that poetry is, in itself, a discipline but insists that it is a method that makes academic disciplines available to a newly-imagined community of readers.


3 “Per nos [books], cum adhuc careatis generum lanugine, in actate tenera constitutis tonsuram portatis in vertice, prohibente statim ecclesiastica sententia formidadanda: Nolite tangere chrestos meos et in prophetis meis nolite malignari; et qui eos tetigerit temere violenter anathematis vulnere ictu proprio protinus feriat” (36, 38). In this passage, books address the clerks.

4 “De istis ad statum pontificalem assumpti nonnullus habuimus de doubs ordinibus, Praedicatorum videlicet et Minorum, nostris asistentes lateribus nostraeque familiae communes, viros utique tam moribus insignitos quam litteris, qu diversorum voluminum correctionibus, expositionibus, tabulationibus ac compilationibus indefessis studiis incumbebant” (92).


13 See Quare non omnino negleximus fabulas poetarum” in Richard of Bury, *Philobiblon*, pp. 124, 126, and 128.


17 On the training of junior clerks, see Thomas Frederick Tout, “Literature and Learning,” pp. 368-70. Tout argues that junior officials trained through a method of apprenticeship. Their masters, therefore, were not clerks or graduates of the university. Instead, they were trained in a technical craft by more senior clerks.

18 See Chaucer’s identification of Bradwardine as theologian and bishop, “Bishop Bradwardyn,” in *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (VII.3242). All citations to Chaucer’s work refer to *The Riverside Chaucer*, Ed. Larry Benson et al., 3rd Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All citations to *The Canterbury Tales* are given in fragment numbers and line numbers. On the life and teaching of Thomas Bradwardine, see *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine* (Utrecht: Kemink and Zoon, 1957).


See J. B. Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982), p. 16. Allen takes great pains to describe poetry as a medieval category. For Allen, writing after Giles of Rome, poetry, as an exercise in moral thinking, is figurative and, therefore, less intellectually exacting or, at least, less precise in its processes and methods then other kinds of philosophy. Allen writes: “Moral thinking is ‘gross’ or approximate and ‘figurative;’ it cannot be dealt with fairly or completely by simple ‘narration.’ It involves the use of ‘types.’ It moves the affection and the will, and persuades to action. It is suited to the non-philosophical mind—it is capable of being popular.”

All citations of *Saint Erkenwald* refer to *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, ed. Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron, and Clifford Peterson and trans. Casey Finch (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: U of California P, 1995). Citations are made only to the Middle English text and refer only to line numbers.


50 Walter Burley (1274/5-1344), an English scholastic theologian, seems to have been associated with London in spite of a storied, international intellectual career which included periods of residence in Yorkshire, Paris, Southern France and Italy. He taught in London at the same time as William Ockham and his writing seems to survive in London manuscripts primarily. See Susan Cavanaugh, *A Study of Books Privately Owned in England*. For William J. Courtenay, Richard of Bury (1287-1345), Bishop of Durham, represents a late medieval London scholar best and his Latin writing proceeded to become a model for Latin documentary composition. Not only does Richard of Bury articulate the need for books and bequeath a body of books for the training of young Oxford students, his intellectual and political life begins to exemplify a scholarly, public career.


54 The comparison between Paris and London may be useful here once again. In the fifteenth century in Paris, Jean Gerson, the aforementioned Chancellor of the University of Paris, transformed “publishing” in France by inaugurating a new genre, the *tractatus*, and making it widely available. The Chancellor himself inaugurates new models for making learning that is timely and “capable of being popular” (like poetry) to a broader


Chapter Two

Chaucerian Disciplines:

Chaucer, Hoccleve, and London Science

Academic Chaucer

In the early modern print culture that produced his collected works, Geoffrey Chaucer is resurrected as “Our Ancient and lerned English Poet, Geoffrey Chaucer.” The early editions of Chaucer’s works take pains to announce a provenance, often a remarkably gentil one, for the person who began to embody the institution of poetry in English. The name Chaucer identified an English origin (Chaucer is an English ancient), but they also asserted his credentials (Chaucer is learned). Chaucer’s learning played a crucial role in defining him as a poet. When Philip Sidney describes the history of English poetry, he celebrates Chaucer’s capacity for poetic-making in the poet’s “misty time,” thereby associating more recent vernacular poetic production with the arrival of a metaphorically more illuminated age (“in this clear age”). For Sidney, both poetry and learning are progressive and Chaucer’s “misty time” was as yet un-illumined by the kinds of knowledge available to Sidney and his peers in a later, more-or-less reformed and more-or-less humanist England. By locating Chaucer in an age of dark but “reverent antiquity,” Sidney excuses Chaucer’s perceived poetic and linguistic shortcomings. But Sidney’s faith in the capacity of poetry to illumine and teach, to be as capable of instruction as philosophy or law, from its very inception is not recapitulated in every single early modern recreation of the man who had already become England’s most treasured vernacular poet.1
Other early modern scholars, antiquarians, editors, and printers would account for Chaucer’s untimely capacity to produce learned poetry suited to their “clear age” by constructing and reiterating vitas that account for Chaucer’s prescient learning. Chaucer’s early modern biographers, often themselves university men (Thomas Speght, John Bale, and John Leland were all Cambridge-men), identified Chaucer as one of their own party. Their identification of Chaucer as both a Cambridge and Oxford man explains the scope of his capacities and the diversity of his interests. In order to be a translator of Latin and French, in order to develop an interest in astronomy, in order to be able to talk of the ancients with aplomb, and to create out of seeming nothing multiple forms of English poetry, Chaucer must have trained at the premier institutions of scholarship of late medieval England. English poetry’s origins may be iterated in a single name, Chaucer, but that name was made to reverberate with the authority of the pedagogical institutions crucial to the intellectual formation of many of the literary men (Sidney excluded) of Chaucer’s “misty time” as well as of a later “clear age.”

The belated attribution of either a Cambridge or Oxford pedigree (or both) to Chaucer cannot explain the range of Chaucer’s interests or his devotion to literary production. This did not deter the early modern historian John Bale (1495-1563) or the antiquarian John Leland (1503-52) from “figuring forth” overblown accounts of Chaucer’s education that were reiterated in the vitas attached to the printed collected works. For example, in the “Life of Chaucer” appended to George Bishop’s 1602 printing of Thomas Speght’s edition of the Complete Works (1598), the composite authors of Chaucer’s vita cite John Leland’s assertion that Chaucer “was in the Vniuersitie of
Oxford, as also in Cambridge” (B iii). Chaucer’s supposed Cambridge education began at Canterbury College⁴ and continued, in Oxford, at Merton College where Chaucer allegedly studied with “John Wycliffe, whose opinions in religion he [Chaucer] much affected” (B iii).⁵ Chaucer’s proto-Protestant education did not end with these already celebrated institutions of his “bringing vp” (B iii). In addition, Chaucer became a “skillfull Mathematician” under the instruction of “Iohn Some and Nicholas Lynne, friers Carmelites of Linne” (B iii).⁶ Chaucer’s brief mention of the Franciscan friar John Somer and the Carmelite friar Nicholas of Lynn and their “kalendars” of longitudes and latitudes in A Treatise on the Astrolabe (1391-2; 1393) is transformed into a period of extended, intimate, advanced instruction. Chaucer continues his “diligent exercise in learning” abroad (in the courts of France and Flanders) and at home (in “the Court at London, and the Colledges of the Lawiers”). The vita produces a Chaucer who emerges from the universities, the courts, and the Inns (at the “Colledges”) as a “wittie Logician, a sweete Rhetorican, a pleasant Poet, a graue Philosopher, and a holy Diuine” and who, through lifetime training, becomes “a singular man in all kind of knowledge” (B iii).

The vita imagines Chaucer at the heart of fourteenth-century intellectual life and even at the center of its most explosive theological controversies (Chaucer studied with Wycliffe). It anachronistically invents the Inns as institutions of learning, as alternatives to universities in the late fourteenth century. The vita locates Chaucer and his contemporary John Gower (d. 1408) at the Inns.⁷ Chaucer’s real tasks in the domestic, diplomatic, bureaucratic, legal and political posts which he held are relegated to short separate sections (His Servise, His Rewardes) with the effect of creating a scholarly
Chaucer who spent his days in the service of King and country, in England and in France, attaining and receiving commendation for “great perfection in all kind of learning” (B iii).  

But Chaucer never attended Oxford or Cambridge—although he may have had friends from Merton such as Ralph Strode. Richard II’s court, even in the most generous of estimations, was never like a Capetian court or even a Lancastrian court where academic, vernacular translation and poetic production were actively and systematically patronized. The Inns, in all likelihood, did not provide a lay substitute for university education until the fifteenth century. Fancied institutional affiliations made the case that Chaucer possessed academic credentials and that his poetry was of intellectual value. But even as we discard the idea that Chaucer was at the center of institutional, intellectual life in the late fourteenth century, we must still take Chaucer’s early readers’ recognition of Chaucer as a scholar into consideration. John Bale, John Leland, and Thomas Speght’s untimely affiliation of Chaucerian learning with reformist theology and their desire to recognize a fellow-schoolman suggests an intimate identification with “our ancient” and “our learned” poet. Even as Chaucer’s poetry was being published in London for readers wider than a university audience, medieval English poetry accrues value by virtue of its association with already prestigious kinds of intellectual labor such as study in the university. For these men, it seems insufficient that Chaucer should have been trained only in the Almonry School at St. Paul’s, as Edith Rickert proposed so long ago in “Chaucer at School,” or that he might have been educated within the confines of an aristocratic household, as Richard Firth Green has suggested. More importantly, the
value of antiquarian work becomes implicated in the value of the people, the histories, and the objects of their study. In order to justify the Chaucerian corpus as an object of study and veneration, Chaucer must be turned into a gentleman-scholar and his work must be implicated in the longer history of academic production.

But English poetry written by London’s poets in the fourteenth century, while decidedly academic in its procedures, also responds to the emergence of what Andrew Galloway has so aptly called an English fourteenth-century intellectual marketplace. Chaucer, though not part of Galloway’s study, demonstrates a concern with the “social uses of knowledge in a wide array of academic and non-academically fostered forms, perceived as fraudulent or legitimate, and on its social boundaries or transgressions, perceived as justifiable, subversive or oppressive.” Chaucer, as I will demonstrate in the second part of this chapter, describes alternative models and sites of teaching and imagines the ways in which science or knowledge in general and particular disciplines, crafts, or arts are necessarily transformed when they are removed to extramural spheres. Chaucer demonstrates much less anxiety than his near-contemporary William Langland as he translates academic traditions into the vernacular. Nevertheless, he is equally though differently invested in imagining how the movements of the disciplines to places outside of institutions necessarily change their status, their form, and the ways in which they accrued value. “Newe sciences” emerge out of “old books” when new practitioners and new kinds of students lay their hands on them.

Chaucer was scholarly in disposition: his most compelling self-portraits feature him in study and his poems repeatedly explore the somatic effects of his frustrated
attempts to hit the books. But Chaucer also makes it known in the Retractions, in The Man of Law’s Prologue, and in the “Prologue” to The Legend of Good Women that his scholarly labors have been productive. The work that he identifies repeatedly when he is fictively compelled to defend himself is the Boece (1381-1386). Chaucer’s translation of Boethius’ sixth-century treatise The Consolation of Philosophy (De consolatione philosophiae) was one of his most popular works and it was reproduced under his guidance with great care. He mentions his Boece by name, alongside his Boethian epic Troilus and Criseyde, when he pleads with “Adam Scriveyn” to write with more accuracy. The Boece provides a Middle English vocabulary for Chaucerian philosophy: it creates an English vocabulary for philosophical discussion and it provides a foundation for a range of Chaucerian imaginative productions concerned with the relationship between the will and predestination (The Knight’s Tale, Troilus and Criseyde, The Former Age, Fortune, Lak of Stedfastnesse, The Romaunt of the Rose). Chaucer’s contemporaries, John Gower and Thomas Usk (d. 1388) in particular, respond to Chaucer’s Boece (as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation). Additionally, Henry Scogan (d. 1407), one of the members of Chaucer’s inner circle, identifies Chaucer, Boethius, and Cicero as authorities and identifies Chaucerian teaching with a Boethian repudiation of temporal goods (l. 99). Thomas Hoccleve (d. 1437) meditates on the vicissitudes of Fortune in The Regiment of Princes (1411). The Boece was the work most crucial to Chaucer’s apology for his literary and scholarly career and it is the work and his own Boethian corpus that demanded immediate poetic responses.
The Boece also demonstrates that Chaucer thought, studied, and worked like an academic. Chaucer’s translation, as Alistair Minnis and Timothy Machan have demonstrated, is relentlessly scholarly: he translates his Middle English text from a copy of the Latin Vulgate text, Jean de Meun’s French translation of Boethius’ (Li Livres de Confort de Philosophie), and a copy of the Dominican friar Nicholas Trevet’s comprehensive commentary (1307). Chaucer was not simply concerned with accuracy of translation, but also with translating Boethius’ work and the medieval tradition of commentary. He brings an up-to-date version of the Consolation into the English vernacular and attempts to make Boethius’ philosophy available through glosses, through commentary, and through a procedure of careful translation that takes care to make Middle English capable of expressing philosophical ideas. In his efforts to make English capable of explaining crucial knowledge, Chaucer resembles another prose translator from the period, the scholar John Trevisa (d. 1402). Chaucer’s performance of a scholarly translation resembles extramural academic clerical practice, particularly in his commitment to accuracy and faithfulness.

Chaucer was, in spite of his many courtly affiliations, a London poet. He was born in London, the son of a vintner, and was a London resident again in Aldgate from 1374. Chaucer probably briefly left the city to be the Justice of the Peace in Kent during the most troublesome years of civic factional strife. Chaucer returned to the city by 1389, as Clerk of the King’s Works and his final leasehold lay immediately outside the city in Westminster. Chaucer’s first audience, the one composed of equals and near equals who shared his intellectual concerns, consisted of men who practiced their professions in
London and were not much different in composition from Langland’s earliest audience of bureaucrats and lawyers.24 Members of the mercantile, London classes became owners of Chaucer manuscripts, particularly of the Boece, in the fifteenth century. Troilus and Criseyde is bequeathed to the care of its London and Southwark godfathers, John Gower and Ralph Strode. Removal from London became the occasion for composing addresses directly to other London friends—Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan, Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton25—but also of reconstituting London, as a political entity, in his fictive imaginings of associational forms and even of social conflict in The Canterbury Tales.26

Langland, the earliest poet implicated in this dissertation, was also deeply concerned with representing the will—after all, his protagonist is called Will. But it is Chaucer’s writing that demands an immediate poetic response. The Boece inaugurates a poetic engagement with history, with philosophy, with the terms of salvation, with ethics through its vocabulary. Chaucer’s figurative writing, in addition, models a local, London poetic style. By the time that he composes The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer begins to think of English poetic styles in terms of the location of its practitioners. The Man of Law, a Londoner with whom Chaucer identifies, speaks of Chaucer’s poetry as if Chaucer were his neighborhood poet.27 The Parson, who repudiates poetry in general, opposes his own speech to the “‘rum, ram, ruff’” (X.42) of decidedly non-Chaucerian in style Southern men. Chaucer, therefore, inaugurates the concerns of London poetry and he begins to identify his own, very French and very courtly methods of poetic composition with the City. Chaucer’s Boethian corpus and the range of poetic responses it produced compels
Derek Pearsall’s historical fantasy: it must have seemed that “on every street corner of London questions of free will and predestination were being hotly debated.”

Chaucer’s Boece reveals an academic Chaucer who preoccupies himself with a series of questions that revolve primarily around the issues Fortune, predestination and the will. In this preoccupation, in particular, he also resembles the academics of the City. Thomas Bradwardine (1300-1349), former Chancellor of St. Paul’s (1347-1349) and briefly Archbishop of Canterbury (1348-1349), composed a theological, scholastic polemic on the relationship between free will and grace, De Causa Dei (1344). Chaucer was clearly aware of Bradwardine’s writing—he mentions it in The Nun’s Priest’s Tale (VII.3242)—and their shared interest in exploring and explaining the relationship between the will and salvation. This testifies to the intimacy between lay and clerical concerns so crucial to my introductory chapter. Although they make use of different forms of representation and argumentation, clerical and lay intellectual cultures share similar intellectual concerns and investments. It is fitting, therefore, that the Boece should be the work by which Chaucer identified his intellectual contribution. It was the text that defined him in the late-medieval intellectual marketplace since it translated an authority, addressed crucial and timely theological concerns, and inaugurated a local London discussion conducted through poetry or figurative representation rather than through scholastic argumentation.

But to identify academic Chaucer with the Chaucer of the Boece would be to ignore the fact that his Boece was much less crucial to his early modern editors (Speght, Leland, Bale) than it was to his fourteenth- and fifteenth-century readers. In The
Canterbury Tales, Chaucer’s self-portrait invites readers to indulge in Richard of Bury’s fantasy of a radical difference between lay and clerical cultures. In The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer misleads us into thinking that his poetic production is different in concern and form from clerical, literary production (vernacularity aside, particularly since actual clerics were writing in the vernacular). Prior to telling his tale to Chaucer’s pilgrim company, the Clerk of Oxenford introduces his tale as translation of a work he attributes to Petrarch:

‘Fraunceys Petrak, the lauriate poete,  
Hight this clerk, whose rethorike sweete  
Enluynned al Ytaille of poetrie’  
IV. 31-3

The Clerk announces, more explicitly than Chaucer ever does in his own person, the arrival of Italian humanist writing in England. Chaucer, notably, replaces himself with a student affiliated with an institution in the matter of transmission and translation. Petrarch, in England, is to be embodied by a Clerk rather than a “clark” or a bureaucrat like Chaucer. In addition, the philosophy of Giovanni da Lignano, a lawyer but a lawyer affiliated with the university in Padua (where Dante wrote his own articulation of a lay pedagogic program, Il Convivio), becomes part of this same set of affiliations: the Clerk of Oxford kills both di Lignano and Petrarch in order to claim his Italian inheritance which consists of the right to disseminate their illuminating learning in poetry and law or “oother art particuluer” (IV.35).

Geoffrey Chaucer effaces himself from the international field of scholarly, clerical transmission, thus allowing readers to identify poetic production in the spirit of
Petrarch with an Oxford student. The belated institutional affiliation with a university—Boccaccio pictures poets as solitary and vatic, 30 Chaucer’s Clerk wants Petrarch to be a schoolman (strikingly after the foundation of a studium generale in Florence)—identifies English learning with institutions even when the material comes from more disparate venues. The Clerk of Oxford’s claims are very compelling: “‘But forth to tellen of this worthy man./ That taughte me this tale, as I bigan’” (IV.39-40). These lines don’t claim that the Clerk has met a living Petrarch, but they suggest an intimate relationship befitting to that of master and student. The very act of translating Petrarch’s tale allows the Clerk to embody Petrarchness. The Clerk plays the role of England’s Boccaccio—he will tell of the man Petrarch—while simultaneously laying claim to the scholastic learning of the schools through the material objects he carries with him, his black and red books of Aristotle’s philosophy. He embodies and lays claim to every species of learning: he is Petrarch and Aristotle and, in addition, a lawyer. Oxford’s students represent greedy, youthful enthusiasm for learning: the Clerk lays claim to every single learned discipline and embodies, in one person, a potential practitioner of each professional, learned art.

Intellectual transactions between clerics (schoolmen and otherwise) seem enclosed in The Canterbury Tales. On the one hand, the pilgrimage itself models how clerics come to be instructors of lay audiences—the Parson, in particular, preaches—but there is also another method of transmission that occurs between cleric-master (Petrarch) and student (the Clerk of Oxford) that is almost as secret and intimate as the instruction between Aristotle and Alexander, a pedagogic exchange that circulated in the middle ages under the sign of “secret.” Chaucer refuses to implicate himself in academic and
institutional history, seemingly divorcing himself from the realm of the academic and insisting upon his London identity in *The Man of Law's Introduction* but only in so far as he is an Ovidian versifier and one so incapable of influence that the Man of Law who cites him fails to recognize him on their shared pilgrimage (II.46-56).

Chaucer, as Lee Patterson has demonstrated, plays with competing identifications: poets can present themselves as either makers, academically-inclined counselors, or as versifying minstrels. Chaucer’s persona is divided in *The Canterbury Tales*, between an academic Chaucer, as I have called him, and a frivolous Chaucer, someone whose ribald writing would later be read as representative of real English “folk.” He is yet uncertain of how to invest his scholarly efforts with value and uncertain about what kinds of writing may best be useful for the promotion of London learning. He experiments with multiple forms and genres in order to confound readerly expectation: he surprises readers with differing assessments of poetic contribution to “lore.” Leland, Speght, and Bale, far more assertively, invent an academic: their writings insist upon Chaucerian learning and apologize for his errors in translation and his indecorous language. They invest their own antiquarian efforts with value by implicating Chaucerian writing in academic history. They compensate for the continued absence of a university in London in the sixteenth century by inventing a continuous English scholarly tradition that is native to London (like Chaucer) but deeply affiliated with the universities (like their Chaucer).

The second part of this chapter reads the “Prologue” to *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* and one of Chaucer’s last works, *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* (1396-1400), as Chaucerian meditations on the transmission of academic *science* to lay, reading
audiences. Although Chaucer himself writes and translates like an academic and although his own career testifies to the availability of formerly exclusively clerical academic career trajectories and academic practices, he also imagines the necessary marginality of belated vernacular, lay contributions to intellectual history. In particular, in The Canon's Yeoman's Tale, Chaucer expresses a self-conscious awareness of the proliferation of extramural intellectual performances. He carefully delineates, in the Astrolabe, suitable methods and occasions for extramural instruction and, in The Canon's Yeoman's Tale, he warns against the possibilities of the abuse of trafficking in intellectual identities and scholarly knowledge as new varieties of scholars emerge. Because, in fact, the academy no longer has a monopoly on determining the course of every kind of scholarly and intellectual career, new kinds of intellectuals proliferate in urban settings who are capable of rogue teaching and inventing rogue sciences.

In the third part of this chapter, I return again to the thorny problem of the history of an academic Chaucer when I read Thomas Hoccleve's (d. 1437) efforts in The Regiment of Princes (1411) as part of the immediate reception of Chaucerian writing. Chaucer identifies his scholarly efforts as marginal, in spite of his centrality to an emergent London poetic learning. Hoccleve grounds his poetic authority upon vernacular, Chaucerian learning. He invents a Chaucerian tradition by asserting the prestige of what he construes as an already established London Chaucerian science. He lays the groundwork, therefore, for the historical fantasies of later editors who would make an academic of Chaucer: for Hoccleve too, Chaucer is the father of English poetry and English learning. Chaucer, himself unaffiliated with academic institution, immediately
becomes an institution. Chaucer’s multiple efforts to explain the very vexed and complicated relationships between lay, vernacular scholarly efforts and the traditions of the academy are simplified: Chaucer’s teaching becomes a substitute for clerical training and discipline, an alternative method and kind of *science*.

*Chaucerian Science*

The word *science* in Middle English does not refer to a science, as opposed to an art, or to a mechanical or experimental process radically distinct from the processes implicated in generating what we now refer to as the arts, humanities, or the disciplines associated with letters. *Science*, in Middle English, can refer to knowledge in general, the capacity to know, to a particular discipline (particularly of the trivium and the quadriovium, of what we call the liberal arts), or, indeed, to a mechanical science or what me might call a craft. In spite of the late medieval interest in experiment after the translation of the works of Aristotle, institutional models for the development and preservation of what we, as moderns, might call a science primarily required skill in the literary arts of hermeneutics and translation rather than upon mechanical experiment and gathering data. To speak of Chaucer’s interest in *science* means discussing Chaucerian investment in every branch of knowledge.

Having said that, it is striking that Chaucer invents a genre of Middle English instruction (the scientific astronomical vernacular tract) and, second, imagines new ways of teaching in the City by describing disciplines that are specifically dependent upon mechanical experiment for validation and verification. Chaucer, like the Wife of Bath, reminds us of the increasing importance of the value of experience as a means of
generating knowledge or science: “Experience, though noon auctoritee/ Were in this world, is right ynogh for me” (III.1-2). The juxtaposition of the Astrolabe and The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale emerges from their similar investment in describing sciences or disciplines that skirted the distinction between a theoretical art and a mechanical art. Astronomy/astrology and alchemy were marginal enough to the academy that they seemed particularly susceptible to lay appropriation and susceptible too to transformation through experiment.

Chaucer’s A Treatise on the Astrolabe most explicitly reveals Chaucer’s commitment to translation and also his awareness of the history of translation. His preface discloses a knowledge of the history of the transmission of the sciences: knowledge comes from the Greeks in Greek, to the Arabs in Arabic, the Jews in Hebrew, the “Latins” in Latin and, now, to the English in “naked wordes in Englissh” (Prol. 25-26). Chaucer’s justification of his work, which identifies a series of languages including Latin as vernacular languages, also traces the movement of the translation of scientific learning. The Greeks, mythically, found learning but their knowledge is preserved in Hebrew and Arabic prior to their Latin iteration. English, unlike Latin, will not usurp the authority of other languages in the same way that Chaucer’s supplement to Lewis’ learning will not usurp the authority of the Latin texts that Lewis will someday read (“But consider wel that I ne usurpe not to have founden this werk of my labour or of myn engyn. I n’am but a lewd compilator of the labour of olde astrologiens, and have it translated in myn English only for thy doctrine” [59-62]). Chaucer makes it clear that
he is a translator rather than a “founder” of knowledge. He assumes, therefore, a customary stance of humility in the face of the learned traditions of “olde astrologiens.”

Chaucer carefully circumscribes the contexts of the Astrolabe’s reception and this, in turn, allows him to assume an unusually didactic, authoritative, instructive tone. The prefatory material narrates the occasion of Chaucer’s writing. Lewis, “bey praier in special to lerne the tretys of the Astrelabie” (Prol. 4-5), “commissions” the work. Chaucer’s perception that “Lyte Lowys,” demonstrates an “abilitie to lerne sciences touching nombres and proporciouns” (Prol. 2-3) becomes the prompt for the production of a much needed, discrete, instructive, practical English work that compiles and translates materials from Latin scholarly productions (50-55). Chaucer’s Treatise is an intimate production, one that repeats personal addresses to Lewis beyond the preface (“Forget not thys, litel Lowys” [I.6]). Chaucer’s teaching is very personal and specific. He does not teach Lewis about astrolabes abstractly, but how to use “thyn oune instrument” (68) specifically. This intimacy, which imagines particular objects and particular exchanges between father and son and teacher and student, emphasizes the intimacy associated with vernacular instruction. Vernacular teaching is an intimate affair that cements bonds between friends: “Than for as moche as a philsofre saith, ‘he wrappith him in his frend, that condescendith to the rightfulle praiers of his frend’” (Prol. 5-8).

Chaucer does allude to an alternative audience: “Nowe wol I preie meekly every discret persone that redith or herith this litel tretys to have my rude endityng for excused, and my superfluitie of words” (41-44). These lines suggest a Chaucerian awareness that
this treatise is going to be read beyond its intended, immediate audience of one. But the opening address, which establishes intimacy and friendly feeling between translator and reader, must determine other readers’ reception of the text (41-49). Other readers’ are asked to forgive Chaucer’s repetitiveness and simplicity because the treatise is intended for a specific child with specific capacities whose most ardent desire is to learn how to use an instrument capable of being put to practical use. Every “discrete persone” who is not Lewis must temper his expectations of the material accordingly.

In the “Prologue” to his Astrolabe, Chaucer dictates the terms by which English can become a language capable of instruction: if the language is rude, it is because it is “curious endityng and hard sentence is ful hevy a onys for such a childe to lerne” (46-47). If the language is repetitive, this is because “me semeth better to written unto a child twyes a god sentence, than he forget it onys” (48-50). Chaucer outlines a method for vernacular instruction—it is repetitive, it is simple, and simplified. In order to claim a role for vernacular scientific instruction at all, he imagines all instruction in the vernacular as like to teaching a child. Vernacular instruction is necessarily elementary rather than a substitute for advanced, Latin instruction. It is incapable, furthermore, of giving Lewis, or the reader who is rendered like a ten-year old, the correct capacity for advanced experiment. Vernacular instruction, in itself, is incapable, as we shall see, of equipping readers with the cognitive tools or the appropriate literary capacities for further learning.

The Astrolabe does not aspire to teach more than the parts and uses of an instrument, to present tables of longitudes and latitude as well as some theory about the
motions of the “celestiall bodies” (88-9) and other “general rules of theorik in astrologie” (103). It is not a comprehensive introduction to astronomy and astrology but a guide to playful childhood experiment. Chaucer refuses to translate all the conclusions that may be found through an astrolabe in part because “somme of hen ben to harde to they tendir age of ten yeer to conceive” (23-24). The Astrolabe is also necessarily incomplete: it does not usurp the role of Latin compilations that are far more comprehensive in scope, particularly theoretically. Chaucer takes great care here to set a limit to the value of his writing: it is elementary and prior to further Latin learning. He also takes care to outline a method for vernacular teaching. But once “Lyte Lowys my son” learns Latin, he will refer, naturally, to better Latin texts.

Chaucer makes a claim for the value of his vernacular, scientific tract by alleging that it presents one path to knowledge, among many. There are diverse languages by which men may “ben suffisantly lerned and taught” (37-38) and, therefore, the English Astrolabe represents one of the “diverse pathes” that “leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome” (40). Here, briefly, Chaucer entertains the notion that English science might be sufficient. But he is too aware of the incredibly long history of Latin learning and institutional instruction—of the value of training in grammar and rhetoric, available mostly in Latin—to flirt with the idea for too long. The subtext—that institutional instruction is the most crucial course of instruction appears most prominently when readers realize that Little Lewis is a student in the town of Oxford, a university town that Chaucer associates with astronomy in The Miller’s Tale. All of Chaucer’s demonstrations of the measure of the skies is “compowned after the latitude of Oxenforde” (9-10).
Little Lewis is clearly a precocious student, likely a student of an Oxford grammar school whose instruction in Latin has not yet progressed sufficiently for reading Latin astronomical and astrological treatises. This insistence upon identifying Lewis’ institutional education even while he supplies a supplement to it in the form of a vernacular scientific work presents Chaucer’s awareness not only of the belatedness of English as a scientific language but also of the marginality of lay, vernacular translation as contribution to science in general and astronomical and astrological science in particular. Real, or at least difficult, astronomy and astrology will be practiced and learned in places where there are universities, such as Oxford, by men such as the “reverent clerkes, Frere J. Somer and Frere N. Lenne” (85-86).

Astronomy and astrology are hands-on arts, susceptible to being learned through experience with an instrument or a tool and this particular, practical quality of astronomical and astrological sciences makes it a suitable candidate for translation and teaching outside of the institution. But even as Chaucer justifies the value of vernacular translation, he feels compelled to make a deferential gesture. *Science*, in general, and even this particular science has a long, Latin history. Even though all instruction is identified with the vernacular (especially if Latin is a vernacular), academic and pedagogical institutions make use of Latin. Access to more advanced forms of learning always demands Latinity.

The relationship between a science, astronomy, and an instrument, the astrolabe, makes the science of astronomy capable of being reduced to a set of instructions for the basic use of a tool. The astrolabe, as an instrument, presents an occasion for teaching
outside of institutions because teaching astronomy does not necessarily implicate the entire theoretical apparatus of a discipline or disciplines (astronomy or astronomy and astrology together). In addition, the use of an instrument that was of practical use outside of the institutions of learning in fields such as navigation makes astronomy seem like an art that should be available to non-academics rather than an exclusively theoretical liberal art. Chaucer’s justification of his translation of an academic discipline is thereby enabled and justified by its character: translation into various vernaculars has been crucial to making knowledge available, but this particular science also can be imagined to be of value outside the academy. Astronomy, knowledge of the use of the astrolabe in particular, can help a person locate himself in the universe and, in addition, also explain one’s natural, astrologically-determined inclinations. It is a science capable of being used and valued by the “lewd” and, therefore, more readily subject to the workings of a “lewd compilator” (61-62). Even then, Chaucer’s English performance of scientific instruction (“for thy doctrine” [63-64]) is presented as marginal to institutional instruction, a stop-gap “litel tretys” (11) that will cease to be of any use to Lewis once he learns to read Latin well. Chaucer’s Astrolabe, therefore, in spite of its vernacularity, does not presume to make a science universally available to English readers: it presents itself as a gentle introduction to further, more advanced Latin training.

Chaucer invents a form, a vocabulary, and a method for vernacular astronomical instruction in the Middle Ages when he writes the first English astronomical treatise.

Alchemy, like astronomy and astrology, seems particularly suitable for extramural transmission and practice. Alchemy is equal parts a mechanical art, a craft in the sense of
a skilled trade, and a theoretical art, a science: the manual labors involved in alchemy—
described so well by the Canon’s Yeoman—makes it seem like a practical art even if its theoretical apparatus is clerical, even esoteric: “Philosophres spoken so mystily/ In this craft that men kan nat come therby,/ For any wit that men han nowe-a-daye” (VIII.13494-
1396).39 Alchemy is, on the one hand, the “secree of secretes” (1447), and on the other, seemingly available, capable of being subjected to experiment and practice as well as easily reduced to a mechanical craft.40 Chaucer’s contemporary, John Gower, also professes an interest in alchemy and introduces his tale about the art and the stone so crucial to its practice in the Confessio Amantis with a division of the sciences that, appropriately, confounds common divisions between mechanical and theoretical sciences.41

Alchemy, alongside the astronomy and astrology, was also practiced widely in non-academic settings in the later Middle Ages. By the later Middle Ages, after alchemy was banned from the universities (it was banned in Paris in 1332), it became less likely to be an academic art than an art practiced by scholarly clerics who had moved out of the university, men (in fact) like the rogue Canon who briefly joins Chaucer’s company.42 Manuscripts of alchemy, like those of astrology/astronomy, often circulated in the vernacular or in the vernacular alongside Latin earlier than other scientific texts.43 The Canon’s Yeoman, as unreliable a narrator as they come, provides a justification of alchemical practice. Knowledge of alchemy was once available (Plato knew the name of the magic stone that enables its successful practice). But the vocabulary of alchemy has become particularly convoluted: its terms have become so “mysty” so as to be
incomprehensible “nowe-a-dayes.” The Canon’s Yeoman identifies a reason for the secretive, convoluted discursive structures of alchemy. Plato tells a curious disciple:

“For unto Crist it [the philosopher’s stone or the mineral necessary for alchemy to work] is so lief and deere/ That he wol nat that it discovered bee,/ But where it liketh to his deitee/ Men for t’enspire, and eek for to deffende/ Whom that it liketh” (VIII.14671471).

Alchemy remains a valuable science, but its practice is severely restricted to the urgent purposes of inspiring faith in Christ and defending Christ’s faithful. Alchemy is legitimate only when—like a liberal art—the pursuit of alchemy contributes to the project of salvation.

Chaucer stages the removal of alchemy from academic institutions. Once, its practitioners were prestigious scholars, widely renowned men such as Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, and the Franciscan Arnoldus of Villanova. In his own day, however, the Canon’s Yeoman attests that, in spite of their failure to keep their practice entirely secret (i.e., people can smell an alchemist from a mile away [VIII. 887-889]), alchemists continue to practice their craft. He identifies these practitioners as canons alienated from their houses. In the second part of his tale, the London alchemist, also a canon, who sells his recipe for silver bargains for a higher price by claiming that his knowledge is incredibly rare (“I warne yow wel, for save I and a frere,/ In Engelond ther kan no man it make” [VIII.1355-1356]). Clerical crafts or sciences, the liberal arts, are practiced widely: indeed, it should be presumed that every cleric has sufficient knowledge of the arts because their learning enables them to fulfill their pastoral roles. But alchemy, as a marginal discipline, circulates differently. It is a knowledge that is so exclusive, so secret,
that its practitioners can sell it and, thereby, abuse it. But, for the reason that it can be bought and sold (and practiced like a mechanical craft), this secret science also seems more immediately available to lay appropriation. It is possible to buy a alchemical competence.

Alchemy, because it is a secret knowledge that belongs to an exclusive coterie with members who are sworn into secrecy and who assemble their own exclusive professional vocabulary, resembles the skilled, mechanical crafts practiced by urban guilds. Chaucer, as we shall see, takes advantage of this similarity in order to describe the repercussions of removing sciences from their traditional, institutional settings: what happens if a science is treated as if it were a commodity that is literally traded (particularly since successful alchemical practice produces currency)? What happens if the traditional model for training in the sciences, such as going to school, is eschewed in favor of urban forms of training, such as an apprenticeship? What happens, therefore, when knowledge of the sciences, when divorced from academic institutions, becomes instrumental to the practice of a personally profitable occupation rather than part of a clerical profession that is crucial to the promotion of salvation and common good? In The Canon's Yeoman's Tale, Chaucer asks his readers to imagine whether or not urban professional associations and urban forms of training are capable of usurping the role of academic institutions, especially since such an extramural movement implies the loss of the controls and protocols associated with institutional academic culture.

Chaucer opens the tale with an allusion to the marginality of the craft of alchemy: its practitioners lurk in the "suburbs of a town" (VIII.657) and live alongside robbers
and thieves. Like robbers and thieves, they are perpetually running away: the Canon and his Yeoman join the company to seek protection, sweaty from what seems like a routine escape. The Canon runs away again when he discovers that his own Yeoman, his servant, would “telle his pryvetee” (VIII.771). In spite of his “sluttish” (636) dress, however, the canon is recognizably clerical enough to provoke Harry Bailey’s question: “‘Is he a clerk, or noon? Telle what he is’” (VIII.616). The Canon’s indeterminate status, strikingly, resembles Chaucer’s own—both men provoke the question of profession from Harry Bailey. From this moment onward, it is clear that the Canon and his Yeoman present images of the extramural, intellectual: they are trafficking in learning, but have no right to either traffic in it or to profess it.

The Canon Yeoman’s initial description of his lord—“‘He is a man of heigh discresioun... he is a passyng man’” (VIII.613-4)—seems inadequate. The Canon’s Yeoman responds to Harry Bailey by admitting that his master is not exactly a clerk—“Nay, he is gretter than a clerk, ywis” (VIII.616)—but the practitioner of a particularly profitable craft. The Canon’s Yeoman offers a surprising description of his relationship with his master and the science they practice. He identifies them as practitioners of a craft rather than cleric and servant: they are like master and apprentice rather than master or teacher and student. Even the specified period of frustrated training—“With this Chaonoun I dwelt have seven year,/ And of his science am I never the neer” (VIII.720-1)—resembles a period of apprenticeship rather than a period of training in an institutional, educational setting like a university. Given the mechanical nature of the Canon and his Yeoman’s labors (they spend their days in multiplication and the Canon
Yeoman’s body is irrevocably altered for it), the art that they practice seems more like a city-craft than scholarly science, linked to their place of residence rather than their claims of clerisy.

But, as it turns out, the model of training city guildsmen who practice professions is not a suitable substitute for training in academic institutions. Instruction in science, in the tale, is removed from the institution of university or school and granted to each individual teacher, imagined as a member of a guild (as it in fact was, since every man with a license or M.A. could legitimately teach, though we know nothing of the Canon’s particular academic achievements). Chaucer takes advantage of the mechanical nature of alchemy and the manner in which teachers—as members of guild—made themselves, at least in theory, indistinct from experts in trade and skilled occupation. In The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale, science even clerical science has become conflated with an urban craft, a mystery to be passed on from one (criminal) craftsman to his servant. But residing outside the appropriate academic institution and bereft of the apparatus of institutional training, the status of alchemy becomes indeterminate. The Canon’s Yeoman is confounded: he fails to recognize the fraudulence of the craft he aspires to learn and he fails to acquire a clerical demeanor or learn a clerical vocabulary. The Canon’s Yeoman also seems uncertain about his goals: at the end of his frustrated training, he will not receive the right to wear the habit of a Canon, nor does he acquire the necessary clerical habits of speech and thought that might have permitted him to masquerade as an authoritative teacher and practitioner of an urban alchemical craft.
In the sixteenth-century, parts of both Chaucer’s *The Canon Yeoman’s Tale* and Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* were included in manuscripts as testimony to the art and practice of alchemy. But what is really crucial to Chaucer’s narration of the procedures of the alchemical art is the failure of a seven-year apprenticeship rather than whether or not alchemy constitutes a valid science. Alchemy, in spite of its non-academic status, partakes (like Chaucer’s writing) of the language and forms of institutional productions: it is an art that possesses an order (of theory, of materials, of narration) and a taxonomy (of materials). To speak of this “elvyssh nyce lore” (VIII.843) with authority requires the habits acquired from years of institutional training. Institutional training involves learning to speak, to order, to narrate accordingly, to cite and repeat, to remember. University training, for example, includes years of lecturing, of disputing, and of debating. The arts of *ordinatio*, so clearly on display in the arrangement of Chaucer manuscripts, are absent from the Canon’s Yeoman’s narrative practice. The Canon’s Yeoman’s repudiation of his master is coupled with an admiration that produces an aping of his master’s speech. He forgets things; he cannot tell according to order: “There is also ful many another thyng/ That is unto oure craft aperteynyg/ Though I by order hem nat reherce kan/ By cause that I am a lewed man” (VIII.784-7). Alchemy here stands in not simply for an illicit art that is part mechanical and part theoretical, but also for a textual and literate capacity imagined as a narrative capacity. The Canon’s Yeoman cannot duplicate the effects of years of scholarly institutional training that have produced his Canon. The teaching of science cannot be passed on, Chaucer warns, as if learning an academic science were the equivalent of learning any other urban profession: it is not taught directly by master to
servant but remains dependent on institutional training, formation, and study. The Canon Yeoman’s apprenticeship cannot hope to duplicate those years and habits of training even in the vernacular.

Unlike most of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* is not a translation. Chaucer, therefore, already renders translation much less crucial than the problem of translating forms of argumentation, of recreating institutional training and its habits of thought and speech, and of imagining a valid, urban discipline that is profitable intellectually and financially. Because of the fact that it is not a translation, *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* immediately presents the possibility of collapsing distinctions between clerical and lay: there is no Latin text, although there is a Latin tradition of alchemical study, to which a reader can refer which may assist in better interpreting a tale so that a non-Latinate reader of the English text can very well claim to have hermeneutic authority. The tale itself invites interpretation in a way that collapses distinctions between clerical and lay. Alchemy, because of its status as a discipline, can act as if a test case for collapsing the distinctions between learned and lewd, especially since both learned and lewd are confounded by alchemy (“And konne he letterure or konne he noon,/ As in effect, he shal fynde it al oon...This is to seyn, they faillen bothe two” [VIII.845-6; 850]). Indeed, the unnamed other London canon of the second part of the tale tricks another cleric, a “preest, an annueleer” (VIII.1012). Everyone should be rendered a “lewed man” (1445) by the science and practice of alchemy. This is because, first, everyone should fail (unless by force of miracle) and, second, because both lewd and learned are susceptible to the tricks of huckster alchemists.
Ultimately, however, linguistic and narrative capacities associated with clerical training prevent the absolute collapse of distinction between the learned and the lewd. Like Chaucer, John Gower provides an illustrious history for the suspect and marginal art of alchemy: the practitioners of alchemy include the celebrated and influential medieval Aristotelian commentator Avicenna (“Among the which is Avicen,/ Which fond and wrot a gret partie/ The practique of Alconomie” [Confessio Amantis IV.vii.2610-2612]). The glorified history of alchemy renders it available to only the most wise of scholars: “Whos bokes [Avicenna’s], pleinli as thei stoned./ Upon this craft, fewe understonde” (Confessio Amantis IV.2612-2613). Alchemy is a mysterious art: its books may now be in Latin but its foundations as an art are incomprehensible except to its mysterious Greek, Arabic, and Chaldean founders (IV.2627). Nevertheless, Gower immediately follows this assertion with a brief history of the Latin arts of grammar so deeply implicated in medieval translation, hermeneutics, and rhetoric. Even when the science under discussion skirts the division between the mechanical and the theoretical and even when its unavailability as an art to be practiced or theorized is not defined by its Latinity, a discussion of the discipline of alchemy cannot be divorced from the history of the Latin literary arts associated with clerical professions, training, and practice. For both Gower and Chaucer—even as they engage in vernacular teaching, the sciences are always necessarily affiliated with instruction in Latin and the training required for achieving an adequate, competent Latinity.

The Canon Yeoman’s method of narration, therefore, coincides with his irredeemable “lewedness:” he forgets bits and pieces of the art and appends them to his
tale later ("Yet forgat I to maken rehersaille" [VIII.853]). He confuses the purpose of his "slidyng science" (732). Years of practice have not led him closer to the status of his master in spite of his desire to duplicate the Canon’s teaching ("I wol yow telle, as was me taught also,/ The foure spirites and the bodies seven,/ By ordre, as ofte I herde my lord hem nevene" [VIII.819-21]). The authority of even the marginal art of alchemy has been its investment with clerical apparatus and clerical vocabulary: "Whan we been there as we we shul exercise/ Oure elvysshe crafte, we semen wonder wise,/ Oure termes been so clergial and so queynte" (VIII.750-2). But the Yeoman’s incapacity to duplicate the "clergial" terms and processes of the craft without his master suggest again that distinctions between clergy and lay cannot be entirely collapsed even when the science that is being transmitted is already, by definition, subject to appropriation by scholarly, non-academic and urban would-be scholars.

In *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*, Chaucer presents the most literal possible exploration of the practice of taking advantage of intellectual capital so crucial to Andrew Galloway’s formulation of a late-medieval intellectual marketplace. Instead, however, of accruing value as a person because he is associated with learned culture and teaching, the Canon of the tale literally deals in currency: he sells his knowledge of how to make metals that can act as if currency. It is revealing that discouraged alchemists imagine themselves like merchants. After failing once again to make valuable metals during one of their experiments, one of the alchemists describes their efforts in mercantile terms: "‘Us moste putte oure good in aventure./ A marchant, pardee, may nat ay endure,/ Trusteth me wel, in his prosperitee./ Sometyme his good is drowned in the see./ And
somtyme comth it sauf unto to londe’” (VIII.946-950). The line presents a startling joke at the expense of alchemists who think of themselves as practitioners of an especially esoteric science, because it reveals the nature of their practice. They really are more like merchants than they are scholars. They live in cities; they put other people’s goods at risk; they hope for profit. Their identities remain only marginally attached to academic, scholarly practice but they hide behind academic language vocabularies in order to capitalize on the cultural value of their clerical training and professions. Chaucer, who often enough assumes the role of vernacular scholar, only tentatively, hesitantly, and humbly proposes to participate in study in London: he wants to maintain a distinction between his jobs, what he does for his livelihood, and his scholarship, what he does to further learning. A refusal to traffic in learning as if it were currency, therefore, becomes a mark of the legitimate academic, extramural scientific (in the medieval sense) practice. It ensures that the sciences are practiced only for common profit.

The Canon’s Yeoman rehabilitates himself by presenting his experience of irrevocable financial and physical loss as a warning to every man who aspires to learn and practice alchemy: “Lat every man be war by me for evere!” (VIII.737). He even invokes another clerk (VIII.748), perhaps a better one, who once taught him the invaluable lesson that “For unto shrewes joye it is and ese/ To have hir felawes in peyne and disede” (VIII.746-747). The health of a fellowship requires the good will of all its members. Alchemy, as a science, does not perform the work that science, or knowledge or a discipline of knowledge, is intended to do which is discover truth for the betterment of the community. In order to ensure that persons and communities are no longer
damaged by the effects of the “chaffare” (VIII.1421) or trade in knowledge, the Canon’s Yeoman invokes a higher order of philosopher. Historically, the philosophers have banned all arts such as alchemy because they are unnatural, magical arts that properly belong only to the Christ. The second half of the tale, which takes place in London (VIII.1012) locates the place where such illicit traffic in knowledge is most likely to take place. The City is a likely candidate for forms of association that might seem capable of usurping the role of traditional academic institutions. Chaucer warns, however, that trafficking in science through non-academic channels detrimentally transforms scientific disciplines: divorced from institution, they are as likely to be put to use for personal gain rather than common and salvific profit.

Chaucer, as we have already seen, inaugurates an academic London poetry: he produces an academic translation of the Boece and continues to explore the subjects invoked by the Boece. He is not, therefore, opposed to lay philosophical engagement in the vernacular. However, he seems wary of a lay learning that divorces itself from the disciplines and apparatus associated with the academy and that might be affiliated primarily and only with urban practices of training, such as occupational apprenticeships practiced by members of guilds. Such a conflation would reduce the practice of academic learning to the status of learning a trade and this, in spite of guilds’ protestations otherwise, is not performed for common profit. In order not to “usurp” the role of institutional scholarly production and, thereby, make learning liable to commodification, Chaucer again makes training and capacity in the Latin literate arts crucial to the credible practice of scholarship. Only such skills can collapse the distinction between learned and
lewd and the acquisition of such skills, furthermore, can be and should be expected to
cultivate the habits of disciplined, legitimate, and ethical intellectual practice.

Even though Chaucer relegates Latin’s status to vernacular language in the
*Astrolabe*, he is not interested in making academic forms of engagement popular in the
sense of universally available. His own pedagogical treatise on the *Astrolabe* is intended
only as a discrete aid, of value only while Lewis remains incapable of reading Latin. It is
presumed that Lewis’ linguistic training will be continued and, as he acquires a facility
with Latin, he will also (unlike the Canon’s Yeoman) acquire the tools and capacities for
narration, composition, and speech associated with clerical and clericalized persons in
*both* Latin and the vernacular. Chaucer’s own capacity for scholarly engagement depends
upon his Latinity: it allows him to claim an intellectual role, translator, but it also
announces his intimate knowledge of learned traditions. His learning, although he is not
affiliated with an institution, is therefore not alienated from clerical investments but a
belated, vernacular contribution.

The fifteenth century sees the emergence of grammar teaching in the vernacular
and Chaucer’s own writing—as Leland, Bale, and Speght so rightly point out—later
becomes implicated in the history of vernacular instruction and, therefore, in academic
history. But Chaucer himself clearly still associates training to think and to write with
Latin instruction. For Chaucer, vernacular instruction, even his own instruction in the
*Astrolabe*, is belated and simplified: it is therefore only capable of acting as a supplement
to Lewis’ program of learning. Chaucer claims a space for vernacular instruction and for
continued, lifelong scholarly engagement in the vernacular, but he ascribes to it a very
marginal status. Training in a guild or even the training implicated when a master teaches a servant his trade does not and cannot act as an effective substitute for institutional, academic training, particularly since it might render academic study like to preparation for practicing a mechanical trade or membership in a mercantile association.

To be learned, for Chaucer, implies a capacity for narration and for effective speech that permits the appropriation of a persona affiliated, still, with the clerical profession. Instruction in the linguistic arts remains crucial and the failure to acquire these arts renders a member of the community irredeemably lewd or unlearned, incapable of inhabiting a clerical persona. This changes within half a generation as we see the effects of Chaucer’s inauguration of London learning in the fifteenth century in the writing of Thomas Hoccleve.

*Thomas Hoccleve’s Chaucerian Science*

Thomas Hoccleve (d. 1437), one of Chaucer’s earliest imitators, identifies Chaucer as his “universel fadir in science” (1964) in *The Regiment of Princes*. Only a few years after his death, Chaucer’s frustrated and laborious study in *The Parliament of Fowls* has been transformed. By Hoccleve’s poetic prime, Chaucer is already a celebrated scholar, someone whose portrait is memorialized in a work that aspires to reproduce his poetic style and pedagogical aspirations (4992-5005). Hoccleve even calls a recently deceased and still lamented Chaucer his “maistir” repeatedly, invoking through context a word that refers to teachers (to one’s *magister*) as much as it was a simple honorific referring to gentlemen. He is the “deere maistir” and “fadir” (2077; 2078) who “fayn wolde han me taught,/ But I was dul and lerned lyte or naght” (2078-2079). For
Hoccleve, Chaucer’s science is entirely Boethian and affiliated with political counsel in spite of his invocation of Cicero, Virgil, and Aristotle as ancient Chaucerian counterparts. The *Regiment*, in parts, honestly represents Boethian philosophy (it repudiates worldly goods, it laments the mutability of Fortune in its “Prologue”) in order to delineate an ethics. But it also makes literal the relationship between *De consolatione philosophiae* and the tradition of political counsel. Minnis and Machan speculate that the popularity of the *Boece* in the fifteenth century comes from its affirmation of the “moral and ethical *sententiae* then deemed appropriate advice for writers to offer princes—it would have sat comfortably beside other books written more formally in the *de regimine principum* mode.” Hoccleve takes advantage of this relationship between the *Boece* and the counsel for princes tradition: the *Regiment* presents a Chaucerian, Boethian “Prologue” as a prelude to his translation of two works of the advice genre, “Gyles of Regiment/ of Princes” (2052-2053) and the “book” of “Jacob of Cessolis…That the Ches Moralyised cleped is” (2109-211).

Geoffrey Chaucer’s engagement with a diverse array of medieval sciences seems lost on Hoccleve, in part because the Chaucer of the *Complete Works* was not available to him. Instead, Thomas Hoccleve like most late medieval readers of Chaucer manuscripts knew a little Chaucer, probably the *Boece* and the *Troilus*, and, in all likelihood, they constituted a Chaucer tradition out of what little they knew. For Hoccleve, Chaucerian vernacular science, imagined primarily as the science of providing political counsel, becomes a means of styling himself, as a bureaucrat who writes poetry like his “maistir” and “fadir,” as a likely candidate for advancement, for pay, and for inclusion in a circle of
courtly counselors. It is surprising that Hoccleve models his literary career primarily upon Chaucer's. During the Lancastrian regime, there were other models for service as a learned, poetic counselor: Hoccleve might have chosen to propose a role for himself similar to that of Christine di Pisan's son in the court of Henry IV. He might have chosen to imagine himself like an Italian humanist in the service of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who hired bureaucrats and advisors because he associated Italian scholars with both better Latin and general prestige. But Hoccleve insists upon the value of a vernacular, local poetic tradition and its capacity for transmitting science, London's Chaucerian science, to the court. It is Hoccleve, who presents himself constantly traversing the division between Westminster and London, who presents a Chaucerian tradition as if it were native to the City of London and its environs. Chaucer, therefore, immediately becomes implicated in the history of London instruction as the "firste fyndere of our fair language" (4978).

Hoccleve's earlier work *La Male Regle* (1405) traffics in the idea that Hoccleve's labors present a counterpoint to the flattery that threatens the health of the realm. Flattery, Hoccleve writes, is the bane of both young men (who, naturally, stray from a moderate regimen) and of government: "Albeit Pat my yeeres be but yong,/ Yit haue I seen in folk of hy degree,/How Pat wenym of faueles tonge/ Hath mortifed hir prosperitee/ And brought hem in sho sharp aduersitee" (209-213). Young though he may be, Hoccleve already understands the ill effects of an unruly regimen (a "male regle") and insists that the Lancastrian kingdom suffers from the same unruly governance. Flattery results in an unwillingness to tell governors the truth becomes the occasion of the nation's ill fortunes.
Just like a young man, the nation needs “conseil.” Hoccleve’s petitionary poem, therefore, also oddly figures his poetry as a vehicle for counsel. Some poetry (“poesie” [262]) constitutes flattery that is detrimental to the realm. But the admittedly drunk, broke, ill, and social climbing Hoccleve nevertheless proposes that he is the purveyor of true “conseil” (ll. 273-83). His age, he argues, is characterized by a love of flattery, imagined as falsehood—“Men seten nat by trouthe nowadayes./ Men loue it nat. Men wole it nat cherice./ And yit is trouthe best at all assayes” (281-3)—and, as his career progresses (poorly), Hoccleve will present his poetry as truthful “conseil.”

Hoccleve’s career as a clerk of the Privy Seal is not, in The Regiment of Princes, grounds for his role as counselor.\textsuperscript{55} The Regiment, half autobiographical dialogue and half translation of multiple advice to princes manuals that Hoccleve describes as a compilation of “sentence” (2132),\textsuperscript{56} is justified on the grounds of its relationship to an already established London learning, associated with two of its practitioners Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower (1962; 1975). The autobiographical narrative of the Regiment insists upon learning as the condition for lifting Hoccleve out of existential and financial despair and this same learning, coupled with his profession of writing, becomes the enabling condition for Hoccleve’s attempt to fashion himself into a counselor and into a professional, Chaucerian poet.\textsuperscript{57}

The unnamed, poorly dressed Old Man who interrupts Hoccleve’s pensive walk along the Strand from his nearby home at Chester’s Inn in the Regiment asks immediately: “‘If that thee lyke to been esid wel,/ As suffre me with thee a whyle./ Art thow aght lettred?’” (148-50). Being “lettred” (whether imagined as capable of reading
or, more broadly, educated) becomes the condition for the alleviation of both personal and social pain:

\[58\]

‘Lettred folk han greater discrecion
And bet conceyve konne a mannes sawe,
And rather wole applie to reson
And from folie sonner hem withdrawe,
Than he that neithir reson can ne lawe,
Ne lerned hath no maner letterure.
Plukke up thyn herte—I hope I shal thee cure.’

155-161

Hoccleve admits to a smattering of learning, which is in itself already lays the groundwork for further understanding (“to conceyve konne a mannes sawe”). Reason here is not imagined as a natural, human capacity. Instead, reason is a method and a capacity that is born out of training. In order to learn more, a member of the “folk” (155) must have a basic literacy and familiarity with the methods of learning. Hoccleve is untrained in advanced institutions—unlike his contemporary, the monk and Oxford graduate John Lydgate (d. 1449/1450), and so he makes London learning central to the narrative of his intellectual development. He is, in his own vernacular and Chaucerian fashion, “lettred.”

The “Prologue” to the *Regiment* is an extended, intimate pedagogic exchange between an old and a young man, duplicating the exchange between master and pupil but also, as we shall see, between father and son. The word “lore” (192; 215; 1552), another word for learning, is repeated again and again as a description of the teaching that the Old Man proffers his accidental ward. The relationship between the Old Man and Hoccleve’s poetic persona is part confessional—Hoccleve is constantly prompted to tell of his grievances followed by teaching illustrated by exempla (on heresy, on chastity in marriage, on the need for peace, on the need to wear modest clothes, on the need to cast
off the things of the world in a Boethian manner). In this, Hoccleve and his instructor resemble John Gower’s Amans and Genius from the *Confessio Amantis*. The Old Man’s constant prompting, his identifications and catalogues of the possible grief-inducing conditions of Hoccleve’s life resemble confessional prompts: “‘Now, good sone, telle on thy grevance/ What is thy cause of thought in special’”(232-3). Later, Hoccleve, admitting that the Old Man’s lore relieves him of pain, then submits himself, like a penitent, to his interlocutor’s “correccioun” (“And meekly yow byseeche I of pardoun,/ Me submittynge unto correccioun” [755-6]). Hoccleve, therefore, submits himself to both intellectual and ethical correction, but also identifies himself as a young man susceptible to instruction that literally occurs on the streets of the city.

But Hoccleve’s woes, as it turns out, are professional—he is not getting paid for his job or his “plotmeel” (2055) translations, he is unqualified for a benefice, and he is an unlikely the object of patronage—rather than ethical. The Old Man’s confessional pedagogy reveals an autobiographical persona who insists upon his orthodoxy, on his chastity, and on his modesty and reveals that he is capable of ethical action in the world he inhabits. In addition, Hoccleve identifies the value of his labor as a clerk and he justifies it as work so he is not anxious about the value of his profession or of its indeterminacy in spite of seeming resemblances between him and Langland’s Will. For Hoccleve, labors at the Privy Seal are entirely physical and professional, not to be conflated with an intellectual vocation. Writing, he says, is backbreaking, eye-straining, stomach-churning work that does not admit of singing or chatting like other kinds of physical labor (88-1029). Other kinds of physical labor are also classified as crafts that
require learning: "Considerynge how that I am nat/ In housbondrye lerned worth a
myte" (976-7). For Hoccleve, all kinds of work—and their "artificers" (1009)—require
skill and his impulse is inclusive: the mechanical, agricultural arts constitute a learned
labor, as does his backbreaking writing. But neither his physical writing labor as a
minor clerk nor the agricultural arts are likely to constitute the arts that relieve him of his
fear of poverty, present and future.

The only solution that answers the Old Man’s initial question—a question that
reminds readers of Harry Bailey’s address to Geoffrey Chaucer—of “What man art
thow?” (144) comes when Hoccleve identifies himself by name: “Hoccleve, fadir myn,
men clepen me” (1864). The identification of the name, which allows the Old Man to
recognize an acquaintance of Geoffrey Chaucer (“Sone, I have herd or this men speke of
thee;/ Thow were aquyntid with Chaucer, pardee” [1866-7]). An acquaintance with
Chaucer suggests a capacity for poetic composition in English (“Although thow seye
that thow in Latyn/ Ne in Frensshe neithir canst but small endyte,/ In Englissh tonge
canstow wel afyn” [1870-2]):

‘Sharpe they penne and wryte on lustyly.
Let see, my sone, make it fressh and gay;
Owte thyn aart if thow canst craftily’
His [Prince Henry] hy prudence hath insighte verray
To juge if it be wel ymmad or nay.’

Hoccleve is being asked to write “a goodly tale or two” by which Henry, Prince of
Wales, may “desporten hym by nyght” so that his “free grace” may light upon Hoccleve
(1902-4). But these tales in Chaucerian language and form are intended not only for
pleasure but also for counsel: “Wryte him nothyng that sowneth into vice./ Kythe thy
love in mateere of sadnesse./ Looke if thow fynde canst any tretice./ Growndid on his
estates holsumnesse’’ (1947-50). Chaucer’s professional identification, or his lack
thereof, is provoked by the same question—“What man art thow?” (VII.695)—that
leads to a translation of a work of counsel, The Tale of Melibee, after the failure of
Chaucer’s romance in The Canterbury Tales. In The Regiment, Chaucerian ambivalence
is displaced in favor of the explicit assertion that one is Chaucer’s student. Being
Chaucer’s student is both a scholarly credential and literally credential. It qualifies
Hoccleve to write tales and to perform the role of counselor.

Hoccleve, therefore, presents the spaces between London and Westminster (and,
with his one mention of Gower [1975], Southwark) as sites of intimate instruction
between fathers and their sons, relationships similar to pedagogical model presented in an
intimate text such as Chaucer’s Astrolabe.64 But it also presents the instruction at the
hands of Chaucer and Gower as abruptly interrupted by the unfortunate deaths of his
masters, his authorities and teachers. Hoccleve’s urban, poetic intellectual formation must
be completed by the Old Man at the Strand who, identified as father, reprises Chaucer’s
role.65 Hoccleve persists in presenting himself as a young man—he might have been as
old as 44 by 1411—because he invokes an incomplete, interrupted period of instruction:
his wit, therefore, is enfeebled by interrupted study as well as by anxiety and melancholy.

But Hoccleve’s clerical authority does not emerge from an opposition that he
imposes between the university and London learning. In fact, Chaucer—the “flour of
eloquent” (1962), the “mirror of fructuous entendement” (1963), and “universal fadir
in science” (1964)—is conflated with institution: he produces knowledge that can
compete with the knowledge of the universities. Drawing a parallel between his own suffering as a long overlooked and honest public servant and the neglected learned clerks of Oxford and Cambridge, Hoccleve laments that he like the learned clerics of the universities who don’t trade in favel or falsehood and flattery are similarly overlooked. Favel is rewarded instead of clerks such as Hoccleve (armed with a basic London learning) and the scholars of the university. Chaucerian learning, a London learning that continues in its Hocclevean iteration, is stealthily licensed as the equivalent of other, more established kinds of pedagogical program. The refusal to establish Oxford, for example, as on explicit object of critique may be a politic move on Hoccleve’s part: his would-be patron, the Prince of Wales, was a protector and patron of the University of Oxford. London learning, imagined as a Chaucerian institution, is not opposed to Oxford’s intellectual culture: London is simply one of many sites of intellectual formation. It produces clerical poets.

It may be argued that Chaucerian learning is certainly not necessarily a London learning: Chaucer and Hoccleve both inhabited the space of Westminster. Chaucer was definitely courtly and Hoccleve definitely wanted to belong to the court. The Regiment, his public poem, is a bid for royal patronage. But Hoccleve brings to court a learning that is associated with the city—through Gower and Chaucer, his deceased “maistirs”—that continues in the city: the Old Man inhabits one of the largest Carmelite houses in England in the city, between Fleet Street and the Thames. Furthermore, Hoccleve’s poetic activities, much more than Chaucer’s, are explicitly affiliated with London and, though he seems to have found it difficult to find royal patrons, he certainly wrote works
commissioned by members of the city, like his contemporary Lydgate. Hoccleve, therefore, presents his learned production as the product of London scholarly training. Hoccleve’s “Prologue” to The Regiment of Princes, therefore, makes the case that the small space of the city has become a site of intimate, extended intellectual exchange where troubled, melancholic clerks happen continuously upon intellectual mentors and, thereby, proceed through a London course of intellectual development attested to in his poetic productions.

3 On the high wastage rates at English universities, see Allan B. Cobban, English University Life in the Middle Ages (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1999), pp. 22-3. Cobban writes that, rather often, brief attendance at either Cambridge or Oxford, without receiving a degree, was often useful in social and career advancement. Chaucer’s imagined training in a university would not account for his life-long commitment to study.
5 For Chaucer’s actual affiliations at Merton College, see J. A. W. Bennett, Chaucer at Oxford and Cambridge (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1974).
8 For more on Chaucer’s actual work and a militant perspective on Chaucer’s identification with servitude, see David R. Carlson, Chaucer’s Jobs (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

10 On Chaucerian reception and intimate identifications with the lost author, see Stephanie Trigg, Congenial Souls: Reading Chaucer from Medieval to Postmodern (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002).


15 Chaucer writes, as he opens The Parliament of Fowls: "And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,/ Cometh al this newe science that men lere" (24-25). All citations to Chaucer's works refer to The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry Benson, et al., 3rd ed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All citations to The Canterbury Tales refer to fragment number and line number.


27 See David Wallace, “‘Deyntee to Chaffare:’ Men of Law, Merchants, and the Constance Story” in *Chaucerian Polity*, pp. 182-221.


29 See my opening chapter, “Putting London in its Place: London’s Poets and Late Medieval English Intellectual History.”


Chaucer is, however, radically different from men like John Trevisa and, in all likelihood, William Langland in that he does not labor under the aegis of a patron.


For a recent reading of Chaucer’s preface to the *Astrolabe* and translation, see Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), pp. 75-100.

See also II.22 (“To knowe in speciall the latitude of oure counter, I mene after the latitude of Oxenford, and the height of oure pool.”).


Elementary education began at age eight or nine and lasted for about six to ten years. Training at university is not set by a period, but lasted between four and five years generally.


For this reason, speculatively, Hoccleve omits any mention of his likely 1380s training at the Inns of Chancery and any mention of his role in contributing to the Formulary, a likely tool for fellow younger clerks mentioned in *La Male Regle*. On Hoccleve’s training, see John A. Burrow, *Thomas Hoccleve* (Aldershot and Brookefield: Variorum, 1994).


Alias, so many a worthy clerk famous
In Oxendforde and in Cambrigge also
Stonde unavaunced, wher the vicious
Favel hath chirches and provendres mo
Than God is plesid with.


Chapter Three

John Gower and the Discipline of History

*John Gower, London, and the Problem of History*

Cladyns, Esdras and Sulpices,
Termegis, Pandulf, Frigidilles,
Menander, Ephiloquorus,
Solins, Pandas and Josephus
The ferste were of Enditours,
Of old Cronique and ek auctuors.
--*Confessio Amantis*, IV. 2407-12

In Book IV of his most widely-read poem, the Middle English *Confessio Amantis* (First Recension 1386; Second Recension 1390-2; Third Recension 1393), John Gower (d. 1408) presents a catalogue of the inventors of the “artes et sciencias” whose diligence (“diligencia”) begot “doctrinam et auxilium” for all the members of humanity.² The catalogue is not orderly, following neither strict temporal order (Josephus comes before Herodotus) nor any conventional division of the sciences (natural philosophy, writing, augury, physiognomy, history, poetry, music, portraiture, sculpture, metalwork, fishing, hunting, cooking, cloth-making appear together in no particular order). Grammatically, the portion of the catalogue cited above seems to refer primarily to historians but actually presents chroniclers in the company of the playwright Menander and the poets Claudian (Cladyns) and Sulpicius (Sulpices). John Gower presents a genealogy of the arts in that he explains the origins of various arts and sciences. But Gower also confuses the taxonomy of the medieval disciplines and the temporal order of their invention.
John Gower emphatically includes the writing of “old Cronique” in this catalogue of useful intellectual sciences and arts and he even cites historical writing as the source of this unusual catalogue in celebration of those who “studie and muse” (IV.2386): “The name of hem schal nevere aweie” for they can be found “in the Croniques” (2395).

Gower’s celebration of intellectual labor presents a history of the arts and sciences by identifying their earliest practitioners, but fails to identify any specific Gowerian affiliation. We don’t know if he thinks of himself primarily as a historian or a poet or if he imagines any division between these two scholarly roles. The nature of Gower’s intellectual labor remains unstated, even though the source of his writing, “old Cronique,” is clear.

Andrew Galloway’s influential “Gower in His Most Learned Role and the Peasants Reveolt of 1381” argues that Gower’s poetic project imagines how knowledge or learning constitutes both self and social conditions. A change in the means and modes by which knowledge is constituted becomes a condition for change. Gower’s critique of the peasants in revolt is a criticism, therefore of their method of knowing and not knowing. It is a critique of the state of learning in late medieval England. In this chapter, I argue that John Gower, in the Middle English Confessio Amantis and in his earlier Latin poem the Vox Clamantis (1382), is invested in constituting historical knowledge. In order to accomplish this, Gower self-consciously revises the accustomed conventions of chronicle writing in order to introduce a historical writing that more effectively asserts urgent ethical and political imperatives. Crucially, Gower responds to the failure of an established tradition of historical writing, associated with the chronicles of institutions.
such as monastic houses, and of the failure of these works to produce both ethical persons capable of fulfilling their right social roles. I argue too that Gower, rewriting the conventions of historical writing, also engages with the intellectual movements that dominate fourteenth-century London. Gower’s historical writing, therefore, responds to historical writing as imagined by institutions and to London learning.

In this chapter, I also argue that local writing does not necessarily imply vernacular writing in the later Middle Ages. Latin, as a language of scholarly practice, has always been identified with institutions with universal and transnational purviews such as universities. Latin, imagined as an unchanging language that preserves continuities, belonged to institutions that theoretically produced similarly motivated and trained Latinate scholars in perpetuity. To state a truism common to scholars who study the middle ages and medieval writers themselves quite baldly, Latin was the language of clerks universally and the various vernaculars the languages of the nobility, the mercantile classes, and the laity more broadly speaking. Membership in a non-clerical community (imagined as a nation or otherwise) becomes conflated with linguistic facility in a local, vernacular tongue. An imagined affiliation between community and vernacular language provides the impetus for translation, but it would overstate the point to say that writing in Latin limits one’s audience to the clergy. Furthermore, Latinity is not necessarily always a bid for a transnational readership—it is, in fact, Gower’s English poem that wins him a transnational audience. Gower’s multilingual practice has become the occasion for reassessing which groups read in Latin and which in the vernacular in Late Medieval England. Latinate clerks, such as the Austin Canons of St. Mary
Overey’s in Southwark, were likely audiences for Gower’s vernacular writing and were likely the most crucial agents for the transmission of the vernacular *Confessio Amantis*.8

John Gower’s Latin writing was not addressed to a different audience from his vernacular writing in Anglo-Norman and in Middle English. The *Vox*, because it is written in Latin, is not exclusively addressed to clerics. Indeed, the *Vox* constantly advocates for the reform and renewal of Gower’s native land and all of its inhabitants. The *Vox* directly addresses King, judiciary, and peasantry. And, much more so than the *Confessio*, the *Vox* is specifically being produced with an eye towards the city of London. It opens with an allegorical account of the “sack” of London in 1381 and addresses the problems that beset the city of London—the practices of merchants and artisans, the role of the mayor, the problems of civic governance.9 This chapter, therefore, presents John Gower’s Latin poetry as equally local as Gower’s canonical, English poem. Furthermore, I argue implicitly that the division between a lay and clerical readership is difficult to make in the face of Gower’s multilingual career and in his choice of genre, history: historical writing, I will demonstrate, was susceptible to continuation and emendation outside institutional scholarly settings in Gower’s England.

This chapter presents John Gower as a London historian in Latin and in Middle English. In order to make this argument, I situate Gower’s poetry in the traditions of both historical writing about London and historical writing in England. Second, I locate Gower in the immediate milieu of London intellectual culture by presenting his historical writing as a response to Chaucerian-Boethian philosophy. John Gower’s reinvention of historiography becomes the occasion for advocating a counter-ethic in an intimate,
intellectual poetic London that was, increasingly, dominated by the Boethian tradition, particularly after Chaucer’s academic translations of Guillaume de Lorris’ and Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* (1368-72) and Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*. (1382-6). Gower, an intimate of Chaucerian intellectual circles, posits an alternative to Boethian ethics by presenting a direct correspondence between individual ethics and the course of history. Gower, as I will demonstrate, presents the possibility of a radical historical agency. For Gower, history is emphatically the result of willed participation by ethical agents. The person and the world, therefore, are described in tandem. Development and degeneration, rather than virtuous fortitude in the face of changeable Fortune, become the tropes by which Gower narrates history and the possibility of change.

Southwark was hardly a quiet retreat, but Gower’s residence there provided the opportunity for a long and productive retirement. He was well-placed to observe events and people at a remove, distanced from legislature and judiciary at Westminster and the Temple, and from the centres of wealth and power in the City, but only a ferry-boat from all three, and with the powerful and wealthy in his immediate neighbourhood.

--Rosamund S. Allen

Gower’s residence in an Austin Priory in Southwark has allowed us to imagine Gower as overly monk-like: he wanted an “opportunity for a long and productive retirement.” He lived a life of scholarly *otium*, composing poetry and revising poetry *as if*
at leisure, rather than urgently driven (as his poetry would have us believe) by near apocalyptic political events and deep social disaffection. Gower, the monkish poet, writes productively but only after observing events and people “at a remove.” This chapter, in part, makes the already small divisions between Southwark and London and Southwark, and Westminster seem even smaller. All of London, Westminster, and Southwark become, in this chapter, Gower’s immediate neighborhood. I am not arguing that Southwark can now be conflated with the city as a jurisdiction or that Gower’s Southwark was governed by the same immediate legal, mercantile, and civic concerns as the City. Instead, I bring Westminster, London, and Southwark even closer together by imagining a shared intellectual culture between these nearby jurisdictions: bureaucrats in Westminster, jurists in London, and poets in Southwark shared intellectual concerns and wrote to and for each other. They responded to the same academic, institutional traditions and to each other across the Thames. The history of the intellectuals of London, like the history of the City itself, often incorporates the districts of Southwark and Westminster. Far from working in isolation with old books, Gower frequently speaks directly about and to the members of the City as well as to the King and the nobility in Westminster. More importantly, he responds to intellectual currents that circulate in the city that travel through the channels of his immediate intellectual circle (both the canons of Southwark and his peers Chaucer and their earliest readers in the city), the courts, and the channels of religious institutions. Historical writing and intellectual culture do not respect civic and legal boundaries especially when legal and civic jurisdictions are so easily crossed by ferry-boat.
John Gower, unlike Geoffrey Chaucer, was not a native of the City. His Middle English, unlike Chaucer’s, cannot even be identified with the metropolitan area in which he spent most of his life. Gower was probably born in Kent and, later, lived with Austin Canons in St. Mary Overey’s as a corrodian in the independent jurisdiction of Southwark just across the Thames. Robert Epstein argues that John Gower was far more interested in bridging the division between Southwark and Westminster than the division between Southwark and London and that he, therefore, purges his works of any real allusions to his urban environment. But Gower actually inaugurates the two works I present as his histories with representations of the city of London and with allusions to narrative of the city’s heroic foundation. The *Vox Clamantis* opens with the peasants’ “sack” of the walled city of London and the First Recension of the *Confessio Amantis* opens with an accidental meeting between Richard II and John Gower’s poetic avatar along the Thames. In both narratives, Gower identifies the city of New Troy as the location that begets an occasion for writing.

The famous scene on the barge of the First Recension of the *Confessio Amantis*, however fictive, demonstrates that the ruling classes and their would-be lay, intellectual advisors interacted in and around the city of London. London was the site of the most crucial historical events of the period—for Gower, the only notable events of the Peasant Rising of 1381 happened in London. London was also the site where one could find a new readership and be part of a new community of writers and lay scholars. In London, Gower could imagine performing revisions to scholarly and academic traditions and expect to find an audience in all of England’s languages. London, the first place
deliberately established by the mythical founder of England, was the best place from which one could write a new book of history for either Richard or England’s sake. From the urban nexus that includes London and with London in mind, Gower invokes poetry’s role in the possibility of the urgent renewal of the very loosely defined art of writing history.

The (unofficial) title of London historian has been conferred upon the likes of John Stow (d. 1605), a sixteenth-century member of the Society of Antiquaries who wrote and published *A Survey of London* (1598; 1603). John Stow’s topographic or chorographic account of the city of London is narrated as a survey of the city (or as one critic puts it a “walk around the city”), but this survey also becomes the occasion for narrating more conventional chronological histories in brief. Stow is a London historian: he is from London, he lived in London and he wrote about London. While sixteenth-century antiquarianism provided new print occasions for writing and collating chronological, chorographic, and topographic narratives of the city (as well as of England as a whole), the Middle Ages were not bereft of city historians. John Stow’s vast personal collection of chronicles testify to his dependence upon medieval Latin and French chronicles—he draws from the histories of the William of Malmesbury, Nicholas Trevet, and Matthew Paris and mines them for mention of the city. In addition, Stow also collected and preserved fifteenth-century vernacular, mercantile London chronicles.

I open this discussion of medieval historiography with the much later writing of John Stow in order to identify a tradition that more conventionally constitutes London historical writing: by asserting the history of a genre, urban histories about London, I
intend to demonstrate how anomalous Gower’s historical poetic experiment was and why Gower is so often overlooked as a London historian or, indeed, as a historian. John Stow, as it turns out, was deeply familiar with the writing of another medieval poet, John Lydgate (d. 1449/50). Lydgate’s relationship with the city—he produced monumental, processional, public dramatic writing—may have seemed, to a London antiquarian, more pertinent to London’s history than Gower’s rarely reprinted poetry.

The Middle Ages produced its own London historical writing, much of it collected, preserved, or attested by Stow. These include, for example, William FitzStephen’s twelfth-century description of London, which he first appended to his life of Thomas Becket (*Vita Sancti Thomæ, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi et Martyris*). Stow printed FitzStephen’s account of London with his *Survey*. In the fourteenth century, FitzStephen’s description of the city was also included in the *Liber Custumarum* by Andrew Horn, Chamberlain of the City (1320-28). The *Liber Custumarum* was Horn’s collection of the civic documents of the city of London. Andrew Horn composed his *Liber* by collecting the materials of civic culture, which included the materials of its history and law. In addition, Andrew Horn composed a Latin chronicle of the city of London, the *Annales Londoniensis*. The *Liber Custumarum* and the *Annales Londoniensis* record the customs, rights and privileges of the city. These two early fourteenth-century texts, as Mary Rose McLaren and Ralph Hanna write, inaugurated London bookmaking and London legal and historical writing.

Horn’s works provided a template for the outburst of citizen chronicle writing in the fifteenth century. These temporally organized citizen productions, often written in
the vernacular, recorded the weather, the prices of commodities, pageants, mayoral lists, and major political events such as uprisings and the immediately infamous acts of Joan of Arc. John Stow’s collection, which included Fitzstephen’s *Description* and many vernacular late-medieval London histories, along with Horn’s writings encompass the full range of works that are easily identified as constitutive of a tradition of urban London history. They attest to an interest in recording London history prior to Stow and to a continuous tradition of historical writing about London and its environs.

John Gower’s major productions—the *Cronica Tripertita* (1400) aside—are not histories in the conventional sense of temporally organized testimony or witness to the events of history. Nor are they recognizably collated accounts of historical matter organized according to the passage of time.29 They, therefore, do not conform to either pre-modern or modern expectations of historical writing: Gower’s works, always allegorical (including the *Cronica*), never represent history literally. But his historical vision, much more so than Rose McLaren’s “revolutionary” vernacular lay chronicles, present a transformation of the discipline of history as imagined by Isidore of Seville or as practiced by historian compilators such as the English Benedictine monk Ranulph Higden (*Polychronicon*, 1326) or the Dominican Vincent of Beauvais (*Speculum Historiale*, 1250).30

All of Gower’s major poems—the Latin *Vox Clamantis* (1377-81; Revision in 1400), the Anglo-Norman *Mirour de l’Ommee* (1376-9), and the Middle English *Confessio Amantis*—open with history. The *Vox* opens with an account of the recent Peasant Uprising of 1381. The extant fragment of the *Mirour* opens with a universal
history, beginning with the advent of sin and the creation of Adam and Eve. The Prologue of the Confessio Amantis opens with an ode to old book which is then followed by an estates satire. The “Prologue” longs nostalgically for better past times attested by chronicles, and it includes a presentation of a temporal scheme in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. Gower’s works testify to a career-long engagement with the matter of history and with its multiple sources, iterations, and chronologies. If John Gower does not immediately offer his readers histories, chronicles, or annals, he certainly demonstrates that his writing is conscious of history and of the value of reading about the past and of imagining the uses of the past for securing the privileges of the present and for the safeguarding of a future.

Gower’s clear investment in the historical is sometimes difficult to discover. His major works are so compendious and partake in so many medieval genres that it proves difficult to argue that he is a historian above all else: his works may also be described as Ovidian narratives, penitential manuals, political satires, and advice for princes manuals. These genres are easier to describe than historical writing. The nature of history as a medieval discipline, practiced both inside and outside scholarly institutions is rather unclear. The term for a historical narrative was indeterminate and the art of writing history was practiced rather than theorized. History was not an academic discipline in the same way as, for example, an art of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) or the quadrivium (music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy). It does not constitute one of the later parts of the university curriculum for the Bachelor of Arts such as the study of physics, natural philosophy, moral philosophy, or metaphysics. Neither does the study
of history constitute an advanced degree such as Law or Theology or Medicine. The libraries of Cambridge and Oxford possessed relatively few chronicles, even though many writers of chronicles were trained in the university.\textsuperscript{33}

History was both ubiquitous and slippery, much like rhetoric as Rita Copeland has described it.\textsuperscript{34} Isidore of Seville, for example, classifies history as a subset of the art of grammar since he considers it an art primarily concerned, like grammar, with correctness and accuracy. Hugh of St. Victor, in the \textit{Didascalicon}, only speaks of the historical in the terms of the literal: reading historically corresponds to an understanding of the literal sense.\textsuperscript{35} Historical knowledge, therefore, is a child-like knowledge of the text only and not a category of knowledge or a discipline in itself. Brunetto Latini’s \textit{Tré sor} (1260-6), a vernacular lay encyclopedic appropriation of the sciences associated with institutions includes a history (beginning with creation, proceeding through the history of the Old Testament, the establishment of the European kingdoms, and the establishment of the Church and the Holy Roman Empire). But the \textit{Tré sor} refrains from naming history as a branch of theoretical knowledge.\textsuperscript{36} The narration of a rather long history occurs only as an aside to Brunetto’s discussion of the inauguration of the law in his section on theology.

Book VII of the \textit{Confessio Amantis} provides a schema of the medieval arts and sciences, John Gower, like Brunetto Latini, never identifies history as a discrete discipline.\textsuperscript{37} But he is perfectly conscious of the genres of the books he uses in order to compile the \textit{Confessio}. In Book IV, the introduction of the narration of the origins of diverse intellectual labors is called a “histoire” (2360). In Book VI, Amans confesses
that he feeds his ears with “redinge of romance” (878) and he calls tales of courtly love lovers’ “histoire” (885). Genius calls the “Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus” an “old histoire,” that he finds compiled in book (VI.1383). He also calls the “Tale of Gideon,” an exemplary “histoire” (VII.3790). But more often than “histoire” which often corresponds to simply story or narrative or even to romance, the words “croniqe,” “croniqes,” “cronique” and “old cronique” identify Gower’s sourcebooks for his English material. From Book I onwards, the word “cronique” begins to identify the source of Gower’s most compelling tales: “The Tale of Florent,” “The Tale of Three Questions,” “The Tale of Constance,” “The Tale of Demetrius and Perseus,” “The Tale of Pope Boniface,” “The Tale of Constantine and Silvester,” “The Tale of Nectanabus,” “King, Wine, Women, and Truth,” and “The Tale of Appolonus of Tyre.”

The constant and explicit recourse to the chronicle, a term that clearly designates historical writing, represents Gower’s acknowledgement of a methodical debt to medieval chroniclers such as Ranulph Higden and Vincent Beauvais. He reprises, for example, the scene of the compilation of old books in the Confessio Amantis. This scene has allowed us to picture him as a solitary figure in a library, as removed from the world as we like to imagine monastic historians were. Many of Gower’s tales are revisions and translations of tales from Higden’s influential chronicle, the Polychronicon, particularly his tales about Alexander the Great. Gower’s Tale of Constance (II.587-1612) is a version of a tale from Les Cronicles (1334), composed by the Dominican friar and scholar Nicholas Trevet. Even though he revises the form of historical writing, Gower clearly demonstrates a faith in the value of historical knowledge and he turns to the
repositories of history, chronicles, for exemplary tales. He may not have faith in the customary form of the chronicle, but he certainly values the writing of the past and writings about the past.

In his estates satires, Gower often makes use of the past in a seemingly unthinking way: he customarily appeals to exemplars from the past in order to denigrate clerics, knights, and peasants of the present in comparison. But this is not simply a conventional gesture on Gower’s part, particularly since he knows perfectly well that exemplarity has limited uses. The analogy between past and present types and past and present events always collapses in the face of historical difference. Gower’s awareness of the specificities of each historical moment leads him to reorganize the material of history so that historical knowledge might continue to matter in spite of this alienating historical difference. What may, at first glance, seem like rhetorical nostalgia (i.e., everything was better in the past), actually represents a poetic attempt to legitimize historical knowledge in spite of the breaks and ruptures of history that have created Gower’s estranged place and time.

*John Gower’s Latin History of England*

After composing most of the *Vox Clamantis* in the late 1370s, John Gower appended an opening chapter in which he represents, as if a prophetic dream, the Peasant Insurgency of 1381. In 1400, Gower responds to the series of events that end with the deposition of Richard II and the coronation of Henry IV by appending another work, the *Cronica Tripertita*, to at least four manuscripts of the *Vox* and dedicating the whole of the various manuscripts to a recently re-instated Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Thomas of
Arundel who had returned from exile upon Henry IV’s ascension. In the dedication of 1400, John Gower appears to his readers as old, debilitated, racked by pain, near blind and, therefore, near incapable of performing his writerly office. In another, shorter Latin poem, *Quicquid homo scribat*, Gower announces that he must cease to write because of this impending blindness.

There are three distinct versions of *Quicquid homo scribat*, but two of these versions offer the same striking assessment of Gower’s Latin literary career which are book-ended by the *Vox* and the *Cronica*, both of which he identifies as chronicles (“Nota hic in fine qualiter a principio illius cronice que *Vox Clamantis* dicitur, una cum sequenti cronica que *Tripertita* est” in the Cotton, Harleian, and Glasgow versions; “Hic in fine notandum est qualiter, ab illa cronica que *Vox Clamantis* dicitur usque in finem istius cronice que *Tripertita* est” in the All Souls version). Gower identifies himself in Latin as a chronicler, a writer of historical matter. The four surviving Latin books that feature both the *Vox* and the *Cronica* offer Gower’s readers material embodiments of a career in historical writing that lasts, as he himself says, for the duration of the reign of Richard II.

The *Vox*, first composed in the 1370s and initially completed in the aftermath of the insurgency of 1381, contains an epistle to a good, young King (“O pie rex iuuenis” [Vi.1039]) from chapters viii to xviii. The epistle, initially addressed to a young King Richard, sees Gower embodying the role of ethical counselor who recommends a preference for sound counsel, a regard for the law, clemency, piety and virtue. Attention to these virtues will prevent the King from experiencing the fate of other, fallen great men:
Here, Gower exploits the historical youthfulness of the King in order to claim that the ethical precepts that he presents in his “epistolam doctrine” are elementary, basic and crucial: “Prius imbuerit, testa tenere solet.” He claims, for himself, the right to counsel the King. In 1381, Gower is still hoping that the narrative of the King’s reign will prove triumphant, that his young King may be able to turn the tides of English history after a course of instruction at his hands.

By 1400, Gower’s Latin manuscripts begin with the event that sees the triumphant emergence of the young King on the public stage, the Insurgency of 1381, and ends with the same King’s tragic but necessary deposition. The 1400 manuscripts of the Vox do not imply that a historical period and its character coincide with the duration of a reign. Although the regnal year as a chronological technology emerged in the fourteenth century (and the regnal chronicle was a particularly popular genre in the later English middle ages), Gower’s sense of historical period does not so much coincide with the duration of the King’s life but with the duration of his own poetic career.\textsuperscript{47} Gower’s own debilitating age and the accompanying physical degeneration that almost prevents writing correspond with the debilitating failures of his historical time as dramatically as the failures of its now deposed ruler.
The rest of this section locates Gower’s *Vox Clamantis* in the context of historical writing in fourteenth-century England. It explains how and why Gower uses and refuses conventions of temporal organization and the methods of compiling, composing, and appending to the chronicle as a genre. Gower’s *Vox* presents an innovation in the method of medieval historical composition. The third part of this chapter analyzes the implications of Gower’s choice not to order his “cronica” *as if* a chronicle and explains Gower’s choice of alternative. His abiding interest in the formation of medieval historical subjects, I will argue, leads him to privilege an ordering principle that explains the development of a life over the passage of time. Gower, therefore, narrates a model for intellectual and ethical development under the guise of a history that is available not only to the King but also to all of his people, with Gower himself oddly imagined as representative of the common man.

What precisely about the *Vox* makes it a chronicle? The generic title chronicle was remarkably fluid in the middle ages, but it nevertheless implied a narrative organized like an annal. A chronicle or a chronicon might be an annalistic account, whether local or universal, or a compilation of many annalistic histories such as Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon.* Gower’s *Cronica Tripertita* narrates events in three distinct sections that constitute clusters of events: the Merciless Parliament of 1388, Richard II’s retaliation against the Lords Appellant in 1397, and the deposition of Richard II in 1399 immediately followed by the coronation of Henry IV in 1400. The *Cronica Tripertita*’s structure is already experimental—it is composed in difficult Latin verse meter and its historical actors are represented in heraldic allegory. Furthermore, the narrative takes
great license with temporal order in order to highlight certain events and to efface any memory of others.\textsuperscript{49}

The *Cronica*, by name and form, is a chronicle. Its narrative identifies a series of events, their causes, and their ends. Gower’s tripartite structure mimics a conventional, if unusual, historical scheme that comes from Hugh of St. Victor and finds currency in England through Ranulph Higden’s influential monastic chronicle.\textsuperscript{50} Hugh of St. Victor identifies historical time as tripartite in structure: the three ages of history correspond to the stages “in a continuous ascent towards God after man’s Fall” in *De Sacramentis*.\textsuperscript{51} Hugh of St. Victor’s chronology proposes a first age (from the Fall to Abraham), a second age (Moses to immediately prior to Christ) and a third age (from the birth of Christ onwards).\textsuperscript{52} Gower’s *Cronica Tripertita* opens with a similar model of historic time: “1st tripertita, sequitur que, mente perita/ Cronica seruetur nam pars que prima videtur/ Est opus humanum, pars illa secunda prophanum/ Est opus inferni, pars tercia iure superni/ Est opus in Christo” (ll. 1-5). The development of events in England—the Merciless Parliament, Richard II’s revenge, Richard II’s deposition—corresponds to the structure of salvific time.

The *Vox Clamantis*, on the other hand, really does not resemble a conventional historical narrative. It opens like a chronicle by identifying the year and month of the events that will be narrated (“Contigit vt quarto Ricardi regis in anno,/ Dum clamat mensem Iunius esse suum” [I.i.1-2]). But after the opening account of a dream vision of the Peasant Insurgency of 1381, most of the middle portion of the *Vox* consists of a characteristic Gowerian estates satire with a mirror for princes imbedded within it (i.e., it
is, therefore, not unlike the more familiar English *Confessio Amantis*). In the *Vox*, Gower refrains from presenting any schema of history, temporal order, or historical progress: even his “eyewitness” account of the insurgency is veiled in the conventions of dream vision allegory and composed primarily of Ovidian quotation.\(^5\) John Gower was very likely witness to the events of 1381, particularly since there are no records that he ever left the country. But instead of laying claim to an Isidorean historical authority, he narrates the events of the insurgency as if an allegorical, prophetic portent of what is to come rather than as a record of things past.

John Gower insists on calling the *Vox* a history (a *cronica*) in 1400 but his narration of events refuses to conform to the conventions of the chronicle. In fact, Book I of the *Vox Clamantis* reads almost like an anti-chronicle. When he invokes the name of John the Baptist (Prol. 57-8), he lays claim to a prophetic rather than a historical authority. He presents the events of the very recent past as if apocalyptic portent. As Book I opens, England appears as an unnamed *locus amoenus* until Gower’s poetic persona dreams a series of unprecedented, unnatural events that disturb its sunny calm. In Gower’s dream, peasants, the laboring classes, have become so consumed by greed that they are transformed into a series of increasingly destructive feral and wild beasts. They constitute a mob that ravages the land. London, a suddenly defenseless city, is swarmed by these peasants-turned-beasts who are joined by the lower and middling classes of the city. Their combined force overthrows the hierarchies of Gower’s England. These mobs of beast commit outrages against the nobility and clergy resident in New Troy in mocking, parodies of legal procedure. The troubles seem so great that Gower is moved to draw
analyses between the events in his dream and historical tragedies: the uprising is like the plagues of Egypt, the Fall of London as catastrophic as the Fall of Troy.

Gower is unrelenting in his representation of peasant violence. The dream vision features the peasant massacre of foreign merchants, their violation of corpses, their destruction of buildings and homes, and their cruelty against the ruling classes. Gower even assumes the personas of the persecuted: he is a solitary exile from the city, bereft of community and communication in the woods. He then appears as if a noble trapped in a besieged Tower of London figured as a storm-wracked ship. Gower refuses to lay claim to historical witness as authorization and occasion for the unaccustomed immediate, affective charge of Book I. Instead, the dream is vivid and affective because it is prophetic. The spectacle that Gower conjures is intended to frighten readers into reform and into action rather than to recall still vivid memories of a very recent insurgency. When the dreamer wakes, paradise has not actually been disturbed, but Gower warns that the peasantry await an opportune moment to rise against authorities and usurp their privileges (I.xxi.2093-2110).^5^4

Book I of the *Vox* compels readers to recognize Gower’s refusal to submit to the conventions of historical writing. He refuses to present readers with a familiar chronicle form even as he insists, conventionally, that the matter of the past supplies examples for the future (“Scripture veteris capiunt exempla future,/ Nam dabit experta res magis esse fidel” [I.i.1-2]). But making sense of the narrative of Book I requires readers to be familiar with the tradition of historical writing about England and London and their foundation. Gower’s Latin book, therefore, challenges readers to change their
expectations of historical writing as it was practiced in the fourteenth century. Chronicles were imagined as temporally organized narratives that attest to historical events through eyewitness accounts and through the citation and inclusion of documents recording rights, precedents and laws that protect institutions and establish their privileges. Gower wants to put historical allusion to work to announce an ethical imperative and, in order to accomplish this, he overturns the conventions of historical narration even as he relies on his readers’ knowledge of history as it has been conventionally told.

Gower’s version of the Peasant Insurgency demands a familiarity with the tradition of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britannie* (1138), a tradition elaborated in works such as the *Brut* tradition in Anglo-Norman, Latin, and Middle English verse and prose. Gower never explicitly cites Geoffrey of Monmouth, but he revisits the powerful myth of origins that begins with Geoffrey. When Gower represents the very recent events of 1381 as if a dream, he cites Geoffrey’s identification of London with New Troy (*Trinovantum*). Gower’s narrative resurrects both the foundation myth of Britain and the Trojan War, the aftermath of which generates all subsequent European kingdoms.

In Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*, Brutus, an exiled Trojan, leads a community of Trojans exiled in Greece to a promised land under the aegis of the goddess Diana. Upon landing on the shores of the island of Albion, they name it Britain after their leader. Brutus then founds a capital on the Thames (New Troy), later named London after a subsequent King Lud. In Gower’s account of the insurgency, London is no longer at the margins of a secular history that begins with the Trojan War. Instead, London itself
assumes the place of Troy when it is besieged with a disaster. The destruction wrought upon London becomes harbinger for the destruction of other cities: "Sperserat ambiguas huius vaga fama per urbes/ Rumoris sonitum, cordaque firma mouet;/ Eventuque graui recitatus publica clades,/ Nec de fortnua quo cadet ipse sapit" (I.xv.1231-5). London as Troy, before 1381, represents a series of political and ethical ideals since the city acts as capital and model polity. The city's surprising susceptibility to invasion and destruction (I.xiii.879-82) becomes cause for collective lamentation across Brut's island (I.xv.1333-36).

John Gower equates the consequences of the destruction of ancient Troy with the consequences of the Peasant Insurgency of 1381. But his dream does not end with lamentation. In the aftermath of the Insurgency, the sun shines briefly upon England and London once again, but Gower's persona remains doubtful about the stability of this peace and boards a ship bound for more peaceful shores. He figures himself on a storm-wracked ship, hoping to find a "littora pacifica" (I.xx1957). Instead, he finds himself upon an island with geographical features that suggest the temper of its inhabitants. He is immediately beset with a crowd of people ("plebis" [I.xx.1957]). He asks: "Dic, Insula qualis, et unde/ Tantus adest poplus, quis sit et inde modus?" [I.xx.1959-60]). He receives this dispiriting response:

‘Exulis hec dici nuper solet Insula Bruti, Quam sibi companciens ipsa Diana dabit. Huius enim terre gens hec est incholas, ritus Cuius amore procul dissona plura tenet. Nam quia gens variis hec est de gentibus orta, Erroses varie condiciones habet: Egregie forme sunt hii, set condicione
Gower revisits Brutus’ journey, but his journey does not end with redemption, promise, or fulfillment. He leaves a recently ravaged “Troy” behind only to find himself as fearful of the people of his new island, an England without a history, as he had been of the peasants-turned-beasts of the recent insurgency in the city.

Gower falls into a deep and melancholic stupor (I.xx.1987-2006). He “wakes” only when a “vox celica” (I.xx.2019) commands him to perform his appointed labor of narrating his prophetic dream: “‘Te tamen admoneo, tibi cum dent ocia tempus,/ Quicquid in hoc sompno visus et auris habent,/ Scribere festines, nam sompnia sepe futurum/ Indicium reddunt” (I.xx.2047-50). Gower is asked to write the contents of his dream (sompno) because dreams are portents of the future. Gower’s dream, therefore, presents the most influential narrative of English origins as if a portent of the establishment of an island nation of many lawless peoples who require a lawgiver to turn them into an estimable community capable of mutual love. Gower’s historical narrative, therefore, assumes the place of the law: a new law and a new historical narrative
coincide. This historical narrative becomes the means by which Gower can form a community of law, peace, and love amongst the people of England and of London.

Gower’s arrival upon the shores of an England that he refuses to identify with England recapitulates multiple legendary arrivals from historical writing. It revisits Geoffrey of Monmouth’s tale of the arrival of Brutus and his community of Trojans. But it also reverberates with the arrival of figures such as Germanus and Augustine from Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (c. 586) who came to Britain to dispel heresy and to establish an orthodox Roman church respectively. But instead of casting his arrival upon the island as a continuation of the efforts of these various historical figures, Gower sets all other histories aside: he encounters a land bereft of history. The waves of immigrating upon the island have occurred, but clearly no writing—historical or legal—has been circulated to establish love, law, and peace. Gower himself must write the history that establishes law and love among the people who inhabit Brutus’ island. The *Vox* does not resemble a conventional chronicle (the middle portion of the *Vox* is mostly estates satire), but it is supposed to do the work of a chronicle or a historical narrative. It will establish precedents for behavior, for law, for ethical action in community. History, like law, produces precedents and exemplars.

Gower, I argue, revisits the most popular foundation myth of Britain in order to sever his own period and place from its history as narrated in conventional chronicles. By staging a fictive arrival upon a lawless island bereft of a history (i.e., no historical narrative exists that has brought these diverse peoples together), John Gower assumes the vocation to write a narrative that will establish law, peace, and love among the people.
That narrative, the *Vox*, opens with a *visio*, but quickly becomes, in Books II and VII, a recapitulation of law (the announcement of ethical principles including an account of the commandments and the seven deadly sins) and, in Books III to VI, a series of estates satires. In this context, Gower's appeals to past times and past exemplars in the estates satire section no longer produce a disconcerting sense that Gower makes no distinctions between different kinds of past. Instead, readers understand that Gower has freed himself to choose whatever exemplars suit him for the purposes of writing an entirely new historical narrative.

In Book I of the *Vox*, John Gower announces the failure of the current method of writing about history. His writing, therefore, represents a new narrative regime for historical writing, which explains why it is so difficult to situate him within traditions of historical writing in general and historical writing about London in particular. Geoffrey of Monmouth's heroic foundational narrative was no longer the most important historical text of Gower's day, but it remained influential and this narrative is reiterated again and again in English chronicles. Ranulph Higden, a Benedictine monk resident in St. Werburgh's in Chester at the end of the thirteenth century, composed the most influential universal chronicle in late medieval England. For Emily Steiner, the *Polychronicon*'s great innovation lies in its capacity to subject encyclopedic knowledge to the narrative regime of the chronicle, as if, in the telling of history all other forms of knowledge will somehow also be taught. Higden's influential history subjects historical knowledge to scholarly scrutiny: Higden comments on the plausible historicity of many of the statements he narrates from various sources. But no matter how many doubts he may
have had about the *Historia Regum Britannie*’s historical accuracy, Higden nevertheless finds himself reprising British regnal history through the lens of the *Historia*.  

Located (debatably) at the other end of the scholarly spectrum, Robert Mannyng (d. 1338) composed two Middle English works: a penitential manual organized like the *Confessio Amantis* called *Handlyng Sinne* and *The Chronicle or The Story of England*, featuring material collated from French and Latin sources. Unlike Higden’s universal history, which finds a wider readership than his monastic house almost accidentally, Robert Mannyng presents an eager “lewed” (1.84) audience for his chronicle. As he begins his chronicle, Robert Mannyng presents a genealogical survey of English historiography: he identifies his debt to a tradition of historical writing, giving pride of place to Geoffrey of Monmouth. Dares writes the first eyewitness account of the Trojan War. Geoffrey of Monmouth then continues the tradition by translating a book of “Breton” into Latin, an act crucial after the Norman Conquest since Latin became the language that “clerks haf now knawing in” (I.66). Geoffrey’s Latin history is then translated into French by both Master Wace, clerk of Caen and author of the *Roman de Brut*, and Peter Langtoft and, finally, into English, by Robert Mannynge himself.

By identifying the trajectory of historical writing, Robert Mannyng recapitulates the linguistic changes to which historical knowledge has been subjected in order to remain vital and available. But Robert Mannyng also legitimizes history as a body of knowledge. By translating an ancient book from Breton into Latin, Geoffrey of Monmouth makes historical knowledge available to its rightful keepers, Latinate clerks. Robert Mannyng now translates historical knowledge back into a vernacular, borrowing
from the writing of clerks, in order to present it to a wider audience anew. Historical writing, therefore, takes pains to announce its provenance in order to legitimate the learning it proffers. Gower, who most explicitly identifies historical knowledge as crucial to the formation of subject and community, chooses an unexpected tactic. He divorces his account of self and community from history and the practice of historical writing. He does not lay claim to traditions of historical writing.

By writing in Latin, Gower avoids any need to provide a trajectory for the transformation of historical writing. But instead of highlighting the possibility of the continuity of historical knowledge—a continuity that legitimizes history as a discipline in practice, Gower disavows historical continuity. Gower critically reassesses the startling continuity of history and the processes of historical writing that produce continuity: these have, after all, failed to produce ethical subjects and communities. His Latin chronicle writings are, therefore, divorced from the traditions that legitimate other forms of historical production.

A chronicle, by convention, never simply records contemporary events. It also extends backwards and forwards in time, at the moment of its composition and in its presentation and reception. Another chronicle witness to the events of 1381 was begun by Henry Knighton, Austin Canon of St. Mary of the Meadows in Leceister in the 1370s. As Knighton revised the work we now call *Knighton’s Chronicle*, he extended it backwards (as far back as the Norman Conquest) and forwards (as far as 1396) simultaneously. Knighton, furthermore, identifies the entirety of his chronicle as a continuation of
Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon* (“Finito .vij. et sic ultimo libro Cistrensis, solus procedit Leycenterensis prosequens inceptam materiam”).

Similarly, the elegaic alliterative early Middle English verse chronicle, *Lajamon’s Brut* actually translates three traditions of historical writing: the “English” book of Bede, the still unidentified Latin books of Austin and Albin, and the French book of Wace (*Le Roman de Brut*). *Lajamon* refers to the individual “books” that he gathers in order to justify his poetic production as the collation and renewal of multiple traditions: an old English tradition he associates with what is likely an Anglo-Saxon translation of Bede’s Latin history, the monastic Latin tradition, and a French tradition that was explicitly being produced for the nobility.

Not only does *Lajamon* bring together all these three traditions, it also presents itself as liable to continuation. An owner of one of the manuscripts of the *Brut* (MS Cot. Caligula A.ix) appended another chronicle to his manuscript. This “continuation” of the *Brut*, in Latin, begins with the Norman Conquest and moves forward in time.

Gower’s historical practice, which presents a singular and discrete performance in the *Vox* or the singular but still discrete chronicle book that includes the *Vox* and the *Cronica Tripertita*, is startling and unusual. Adam Usk (1350-1430), another chronicler, might be usefully compared to Gower. Adam Usk was an Oxford-educated Welshman and, later, a Doctor of Canon Law. In the early fifteenth century, Usk was a very active advocate for Henry IV and his magnates. Thomas Arundel, to whom Gower dedicates the 1400 Recension of the *Vox*, was Usk’s foremost patron. Usk, like Gower, writes history: he does not however invent a discrete vehicle (a singular work like the *Vox*) to present his
historical account. Like Henry Knighton, the Austin Prior, Usk perceives his work as a continuation of Higden’s Polychronicon. Usk’s personal copy of the Polychronicon still survives (Add MS. 10. 104). Usk’s copy already features a continuation of the Polychronicon for the years 1343-77. Usk then appends his own chronicle account of the years 1377-1421 to the same material book. Usk actually begins chronicling later in his career in about 1401: he therefore fills in the historical gaps backwards and forwards in time. The composition of the book reveals that Usk, not currently resident in a monastic or academic institution, perceives the extramural project of chronicle writing as part of a collective enterprise. Even as he takes the extraordinary step of composing an extramural Latin chronicle, Usk, repeats the conventions of chronicle writing in institutional settings. Historical writing, therefore, is imagined as continuous and the project of writing history is imagined as a collective enterprise.

Gower, who lived with Austin Canons, had first hand knowledge of the methods by which chronicles were compiled, composed, and read in institutions. He had many examples of chronicles on hand that demonstrated what a cronica was supposed to be. MS Rawl. 177 survives from the early fourteenth century and was composed and kept at the library of St. Mary Overey’s in Southwark. The monk who compiled the final section of the manuscript writes that he finished composing the work in the year of the abbot Willaim Walley’s death. The manuscript contains a more or less faithful excerpt from the Flores Historiarum (from the creation of Adam to the prophecies of Merlin). The Flores, like the Polychronicon, circulated in late medieval England and was probably first composed by either Roger of Wendover or Matthew Paris at the scriptorium of St.
Albans in the late thirteenth century. The version of the *Flores* that circulated in Gower's London was likely completed by a monk resident in Westminster. In MS Rawl. 177, three distinct sections follow the *Flores Historiarum*: an account of the four major kingdoms (though it is primarily interested in Rome), a list of popes from Saint Peter to Honorius IV, and an annal that begins with 1 AD that ends with 1187. The final annal encompasses events from the baptism of Christ to the emergence of the Roman Empire to the appearance of comets and becomes more and more elaborate as time passes and it begins to focus more intensely on English events and English regnal succession. Across the various parts of the manuscript, chronology and succession are the primary organizing principle: years and the names of Popes and Kings are always rubricated even as the hands change throughout the manuscript. Readers understand that the passage of time and succession, the passing down of title and privilege and property, are the primary organizing principles of historical knowledge. Readers know too that chronicle accounts, by convention, are continuous. Gower's own history lessons stressed continuity as the crucial narrative principle of history.

Gower's familiarity with the chronicles that circulated in and around London, Southwark, and Westminster allowed him to simultaneously mine chronicles for material while eschewing their conventions. Gower had more standard chronicles before him—and practitioners of chronicle composition with him in the Priory—and was self-consciously wiping the slate of history and historical writing clean by inaugurating a new discrete historical narrative. He arrives at an England where, in spite of the successive waves of immigration, no kind of writing that constitutes the law or historical precedent
has yet been planted or has yet taken hold of the hearts of the people. The opening *visio* of the *Vox* describes an England where the chronicle can and should be made anew.

Gower, therefore, imaginatively becomes the voice of one crying in the wilderness, a solitary prophetic allegorical poet. The divine injunction, to write in order to save the people from themselves, makes it seem as if all writing in England has been erased and Gower alone must institute a new writing. Although his writing will be dense with ancient allusion and quotation (“Doctorum veterum mea carmina fortificando/ Pluribus exemplis scripta fuisse reor” [II.i.81-1]), it will be a new writing altogether, dedicated to documenting new sorrows (“Vox clamantis erit nomenque voluminis huius,/ Quod sibi scripta noui verba doloris habet” [II.i.82-3]). Gower’s writing, however, does not begin with a distant past but with his dream and the “clamore communi” that reveals to him “qualiter status et ordo mundi.” The lamentation for present becomes the occasion for the instrumental use of historical knowledge that need not be imagined as inherited knowledge from legitimate traditions.

Gower must have been aware that there were more and more kinds of chronicle writer in the fourteenth century. Clerks such as Adam Murimuth (d. 1347) and Adam Usk were writing extramural Latin chronicles. Andrew Horn composed a Latin city chronicle. Sir Thomas Gray, Jean Froissart, and Robert of Gloucester had written vernacular chronicles in French and English. John Gower was certainly aware that the chronicle as a genre was, increasingly, susceptible to extramural literary innovation. He then attempts to reinvent the institutional Latin chronicle by narrating its failure—historical writing fails to deter the insurgency of 1381 or the deposition and actions of a
poor King in the *Cronica*—and he rewrites the genre of *cronica* and transforms its mode of composition and narrative structure in an attempt to write the history of the country anew. It is in the *Vox*, a Lain work devoted to what ails the problems of his part of the world, that Gower begins to compose historical narratives that are deliberately organized according to the needs of the present rather than according to the need to continue the trajectory of historical writing past.

In Book I of the *Vox*, John Gower presents a peasantry hungry for knowledge and grossly misled by false teaching. A leader of the peasants, the Jay or John Ball, speaks to the community and his false teaching constitutes a new and destructive learning. John Ball acts as John Gower’s narrative double in the *Vox*, since both of them aspire to the status of prophet: “Balle propheta docet, quem spiritus ante malignus/ Edocuit, que sua tunc fuit alta scola” ([I.xi.792-3]). John Ball’s teaching has a provenance, an evil spirit taught him and now he teaches the people. The people here have been divorced from all other kinds of learning, which has resulted in their vulnerability to any kind of teacher. John Ball’s teaching then is formative and Gower must find a substitute teaching, better but equally, compellingly novel. Gower laments, in his dream, that there should be no man of wisdom (“Consilim sapiens nec sapientis erat” [I.xi.826]) capable of silencing the noises of the unruly people. In a self-aggrandizing move that betrays an honest faith in the pedagogic value of poetic writing, John Gower begins to stage an opportunity to figure himself as a wise man, a new Arion, in his Latin poem. John Ball’s teaching produced monstrous inhumane noises from a rabble, but Gower’s wisdom, his revision of history, will produce harmonious language and a harmonious polity.
The end of the Ricardian period happens to coincide with the death of Geoffrey Chaucer. This convenient historical accident has given birth to multiple narratives of periodization that have equated the “Ricardian Period” with the explosion of vernacular poetry in England. Gower, who outlives Chaucer by eight years, insists in *Quicquid homo scribat* that his career (like Chaucer’s life) coincides with the reign of Richard II. His literary life and the reign of Richard II are contemporaneous. Gower is disingenuous here (i.e., he writes after Richard’s deposition), but he is also making a historicist gesture: Gower makes the span of a life or of a career, in this case his own, the primary organizing principle of history. The life, rather than the span of a reign, becomes the most important organizing feature of the indeterminate discipline of history. This is not quite history as we know it: we call this a biography, the Middle Ages called it a *vita*. But for Gower, the conflation of a historical period and the span of a life and/or a career become the occasion for giving historical writing a new form and for announcing an anthropomorphic, developmental model for historical writing. By conflating his career with the span of Richard’s reign, John Gower makes his life and his development as crucial to determining the character of the times (or the period) as the life of the King. The King’s life and character cease to be representative of the health and state of the body politic. A life, any life, every life can now bear the weight of representing history.

Chaucer’s *Boece*, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, provoked responses from London’s other poets, men such as Henry Scogan, Thomas Usk, and Thomas Hoccleve. These poets, therefore, compete with Chaucer as well as pay homage to him. Gower’s
revision of historical writing, the *Vox* and the *Confessio*, also responds to the *Boec*.  
Revision of historical narrative becomes a means of thinking differently and, perhaps, more directly about the properties of the will. Gower does not dispense with Boethius' authoritative philosophy, but he is differently invested in the capacity of the will. In the First Recension of the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower's one mention of Chaucer, in which he relegates Chaucer to Venus' court, already suggests a difference in intellectual investment. Chaucer is a Boethian: he writes in the tradition associated with the *Consolation of Philosophy*. He writes after Allan of Lille and after Jean de Meun. Gower participates in this same tradition—his confessor in the *Confessio Amantis* is named Genius, the reproductive principle—but he is also revising Boethian principle by explaining the place of the will in history.

Chaucer's *Boece* invests itself in the question of the disposition of God. Divine Providence, foreknowledge, and free will are questions that continued to obsess medieval thinkers after Boethius. But the *Boece* is not—unlike historical writing—deeply concerned with the role of human disposition in determining a course of action or, indeed, of determining the course of history. The properties of God are the utmost concerns of the *Boece*, a theological tract that makes consolation in the face of historical events its primary concern. Fortune is repudiated as the domineering, determining force of human happiness and certainly is divorced from any capacity to discover the good, but she is replaced as the good by God. The desire for salvation simply requires the cleaving of the soul to God regardless of the vagaries of Fortune. Boethius professes very little interest of explaining the historical effects of the transformation of individuals. Chaucer,
himself, realizes the comical effects of imagining a historical narrative governed by Boethian principle: *The Monk’s Tale* reprises again and again the relentless narrative of the rise and fall of hapless individuals whose wills cannot govern or change the course of historical events.

Gower wants a more productive historical writing and, for this reason, he cant against the relentless theorizing of Fortune, her effects, and the appropriate responses to Fortune. In addition, he is far less interested in the role of Divine disposition than he is in human disposition. Gower, instead, theorizes the disposition of man as both a body and a person (a body and a soul) and, he then narrates the effects of human disposition in history. Gower’s investment in the historical, therefore, presents his response to Chaucer’s London *Boece*. A revision of the traditions of historical writing already present the opportunity for imagining the laws that govern the disposition of society—how is London and England to be restored after its destruction, what should a social order look like. Revising historical narrative also presents a means of theorizing the necessity of transforming human disposition: for Gower, changes in the course of history must address the issue of the human disposition because subjects must will reform and change in self and polity. His history, therefore, refuses to follow either the Boethian course of the inevitable rise and fall of each human being. By virtue of his refusal to make temporal order the governing principle of narrative, he marginalizes the role of Divine disposition and Fortune’s vagaries in determining history.

Book II of the *Vox* repudiates Fortune’s role in determining the outcome of a life or of history entirely: all of nature obeys just men and all of nature disobeys sinful men.
For Gower, triumphant history, both personal and collective, is entirely determined by one’s ethics and this philosophical stance, which I propose to call Gowerian radical agency, is his dissenting counterpoint to an emergent Boethian London tradition. Gower presents his own developmental narrative—and the Confessio is, if anything, an account of the development of a poetic career—as a revision of the usual way to tell a Boethian life or a Boethian history. As Chaucer’s Monk would attest, Boethian narratives are necessarily tragic. Gower’s narration of development, formation, growth, and change already implies a different kind of faith in the capacity of persons to determine history. Gower’s writing, therefore, simultaneously presents an innovation of the chronicle, imagined as a temporally ordered collection of historical matter, and a response to the effects and influence of Boethian philosophy that he associates with the writing of Geoffrey Chaucer.

In the Vox, John Gower bookends his estates satire with Book II, a treatise against having faith in mutable Fortune, and Book VII, a chapter that insists upon the idea that man is a mirror and microcosm of the world as well as a penitential manual writ small (VII.ix-xv). In both books, Gower insists that the character of a period’s men rather than determine the character and fortune of a period. Instead of submitting to the demands of time and Fortune, Gower insists upon ethical action as a means of maintaining dominion over self and world (II.v.217ff). God disposes of the times according to the qualities of human beings themselves, not out of caprice (“Sic deus ex meritis disponit tempora nostris” [II.v.231]). Indeed, John Gower’s one concession to temporal progress in the Vox takes on an appropriately anthropomorphic shape: Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a statue
with a golden head and feet of iron and clay. In the “Prologue” of the Confessio Amantis, 
this same figure is glossed so that each successive material and body part refers to a 
historical period. In the Vox, Gower simply describes the radical difference between men 
of the golden age and the sinful men of the time of iron and clay. The fate of the present 
time is identified immediately, not with degeneration that takes place over centuries, but 
with the failure of the men (and women [V.vi]) who have not fulfilled their ethical duties. 
The blame, therefore, for the crises of Richard II’s England lie with the quality of its 
persons (including the King). Gower’s work presents the possibility of immediate, 
effective change: if the persons of England and the King are radically changed then 
change in the order and fortune of the polity should follow in spite of the seemingly 
inevitable course of the degeneration of human character through time.

Gower ends with an appeal to the idea that man is a microcosm of the world. In 
one memorable medieval articulation of this neo-Platonic idea, the Chartrian thinker and 
poet Bernardus Silvestris presents an allegory that he calls Cosmographia (1147). In the 
Cosmographia, Nature approaches Noys or Divine Providence in order to plead for the 
transformation of formless matter (Hyle) and the warring elements of Hyle (fire, earth, 
moisture, air) into a beautiful orderly universe. In the first book of the Cosmographia, 
the labor of creating the universe is completed with the help of the figures Endelechia and 
Genius. In the second book, Nature joins forces with two other powers, Urania and 
Physis, in order to create man, the apotheosis of creation. Man, Noys says, resembles the 
divine in form and, although his body will be derived from the elements, his 
understanding would come from the heavens. Man, therefore, represents the harmonious
union of the dual elements of the universe, the divine and the earthly. The rest of the second book is devoted to describing the composition of man: his dual nature represents the possibility of his soul’s survival after the decay of the body and his intellectual capacities allow him to look upward so that he can determine the course of his life according to the course of the heavens.\textsuperscript{79}

The representation of man’s creation presents the idea that man is a microcosm of the universe as well as the perfect combination of earthly and divine. This perfection implies dominion: the course of his life corresponds with the divinely ordained course of the heavens, but he also has the power to determine the course of the rest of creation. This idea reappears in the works of the two famous chroniclers whose names constantly appear in this chapter, Ranulph Higden and Vincent of Beauvais. The idea that man is a microcosm of the universe, in both cases, is presented as a prelude to the presentation of human history. The idea, presented before the progressive narration of both of these works, justifies history as a subject of scholarly scrutiny and explains man’s place in the larger “history” of the universe by insisting upon his central role in it.

Vincent of Beauvais’ \textit{Speculum Historiale} (c. 1250) opens with an apology for the method and the matter of the compilation.\textsuperscript{80} Book II, where Vincent begins to speak of history, opens with an account of the nature of God and the angels before it proceeds with the creation of man, Adam, and proceeds by following the generations that succeed Adam. Before presenting Adam, however, Vincent explains the composition of man, his capacities, and the qualities of his body and soul.\textsuperscript{81} Citing Aristotle, Vincent identifies man as the most noble and most high of the animals of God’s creation because of his
capacity for rational thought ("Nobiliissimum & altissimus inter animalia terrestria est homo solus ratione utens" [II.xxx]). Furthermore, man, because of his singular capacities and singular composition, contains all the elements of creation and of God: "Vunum etiam dicitur micorcosmus idest minor mundus" (II.xxx). The statement presents the correspondence between the parts of man's body and soul and the order of creation. For Vincent, therefore, writing history temporally ordered also implies that he is writing about the development (or formation, to use Simpson's terms) of man, not simply in terms of the passing of generations but also of the development and degeneration of his many capacities through time.\(^{82}\)

Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* makes this relationship more explicit. The *Polychronicon* also begins with history-proper in Book II (Book I is dedicated to a geographical knowledge). Again, Ranulph begins with Adam and introduces Adam with opening chapters about the creation of man and his relationship to the world. Again, man resembles the world ("In tribus namque assimilantur mundus et homo, in dimensione diametrali, in dispositione ratiolnali, in operatione virtuali" [II.i., p. 176]). The course of man's history is then described in terms of the development of a life according to the third likeness. The world was once robust in years past (annis prioribus) like a young man (juventute), but it is now old (senectute) and, therefore, racked with various pains (III.i, p. 184). History, like a life, follows a developmental physical and moral model: youth and vigor correspond to virtue and age and physical pain to vice.

John Gower takes advantage of this conflation between man and world, an idea proposed in the chronicles so familiar to him in St. Mary Overey's Priory library, in order
to identify historical narration with the narration of the development or formation of a man. In the *Vox*, he reiterates the idea that man is microcosm of the world ("Hic tractat qualiter homo dicitur minor mundus; ita quod secundum hoc quod bene vel mle agit, mundus bonus vel malus per consequens existit;" "Hic loquitur qualiter homo, qui minor mundus dicitur, a mundo secundum corpus in mortem transibit, et sicut ipse corporis sui peccato huius mundi corrupcionis, dum viuit, causat euentum, ita in corpore mortuou postea putredinis subire corrupcionem cogetur."83). Gower here collapses distinctions between man, the microcosm, and the world: the very body’s corruption causes the corruption of the world ("et sicut ipse corporis sui peccato huius mundi corrupcionis"). The corruption of the body—proceeding from any one of the deadly sins—is tied to ethical action rather than to natural, necessary organic decay: pride withers the body (VIII.ix), envy causes the lips to fall off one’s face (VIII.x), sloth leads to incapacity (VII.xiii).

For Gower, the distinction between the microcosm and the macrocosm collapse to the point that there is no such thing as an act without historical consequence. An unethic al act has a detrimental effect upon the body and the body politic simultaneously. The development of an ethical man, who fulfills his proper social role, therefore has consequences for the well-being of the polity and of the universe: "Est homo qui mundus de iure suo sibi mundum/ Subdit, et in elius dirigit inde status:/ Si tamen inmundus est, que sunt singula mundi/Ledit et in peius omne refundit (VII.viii.647-50). Gower reiterates this sentiment immediately in order to emphasize its importance: "Vt vult ipse suum proprio regit ordine mundum,/ Si bonus ipse, bonum, si malus ipse malum"
Man is not simply a microcosm because he contains elements of all creation and divine intellection, but also because he directs the course of the world for better or for worse.

Human disposition—if man is good, the world is good and if evil, the world is evil—becomes the ordering principle that determines history. If he simply remembers his divine origin and restores it (i.e., if he purifies himself of sin), the historical period that he inhabits will naturally and immediately be transformed back to its perfect primordial state (VII.viii.660-672). To purge oneself of sin—and the purging implies a series of ethical and political effects as we see in Gower’s estates satire—restores the right historical course. The *Vox* is identified with chronicle because it makes use of a narrative strategy that emerges from chronicles: Gower definitely knew the *Polychronicon* and probably knew the *Speculum Historiale*. Gower simply takes the conflation between the development of man and the development of the course of history to its most literal logical conclusion: if the development of the world is like the development of man, then telling the story of the transformation of various men across periods constitutes a history. This is not an estates satire, even if estates satire constitutes the body of the poem, but a form of historical writing that includes estates satire.

Gower, although he writes in Latin in this instance, is particularly concerned with the “patria illa in qua natus fuerat:”

Singula que dominus statuit sibi regna per orbem,
Que magis in Cristi nomine signa gerunt,
Diligo, set propriam super omnia diligo terram,
In qua principium duxit origo meum.
Quicquid agant alie terre, non subruor inde,
Gower narrates his own history as if it were firmly tied to the fate of his nation. England is his “proprium...terram.” This is the country of his childhood and the country with which he has an intimate relationship: when she suffers, he suffers (“Hec si quid patitur, mea viscera compaciuntur.”). The fate of the country and the person are one and the same: “Si perstet, persto, si cadat illa, cado.” The mutual relationship between man and world or man and universe or microcosm and macrocosm has become narrower and more specific: Gower is himself the representative microcosm and England is the macrocosm.\(^85\)

Gower’s *Vox Clamantis*—the work of an aging and infirm poet—presents the history of a similarly ailing and aging nation in need for a new and young historical writing.

Gower’s insistence upon this mutuality between microcosm and macrocosm implies a faith in what I have already called radical agency, an idea that he explores more fully in the longer, more canonical poem, the *Confessio Amantis*. Radical agency, in the context of both the *Vox* and the *Confessio*, refers to Gower’s belief in each person’s crucial role in developing the course of a national (or even larger) history. The *Confessio*, therefore, presents a persona who is undergoing reform (or who is being informed, again to use James Simpson’s vocabulary) in order to emerge from behind the veil of the allegorical persona of Amans into the public poetic persona, John Gower ("Lo, thus sche
[Venus] seide, ‘John Gower,/ Now thou art ate laste cast,/ This I have I for thin ese cast,/ That thou nomore of love sieche’. [VIII.2908-11]). Venus charges Gower with the task of writing poetry that will augur peace and heal the multiple divisions that threaten England. Venus appears as the Confessio’s version of the “vox celica:” she commands a writing about the nation and the establishment of a new peace. John Gower, by name, is therefore given his personal task to perform in his career as poet to ward off the apocalypse that threatens England unless “an other such as Arion” (Prol. 1054) should arrive and sing songs that establishes civic peace. John Gower, like his namesake John the Baptist, occupies the role of precursor: each reader of the Confessio is being asked to reform himself and the world by embodying the man, the other Arion, who comes after Gower.

Gower’s English poem never abandons the historical project of the Vox. In fact, I have argued throughout this chapter that these two works represent Gower’s investment in history. The Confessio, in fact, presents the same idea—that man is a microcosm of the world he inhabits and his disposition orders the whole—with which the Vox ends: “The man, as telleth the clergie,/ Is as a world in his partie,/ And whan this litel world mistorneth,/ The grete world al overtorneth” (Prol.955-958). Division, the greatest political crime in Gower’s Confessio Amantis, is the result by the wars between man’s composite materials and faculties: the restoration of these faculties to their rightful order and purpose, therefore, should restore a lost golden age to history.

I am citing the Latin marginalia in Macaulay’s edition.


For example, A. G Rigg and Edward S. Moore write: “Of the three languages [in which Gower wrote], Latin appear to be the most likely vehicle for literary immortality. While English had not yet come into its own and French was losing ground, Latin remained secure as the language of serious endeavor in all areas...The reasons for this are clear. Unlike works in the vernacular, Latin works were not restricted to a particular geographic locality. An Italian could read and address a Latin work of English origin with little or no difficulty...Thus Latin was a language unconstrained by time or geography. It was a truly international language” (154-5). See A. G. Rigg and edward S. Moore, “The Latin Works: Politics, Lament, and Praise” in *A Companion to Gower*, Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 153-64.

For example, see John Trevisa’s “Dialogoue Between the Lord and the Clerk on Translation” in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Talor and Ruth Evans, eds. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University P, 1999), pp. 130-4.

For example, see the “Prologue” to Thomas Usk’s *The Testament of Love* (1385) in R. A. Shoaf’s edition (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1998). In particular, see ll. 15-27.


See Ralph Hanna on the Augustinian Canon’s role in the transmission of Middle English Literature in general in “Augustinian Canons and Middle English Literature” in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna (London: The British Library, 2000), pp. 27-42. See also Jean-Pascal Pouzet’s “Southwark Gower—Augustinian Agencies in Gower’s Manuscripts and Texts,” forthcoming. I am grateful to Professors David Wallace and Jean-Pascal Pouzet for allowing me to read this article.


On the popularity and influence of Chaucer’s *Boece*, see Alistair Minnis and Tim William Machan’s “The *Boece* as Late-Medieval Translation” in *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, A. J. Minnis, ed (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 167-88. For Minnis and Machan, the appeal of the *Boece* and of *The Consolation of Philosophy* in general comes from its affirmation of the “essential moral and ethical *sententiae* then deemed to be appropriate advice for writers to offer princes—it would have sat comfortably beside books written more formally in the *de regimine principum*


13 See Craig Bertolet’s work on Gower’s representation of mercantile practices in “Fraud, Division, and Lies: John Gower and London” in John Gower: Essays at the Millenium (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, pp. 43-70.


18 I thenke and have it understande,
As it bifel upon a tyde,
As thing which scholde tho betyde,--
Under the toun of newe Troye,
Which tok of Brut his firste joye,
In Temse whan it was flowende
As I be bote cam rowende,
So as fortune hir tme sette,
My liege lord par chaunce I mette.
Prol. 34-42

24 See Mary Cheney’s “William FitzStephen and His Life of Archbishop Thomas” in *Church and Gownernment in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to C. R. Cheney on his 7th Birthday* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), pp. 139-56. On the genre of FitzStephen’s work, see John Scattergood, “Misrepresenting the City: Genre, Intertextuality and William FitzStephen’s *Description of London* (c. 1173)” in *London and Europe in the Middle Ages*, pp. 1-34.
27 For more on Andrew Horn, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
29 See Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* for a succinct account of history, imagined as a discipline, in the middle ages. Isidore writes: “A history (historia) is a narration of deeds accomplished; through it what occurred in the past is sorted out. History is so called from the Greek term ἱστορεῖν (‘inquire,’ ‘observe’), that is from ‘seeing’ or ‘knowing.’ Indeed, among the ancients no one would write a history unless he had been present and had seen what was to be written done, for we grasp with our eyes things that occur better
than what we gather from our hearing since what is seen is revealed without falsehood. This discipline has to do with Grammar, because whatever is worthy of rememberance is committed to writing. And for this reason, histories are called ‘monuments’ (monumentum), because they grant a rememberance (memoria) of deeds that have been done” (I.xli). See Isidore of Seville, The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville, Eds. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghoff (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006).


36 Brunetto names the following branches of theoretical knowledge: theology, physics, and mathematics. Physics, all that pertains to corporeal things, is natural history. Mathematics includes arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. See Brunetto Latini, Li Livres dou Tresor, Eds. Spurgeon Baldwin and Paul Barrette (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003), I.3.


Gower writes: “Herici quarti primus regni fuit annus/ Quo michi defecit visus ad acta mea” (Trentham Version, ll. 1-2); “Henrici regis annus fuit ille secundus/ Scribere dum cesso, sum quia cecus ego” (Cotton, Harleian, and Glasgow versions, ll. 1-2); and “illa [i.e., natura] michi finem posuit, quo scribere quicquam/ Ulterius nequio, sum quia cecus ego” (All Souls Version, ll. 3-4). All citations from John Gower’s minor Latin poems are from *John Gower, The Minor Latin Works with In Praise of Peace*, Ed. and trans. R. F Yeager and Michael Livingston (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2005).


On the regnal year as a chronological technology, see Taylor, *English Historical Literature*, 49. Examples of chronicles that limit themselves to the duration of a reign from the later English middle ages include the *Historia vitae et regni Ricardi Secundi*, ed.


49 Eric Stokton, the translator of the Cronica, makes this observation: “It [the Cronica Tripertita] is thus far too unsystematic to be called a ‘chronicle.’ Gower probably chose the title in order to give the illusion of completeness of coverage” (37).

50 See Ranulph Higden’s Polychronicon, Book I, chapter 4, p. 30. All references to the Polychronicon refer to Ranulph Higden, Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden monachi Cestrensis, together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer in the fifteenth century, 9 vols., Rolls Series 41 (Her Majesty’s Stationer’s Office, 1882; Kraus Reprint 1964). All subsequent citations to Higden’s text refer to book number, chapter number, and page number.


52 Hugh of St. Victor writes: “Tria sunt tempora per quæ præsentis sæculi patium decurrunt. Primum est tempus naturalis legis; secundum tempus scriptae legis’ tertium est tempus gratiae. Primum est ab Adam usque ad Moyses; secundum a Moysa usque ad Christum; tertium a Chrístico usque ad finem sæculi.” See De Sacramentis Legis Naturalis et ScriptaeDialogus Magistri Signandi Per M. et Discipuli in the Patrologia Latina Online.


See Emily Steiner, “Radical Historiography: Langland, Trevisa and the Polychronicon” in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005): 171-211.


Ranulf Higden’s work was so widely disseminated and well-known that he is summoned to the court of Edward III in 1352. Presumably, he intended it primarily for his immediate circle at St. Werburgh and considered it likely to be disseminated in other Benedictine houses in England.

All citations to *The Chronicle* refer to Idelle Sullen’s edition (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1996).


All citations of Lajamon refer to Sir Frederic Madden’s edition, *Lajamon’s Brut, or Chronicle of Britain*, 2 vols. (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1847). Madden’s edition provides text from two manuscripts, MS. Cott. Caligula A.ix and MS. Cott. Otho, C.xiii. All quotations are from the former, unless otherwise noted. Citations refer to page numbers only.


See again Jean-Pascal Pouzet’s “Southwark Gower—Augustinian Agencies in Gower’s Manuscripts and Texts,” forthcoming.


74 See, again, Chapter One of this dissertation.

75 See Winthrop Wetherbee. Wetherbee discovers a Boethian skepticism in the space between the vernacular text of Gower's Latin and English in the macaronic *Confessio*. I argue that Gower is directly responding to the Boethian tradition's explanatory power in reference to the works of his own peers in London.

76 See the *Vox*, Book II.iv-vi. See also the opening of Book III: “Cum bona siue mal sit nobis sors tribuenda/ Ex propriis meritis, hiis magis hiisque minus,/ Fit mundique status in tres diuisio partes,/ Omnibus vnde viris quasi sortis opus,/ Et modo per vicia quia sors magis asstat iniqua,/ Ponderet in causis quilibet acta suis” (III.i.1-6).


79 A version of this appears in John Trevisa’s translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ *De proprietibus rerum*, On the Properties of Things: “For as isider seîp by a mysvuse, homo ‘a man’ haþ þe name of humo ‘be erthe’ seþ þat he is nouȝt imaad onliche of body but componed of body and sowle. Þerfore a man hatte antropos in grewe. Antropos is to menen ‘arered vp’ and God ȝau to man an hiȝe mouȝ and ehte hym loke vp and se heuen, and he ȝafe to men visagis arered toward þe sterres. Also a man schal ech þe heuen an nouȝt þutte þis þouȝt in þe erþe and be obedient to þe wombe as a best” (III, pp. 90-1). See *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa’s Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ De Proprietibus Rerum*, Eds. M. C. Seymour et al, Vols. 1-2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).

80 See *Speculum Historiale* (Strassbourg: Johann Mentelin, 1473). On the influence of Vincent of Beauvais’ compilations in late medieval England, see Pauline Aiken, “Vincent of Beauvais and Chaucer’s Monk’s Tale” in *Speculum* 17:1 (1942): 56-68. Ranulf Higden includes the *Speculum Historiale* in his catalogue of sources as “Vincentius Beluacensis, in Speculo Historiali.”
Section titles include: xxx De creacione hominis et requie sabbati; xxxi. Epilogus de formacione corporis humani; xxxii. De divisionibus membrorum; xxxiii. Epilogus de animan humana; xxxxiii. De imortalitate anime et ymagine et sensualite; xxxxiv. De libero arbitrio; xl. De Synderisi).


These are Gower’s chapter titles to VII.viii and VIII.ix.

This quotation is from the Latin header to VII.xxiv.

See Elizabeth Porter, “Gower’s Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm.”
The Thomas Usk catalogue consists of two prose works: a narrative document, *The Appeal of Thomas Usk against John of Northampton* (c. 1384) and an autobiographical political allegory, *the Testament of Love* (c. 1385-86). Thomas Usk was a native Londoner, a professional scribe (as well as a “mainpernor and attorney”) and a sworn member of the Goldsmith’s Guild.¹ In the period and place that Ruth Bird memorably termed “the turbulent London of Richard II,” Usk created a place for himself in civic society by participating in the politics of faction.² Initially a partisan of two-time Mayor of London John of Northampton, Usk switched allegiances after a brief period of imprisonment at the home of the new Mayor, Nicholas Brembre. In 1384, Thomas Usk officially turned his back on his former confederates when he allied himself openly with Brembre’s royalist faction by presenting his *Appeal* to the King in Reading.³ The *Appeal* accuses Northampton’s faction of various conspiracies, including an attempt to alter the results of a legitimate election by rousing a mob to rally in Northampton’s favor. Thomas Usk testifies as a former partisan who knew about Northampton’s plans because he had been present in secret meetings and had participated in illicit schemes. After Usk presented the *Appeal*, Northampton was exiled from London and Usk received a pardon for his pains.

Usk initially found himself underemployed. It seems likely that between his release from prison and the period of his first royal preferment, he composed the more
ambitious Testament of Love. In it, he complains that his political conversion initially produced infamy rather than favor. Usk’s poetic avatar protests that nothing he did under the service of Northampton produced as much “wrathe of the people” and “indignacion of the worthy” (I.vi.570-1) as the well-intentioned Appeal. Eventually, in 1386, Thomas Usk was royally appointed Under-sheriff of Middlesex. But he soon found himself on the wrong side of the political divide once again when the royalist civic government incurred the wrath of the Lords Appellant. In 1387, the Merciless Parliament convicted Usk (a known associate of arch-royalist Brembre and already a renowned turncoat) of treason. Usk—all the while protesting that he had always acted out of loyalty to his King—was drawn, hung, and beheaded in 1388.4

More than any other work of fourteenth-century vernacular poetry, The Testament of Love invites reading as if it were an instrumental document rather than an ambitious allegorical, philosophical, literary work.5 Because the Testament follows the Appeal in the course of Usk’s career, it has proved tempting to read the works in tandem and to read them as similar kinds of writing. Both works testify to professional competence and facilitate political ambitions.6 Furthermore, the Testament’s very title invites a reading of the work as if it were simply a variation of a recognizable documentary genre.7 A testament, in both Modern and Middle English, refers to a range of legal, rather than explicitly literary, genres: a testament names a contract, a bequest, a law, or alternatively, the authentication of such a document.8 By identifying his single poetic work with a documentary genre, Usk forecloses the possibility that readers might look beyond his profession.
The title immediately reminds readers of Usk’s professional capacities as a scribe: he can write wills (testaments) as well as appeals. In addition, the narrative of the Testament fictively recreates his profession. No longer Northampton’s scribe—he had been initially employed by the faction to “write thair billes” (Appeal 11), Usk becomes Lady Love’s scribe instead. He writes Love’s law for the sake of her constituency, Love’s servants. The command to once again assume the office of skriveyn is very explicit in the Testament: “I wol, and I charge thee...to written my wordes and sette hem in writynges that they mov be my witnessynge ben noted among the people” (I.ii.233-5). Usk’s book hints of its ability to function as a legal document. The book itself is a witness: it bequeatheth Lady Love’s teaching to the people but it also attests to that bequest. Usk’s strategy of identifying his poetic work with a documentary genre may have enabled him to imagine a lateral move from one literate profession (scribe) to a similarly literate vocation (poet, however problematic that word may be when used in the context of the fourteenth century). But this move has also prevented later readers from discovering the other ambitions of his only major poetic work.9

The Appeal has been described as a “plaint,” a legal vernacular narrative genre that was peculiar to London in the late fourteenth century.10 The Testament, through appeals to legal forms and conventions, has invited reading as if it were also an extraordinarily elaborate legal plaint. But the Testament is also formally, allegorically, philosophically and even linguistically ambitious. The Testament is deeply indebted, in vocabulary and style, to Chaucer’s translation of Boethius’ De Consolatione philosophiae, the Boece (c. 1378-81).11 And in Book 3, Usk translates large tracts of Anselm of
Canterbury’s treatise on the relationship between Divine foreknowledge and human free will, *De concordia præscientiæ et prædestinationis et gratiæ cum libero arbitrio*, and imbeds them in the Chaucerian-Boethian narrative framework. Usk’s *Testament* aspires to the daunting synthesis of lamentation, *consolatio*, revised theology, courtly love poetry and (as we shall see later) moral philosophy while simultaneously introduces innovations in vernacular prose form and style.  

The *Testament*’s first two books establish the *Testament*’s Boethian narrative framework. Usk’s avatar initially finds himself friendless, abandoned and despairing in a prison. Lady Love, the authoritative substitute for Boethius’ Lady Philosophy, arrives on the scene and promises to alleviate his sorrows. He confesses that he loves the Margaret pearl—alternatively a woman figured by a pearl or literally a pearl. The unnamed narrator now despairs of winning her favor because of ill-advised acts that have led to his removal from his position of wealth and influence. Love teaches the narrator how he might continue to serve the Margaret pearl through good actions, which are described using figures of service in the vocabulary of courtly love and Aristotelian ethics. Books 1 and 2, therefore, feature a narrative of conversion in which the narrator speaks of a series of actions associated with his former mode of life—“manlych” or “worldlich” living (II.iv.330, 331)—which he will now eschew for a life of good works—“resonablich” living (II.iv.331)—that Love assures him will win his Lady’s grace. In the final book, Lady Love demonstrates that Divine foreknowledge and free will are compatible. After concluding that the narrator is not compelled to love but chooses to love, Lady Love then
elaborates a model and a metaphor for true and faithful service that is freely chosen, faithfully continued, and fruitful.

My insistence upon the scholarly and literary achievements of the Testament does not imply a denial that the work was intended to produce real political effects. It remains suggestive that the acrostic that facilitated the identification of the author is a petition: MARGARETE OF VIRTW HAVE MERCI ON THINE VSK. Usk’s acrostic reminds readers of the effects of instrumental documents that scribes produced. The acrostic demands an act (the granting of MERCI) on behalf of a specific, juridical person (VSK). The virtuoso display of literary and scribal skill that accompanies the production of such an elaborate signature is, to be sure, an announcement of professional and literary proficiency and probably, in itself, a bid for preferment. But the Appeal and the Testament nevertheless produce two different Usks. The difference, I argue, lies in the way in which Usk narrates his relationship with the members of London’s community. The Appeal, a legal document, is a singular act, written by a figure with a unique political knowledge and established professional capacities. Usk’s fictive allegory, on the other hand, narrates an exemplary life. In the Testament, Usk tells his life narrative in relation to exemplars: his life is made legible to himself and to his readers by way of his of citations of other lives. His composite life too can become a model. The narrative of the Testament’s persona is subject to appropriation—it can describe the trajectory of other lives—in a way that the life of the legal actor who appears in the Appeal is not.

The juridical person who narrates the Appeal is not precisely identical to the unnamed—aside from the authorial signature—poetic persona of the Testament. In the
two works, Usk establishes different relationships between the narrating persona and the members of London's civic community. The authority of Thomas Usk's *Appeal* rests on the distinction that he makes, first, between himself and the other members of Northampton's cohort, and, second, between himself and the other members of London's commons. Northampton's immediate supporters, unlike Usk, remain unrepentant. In contrast, Usk, in 1384, is a willing political convert. He speaks of being abjectly penitent: “I aske grace & mercy of my lyge lord the kyng, & afterward of the mair, & of al the worthy aldermen, & of al the gode comunes of the town, as he that wol neuer traspace a-yeins the town in no degre” (226-31). Thomas Usk makes it quite clear that he no longer wishes to be affiliated with John of Northampton. Instead, he apologizes to the king, the new Mayor, the aldermen and the “gode communes of the town” and promises that he will never again make the mistake of being a “full helpere & promotour” (226) in underhanded political machinations.

According to Thomas Usk, the “comun poeple” fell under Northampton’s influence because they were simultaneously gullible and faithful: “John Norhampton, John More, & Richard Norbury, & William Essex, drogh to hem the comun poeple for to stonde be thes purposes to lyue & to dye” (46-8); “& than the communes, vpon these wordes wer stered, & seiden truly they wolde go to a-nother eleccion, & noght soeffre thys wrong, to be ded al ther-for attones in on tyme...& truly, had noght the aldermen kome to trete [negotiate], & maked that John Northampton make the poeple gon hoom, they woulde haue go to a Newe eleccion” (188-96). The “smale people of the town” (72) have been drawn in (“drogh to hem”) and “stered” (193) into action by Northampton’s
language. And, they are suggestible to the point that they rebel against the “worthi persons of the town” (118), whom Usk now claims constitute the rightful ruling class (6-9). In the *Appeal*, Usk is obliged to acknowledge that he has been (unlike the body of the “smale” people”) a knowing and knowledgeable actor, otherwise his own document would have neither legal nor rhetorical force. He has always known and understood Northampton’s “entent” (88), his“ful purposyng & ymaginacions of destruccion” (117-8), and “his euel purposed matirs” (210). Thomas Usk, therefore, is the only figure capable of exposing and explaining recent anomalies in the process of electing the mayor of the city.

In the course of narrating the *Appeal*, Thomas Usk becomes increasingly central to the completion of Northampton’s alleged schemes. Initially, he is only present at secret meetings in order to write Northampton’s cohorts bills (11). Usk becomes increasingly more involved in Northampton’s political machinations and he is even part of a company that secretly attempts to procure a writ calling for a new election from John of Gaunt. Nevertheless, he insists upon identifying himself as a scribe: when he is absent, another scribe is more than capable of replacing him (52-3). Reading and writing, as Michael Clanchy has demonstrated, were distinct skills in the middle ages, particularly since writing is a professional craft rather than an intellectual accomplishment. Usk, in the *Appeal*, exploits his professional identity in order to equate his professional ability in “writing” with other clerical capacities, particularly the skill of hermeneutic interpretation. He presents himself as a capable “reader” of political language and political events and this capacity distinguishes him from the other members of the
commons who have been duped. Usk is particularly interested in documenting the intentions behind Northampton’s language and the effects that Northampton intended to generate with speech. Because he had been part of Northampton’s “couyns, & gadrynges, & confederacies” (219), Usk is especially qualified to identify the difference between what Northampton says “vnder colour of wordes of comun profit” (208) and his true, hidden “fals & wykked menyng” (207). Thomas Usk transforms a series of political events into linguistic events: what is spoken and what is not quite spoken and how these words are understood determine the course of London civic life.

By the later Middle Ages, allegory and allegoresis referred primarily to textual, hermeneutic arts rather than rhetorical, political arts. A vernacular document, such as the *Appeal*, which serves a political and legal function does not immediately present itself for hermeneutic scrutiny since its effectiveness depends upon its accuracy and transparency. But Usk narrates events as if what were most crucial is what was spoken. And, it is absolutely important to be able to distinguish between how that spoken language was interpreted earlier (by the “small poeple” or the “common people”) and how it is being interpreted (by himself) in this document for the benefit of the King’s court. In the *Appeal*, Usk refers to the tradition of allegory as a type of political speech: it is the “guarded and elite language” (263) spoken by Northampton’s “couyns, & gadrynges, & confederacies.”

Rhetorical, political language figures centrally in Usk’s account because Northampton disrupts the processes of bureaucratic London politics: rather than conforming to the demands of elaborate processes that would see him elected or not elected by the Common Council, Northampton insists upon bringing the commons,
as an entity distinct from their representative body, directly into the proceedings.\textsuperscript{21} John of Northampton, as Thomas Usk describes him, recreates civic life by transforming a bureaucratic election process into a public rhetorical contest.

Thomas Usk proceeds to describe political language as if it were figurative language. Northampton's disruptive political ambitions are hidden "vnder colour of wordes of comun profit." Usually, a distinction is made between false language (a lie) and figurative language (language susceptible to hermeneutic interpretation or allegoresis, such as poetry or scripture). Here, Usk collapses the distinction. Northampton may not have actually used figurative language in the public forum (as the rebel leaders of 1381 did),\textsuperscript{22} but Usk uses vocabulary that is usually reserved for figurative speech to describe Northampton's alleged lies. By describing lies as if they too required subjection to learned interpretation, Usk can present himself as the most capable—because knowing—narrator of events and proclaim his erudition by unraveling the hidden meaning of language that would have remained opaque otherwise. The Thomas Usk of the \textit{Appeal} is the only "reader" of recent events who can present and interpret Northampton's language before the representatives of the true public will, the King and his servants at court. The \textit{Appeal}, therefore, accounts for a professional and political life and announces Usk's coming of age as a learned commentator of the "text" of London politics.

In the \textit{Testament of Love}, the narrator radically reconfigures his representation of his capacities and, therefore, his relation to the "small people" of the town. No longer a knowing "ful helpere & promotour," the poetic version of Thomas Usk does not absolve
himself of past crimes or free himself of earlier affiliations through belated contrition. Instead, he absolves himself by claiming to be like the members of the unwitting members of the commons. "It was fully supposed my knowyng to be ful in tho maters" (I.vi.566), the narrator admits. In fact, he argues, this is not true: "Lady, yourselfe weten wel that of tho confederacies maked by my soverayns I nas but a servaunt" (II.x.984-5)."

The narrative persona has been beguiled by false language just like the other members of the commons:

"In my youth I was drawe to ben asentuant and, in my mightes, helpyng to certayn conjuracions and other great matters of ruling of cytezins, and thilke thynges ben my drawers in and exitours to tho maters werne so paynted and coloured that, at the prime face, me semed them noble and glorious to all the people."

I.vi.544-8, emphases added

The narrator claims to be one of the Appeal's "small people." The "smalle people" of the Appeal reappear in the Testament under the names the "feoble-wytted people" (I.vi.594) and "these shepy people" (I.vi.625). Like the "shepy people," the Testament's persona is neither bright enough nor vigilant enough to notice that the "paynted" and "coloured" language of "common profit" that seems immediately affecting ("I than so styred by al these wayes toforne nempned" [I.vi.591-2]) actually consists of lies. Although he assists and participates in "certayn conjuracions and other great matters of ruling of cytezins," he has no "wetyng [of] the privy entent of their meanynge" (I.vi.594). The poetic persona's assent, his decision to be part of a series of political machinations that have "broken and adnulled" the peace of his native "comunalte" (I.vi.578) of London, has been unthinking, brought upon by his meek and docile obedience to a few men capable of
stirring and exciting people with “none insyght of guernatyfe prudence, to clamure and to crye on maters” (l.vi.594-5).

The fictive retelling of extremely recent political events as a distant past, Usk’s “youth,” presents a willful representation of a self who is politically innocent and intellectually inept. By associating his narrative persona with the “shepy people’s” intellectual capacity and their political innocence, Usk casts his political life as representative. He is a typical, rather than a singular and singularly crucial, member of the commons. His life, development and reform, which are about to be narrated and performed in the Testament, represent an instructive pattern for the rest of London’s shepy citizenry. The unnamed version of Thomas Usk who appears in the Testament is capable of representing the members of the commons.

By discussing how Usk reconfigures his relationship with the London commons between the Appeal and the Testament, I hope to establish how the aspirations of these two works differ even though they narrate the history of the same London citizen’s political career. Usk, in the Testament, refuses to proclaim his own learnedness. He exaggerates his innocence and conflates this political innocence with an incapacity for interpreting political rhetoric. Usk exonerates himself from the enmity that his political acts have occasioned by insisting upon his own youthful thoughtlessness and he then recreates his poetic avatar in the image of an infantilized, unthinking, and almost bestial (shepy) commons. I am also demonstrating that the announcement of hermeneutic capacity (or a lack thereof) has become one of the central means of figuring his identity as professional and citizen. The Usk of the Appeal is capable of particular hermeneutic
operations that make him the only possible witness and interpreter of Northampton’s misuse of the rhetoric of common good. The Usk of the Testament, on the other hand, will represent his own schooling in Love as a model for acquiring the necessary hermeneutic skills that will enable rational thought, ethical deliberation, and capable political action. In both works, the ability to read or interpret language correctly becomes the means by which Usk narrates his development and transformation as a London citizen.

*Thomas Usk at School*

Also manye tonges of great false techynges in gylynge maner, principally in my tymes not onely with wordes but also with armes, loves servaunts and professes in his religion of trewe rule pursewen to counfounden and distroyen. And for as moche as holy fathers that our christen fayth approved and strenghted to the Jewes as to men reasonable and of divynité lerned proved thilke faythe with resones and with auctorites of the Olde Testament and of the newe her pertynacie to distroy. But to paynyms that for beestes and houndes were holde to put hem out of their errour was myrcales of God shewed. These thynge were figured by comynge of th’angel to the shepeherdes and by the sterre to paynyms kynges, as who saythe: angel reasonable to reasonable creature and sterre of miracle to people bestial (not learned) were sent to enforme. But I, lovers clerke, in al my connyng and with al my mightes, trewly I have no suche grace in vertue of miracles ne for no discomfyte falsheedes suffyseth not auctorytes alone sythen that suche heretykes and mainteynours of falsytes. Wherfore I wotte wel, sythen that they ben men and reason is approved in hem, the clowde of erroure hath her reason bewonde probable resons whiche that catchende wytte rightfully may not withsytte. By my travaylaynge studye I have ordeyned hem with that auctorité misglosed by mannès reason to graunt shal be enduced.

II.i.31-45

The passage that I cite at length above presents Thomas Usk flirting with historiography. In the time of Christ’s coming, he argues, the Jews were already judged
to be reasonable men ("men reasonable and of dyvinité lerned"). Therefore, the "holy fathers" attempted to convert them through reason and through recourse to the authority of the Old Testament. Pagans, on the other hand, were "peopyl bestyal (not lerned)" and the truth could only be revealed to them through miracles. In Usk's own time, everyone is as capable of reason just as the Jews in Christ's time were. The act of resisting Love's teaching, therefore, is the equivalent of the Jewish refusal to convert to Christianity. Resistance to Love's teaching is cast as heresy: probable reason has beguiled some men's wits to the extent that they, like the Jews of times past, will fail to be convinced by the learning that Love's clerk presents in this "leude" book (II.i.49). This moment in the Testament asserts the value of Love's teaching—it is the equivalent of the teaching of the Holy Fathers—and also its urgency. One must be converted to Love's true teaching now before falling into the trap of seeming probable reason. Thomas Usk forecloses argument—to misunderstand or disagree is heretic—even though he foresees failure—his readers will respond to his book as the Jews responded to revelation.

But, in his roundabout way, Usk is also pointing to the population of London's susceptibility to instruction. London, for Usk, is a pedagogical theatre: there are true servants of Love, who take the role of clerk and who write, who must compete with Love's false servants, who fight with words and arms. In the competitive London pedagogical arena, there are "manye tonges of great false techynges in gylinge maner." Teaching, briefly, assumes the form of public preaching: "in my tymes," there are many competing preachers, men capable of reason ("sythen that they ben men and reason is approved in hem" [II.i.41-2]) who are actually "heretykes and maintaynors of falsytes."
Backed by a metaphorical might, these false servants of Love can marginalize Usk’s vernacular doctrine. Usk casts himself as an underdog preacher-clerk, incapable of expressing truth through any other means than a pen fearful of rebuke and scorn (II.i.46-7).

London, therefore, is being described as an arena of competing masculine preachers or as a metaphorical theatre where Love’s unarmed servants must compete with armed alleged servants who profess competing doctrines. Usk proffers a moral philosophy that he gathers from the authoritative writing of Boethius, Anselm, and Aristotle that he styles in Chaucer’s poetic, vernacular idiom. Usk’s scholastic moral philosophy—which I will describe in Book III—constitutes a version of immediately profitable, useful, and immediately comprehensible (because vernacular) masculine London learning. Thomas Usk does not expect a favorable reception, but he identifies his ambition to offer a competing philosophy for a London community that is being inundated with competing, error-laden creeds. But before Usk can proffer this knowledge (in a persona that slips between scribe and clerk), he, and the commons he represents, must undergo a course of instruction under the poetic fiction of authoritative feminine, poetic tutelage.

When the Testament finally ends, it becomes suddenly clear that Thomas Usk has hoped to teach a method of reading. The Margaret pearl, the object of the poem’s desire, is represented as a pearl or a woman. But, Usk writes, his readers should understand either as a reference to “grace, lernyng, or wisdom of God, or els holy church” (III.ix.1124). The unsatisfying ending—which refuses to identify precisely what Thomas
Usk wants politically—is immediately followed by the a familiar commonplace of medieval hermeneutics: “It is the spyrite that yeveth lyfe; the flesshe of nothing it profyteth” (1126). Usk ends by reminding his readers that they have been given the task of unraveling the Testament’s allegory. But the Testament is also forgiving of its readers: the vernacular life narrative that it contains demonstrates a means by which the readers of the work, like Usk himself, might come to acquire the skills that are required for interpreting allegory. By identifying himself as a typical member of London’s community, Usk makes his own education available as a model. In other words, Thomas Usk imagines Lady Love as his teacher and the teacher of all the willing students of a London school.

Because Thomas Usk is a scribe, he can describe the progress of his life in “travaylynge studye” (II.i.44) in the terms of his professional training. The skills of learned literary composition and interpretation develop (in fiction) in tandem with the craft of making books and documents. When the Testament begins, it is bereft of the rhetorical flourishes that make a literary work pleasurable to read and of the ornaments that make a manuscript beautiful to see. Although written in dense and difficult English prose, the Testament pretends to be more accessible to a London audience than Latin or French or verse in any language. The “Prologue” identifies English prose as an unornamented medium: the Testament’s language is “chalky purtreyture” (12), written by an unlearned and unworthy compiler for the benefit of his equally “rude” readership. The Testament announces itself as a beginner’s text. The poet and scribe, Thomas Usk, does not possess the capacities that might have permitted him to compose a beautiful poem or
craft a beautiful manuscript. But the work’s rude style and the material object’s purported ugliness also makes it appropriate to an imagined diverse audience of beginners. By dramatizing his own apprenticeship as a student and as a scribe, Thomas Usk insists that he is inhabiting the same role as his “rude” readership rather than actually performing the role of instructor.

The narrative of the Testament opens with dispossession and despair. The narrator finds himself bereft of the goods and titles that have constituted his identity as a citizen of the city. Stripped of wealth (richesse), office (honour of dignyte), power (power of might), and renown (renome in peoples mouthes), he believes that he cannot win the Margaret pearl. He incurs this dramatic loss through his earlier “conversion:” having realized that he has been coerced into participating in ill-meaning schemes in the realm of civic politics, he “declared certayne poyntes” (i.vi.592) against his unnamed enemies, although his accusations correspond more or less to Thomas Usk’s accusations against John of Northampton in the Appeal. His proclamation of “sothfast truth” (I.vi.630) has left him imprisoned and friendless. He suffers, therefore, for an act of good service to the city. When Love arrives in the narrator’s prison, she must convince him not to despair of winning the Margaret Pearl’s grace and demonstrate how he may reintegrate himself into his lost community. Love possesses one solution—instruction. The accumulation of knowledge, therefore, can be a goad to serving the Margaret pearl, but also a means of acquiring an alternative identity as a citizen of the city. Knowledge can act as a substitute for wealth, office, power, and renown. The possession of knowledge, in itself, permits Usk to participate in civic life.
Again and again, Usk insists that the *Testament* is a narrative about learning and pedagogy. Lady Love is a teacher. The narrator is a student. The dialogue between Lady Love and the narrator represents a course of instruction. Lady Love here is a substitute for Boethius’ Lady Philosophy, but she also usurps the place of the men who, in the narrator’s fictive “youth,” goaded him into misguided action. Like the men who conjured community with false teaching, Love is a shepherd:

“Wottest thou not wel...that every shepeherde ought by reson to seke his sperkelande [scattered] sheep that arne ronne into wyldernesse among busshes and peryls and hem to their pasture ayen bringe and take on hem privy besy cure of kepyng? And tho the unconnynge shepe scattred wolde ben loste rennyng to wyldernesse and to desertes drawe, or else wolden put hem selfe to the swalowyng wolfe, yet shal the shepeherde by busynesse and travayle so put him forthe that he shal not let hem be loste by no waye.”

I.ii.152-5

Love collects her “unconnynge shepe” when they are lost. But instruction is her means of bringing them, once again, into her pasture: “‘I come in propre person to put thee out of errours and make thee gladde by wayes of reason’” (I.ii.174-5). She continues:

“And also...whan any of my servauntes ben alone in solytary place, I have yet ever besyed me to be with hem in conforte of their hertes, and taught hem to make songes of playnte and of blysse, and to endyten letters of rhetorike in queynt [ornate, poetic] understondynges, and to bethynke hem in what wyse they might best their ladyes in good servyce please, and also to lerne maner in countenance in wordes and in bearyng.”

I.ii.193-8

Lady Love herself already constitutes a community: her very presence relieves her solitary servants. But she also teaches her servants how to compose songs, how to write poetry, and how to please their ladies in language and gesture. The skills that love teaches imagine the possibility of association. Through songs and poetry, for example,
Love’s servants might find a willing audience (“ladyes”). She teaches her servants various skills that will prevent the possibility that they will, never again be solitary.

Initially, Love’s methods for conjuring community correspond to the demands of courtly love: she will teach the narrator how to write songs and poems for the benefit of a beloved. But Lady Love’s identification of herself as a shepherd resonates in a very specific way in a work that identifies the people of the city as members of an “unconnynge” sheep-like herd. She arrives to supply this same herd with a capacity for thoughtful deliberation that will make them less susceptible to false teaching. She will gather her sheep and make them less “unconnynge.” The poem’s narrator sometimes miscasts himself as lover: he identifies Lady Love as his sovereign and himself as her lover as if the Testament of Love presented a sustained courtly love narrative. But Lady Love’s customary impulse is to identify the narrator as a student: he is repeatedly both her “nory” and her “disciple.”29 She calls her sheep the people of her “schole” (I.ii.205).

The Testament invokes the conventions of courtly love intermittently, but the narrative sustains the pedagogical narrative more fully. What begins as a course of instruction in the arts of wooing is transformed, as the narrative progresses, into a narrative about a necessary course of instruction in good reading and good citizenship.

Since Lady Love usurps the place of the dissembling men who earlier led the narrator to commit acts against London’s civic peace, the Testament takes great pains to distinguish her teaching and her methods from theirs. Her language is “soft” and “easy” (I.iv.360) rather than rousing and stirring. The way she speaks does not compel a certain course of action: “Comenly the wyse spelen easely and softe for many skylles
[reasons]: One is their wordes are the more better believed; and also, in speakyng, avysement men may catche what to put forthe and what to holden in” (I.ii. 360-3). The “drawers in” and “exitours” of the narrator’s youth compelled unthinking, immediate action. Love’s mode of speech, on the other hand, is a prompt for thought: her listeners choose “what to put for the and what to holden in.” She also teaches in a more authoritative language, Latin: “Lo, thus ganne she synge in Latyn, as I may constrewme it in our Englysshe tonge” (II.ii.101-2). Here, Usk dramatizes his historical act of translating Anselm of Canterbury’s tract on the free will. He is, fictively, the crucial translator of Lady Love’s teaching (just as Chaucer is the translator of Boethius’ teaching in the *Boece*). Lady Love herself is the soft-spoken, credible and Latinate teacher who can bring the community together under the umbrella of her right “relygion.”

Love’s task is instruction and the narrator’s task is to study and learn. Usk’s poetic persona becomes her scribe and her student, a “[scholer] of [Love’s] lore” (I.ii.179). Study appears under many guises in the *Testament*. Most obviously, it appears in an analogy that Lady Love draws between children’s labor at school and Usk’s labor as the Margaret pearl’s servant:

“And with the more sorowe that a thynge is getten, the more hath joye the ilke thyng afterwards to kepe as it fareth by chyldren in schole, that for lernynge arne beaten whan their lesson they foryetten.”

II.vi.161-4

But study, more broadly defined, refers to the presumed universal desire for understanding that prompts continuous, disciplined pursuit of knowledge beyond the borders of the classroom and long after one’s real youth. Usk, as Nicolette Zeeman reminds us, presents himself as an ardent and constantly frustrated student: “In the
Testament of Love, Usk uses *studie* to denote both the hard work of learning and the desire for more spiritual forms of understanding...Usk’s *studie* is also simultaneously effort, labour, hardship, bafflement, and desire” (198-9). Learning, therefore, continues to be associated with the hermeneutic instruction of the classroom. But learning also continues beyond the classroom and the effort of learning, study, begins to encompass all of the poet’s efforts. But as Usk transforms study into a universal, penitential and ethical labor—that is to say, labor in which everyone (not just clerks) engages—he must also redefine learning. Usk’s substitution of Lady Love for Boethius’ Lady Philosophy and her identification of Love as the transmitter of Anselm of Canterbury’s teaching explicitly replaces the rarefied learning of the schoolroom and the schools with a universal capacity (to love) and a universal desire (for love, for community).

The translation of knowledge from institutions of learning into the civic arena entails the description of a revised narrative of scholarly development. Since Usk will teach a moral philosophy particularly suited to the city of London, he must prepare readers to engage in study by taking them through a course of the more rudimentary disciplines of knowledge. He elaborates how his readers may acquire the crucial skills of interpretation and logical reasoning so that they might recognize and understand Love’s London learning. Usk, being a scribe and a poet, is particularly keen to describe a course through the arts of the trivium (the medieval literate arts of grammar, rhetoric, and logic) in preparation for his vernacular “course” on London moral philosophy (a discipline I will describe in the third section). Thomas Usk takes advantage of the fact that the trivium arts are the first arts that students must learn in the Latin curriculum. But Usk’s
vernacular curriculum is much shorter than a traditional one. The fact that Usk’s text is written in London English explains his alterations to his fictive “curriculum.” In order to understand and interpret a vernacular work as opposed to a Latin work, readers need a modicum of hermeneutic skill but it is absolutely crucial that they possess a great deal of zealous desire. For Usk, the non-ideal conditions of preaching and teaching in the competitive arena of London—a site of many competing, powerful voices—becomes an opportunity for identifying the absolutely most crucial, most urgent, and most necessary skills and disciplines required for ethical action and political participation. His moral philosophy abbreviates the prescriptions of the clerical curriculum by alluding to the more limited capacities of a non-Latinate London audience. He provides only the material that precisely corresponds to this audience’s immediate needs.

Thomas Usk, as I have said, figures himself and the other members of London’s community as absolute beginners in the realm of politics. Like him too, they are absolute beginners in the arts of interpretation. Usk’s poetic persona even requires further instruction in grammar, the first of the trivium disciplines:

But bycause that in connynge I am yonge and can yet but crepe, this leude A B C have I sette into lernyng. For I can not passen the telling of thre as yet.

II.i.84-5

In this passage, Usk admits that he is “yonge” in learning and he identifies the matter of the Testament as rudimentary since the scribe who transmits knowledge can only “crepe” in knowledge. He has set a “leude A B C” or a book of basic vernacular instruction into writing because of his own scholarly shortcomings. The narrator describes his lack of formal training by referring to the process of grammatical instruction and particularly the
learning of the alphabet. The scholar John Trevisa, a scholar who like Usk’s translates Latin materials into Middle English, opens his translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ *De proprietibus rerum* (1230) similarly. In a verse that prefaces many of the manuscripts of Trevisa’s *On the Properties of Things* (1385-7), Trevisa (presumably) writes that he will leave behind the game of simple prayer (“diuers pleyes in his name/ I shal let passe forth [ll. 13-4]) in order to turn to the game of scriptural interpretation. The first step in the new “game” of scriptural interpretation is learning the alphabet: “In the first lessoun bat I took/ Thanne I lerned a and be/ And oper letters by here names” (ll. 3-5).

By alluding to the very first step of grammatical instruction, Trevisa identifies his *On the Properties of Things* as a tool for making further progress in the art of scriptural interpretation. Bartholomaeus encyclopedia and Trevisa’s translation of it are intended as guides for readers of Holy Books. But, because they are both composing vernacular works, Trevisa and Usk are already necessarily imagining the movement of knowledge from its usual, clerical sphere to a broader, vernacular lay arena. Thomas Usk’s allusion to the course of grammatical instruction is far more forthright than Trevisa’s: Usk admits to presenting a method for reading his own book, his “leude A B C.” The *Testament* will narrate the method by which its readers might accrue the skills necessary for reading the vernacular poetry contained in the *Testament* according to its spirit rather than its letter. That Usk’s book itself is a “leude A B C” identifies it as a vernacular primer of sorts, a method for accumulating knowledge as much as a receptacle or container of knowledge.
Love, the teacher of the poem, teaches Usk’s persona and the other would-be readers of the London commons how to read according to the spirit. As the embodiment of a feeling, Lady Love represents the desire for the capacity to understand. This desire, in itself, comes to embody a method for learning the interpretative arts. Usk writes:

Now, wel of wisdom and of al welthe, withouten thee may nothynge ben lerned. Thou bearest the keyes of al privy thinges. In vayne travayle men to catche any stedyship, but if ye lady, first the lock unshet [un-shut]...Yet al thynge desyreth ye wern [deny] no man of helpe that wel done you lore.  
I.iv.382-90

Love is the “wel of wisdom” but, more importantly, she bears “the keyes of al privy thinges.” “Privy thinges,” as we have seen, can refer to the secret meaning of John of Northampton’s language. But “privy thinges” can refer more broadly and positively to the spiritual or allegorical significance of writing in general, whether scriptural or poetic. The Testament of Love, for example, is a book of “privy thinges:” “In this boke be many privy thinges wimped and folde. Unneth [scarcely] shal leude men the plites [pleats] unwinde” (III.ix.1105-6). Thomas Usk, therefore, is identifying Love as the personification allegory who can unlock, through the desire she embodies, The Testament of Love. She is the “keye” to the work.

The commons of London, and the narrator along with them, have been “drawn in” by false teaching in misleading language. Unable to understand words spoken in a public arena that contained “privy” meanings, they have fallen victim to the promptings of “miss-menynge” (II.ix.1365) people. The narrator admits that he has been tricked into regrettable action by language that “werne so paynted and coloured that, at the prime face, me semed them noble and glorious to all the people” (I.vi.547-8). Love then defines
the narrator’s task—as a lover, as a student, and as a civic actor—as the accumulation of
the skills necessary for telling false language from true teaching. This is only possible,
she elaborates, if he and the other members of the community are capable of discovering
the “privy” meaning of language.

In order to demonstrate, Lady Love, like a preacher, tells a parable from Proverbs 7:22:

“Proverbes of Salomon openly teacheth howe sometyme an innocent
walkyd by the way in blyndnesse of a derke night, whom mette a
woman...as a strumpet arrayed redily purveyed in turnynge of thoughtes
with veyne janglynges, and of rest inpacient, by dissimulacyon of termes,
sayeng in this wyse: ‘Come and be we drunken of our swet pappes; use we
covetous collynges [embraces].’ And thus drawen was this innocent as an
oxe to the larder.”

II.xiv.1352-68

The narrator, confused, demands that Love “declare me the entent” of this parable. Love
explains that the innocent is a “scholer learnynge of my lore in sechyng of blysse” (1359-60).
But being blind of understanding, the innocent is beguiled by the “unleful lustye
habyte, with softe speche and mery, and with fayre honyed wordes heretykes and misse-
menyng peole skrlen [veil] and wylmen [conceal] their errors” (1365-6). Love
argues that a more experienced “scholar” should be able to distinguish between her
language, which conceals allegorical meaning under pleats, and the false language of
heretic teachers, whose language is similarly veiled (skrlen, wylmen).

Love continues by identifying the parable as an allegory for the poetic persona’s
life: “fayned love” once caught his “wyttes” and turned his head with “jangling wordes”
(1374). As Lady Love narrates this parable, she demonstrates how a reader might unlock
the meaning of a parable. She demonstrates a method of hermeneutic interpretation by
declaring the hidden “entente” of her language. But she also warns that her mode of speech is subject to appropriation. The poetic persona must be able to use his newfound skills of interpretation to distinguish between true teaching and heresy as well as to unravel the “privy thinges” hidden by the literal sense.

For Thomas Usk, the path of study does not imply an academic or clerical life spent in the service of the church or affiliated with an institution of learning. Instead, he makes the standard clerical narrative of intellectual progress—the student’s development of a capacity to read allegorically—relevant to an active life in a civic arena which is also, according to Usk, a site of instruction. In the Testament, the path of long study (as Christine di Pisan calls it), can take diverse forms and the men who undertake it might belong to diverse professions. As Lady Love argues, “every man travayleth by dyvers studye and seke thylke blysse by dyvers ways” (II.iv.300-1). Each and every single virtuous path of life constitutes study, even if the profession that is implied is that of poet-scribe in the city rather than that of scholar. The bliss of union with an object of desire, figured by the Margaret, always implies community but does not always imply an academic or clerical community. When Lady Love specifically repudiates modes of life, she does not reject diverse professions. She describes three modes of living: the “reasonablich,” the “manlych” and the “bestialliche” (I.iv.330). The narrator, for example, has, in the past, chosen the “manlych” life or the “worldlich” life in his pursuit of happiness. Lady Love now urges him to abandon the “manlych” life in favor of the “reasonablich” life, a virtuous life in which he habituates himself to virtue and goodness.
Again, however, this “reasonablich” life does not, in any way, preclude a life conducted as a professional active in civic politics. Love’s teaching—indebted to both Boethius and Anslem—demonstrates the right way to make deliberate, freely-willed choices and actions that will result in “blysse.” The poem insists that readers of the community, and the poetic persona himself, can embody this teaching in professions and during occasions that are active as well as contemplative.

Indeed, the few, brief dramatic moments of the Testament revolve around the poetic persona’s re-enactment of Thomas Usk’s scribal profession, a profession that he thinks of in terms of service to the city rather than in the service of scholarship. As a scribe, he primarily attends to the needs of the men who administer and rule. His progress as a student, therefore, is also a means of narrating his development as a scribe. In Book I, Love simply commands him to write: “I wol, and I charge thee, in vertue of obedience that thou to me owest, to written my wordes and sette hem in writynges that they mowe as my witnessynge ben noted amonge the people” (I.ii.233-5). In Book 3, Love repeats her instruction: “Take forth...thy pen and redily write these wordes, for if God wol I shal hem so enforce to thee that they leudnesse...and they sight in ful loking therin amended” (III.iii.245-8). Later in Book 3, Lady Love speaks of the problem of defining what necessity means and how free choice remains possible in spite of the necessity of God’s foreknowledge. The narrator ceases to write at this crucial juncture (“Tho lyst me a lytel to speke and gan stynt my penne of my writing” [II.iv.460-1]). He challenges Love’s teaching by citing authorities who disagree with her. Love proves the argument that necessity does not preclude choice by pointing out that the narrator has actually made a
choice between writing or not writing himself in spite of her orders (III.iv.525-6). Love demonstrates, therefore, that the narrator’s will is never constrained. But this moment in the Testament also powerfully exhibits the development of Usk’s persona: by the latter half of Book III, he wills his own actions thoughtfully rather than obeying blindly.

Usk’s schooling in Love’s lore resembles the education of actual scholars who are learning how to read the scriptures. But the use of this learning has become diverse: interpretive skills can be used to read the Testament of Love instead of the scriptures, for example. Furthermore, Love’s lore actually enables Usk to become a better (or, at least, a more thoughtful) scribe and, therefore, a more likely candidate for good service to the city. It follows that Love’s teaching, which Usk is making available in English, can help other members of his community to perform their professional labors better as well as allow them to participate in political life knowledgeably. Usk’s similitude between his grammatical education in particular (and his education in the trivium arts more broadly) and his development as a citizen actually refers to the medieval curriculum. Ethical and political arts, Janet Coleman writes, were taught alongside the arts of the trivium. The rise of the city-state and the state in the middle ages created a demand for men (like Usk) who could serve in legal and bureaucratic capacities. In urban grammar and cathedral schools, students were likely to learn about ethics and politics as they learnt grammar, rhetoric, and logic. As they learned how to read Latin, they read works such as Cicero’s De officiis and Salust’s Catilinarum, works that described ethical behavior in the community. The arts that allowed students to acquire literary competence, therefore, also provided students with the beginning of an ethical and political education. As these two
branches of learning—reading, hermeneutic interpretation and logical reasoning, on the one hand, and ethics and politics (moral philosophy) on the other—were conflated, they began to share a vocabulary. In this light, it seems perfectly suitable that Usk should narrate his transformation from inept citizen to good citizen by referring to his development from bad reader to good reader.

Steven Justice, Katherine Kerby Fulton and Mar Newman-Hallmundson have carefully reconstructed the limited circles that might have constituted a possible real readership for Thomas Usk. They argue that Usk wrote for a group of literary civic and legal bureaucrats who were deeply engaged in politics. For these actual readers, Thomas Usk presents a familiar narrative of literary intellectual development and he hopes that they will recognize the odd propriety of imbedding a moral philosophy in a narrative that teaches “how to read” in the vernacular from their own experience of learning to read Latin. But, imaginatively, Thomas Usk’s readership is far more diverse since it potentially includes the entirety of the London commons. The members of the commons have been subjected to diverse teachings from competing teachers, peddling different philosophies or metaphorical “relygions.” Thomas Usk offers his own written work, The Testament of Love, as one of many competing philosophies in London’s pedagogic arena. He, and the members of the commons who learn from Lady Love alongside him, constitute Love’s London school.

Thomas Usk in Love

In the first explicit citation of Aristotle in The Testament of Love, Thomas Usk writes: “Whereof in the boke de Animalibus saythe to naturel philosophers; ‘It is a great
lykyng in love of knowyng their creatour, and also in knowynge of causes in kyndely thynges consydered” (Prol. 45-7). Usk’s poetic avatar glosses this statement: “Forsothe, the forms of kyndly thynges and the shap, a great kyndely love me shulde have to the werken that hem made” (47-9). The “Aristotelian” citation establishes natural philosophy’s object of desire: to know the cause of “kindely thynges.” The desire to learn about things indicates a desire to know of the common “creatour.” More importantly this desire breeds an even greater desire, a more ardent “great kyndely [natural] love.”

According to Usk’s logic, loving prompts learning—one loves, one wants to know, and, in possession of knowledge, one loves more. When the word “kyndely” reappears prominently again in The Testament of Love, it no longer refers to the natural desire to learn of natural things.

Also the cytie of London, that is to me so dere and swete, in which I was forthe growen: and more kyndely love have I to that place than to any other in erthe, as every kyndely creature hath ful appetyte to that place of his kyndly engendrure, and to wylne rest and peace in that stede to abide.

I.vi.577-82, emphases added

The natural desire to know one’s creator has been displaced by a natural desire for an alternative origin, the place of one’s “kyndely engendrure.” Usk transforms the city into an earthly version of his creator, emphasizing the naturalness and inalienability of his ties to the city of London.

Usk designs a transition for the reader as he moves from one object of “kyndely love” to another. One loves one’s divine creator as one loves one’s worldly creator, the city. Usk presents himself as a “kyndly thing.” He is engendered by the city; he grows within it. He has been made by the city of London, here understood as a version of the
divine “werkmen.” At this crucial point in the narrative of Usk’s prose allegory, he renews his natural allegiance to the city (rather than to, for example, the King) but he also transforms the desired object of knowledge. For while the object of desire of natural love for the divine creator of natural things is knowledge, the object of desire of a native citizen is not simply to know the city but to know how to “wylne rest and peace in that stede to abide.”

The Testament is a local ethical treatise as much as it is autobiographical political apology. The Testament is a “signed” declaration of Usk’s misdeeds against the city in his “youth” and, therefore, a fictive reiteration of his acknowledgement of guilt in his plea against his former co-conspirators in London factional politics. But it is also work that translates academic ethical and political academic learning into English using the vocabulary of London legal and civic life in order to establish a discipline, a moral philosophy as native to London as Usk himself. Usk’s constant insistence upon the kyndelyness of love in the “Prologue” and Book 6 seems odd because the Testament ultimately makes love unnatural. Love, understood as desire, is “kyndely” but it is also true that love, understood as the teaching of the allegorical interlocutor Lady Love, must be learned. Love refers not only to the Testament’s mode of poetic discourse—courty love—but also to ethics and politics imagined as local version of Lady Love’s discipline.

According to The Testament of Love, philosophy (knowledge, learning, or even Fiona Somerset’s clergie) has “thre speces,” natural, moral and reasonable (III.i.38-9): 38

The first spece of philosophie is naturel, which in kyndely thynges treten and sheweth causes of heven and strength of kyndely course, as by arsmetrike, geometry, musyke, and by astronomye teacheth wayes and course of hevens...The second spece is moral, which in order to lyvyng
maners techeth, and by reson proveth vertues of soule moste worthy in our lyveng, whiche ben prudence, justyce, temperaunce, and strength...The thirde spece turneth into reason of understandyng all thynges to be sayd soth and discussed, and that in two thynges is devyded. One is arte, another is rethorike.

III.i.48-59

Although the Testament seems to want to take its readers across an encyclopedic course through all the sciences, it immediately affiliates itself with moral philosophy, the second species of learning. The Testament does not treat the virtues in the pattern familiar from Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics: it fails to instruct readers in prudence, justice, temperance, and strength in the manner of, for example, many manuals of advice to princes. Nevertheless, it shares the concerns of many of the works that are now considered constitutive of the nebulous category of medieval political thought or, in Usk’s terms, moral philosophy, that which “in lyvyng maners techeth, and by reson proveth vertues of soule most worthy in our lyveng.” In his commentary on the Ethics, Thomas Aquinas provides a more detailed anatomy of late-medieval moral philosophy:

Moral philosophy is divided into three parts. The first of these, which is called individual (monastic) ethics, considers an individual’s operations as ordered to an end. The second, called domestic ethics, considers the operations of the domestic group. The third, called political science, considers the operations of the civic group.40

The Testament of Love is primarily concerned with what Thomas identifies as monastic ethics or with an “individual’s operations as ordered to an end.” However, it is also crucial to recognize that the boundaries between ethics and politics are porous and that Usk’s “end” is political: he presents the elaboration of a viable local ethics as a crucial element to the renewal of broken civic bonds.
The Testament of Love does not appear to be organized as either a political critique or an ethical treatise: rather it seems to be a confession, a *vita* presented as apology. By contrast, it is easy to see that Chaucer’s “moral Gower” is invested in ethics and politics in his *Confessio Amantis* because he organizes his work like an ethical treatise (according to the virtues and vices of a penitential model) and, in its “Prologue,” like the genre associated with political critique, estates satire. It is harder to recognize the Testament’s ambitions as a political and ethical treatise because its treatment of the estates, for example, is brief and imbedded deep in a dense text (II.ii.103-99). Lady Love’s unsystematic lamentation for the estates, a lamentation that quickly becomes a meditation on the idea that a virtuous life constitutes true nobility, is a moment of striking beauty but it does not organize readers’ experience of the Testament as a whole.

Readers are invited to read the ambitions of the Testament as moral philosophy through the literary commonplaces that it shares with texts of medieval political thought, specifically the branches of it that openly appropriated clerical learning for lay audiences. Most importantly, Usk constantly reiterates the commonplace that moral philosophy should ensure peace on earth. The passage quoted above, in which the narrator identifies himself as a native Londoner who naturally wishes it peace and rest, continues with an explanation of what it means to desire peace:

> For knowe thyng it is, al men that desyren to come to the perfyte peace everlasting must the peace by God commended both mayntayne and kepe. This peace by angels voyce was confyrmed, our god entrynge in this worlde. This is for His Testament He left to al His frendes whanne He retourne to the place from whence He came: this his Apostels amonesteth to holden, without whiche man parfytely may have none insyght. Also this God by His comyng made not peace alone betwene hevenly and erthly

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The desire for “perfte peace everlastyng” is transformed into an urgent community project: Christ left a worldly peace that resembles “perfte peace” to all his “frendes.” Without this worldly peace “man parfytely may have none insyght” and this same “insyght” is crucial to the possibility of salvation. The passage imagines the peaceful community that is bequeathed to Christ and his friends through the metaphor of the body-politic: “so He peace confyrmed, that in one heed of love one body we shoulde perfourme.” But the body here no longer refers to Christ’s church. For Usk, peace is the legacy bequeathed to the London community of “frendes.”

The late medieval ideal of peace appears most prominently in works that are affiliated with an Aristotelian strand of moral philosophy. For many learned medieval political thinkers, the commitment to worldly peace justifies the theorization of worldly action and community anew. Such works specifically discuss the problem of right action and right rule (imperial, monarchical, papal, civic, and conflicts between these) and address these problems in an often clerical or academic vocabulary, in spite of the fact that the audiences addressed and imagined are no longer strictly clerical. Dante’s idiosyncratic tract De Monarchia (c. 1310-3), for example, argues that universal peace is necessary for enabling the greatest human pursuit of intellectual activity. As Dante makes the case that a universal monarch would ensure such a universal peace, he, like Usk, argues that peace is Christ’s bequest to humanity. The jurist Marsilius of Padua opens the Defensor Pacis (ca. 1324)—in which he makes the case for distinguishing between
ecclesiastical and imperial/civic jurisdiction—with an introduction that presents his later arguments as necessary steps to ensuring Christ’s peace on earth.\textsuperscript{45}

The repetition of what becomes a commonplace in Usk’s \textit{Testament} suggests a desired affiliation with an emerging body of writing—sometimes still in Latin (\textit{De Monarchia}, the \textit{Defensor Pacis}) but more and more often in the vernacular, in particular in Brunetto Latin’s \textit{Li Livres dou Tresor} (ca. 1260) and Nicole Oresme’s translations of both the \textit{Ethics} (ca. 1370) and the \textit{Politics} (ca. 1371) for the court of Charles V.\textsuperscript{46} In these works, Aristotelian thought becomes the basis for the articulation of theories of medieval governance. Most crucially, Brunetto Latini translates the \textit{Ethics} in Book II of the \textit{Tresor}, a work that in Book III becomes a practical treatise on governance in the city-state. Not only does the \textit{Tresor} circulate widely in England, sections of Part III are also translated from French into Latin by Andrew Horn, London clerk, and imbedded in the \textit{Liber Custumarum} in the early fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{47} The sections of Brunetto’s treatise that give practical advice for maintaining order and peace in the city-state have, by Usk’s period, already become part of London records.

No one genre had a monopoly, as we see, in transmitting ethical and political learning: Dante’s abstract philosophical tract, \textit{De Monarchia} is radically different from Andrew Horn’s custom book that records how London has been incorporated and governed. Thomas Usk needn’t have invested his work with scholastic language or authority to identify it with moral philosophy but he seems to believe that the scholastic intellectual tradition had currency. He introduces many scholastic terms to the English language in the \textit{Testament}.\textsuperscript{48} Book III of the \textit{Testament} translates a dialectical theological
tract by Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109), Benedictine monk and student of Lanfranc at the Abbey of Bec. In the Testament of Love, Thomas Usk demonstrates that imaginative, vernacular allegorical writing can transmit and recreate philosophical arguments using the matter and vocabulary of university learning. But this vocabulary, for Usk, could be fruitfully relocated outside the context of the university and made to speak to the constituents of a city, or at least to members of literary coteries whose primary intellectual and affective relationship was with the city rather than, for example, a college in either Oxford or Cambridge.

In the “Prologue” of the Testament, the author announces himself as a man who participates in the learning associated with the schools, so much so that he can cite the work that gave Aristotle his reputation as a medieval natural philosopher. De Animalibus—Aristotelian natural philosophy as translated and augmented by Albertus Magnus and Michael Scot—was part of the basic university curriculum (especially in nearby Oxford) by the fourteenth-century and, indeed, was a more elementary part of the curriculum than either the Ethics or the Politics. When Usk’s interlocutor Lady Love explains how he should plead to the allegorical beloved lady of the poem, she argues that he must make himself clear according to an “Aristotelian” rhetorical principle: “‘Voice without clere understandyng of sentence, saith Aristotel, ‘right nought printeth in hert’” (III.vii.842-3). Love privileges an allegedly “Aristotelian” style, although the line is actually a direct translation of a sentence from Anselm of Canterbury’s treatise. “Aristotle”’s principle doubles as Usk’s poetic method. Difficult as the Testament may be to for us to understand, Usk clearly sees his vernacular prose as representative of
“Aristotelian” plain style: he argues that its language is deliberately “rude and boystous” so that it may “percen the herte of the herer to the inrest poynte,” thus making it capable of receiving “sentence” (Prol. 5-9). Usk did not attend a university, but he was probably familiar with the order of the curriculum so that references to the curriculum allow him to give shape to the Testament as a narrative of progress in learning. These “Aristotelian” citations also reveal Usk’s scholarly competence. They announce his awareness of what the universities were teaching (or what he thinks they were teaching), as much as they explain a universal desire for knowledge and a rhetorical method for transmitting knowledge.

Moral Aristotle soon overshadows Natural History Aristotle and Rhetoric Aristotle in the work of Thomas Usk. When Book II opens, Usk cites Aristotle again when he explains that Love is the cause and the end of his work:

Every thynge to whom is owande occasyon done as for his ende, Aristotle supposeth that the actes of every thynge ben in a maner his fynal cause. A fynal cause is noblerer, or else even as noble, as thylke thynge that is fynally to thilke ende, wherefore accion of thyng everlastyng is deemed to be eternal and not temporal sythen it is his fynal cause.

II.i.78-82

Aristotle is cited yet again in Book II in the middle of a demonstration in which Usk, actually sounding more like Boethius, argues that wealth or “richesse” is not the source of bliss: “But after the sentence of Aristotle, every cause is more in dignyte than this thyng caused” (II.v.409-10). Right before Book III translates Anselm’s De Concordia, Lady Love explains what ethical action is, citing Aristotelian teaching as precedent:

“Aristotel determyneth that ende and good ben one and convertible in understanding, and he that wyl doth away good, and he that loketh nat to
th’ende, loketh not to the good. But he that doth good and doth not goodly and draweth away the direction of th’ende nat goodly, must needs be bad.”

III.ii.194-6

Moral Aristotle, that is an ethical and political Aristotle, looms over the Testament: he is cited again and again as the authoritative source of ideas about what constitutes a good act and a good end and a good means to an end.

Book III of the Testament, as I have said, translates Anselm of Canterbury’s De Concordia, a theological tract that reconciles divine foreknowledge and human free will. Both De Concordia and Book III of the Testament share many of the concerns of Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy. But the unnamed Anselm is repeatedly displaced in favor Aristotle, although no Aristotelian work or passage is specifically cited after the first, dubious citation from De Animalibus. Citations of Aristotle in the Testament refer to passages that sound more or less Aristotelian: the Ethics, for example, opens with Aristotle’s claim that the end of an action is always greater, or in Usk’s words, “is more in dignity” than the action or choice itself. But the translation of De Concordia and Usk’s almost seamless stitching of a scholastic dialogue to a Boethian-Chaucerian vernacular, allegorical discursive model seems like a greater literary achievement. The silencing of Anselm, a theologian, emerges, I argue, out of a desire to identify the Testament with the disciplines of moral philosophy rather than the discipline of theology. When the narrator of the poem asks Love about the thorny theological problem of whether or not God must be the source of evil as he is the source of good, Love immediately cites another vernacular source for the answer, Chaucer’s Troilus (even though Anselm tackles the problem of where evil comes from in III.13 of De Concordia).
Lady Love’s evasion allows Usk to affiliate himself with a Chaucerian coterie (i.e., he knows the *Troilus*), but it also identifies the *Troilus* as an alternative source of a different kind of learning: the *Troilus* contains theology and the *Testament* moral philosophy.

Usk is aware of the intellectual currency of a Moral Aristotle but I am not asking readers to think of Usk as someone who comes by his Aristotle honestly. I say this because the passions or feelings can be a much more crucial impetus to ethical action in medieval moral writings that are inflected by Aristotelian thought than in the *Ethics* itself. Aristotle’s *Ethics* discusses the passions and their relationship to the production of good works briefly. The passions are first identified in Chapter 5 of Book II: “by passions, I mean appetite, anger, fear, confidence, envy, joy, love, hatred, longing, emulation, pity and in general the feelings that are associated with pleasure and pain.” For Aristotle, the passions can contribute to one’s state and can have an effect on one’s capacity to act virtuously. The passions are crucial in that they might prompt what is desired (that which is pleasurable), but a passion can never directly produce a good action.

For Aristotle, a good action requires a deliberate choice to do what is right or what is virtuous, a tendency to which one is habituated by institutions such as the law. As Aristotle repeats again and again, virtue is a habit and it is virtue that is crucial to ethical life:

Now neither the excellences nor the vices are *passions*, because we are not called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on the ground of our excellence and our vices...Further, in respect of the passions we are said to be moved, but in respect of the excellences and the vices we are not said to be moved but to be disposed in a particular way."
Thomas Aquinas, commenting on the *Ethics*, similarly does not attribute the power of willing virtuous acts to the passions. For Thomas, passion should not be the dominant influence in the matter of making choices. Indeed, the passions do not fall under the command of the intellective faculty of the soul, which encompasses the will. The passions are passive and subject to the perceptive faculty of the soul. That is to say that the passions are allied to the senses. Thomas Aquinas argues that the intellective faculty or the faculty of understanding encompasses both what the will can know and what the will can rightly desire. The intellective faculty directs feeling in the sense that it produces its own set of desires (intellective faculty of appetite): what the reason determines to be right and what the will desires should correspond in a soul habituated to doing what is right. The intellective faculty, for Thomas, should always mediate between a sense-induced passion and the production of a virtuous ethical act. Thomas, as he comments on Aristotle, subjects feeling to the tyranny of the intellective faculty.

But in some medieval ethical and political works that are inflected by Aristotelian thought, the passions take on a larger role in the production of right action. The section on the passions in Giles of Rome’s influential mirror for princes *De Regimine Principum* (ca.1280), for example, is almost as long as the section on the vices and virtues and almost as systematic.\(^\text{55}\) Giles of Rome refers to twelve passions, rendered here in John Trevisa’s Middle English translation (ca. 1400): “amor (loue), odium (hate), desire, abhominacioun, delectacioun, sorwe, hope, desperacio, drede, hardinesse, wrethe, mansuetude” (I.iii.1, p. 114, ll. 11-13).\(^\text{56}\) Amor, desire, and delectatioun produce good action while odium, abhominacioun, and sorrow produce evil action.
For whan we knowen first þat is good, it pleseth vs; and whanne we fonden to come þereto; þe þridde whanne we hauen it iwonne, þanne we holden vs apayed þerwip. Þan whanne thing þat is good pleseth vs, we hauen loue; and [whanne] we holden vs apaid þerewith, we holden vs apayed and hauen ioye and likyng. Þanne þese þre passions, amor, desirderium, and delectacio, ben itake in comparisoun to good.

I.iii.1, pp. 114-5, ll. 36-42 and 1-3

It remains important to know ("knowen") what is good, but what drives an action is not knowledge but the passions amor, desiderium, and delectatio. For when something is good, it is desired ("we fonden to come þereto") and when it is possessed, it is loved and then we are happy ("we hauen ioye and likyng"). Passion then becomes much more than something that might move the will but must be subject to the intellicative faculty (as it is in the Thomist formation). Aristotle identifies passion as a passively perceived effect upon the bodily organs that might influence how one is disposed to act. Trevisa, translating Giles, identifies passion as the driving and sustaining force of an action. Love is the first of the passions and it is the one that directs the appetite towards the good ("we may say þat alway þe object of lue is good...þanne þe more good a þyng is, þe more principalice and þe more strongliche it is loued" [I.iii.3, p. 118, ll. 3-5 and ll. 7-8]). Trevisa then proceeds to identify what the greatest goods and the greatest loves should be, the good that belongs to God and communities rather than a singular good (I.iii.2, p.118, ll. 9-12).

To reiterate Giles of Rome’s and John Trevisa’s version of an ethical act, human beings recognize the good because they desire and love it. The more good a thing is the greater love one feels for it. Therefore, God and the common good are better than singular good because one feels greater desire and love these things than for oneself.
Passions—specifically amor, desire, and delectacioun—prompt and sustain good acts. The word “love,” in Trevisa’s rendition of Giles of Rome’s advice manual, seems to direct, if not entirely encompass, the perceptions, faculties, and capacities of the will. When Nicolette Zeeman discovers medieval Lain analogues for the will, Latin voluntas, she finds the words affectus, affectio, amor, dilectio, and caritas. In English, the will, Zeeman tells us, is appropriately then translated as likyng, love, desir, or charite. It seems appropriate then that two figures deeply invested in the translation of learning from medieval Latin to Middle English, an English scholar under the patronage of a lord (Trevisa) and scholarly London poet (Usk), should identify the will as the capacity to love.

Thomas Usk identifies the will, after Anselm (III.11), with affection when he anatomizes the soul. He says that the soul has two parts, the reason and the affection. Reason is the capacity that human beings use when “ye loken” (III.v.629), that is reason is associated with a certain kind of empirical sensory perception. But the faculty of the soul that compels action is called the affection: “And thus may wyl by terme of equivocas in thre wayes ben understande: One is instrument of willing; another is affection of this instrument; and the third is that setteth it a werke” (III.v.625-7). Affection naturally desires what is good but it is also crucial that desire and appetite are instrumental to action: one is “drawn desirously” to an object or an action by affection. Affection moves the will, instrument contains the will, and therefore the will sets itself to work, but all of this can be understood under the Uskian rubric affection.
Since, in scholarly English, “love” or “affection” names the will it seems appropriate that Lady Love should teach the narrator how to will the good. Love names the discipline of the will. She embodies ethics in the same way that a personification in another poem might embody another discipline (Astronomy, for example) or all the disciplines of learning at once (Philosophy, for example). Usk willfully and insistently translates Anselmian *rectitudo* or righteousness as “love.” For Anselm, the righteousness of the will is precisely the quality imbued by grace that makes it naturally will the good. For Usk, love is the feeling or the passion that makes human beings naturally desire what is good. As Lady Love teaches the narrator ethics, she actually names herself as the passion, the faculty, and the capacity that urges him to act rightly in spite of political opposition. In the *Testament of Love*, Usk recasts his life imaginatively and his political acts become loving actions. Lady Love describes Thomas Usk presenting his complaint against his former allies to King Richard in the Reading court as an act of love:

> “Who brought thee to werke? Who brought this grace about? Who made thy hert hardy? Trewly it was I, for hadest thou of me fayled, than of this pupose haddest thou never taken in this wyse”

II.iv.385-7

The act of reading a complaint against former London mayor John of Northampton is literally prompted and sustained by love and Love. Again, because love is a mode of action, the task of acting as scribe to Lady Love can also be imagined differently as an ethical imperative: “Rygth so the actes of my boke *Love*, and love is noble” (II.i.82).

Lady Love also teaches her own version of what right action consists of in her own words, and in more or less Usk’s own words (with some debt to Anselm). Right action in the *Testament* is called “service,” a word that coincides with Usk’s poetic pose
as a supplicating lover but also explains a code of ethical service to the city. The Usk-figure asks Love what true service is. Lady Love responds: “I shal say thee...in a fewe wordes: resonable workynges in plesaunce and profit of thy soverayne” (I.II.163-4). For a service to be fruitful, it must consist of good acts that are freely willed by the heart and accomplished without “surquedry” or pride in thought (III.ii.173-5). Love argues that the heart—the organ that loves and that wills—is the ground for the tree that will produce fruitful service. The will, controversially, is likened to a “wexing tree.” (III.vii.806-12). The free will is the ground of one’s desire and it prompts the beginning of service.

Continued service produces a tree’s stock and as that stock grows, it springs branches that correspond to the voicing of desire. Such steadfast and outspoken service necessarily produces fruit or reward. What love, the feeling, and Lady Love, the teacher, engender is willful and fruitful ethical service to a sovereign lady or a sovereign city.

An imaginative production that makes use of the conventions of courtly love narrative should treat of the nature of the erotic desire between man and woman: the fictively desired affiliation between the Testament’s version of Usk and the Margarite pearl demands, in this case, a marriage. But as Thomas Usk defines marriage, he minimizes the erotic and natural, or the kyndely. Love is no longer related to any erotic or reproductive impulse. Instead, “spousayle” (I.ix.910) refers primarily the sacramental and legal union between a man and a woman that demands the utterance of an oath that reveals what Usk calls “consent in hert” (I.ix.909). An oath “enseal[s]” (I.ix.909) the consent and binds, or makes a knot, between two people who promise to live in what Usk
calls assent and accord. Usk identifies the marriage between Mary and Joseph, an unconsummated marriage, as a model and explicitly tells his readers that “spousayle” has nothing to do with sex and everything to do with the act of oath-making.61 Marriage is already a paradigmatic relationship, as J. B. Allen tells us, and a means by which a poet like Chaucer can discuss the “structures of act and promise by which society constitutes itself.”62 Usk makes the extra step of dismissing the erotic element of marriage in order to do away with the complications of analogy: the structures of political act and promise are no longer like to the act and promise of the marriage. Instead, these bonds are now absolutely identical.

At this point, I turn to Lady Love’s political teaching, which borrows from the language of London civic and legal life as well as from Aristotle. Love identifies herself as part of a triumvirate that establishes peace:

And for this booke is al of love and therafter beareth his name, and phylosophie and lawe must hereto acorden by their clergyal discripcions—as phylosophie for love of wisdome is declared, lawe for maintenance of peace is holden—and these with love must nedes acorden, therfore of hem in this place have I touched. Ordre of homly thynge and administration in commynalties of realmes and cyties by evenhead profitably to raigne nat by singuler avauntage, ne by privé envy, ne by soleyn purpose of covetise of worship or of goods, ben disposed in open rule shewed by love, philosophy, and lawe, and yet love toforn al other. Wherfore as susterne in unité they accorden, and one ende—that is peace and rest—they cause and nourishen, and in the joye maynteynen to endure.

III.i.60-70

Philosophy, law, and love maintain the peace: together these three things make “ordre of homly thynges” and “administration in commynalties of realmes and cyties” according to the common rather than the “singuler” good possible. The Testament “touches” or
discusses law and philosophy, but chooses to identify love as the missing element in faction-rife London civic life. Love, in the Testament, has been exiled from what has become a divided city: “‘Trewly, therfore, I have me withdrawe and made my dwellinge out of land in an yle by myself in the occian closed, and yet sayne there many they have me harberowed, but God wot they faylen’” (I.ii.109-11). Usk dramatizes Lady Love’s return as a teacher of ethics: she has returned to London to establish the possibility of enduring rest and peace.

By presenting Love as a personification allegory, Usk makes the will or the affection less abstract. By giving Love a body and voice, he grants her a capacity to narrate her own history. The Testament of Love is as much a vita of Lady Love in London as it is apology for the life of Thomas Usk. For example, Lady Love waxes nostalgic for the distant days when she determined the structure of London civic life. In her absence, she says, accord, goodwill, charity, the law—the abstractions and institutions that enable social, political life—have fallen apart. As Love describes her historical role, she refers to her own greatest historical, political, and legal act: “‘What,’ quod she, ‘most of al maked I not a lovedaye bytwene God and manykynde, and chese a mayde to be nompere [umpire] to put the quarrel at ende?’” (I.ii.168-70). Love is a “nompere,” someone who can end a quarrel and negotiate between the factions of God and humanity. Similarly she has returned to end factional quarrelling in Usk’s divided London.

By calling the accord between god and humanity a loveday, Usk’s Lady Love transforms a universal event (Christ’s coming and the beginning of salvific time) into a local English event. A loveday was an extra-legal English institution, one that readers
of medieval English poetry might be familiar with from Chaucer’s Friar or Langland’s Lady Mede. In these particular instances, lovedays—an agreement presided over by an umpire either appointed by the court or agreed upon by dissenting parties outside the jurisdiction of either civil or ecclesiastical court (an arbitration)—appear disreputable. Chaucer and Langland seem to identify the making of lovedays as an oft-abused, profit-driven practice. But a loveday can also simply be an arbitration that, as in the Usk example, can take on a positive value. When Geoffrey Chaucer enters the House of Fame, for example, he encounters “Loves folk” (l. 675), some of whom continue to be embroiled in “discordes” (l. 685). But Geoffrey also witnesses “moo renovelaunces/ Of olde forleten aqueyntances;/ Mo love dayes and acordes/ Than on instrumentes be cordes” (ll. 693-6). In this example, a loveday creates harmony, like a chord. A loveday, for Chaucer in the “House of Fame” and Usk in the Testament, can be instrumental to renewing bonds of friendship, love, and affection.

Love then renews affiliation where there has been discord and quarrel. In Usk’s Testament, Lady Love instantiates an ethical imperative that should end political division. Love and legal accord and love and political accord must always work together in order to establish the bonds that maintain peace and rest in the city. Love, therefore, is political as much as she is ethical because she establishes membership in a loving community (whether one imagines oneself a spouse or a citizen). Antony Black explains that the ethical value of love begins to take a larger and larger role in theoretical and practical discussions of governance in late medieval European city-states. It is quite possible that Usk sees London as like to the continental city-state and that he participates in a larger
trend of articulating civic ethics as love. But he also reinvents the language of English vernacular political affiliation. His book of ethics is not marked as an ethics of the city-state or commune in general but as a London ethics in particular.

Thomas Usk constantly emphasizes his natural allegiance to London, his native city, but he also implies his affiliation with London civic life by appropriating the language and vocabulary of vernacular affiliation. At this point, I will cite the English guild returns of 1388. I do this not to argue that Usk wrote them himself (he was executed in 1388) or that he was familiar with these specific returns. Rather, I turn to these documents because they reveal the innovative, vernacular vocabularies of affiliation that Thomas Usk, London scrivener, would have known. Most vernacular bureaucratic guild certificates were urban, and mostly London, productions. Usk, as a member of the fraternity of Common Writers of the Court Letter of the City and a sworn member of the Goldsmith's Guild, would have recognized and seen such documents.

The English-language guild returns of 1388 often open with a formula that announces the fact that a guild has been established for the sake of “love and charity” or “love, charity, and peace” amongst a group of men or of men and women. The formula can then include mention of the city of London: “This brotherhed was bygonne in londoun of gode men of Colmanstrete in noresshyng of loue & of charite amonges hem” (Fraternity of St. Nicholas, p. 126) and “In the worshepe of our lord & of oure leuedy sente Marie...this brotherhed is begonne in londoun of godemen of the craft of powchemakeres in norishcing of loue & charite amonges hem” (Fraternity of the Assumption, Craft of Pouchmakers, p. 141). The members of the fraternity have consented to make an oath that
binds them to each other (as indeed, parties in a marriage do), but they also identify their affiliation as London-born ("bygonne in londoun," "begonne in londoun"). The imperative of fraternization is the encouragement of further love: "to noriche more loue bytwen the brethren & sustren of the bretherhede" (Certificate of the Fraternity of St James, p. 133). The returns demand peace among the members of the guild or fraternity: they ask that disputes between members should be resolved by the guild and within the guild, for example. These guilds even establish ruling bodies that determine regulations that guide members in accomplishing their responsibilities.

These voluntary associations are founded upon members' assent to be part of a group, to obey its laws, and to maintain a profitable accord. Members of fraternities are obliged to think of each other, to constantly look towards common profit. The vocabulary of fraternities and guilds literally demands love as the foundation of an associative bond, and demands that this love be continuously nourished by the promise to privilege a common good. The same vocabulary permeates Thomas Usk’s moral philosophy which, like vernacular guild certificates, is an identifiably London production in which the willing assent to belong to an institution—marriage—becomes the paradigm for membership in the city. Loving, willing the common good, and continued willing service, already the hallmarks of London association become the basis of all community. The vocabularies of spousayle, of guild membership and of citizenship in the city are now entirely identical. Usk makes his ethics appropriate to his native place by rendering, in the Testament, a moral philosophy that identifies love, a foundational principle of London fraternity, as a principal component of ethical and political action in the city.
Thomas Usk—scrivener and, I argue, moral philosopher—had a model of associative language before him. He appropriates of the vocabulary of London affiliation as he invents a moral philosophy. This moral philosophy reverberates with the learning of the schools, but can also be identified with the city of London. London emerges not simply as a “kyndely place” that engenders citizens but as an association that demands continued service. The Testament insists upon this loving, civic ethics but also insists that it must be accompanied by an oath (I.vii.687-91). Lady Love tells the poem’s narrator that an oath, to be valid, must be made in “trewe jugement and rightwysnesse,” otherwise it is a perjury, a criminal offense. Valid oaths promise productive, peaceful association rather than faction. Usk’s initial testimony—the Appeal of Thomas Usk Against John of Northampton—produced (in his experience) only further civic division. That oath, fictively imagined in the Testament of Love, results in a continued absence of accord that sees the author beleaguered by the slanders of “jangeleres.” Usk’s Testament is Love’s teaching, her bequest of a civic ethics through her scribe Thomas Usk. But the work also testifies to Usk’s desire to renew his membership in the city and to be, once again, “frended” (III.ix.1129). The Testament is a pledge of service as well as a political apology. It is a document that quasi- legally binds its maker to an oath of love: what follows from now one, he promises, will be his willing service to the cause of rest and peace.
See Ronald Waldron’s entry on Thomas Usk in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. The OED and the Middle English Dictionary define a mainpernor as a “person who stands surety that another (esp. a prisoner) will fulfill a legal obligation to appear in court on a specified day” (OED n. 1). For mention of Usk in his various roles as a legal and scribal professional, see Patent Rolls Richard II 1381-85 2.5000; Plea and Memoranda Rolls 2.221 and 2.265; Close Rolls Richard II, 1381-85, 2.125; Plea and Memoranda Rolls 2.221 and 2.257-8; and Letter Book H 29-30. Marion Turner, Caroline Barron, and Paul Strohm are currently in the process of discovering more of Thomas Usk’s professional affiliations, paying particular attention to his membership in the Goldsmith’s Guild.


3 The Testament of Love alludes to this event. See II.iv.381-6. All citations of The Testament of Love refer to R. Allen Shoaf’s edition (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1998). Citations, unless they are from the “Prologue,” are given with the book number, the chapter number, and the line numbers.


5 I am borrowing the term “instrumental document” from Emily Steiner’s Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2003). Steiner describes the qualities of documents that make them citable in English literature. Documents are brief, recognizable, and are written within a set of institutional protocols and conventions. She continues: “For another thing, the very quality that made the document citable—its brevity, its ability to be framed as text or within a text—is what made it instrumental...Like a social security card or driver’s license, the document’s brevity gave it its practical efficacy, the agency to enact legislation, identify persons, grant land, or declare war” (3). Usk’s Appeal is already an anomalous legal document, belonging to no set criteria of legal appeal (see Strohm’s “The Textual Vicissitudes of Usk’s Appeal”). The Testament is a fective prose narrative.
But, both appeal to documentary conventions in order to “act” and to assert the truth of the narratives they contain. My argument differs from Steiner’s in that I am not interested as much in Usk’s representation of documentary forms in his narrative, but in Usk’s attempts to associate his work with genres of documentary form.

For instance, the *Appeal* is preserved in the Public Records Office and is written in Usk’s own professional, scribal hand: “I, Thomas Vsk, in the presence of John........co........of london knowleched thes wordes & wrote hem with myn owne [honde]” (2-4). Contemporary testimony to the life and career of Thomas Usk invariably refer to his career as, first, a scribe and then a participant in factional politics. No mention is made of his poetic ambitions. Furthermore, there are no extant manuscripts of the Testament. The work only survived as part of the ever-expanding fifteenth-century Chaucer canon, alongside other works misattributed to Chaucer. It was first printed in William Thynne’s 1532 folio edition of the complete works of Chaucer. Early modern printings of the complete works continued to include the Testament and, as the scholarly apparatus expanded, sections of the Testament were actually cited in the prefatory biography of Chaucer to attest, for example, to Chaucer’s London origins. See, for instance, George Bishop’s 1598 and Adam Islip’s 1602 printings of William Thynne’s edition of the complete works of Chaucer. In short, the available documentary and historical record presents Usk as a scribe and an aspiring civil servant and never as a poet. The absence of a manuscript that can reveal material traces of Usk’s ambitions as a poet tends to lead to scholarly readings of his life and his literary ambition based primarily on historically viable readings of his professional, scribal life. Anne Middleton, notably, chooses a different tact by reconstructing Thynne’s copy of what she infers is a fair-copy manuscript of the Testament in “Thomas Usk’s ‘Perdurable Letters’: The Testament of Love from Script to Print” in *Studies in Bibliography* 51 (1998), pp. 63-116. All citations from Thomas Usk’s *Appeal* are from the printed copy of PRO, Ex. Misc. 5/28 in A Book of London English, 1384-1425, ed. R. W. Chamber and Marjorie Daunt (Oxford: Clarendon, 1931), pp. 22-31. All citations refer to line numbers in the printed edition. Examples of scholars who may be said to read Usk’s Testament as an elaborate revision of the Appeal include Paul Strohm and Joanna Summers. The Appeal, according to Paul Strohm, was written in a simple attempt at political preservation. The later, and far more elaborate, Testament presents a slightly grander ambition: it narrates a “more positive expectation of a fresh and profitable tie to the royal faction of Walworth, Philipot, Brembre, and the other leading capitalists of London.” See Strohm, “Politics and Poetics,” p. 87. Joanna Summers makes similar conclusions in “Thomas Usk and The Testament of Love” in *Late Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 24-59. She writes that Usk’s imaginary imprisonment provides the Testament with a tone of urgency that makes it more of a direct appeal for both pardon and patronage. She writes: “Usk fashions an autobiographical identity designed to attain patronage and advancement, to restore his ruined reputation, and possibly to woo those who may elicit his release. For this Usk employs self-justification and self-vindication, but also intertextuality and literary, biblical, and historical
exemplars, not primarily for the sake of the text’s pedagogical arguments, but to construct a persuasive identity for himself and ensure a favourable reception” (27).

“And bycause this boke shal be of love and the pryme causes of steryng in that doyng, with passyons and dyseases for wanting of desyre I wyl that this boke be cleped The Testament of Love” (Prol. 58-9).

All citations of the Middle English Dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary refer to the online editions. See also Frederick Furnivall’s EETS (OS 78) collection The Fifty Earliest Wills in the Court of Probate, London (A D 1387-1439; with a Priest’s of 1454), (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1882, rpt. 1964). The collection provides evidence of, first, the existence of vernacular wills and the use of the word testament in the vernacular to name a bequest and, second, the value of scribal competence and institutional form in the drafting of late medieval wills. See, in particular, the wills of Robert Corn and Lady Alice West in which the word testament is used repeatedly. Thomas Usk swore to the authenticity of the will of Alice, widow of William Spicer of Devizes in 1379. See Plea and Memoranda Rolls 2.257-8. In the poem, Thomas Usk makes use of the word “testament” in its full range. See, for example, his use of the word to refer to the incarnation as the contract and law between men and God, I.vi.585-9. See also Skeat’s discussion of Usk’s use of the word “testament” in the Supplement to the Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, v. 7 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1893), 28.

It might be useful here to think of Usk as one of London’s “clerics.” This body of literate careerists encompassed “scriveners as well as versifiers, ecclesiastical and legal odd-job and regular service men of several sorts” (Middleton 69). In “Private Selves and the Intellectual Marketplace in Late Fourteenth-Century England: The Case of the Two Usks,” Andrew Galloway argues that both Thomas and Adam Usk were, as aspiring intellectuals, in a unique if precarious position of being able to continually redefine their roles as literate professionals and intellectuals in the late-fourteenth century. Thomas Usk uses his professional identity as a literate professional, a scribe and an attorney, in order to make a case for himself as a literary intellectual in the public sphere. Perhaps, for this reason, he famously alludes to Chaucer and his Troilus in III.iv.558-67.


“Yet I also have leve of the noble husbande Boece, although I be a straunger of connynge, to come after his doctryne” (Prol. 78-9).

For a brief discussion of Usk’s prose style and his debt to Chaucer’s vernacular prose style, see C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition (Oxford and London: Humphrey Milford, 1936, rpt. 1938), p. 222-23. Lewis writes: “The comparative mediocrity of Usk’s talent, and the political or biographical problems to which the Testament gives rise, have somewhat obscured its importance in the history of literature. This importance depends upon its form; for the Testament of Love is written in prose. The medium is unusual for most subjects in Chaucer’s time, and for the erotic allegory at all times; and Usk deserves the praise of originality for attempting it. Certainly the use of prose for matter the reverse of utilitarian marks a phase in the coming
The opening letter of each chapter of the Testament of Love reveals an acrostic that reads: MARGARETE OF VIRTW HAVE MERCI ON THIN VSK. Chapters of Book 3 were displaced and incorrectly ordered in the 1532 print edition. Henry Bradley first discovered the error and identified the author of the Testament in 1897 (The Athenaeum 3615 [1897]). See also Anne Middleton’s extraordinarily detailed speculative account of the manuscript and the acrostic in “Thomas Usk’s ‘Perdurable Letters’” and the section entitled “The Problem of the Broken Sequence of Book 3” in R. A. Shoaf’s introduction to his edition, pp. 20-5. In “Thomas Usk and Ralph Higden” (Notes & Queries 10 [1904], p. 287) and “The Date of Thomas Usk’s Testament of Love” (Modern Philology 26.1[1928], 17-29), Walter Skeat and Ramona Bressie establish Usk’s knowledge of Ranulph Higden’s Polychronicon. The opening letters of the chapters of Book 1 of most manuscripts of the Polychronicon can be combined to present the following acrostic: Presentem cronicam compilavit Frater Ranulphus Cestrensis monachus.

The following example from the Testament is particularly beautiful. In this passage, Usk writes that his service to both the city and the Margaret have proved to be without reward: “O good lady...se now howe seven yere passed and more have I graffed and groubed a vyne, and with al the wayes that I coude I sought to a fed me of the grape. But frute have I none founde. Also I have this seven yere served Laban to a wedded Rachel his daughter, but blere eyed Lya is brought to my bedde whiche always engendreth my tene and is ful of chyldren in trybulacion and in care. And although the clippynge and kyssynge of Rachel shuld seme to me swete, yet is she so barayne that gladness ne joye by now way wol springe so that I may wepe with Rachel. I may not ben sounsayled with solace sythen issue of myn hertely desyre is fayled” (I.v.477-85).

Usk’s method for establishing an authorial signature—specifically his decision to call himself VSK rather than Thomas, as was briefly discussed in the Usk panel of the New Chaucer Society in 2006—has presented repercussions for the work’s reception. Usk reveals himself through his patronymic, a name that confers civil identity rather than spiritual identity (see Anne Middleton, “William Langland’s ‘Kynde Name’: Authorial Signature and Social Identity in Late Fourteenth-Century England” in Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530, Ed. Lee Patterson [Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1990], pp. 15-82, see esp. pp. 62-4 on the correspondence between one’s spiritual identity and civic identity and one’s given and proper names in the late medieval period.) Usk, therefore, is read as an author who, first of all, asserts a civic rather than spiritual relationship with his writing. That is to say, his relationship to his writing is that of ownership. According to Middleton, Usk is more interested in a
demonstration of his mastery of scribal skills rather than in demonstrating his mode of living in community. It is my argument—in spite of this daunting body of scholarship—that Usk also attempts what Middleton so effectively argues that *Piers Plowman* does, to revise and reinvent a "revised account of the individual’s powers to interpret, and to represent the ‘commune’" (73).

11 For a discussion of the word commons and its relationship to the representation of community in late medieval England and in Usk’s *Appeal*, see Emily Steiner’s “Commonalty and Literary Form in the 1370s and 80s” in *New Medieval Literatures*, v. 6, David Lawton, Wendy Scase, and Rita Copeland, eds. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 199-21. See specifically, p. 199-201. By commons, I take it that Usk means the artisanal and professional classes of London, specifically those who belonged to the smaller non-mercantile guilds who tended not to hold civic offices. But, it is also my contention that Usk makes use of the general fluidity of the social categories of London civic life in order to claim to be alluding to the members of the *community* more generally. For a general discussion of community in the late middle ages, see Jeannine Quillet, “Community, counsel, and representation” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), pp. 520-72.

17 See Strohm, “Textual Vicissitudes.”
23 Compare this with the language of the *Appeal* as it describes the effects of Northampton’s language on the “small people:” “And that was euer-more an excitation to the pore poeple to make hem be the more feruent & rebel a-yeins the grete men of the won, & ayeins the officers ek” (66-9, italics added); “and the smale poeple was drawe in to be [partie therrof, to that entent that fully thair hertes sholde stande with John Northampton” (146-7, italics added).
24 Compare this with the language of the *Appeal* as it describes how the “small people” are moved to action: “& then the comunes, vpon these wordes, were stered, & seiden truly they wolde go to a-nother eleccion, & noght soeffre thys wrong” (188-9).
25 Thomas Usk’s adjective “shepy” is the only attested use of the word in Middle English, but the word does resemble the word “sheepish” in suggesting “sheep-like.” Sheepish, in Middle English usage, suggests silly or simple as in Wyclif’s “Queynte sleitis to disceyue scheipische men of worldly goodis” (*OED*, sheepish, adj, 2b, 1380). This comparison is particularly productive if one thinks of the association of sheepish with the word “queynte” which means deceptive, generally, but also deceptive, with particular reference
to language. Usk’s “shepy people” are drawn in, as he is, by the “queynte” language (at once elaborate, cunning, even rhetorical and liable to deceive [See MED, queint[e], 2c).

Usk borrows most of his divisions of the ages of the world from Ranulph Higden’s Polychronicon. In III.i, Usk writes of the three-fold division of human time: the time of “Deviacion” (5) or error, time of the coming of Grace to the end of transitory time, and the time when the transitory world ends. This division of history also appears in the Polychronicon, Vol 1, 1.4. In the same chapter in which Higden gives variable divisions of historical time, he also divides time according to the ages of the law. In this periodization, Higden argues that there was a time when the Jews were distinguished from the rest of mankind: “tertius in tertia etate sub lege scripta surrexit ritus Judæorum, quando lex et circumcision Judæos a cæteris distinguebat gentibus.” Usk may have been thinking of this periodization when he argues that there was a period when the Jews, who possessed a legitimate written law, were capable of a mode of thought when pagans were not.

Marion Turner does not read Chaucer as an influence, so much as she describes him as Usk’s competition. See Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006).

In the Testament, the language of manuscript-making intersects with the vocabulary of rhetorical composition: “Some men there ben that peynten with colours ryche and some with vers as with red ynke and some with coles and chalke; and yet is there good matere to the leude people of thilke chalky purtreyture, as hem thynketh for the tyme; and afterward the syght of the better colours yeven to hem more joye for the first leudenesse” (10-3).

“Nory” refers to a child who is nursed or supported, but can also refer to a pupil (MED, norri, n. a.).


I consulted MS E Musao 16 at the Bodleian Library. I include an informal transcription of the prefatory verse from this manuscript here:

IN NOMINE PATRIS ET FILII ET SPIRITUS SANCTI. AMEN. ASSIT PRINCIPIO SANCTA MARIA MEO//
Croys was maad al of reed//
In þe begynnynge of my book//
That is clepid God me spede.//
In þa first lessoun þat I took//
Thanne I learned a and be//
And oþir letters by here names.//

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But alwey God spede me//
That is needful in alle games//
If I plyde in feld opir in medes.//
Ouipir stille ouipir with noyce//
I prey[d]e help in all [my dedis]//
Of hym þat dyde vppon the croyce.//
Now diuers pleyes in his name//
I schal let passé forth and fare//
And auenture to pleye oo longe game.//
Also and I schal spare//
Woodes, medes, and feldes//
Place þat I haue played inne.//
And in his name þat I schal bigyne//
And praye help, counseile, and rede//
To me þat he wole sende//
And þis game reule and lede//
And bringe hit to good ende.//

Qui habet aures audiendi audiat, et cetera.//


I am not arguing that late medieval political thinkers are universally committed to Aristotle. It seems, however, that Usk thinks citations of Aristotle crucial to identifying his scholarly ambitions. For studies that reassess Aristotelian thoughts impact on medieval political thought, see Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought: From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 61-3 and Ann Astell’s “Introduction” in *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1999), pp. 1-22.


53 See *Nichomachean Ethics*, p. 1746. Robert Grossteste’s Latin translation lists the pasiones as concupiscencia, iram, timorem, audaciam, invidiam, gaudium, amicciam, odium, desiderium, zelum, and mirecordiam. See Book II, chapter 5. Pleasure and pain are rendered delectacio and tristicia.

54 See *Nichomachean Ethics*, p. 1746.


58 In a different section of the *Testament*, Usk dramatizes the faculties required for learning and there too he privileges desire and affiliates desire with the will. Usk, in this passage, also refers to the role of the senses in inducing desire. He recounts a time when he met a feral beast in the wilderness. Out of fear, he runs away: “Thus, forsothe, was I aferde and to shyppe me hyed. That were there ynowe to lache myn handes and drawe me to shyppe of whiche many I knewe wel the names. Syght was the first, Lust was a nother, Thought was the thirde, and Wyl eke there was mayster: these broughten me within borde of this shyppe of traveyle” (I.iii.274-7). As Usk describes the necessity of study and of learning how to will, he privileges desire as a tool or aid to willing.
60 See Testament, l.ix.899-912.
63 As a professional scrivener, Usk was intimately familiar with legal practices in London. See Strohm, “The Textual Vicissitudes of Usk’s Appeal.”
68 Caroline M. Barron writes that London guild ordinances were being written in English long before 1388: “The earliest English ordinances seem to be those of the Carpenters, probably drawn up in 1333, followed in 1365 by the Pouchmakers, the Curries in 1367-8, the guild of the Virgin at St Stephen Coleman in 1369-70, the guild of St Anne in Lawrence Jewry in 1372 and the Joiner’s fraternity in St James Garlickhythe in 1375. The wording of these surviving guild ordinances suggests that, in London at least, may guilds and fraternities were already using copies of ordinances and oaths written in English which some of their members, if not all, were able to read” (113). See Caroline M. Barron and Laura Wright’s “The London Middle English Guild Certificates of 1388-89” in Nottingham Medieval Studies (1995): 108-45. Barron continues to argue that Usk was precisely the kind of urban, literary professional who would been familiar with English-language guild documents, pp. 113-4.
I am citing the guild ordinances edited by Laura Wright by name of guild and page number only.

69
Coda

Langland, the *Mum*-Poet, and the Problem of “Kynde”

*The Properties of Things*

William Langland (d. 1390) haunts this dissertation. I invoke his name and his career as if they were self-explanatory. He should have priority: he writes earlier than any poet implicated in this dissertation and he writes in and about the City of London.¹ His only poem was immediately more influential and popular than any other London poem.² *Piers Plowman* has been the occasion of the invention an entire scholarly corpus dedicated to investigating the field of extramural scholarship in late-medieval England.³ Langland has been crucial to literary and historical excavations about the relationship between the academy and lay, intellectual poetic “makyng.”⁴ Discussions of Langland’s career—the ways in which he imagined the training and role of “burel clerkes” (x.292)⁵—have been central to how London’s later fourteenth-century poets described theirs and to how literary critics have imagined extramural contexts for instruction and intellectual work.⁶ A brief autobiographical passage in Passus V of the C-Text of *Piers Plowman* has inspired one of the field’s most important books on the nature of poetic, intellectual labor, *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship.*⁷ But Langland, as it often happens, presents too much of a good thing and, for this reason, I have relegated him momentarily to the margins of “Poetry and London Learning.”

Instead of writing about Langland, I present a brief coda about a Langlandian poem, *Mum and the Soothsegger.* *Mum and the Soothsegger* presents itself in a Langlandian idiom, but, more importantly, it refers to the academic discipline, natural
philosophy, that seems so crucial to Langland's intellectual formation and so central to
the ways in which he defined poetic knowledge. As I will later argue, the Mum-poet's
investment in Langland compels him to describe an ideal polity through an analogy
dependent upon a knowledge of natural philosophy. In this section, I begin to explain
Langland's description of natural philosophy and the means by which Langland identifies
an affiliation between poetry and natural philosophy in order to authorize poetry as a
science.

The study of what Bartholomaeus Anglicus calls the properties of things or de
proprietibus rerum appears in the B-Text at the precise moment when Will, Langland's
protagonist, begins his academic training. Will, having just met the personification
Studie, searches for Clergie, or clerical learning. Dame Studie asserts that Will should be
able to discover how to do well or how to formulate an ethics from Clergie and Scripture
(x.148-151; "kenne me kyndely to knowe what is dowel,"
” x.151). Clergie, in Piers
Plowman, is associated with skills, with arts, and with crafts, most of which were the
property of academic training. Study claims that she herself has taught Clergie about
logic, about law, about music, about grammar and warns him about the sciences he
should not “sotile Inne” (x.188). But he insists upon learning about a science, theology,
that Dame Studie forbids him because it is far too difficult ("Ac Theologie hap tene me
ten score tymes;/ The moore I muse þerInne þe mysier it semeþ./ And þe depper I
deuyned þe darker me þouȝte’’ [x.185-187]). She offers an alternative to theological
knowledge, familiar from the conceit of Thomas Usk’s The Testament of Love (1385-
1386): salvific and ethical sciences are “drawen of loues scole” (x.193). Love begets
grace and, furthermore, lawful love in itself constitutes an ethics (“Loke þow loue lelly if þee likeþ dowel,/ For dobet and dobest ben [drawen] of loues scole” [x.192-193]).

But in spite of this lesson, Will proceeds to seek Clergie and Scripture, authorizing tokens from Dame Studie in hand. They tell him precisely what constitutes “dowel” and they explain too the conditions for salvation, but Will belligerently contradicts them in their own clerical language (“‘Contra!’ quod I, ‘by crist! þat kan I wiþseye,/ And preuen it by þe pistel þat Peter is nempned:/ That is baptised beþ saaf, be he riche or pouere’” [X.349-351]). Will contradicts Clergie and Scripture by using the language of one (“Contra!”) and citing the other (“þe pistel þat Peter is nempned”). Will also identifies the science he wishes to “sotile in”—he wants to know the conditions of salvation—but his initial imitation of clerical language is fruitless. Clergie, Scripture, Trajan, Ymaginatif—Will’s interlocutors in Passus X-XII—provide him with an alternative language. The language of natural philosophy is not associated with clerical forms of theological disputation and of scriptural citation, but it is nevertheless invested with the power to explain the conditions of salvation.¹¹

The word “kynde” and the idea of a “kynde knowing” have been crucial to Langland scholarship: demystifying what precisely Langland means by natural (“kynde”) and natural, unclerical knowledge (“kynde knowing”) explains the stakes of Piers Plowman.¹² But it is also a testament to Langland’s clerical training that he never really dissevers the idea of “kynde” from the history and method of the academic study of “kynde.”¹³ Langland makes the study of “kynde” and the methods of the discipline universally available through poetry, and, by doing so, he invests poetic practice with a
disciplinary history and a methodology. By narrating and conflating a history of the study of “kynde” with the origins of poetry, Langland authorizes his poetic practice. He argues that he provides accessible poetic tales that are unlike dark, impenetrable theological tales (“‘This is a long lesson,’ quod I, ‘and litel am I be wiser;/ Where dowel is or dobet derkliche ye shewen./ Manye tale ye tellen þat Theologie lerneþ’” [x.377-379]).

The virtuous Trajan, who asserts that pagans and Jews and Saracens can be saved in spite of Will’s objections, reminds Will not to “sotile in” sciences that are too complicated for him. He must content himself with learning Christ’s “lawe of loue” (xi.228). Trajan cites his own saviour, Saint Gregory, when he argues against the pursuit of further learning: “And as Seint Gregorie seide, for mannès soul helpe/ Melius est scrutari scelera nostra quam naturas rerum” (xi.230-231). Knowledge of oneself and one’s sins is opposed in Passus XI with the desire for a scientific or clerical learning. The passus announces this argument from its very opening lines when Scripture rebukes Will: “Thanne Scripture scorned me and a skile tolde,/ And lakked me in latyn and liȝte by me sette,/ And seide ‘multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt’” (1-3). But the repudiation of a curiosity for the knowledge of things in favor of knowledge that will allow one to account for oneself (know your sins, know yourself) belies Passus X-XII’s incredible investment in investigating the capacity of “kynde” to explain the conditions of salvation.

Will’s vision of Trajan is interrupted by an account of another dream, a dream of “kynde.” In it, he enacts the role of Adam when he sees the “wonders of þis world” (333): he sees the sun, the see, the sands as well as the bees and birds acting according to the rule of “kynde.” The animals, in particular, eat, drink, breed, and practice their skills
(making nests) as if governed by a natural, rational law (321-367). Will’s vision of “kynde,” particularly because he observes all of nature from a mountain-top, resembles the vision presented to Brunetto Latini (d. 1294) in the Il Tesoretto, a poetic key to the contents of the much more elaborate encyclopedic Tresor.14 The Tresor, like most medieval encyclopedias, presents a guide to “la nature des animaus” (180). Brunetto begins with fish continues with amphibians and then moves on to birds (who are presented in the greatest detail) before ending with animals on land. The presentation of Will’s vision of “kynde,” therefore, presents an allusion to a tradition of writing about nature in an orderly way, to a clerical tradition of imagining the natural order of things through an accounting of animals and their properties.

Langland’s protagonist asks Reason the appropriate question: why are men and women unlike the animals or indeed all the things that exist in nature? He asks why it is that men and women’s willful disobedience of a natural order should even be possible. Will formulates the question in terms of dissimilitude. Similitude, as Michel Foucault has argued, is the method of argumentation and representation most common to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but it is a method most easily and obviously crucial to the making of categories that establish discipline of natural philosophy.15 Albertus Magnus’ (d. 1280) Aristotelian De animalibus, for example, opens with an elaborate justification for how the work will be organized according to the method of comparison. He determines what the best methods are for dividing animals into their various genuses: flyers, swimmers, walkers, creepers. He divides his book according to the comparison of the most common shared organs of animals. Because, for example, all animals have eyes,
or something like to eyes, it would be good to study them according to the likenesses and un-likenesses of their shared organs. Natural philosophy, therefore, as a discipline foregrounds the importance of establishing similitudes in order to discover the properties of things.  

Poetry, Langland contends, partakes of the same methods and the same history as natural philosophy and, therefore, accrues explanatory power. In Passus XII, Will insists upon meddling with making (15) in spite of the fact that are are “bokes ynowe/ To telle men what dowel is, dobet and dobet boþ” (16-17). But as Ymaginatif attempts to curtail Will’s insistence upon discovering a pedagogical and intellectual vocation, he also identifies the primary means by which one may come to some knowledge, natural philosophy. On the one hand, “kynde” is entirely inexplicable (“Kynde knoweþ whi he dide so, ac no clerk ellis’” [235]). On the other hand, seekers who wish to know, to possess Clergie and “kynde wit” (225), naturally “willest of brides & beestes and of hir brdyng knowe,/ Why some be alouþ & some aloft...And of the floures in þe Fryth and of hire faire hewes...And of þe stones and of þe sterres” (219-223). In order to account for this natural curiosity, Ymaginatif argues that “Kynde” provides an alternative knowledge: it has been capable of providing “ensamples” or models for ethical knowledge since the old time of the poets (236-237).

Natural philosophy presents a method and natural philosophy’s methods becomes the property of the poets. In Passus XII, Ymaginatif proceeds to provide a genealogy for poetry as the study of “kynde.” He identifies, first, Aristotle, whose books about animals provided the foundation of natural history in the late-medieval academy, and Avicenna,
the best-known Aristotelian commentator, as natural philosophers and poets. By virtue of the observation of the behavior of peacocks and peahens, for example, the “Poete,” Avicenna, “preuep the pecok for his feþeres” (262). Ymaginatif glosses this statement further: the peacock is like the rich man with his goods. In fact, the “lark þat is a lasse fowel,” like the poor (“To lowe libbynge men þe larke is resembled” [267; emphasis mine]) who constitute the ideal of the poem, are better than peacocks: they can fly and they taste better. Poetry, an extramural intellectual pursuit, is authorized as a method by its likeness to natural philosophy, an academic discipline: Langland goes so far, in fact, as to collapse any distinction between these two seemingly disparate disciplines (poetic-making and the study of nature) by identifying their originators and methods as entirely identical.

For Ymaginatif, the value of the method of natural philosophy lies in its accessibility. Since the actual reason why animals or stones do what they do is inaccessible (only “Kynde” knows), it is best to think of the accumulation of observations about nature as capable of providing exemplary tales that can constitute an ethical knowledge (i.e., to know about “kynde” can help one formulate a means to “dowel”). One must look at nature, not for the “whyes” (218), but for similitudes that constitute ethical models (e.g., it is better to be poor like the lark than rich like a peacock). “Swiche tales” that “tellep Aristotle the grete clerk” (268) are of a different order from the dark tales of theology: they do not seek to explain God or nature, nor do they come shrouded in the mysterious vocabularies and discursive forms of theology. Instead, they seem
immediately and universally accessible because they explain what everyone can see as if they were Adam, the nature and order things.

*Llanglandian Clerks*

I was wilful of wil and wandrid aboute,
Til I came to Cambrigge couthe I not stynte,
To Oxenforde and Orleance and many other places
There the congregacioun of clerz in scole
Were stablid to stonde in strengthe of bileue.
---*Mum and the Soothsegger*, ll. 321-5

The narrator of the fifteenth-century London poem *Mum and the Soothsegger*, on a quest to find a soothsayer as well as to learn the means of saying “sooth,” makes pilgrimages to the designated centers for advanced instruction in late medieval England. Cambridge and Oxford make predictable appearances as locations where clerks congregate. Orléans, home of a prominent *studium generale* under the Capetians, makes an appearance too. The identification of Orléans testifies to its prominence as a center for study—Orléans appears as a place where one can find “yonge clerkes” (V.1119) in Chaucer's *The Franklin’s Tale*—but also stands in as a name for a series of “many other places.” The search for truth, a recreation of the quest for truth in *Piers Plowman*, begins and is frustrated in the sites traditionally associated with learning, the schools.

Clerks constitute a community: as a congregation, a gathering, they should be able together to “stonde in strengthe of bileue.” But the poem announces the failure of the clerical class to pronounce truth from the places designated for their residence and study. The poem also announces the failure of universities to produce a class of men capable of speaking truth once they leave their institutional homes.
London, although likely to have been the place of the poem’s composition, is not named as another place where scholars or clerks congregate. But the poem was likely composed in the city and stylistically and thematically insists upon its affiliation with the London-poem *Piers Plowman*. The poetic fragment does not celebrate a solitary quest for truth as much as reiterate the footsteps of London’s most influential vernacular poem and poet and, in that way, imagine poets as a congregation of clerk-like figures, affiliated by style, vocation, and (implicitly) location rather than by institution. *Mum and the Soothsegger’s* follows the formal qualities of Langland’s distinctive alliterative verse form, his use of allegory, his methods of naming allegorical figures, his means of establishing affinities and genealogies for allegorical concepts and his vocabulary. London is not a site for finding congregations of clerks, but it has become the site associated with renewals of quests for truth. The renewal of the search for knowledge does not find answers in failed intellectual and pedagogical institutions but in the institution of London poetry.

At the time of *Mum*’s composition, Langlandian poetic form already constitutes a pedagogical method. As the poem progresses, it demonstrates no interest in explaining the possibility of “kynde knowing,” Langland’s term for a universal human capacity for reasoning that creates a natural ethical knowledge. This natural rational capacity, “kynde knowing,” appears only once in *Mum and the Soothsegger*. In the dream vision, the poetic narrator’s interlocutor argues that the Soothsayer, the poem’s substitute for Langland’s Piers Plowman, might actually be found in every human heart and mind:

> “His dwelling to discryue,” cote he, “I do hit on alle clerucz That I shal teche [the] treuly the tournyng to his place.

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Yn man-is herte his hovsing is, as holly writte techet,
And mynde is his mansion that made alle th’estres.

In corde fidelis est habitacio veritatis
There foeffed hym his fadre freely forto dwelle,
And put him in possession in paradise terrestre
Yn Adam oure auncetre and his issue aftre.”

1222-9

Briefly, the poem entertains the possibility of a universal human capacity to know the truth, identifying it as a birthright akin to dominion. While this passage seems to authorize a universal capacity for knowing truth, it does not actually imply that everyone should or can speak truth. Soothsaying remains identified with a profession.

Soothsaying, as a profession, is most often opposed to another professional category, “clercz.” Clerks in Mum constitute a broad group that includes almost all the members of the literate professions, clerical and lay (i.e., students, masters, friars, monks, preachers, lawyers, scribes), most of whom find themselves in the position of mediating between the people and their rulers (the King, the Mayor) if only as writers and interpreters of documents and as counselors to the ruling classes of king, lords, and mayors of towns. The dreamer’s interlocutor is actually identifying a species of “kynde knowing” in order to oppose it to what passes for clerical knowledge in the early fifteenth century: clerks makes themselves subject to critical assessments of their scholarly and documentary practice precisely because they fail to speak the truth and live up to the demands of their roles as mediators between the rulers and the people.

In Mum and the Soothsegger, England is on the verge of collapse, a collapse that has been only slightly delayed by the incredible virtues of a new King, Henry IV. The poem’s narrator blames the illnesses that plague the body politic on a class of advisors in

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the service of kings and lords who have failed to speak truth to their masters: “As wold God that eche gome that gre hath take in scoles/ Wolde hold that opinion that ouer-lepe in neuer/ For hit was neuer so nedeful as now sith Noe-is dayes” (1233-1235). 24 The necessary reform that prevents the apocalyptic flooding of England relies upon the learned clergy (“eche gome that gre hath take in scoles”), but they are simply not up to the task. In order to announce a new species of clergy (Langlandian poetry), the Mum-poet must spend the rest of the poem justifying his method and identifying a substance of his teaching.

Because the realm is being governed by means of written documents, identifying who is capable of reading, writing, and speaking truth is under contention. The narrator announces his capacity for soothsaying by identifying vernacular, Langlandian poetic composition as a vehicle for political truth. In the earlier portion of the poem, soothsaying does not appear at to possess a recognizably learned or authoritative manner of speech:

He [a soothsayer] cannot speke in termes in in tyme nother
But bablith fourth bustusely as barn vn-y-lerid;
But euer he hitteth on the heed of the nayle-is ende,
That the pure poynt pricketh on the sothe
Til the foule flessh vomy for attre.

49-53

The poem never doubts the value of the truth-teller’s healthful, purgative speech.25 But the narrator also says that truth-tellers appear as if idiot savants: they do not speak in the technical vocabulary of the clergy and they speak inopportune. Their unlearned, untimely speech is poorly rewarded. They cannot maintain their place in a retinue—since they displease Lords and their clerks. Their soothsaying leads to various physical
humiliations and punishments. Truth comes in bare language and the truth-teller is damned by his unprofessional manner of speech: he sounds like an unlearned child. Mum and the Soothsegger then identifies truth-telling, initially, with the language of that children speak and with a method—the poetic method of Piers Plowman—that allegedly makes its speaker sound untrained.

The allegorical personification Mum later associates a similar kind of childlike babbling with the “‘momeling’” (233) of the poetic narrator:

‘And for my wisedame and witte wone I with the beste;  
While sergeantz the sechith to saise by the lappe  
For thy wilde wordes that maken wretthe ofte.  
Thow were better folowe me foure score wynter  
Thenne be a soeth-sigger, so me God helpe’

249-53

Wisdom and wit are again associated with Mum’s language, the language of clerical service, while soothsaying is associated with an undisciplined “wilde” speech. Mum’s capacity for reasonable-sounding speech silences the narrator momentarily: “‘I blussid for his bablyng and a-bode stille/ And knytte there a knotte and construed no ferther” (239-40). The narrator is unable to respond to Mum’s deceptive wise and witty language because he understands that it has been designated as difficult, technical and socially-valued. The poem then proceeds to make a case that the language of soothsaying as intelligibly learned by identifying it with and authorizing it through the figure of its masterful, admirable dream-interlocutor. The poem, first, demonstrates the failure of the clerical class to advance knowledge and teach it. The poem then proceeds to provide a provenance for ambitious vernacular poetic babbling and mumbling by arguing that this
same “babbling” can capably invent the knowledge that is required to forestall political disaster.

The poetic narrator is not quite lewd: he has received training in a school in his “youthe” (290). He, like Langland, weaves Latin commonplaces throughout his English poem. But he does identify himself as a beginner in learning. Confounded by Mum’s seemingly reasonable and sophisticated arguments, he turns to the collections of maxims that constituted his early language training attributed to Cato, Seneca, Solomon and Sidrac. Unable to make progress alone, he then wanders to the centers of advanced academic training in order to discuss “my matiere of Mvm” (326). He describes these institutions and the disciplines that they teach:

I moueued my matiere of Mvm, as ye knowe,
And of the soethe-sigger in fewe shorte wordes;
To alle the vij sciences I shewed as I couthe
And how we dwellid in dome [for] doute of the better.
Sire Grumbald the grammier tho glowed for anger
That he couthe not congruly knytte thaym to-gedre.
Music and Mvm mighte not accorde,
For thay been contrary of kynde, who-so can spie.
Phisic diffied al [the] bothe sides,
Both Mvm and me the soeth-siggre;
He was accumbrid of oure cumpaignye, by Crist that me bought,
And as voiding as foul [of his make].
Astronomy-ys argumentz were alle of the skyes,
He-is touche no twynte of terrene thinges.
Rhetic-ys reasons me luste not reherce,
For he conceyued not the caas, I knewe by his wordes;
But a sublisthe sophister wit many sharpe wordes
Sette [the] soeth-sigger as shorte as he couthe.
But he wolde melle with Mvm ner more ner lasse,
So chiding and chatering [as chogh was he euer].
Iometrie the ioyalour iablid faste,
And caste many cumpas, as the crafte askith,
And laide leuel and lyne a-long by the squyre.

326-48
The curriculum of the late medieval university is parodied: the sciences are reduced to caricatures. Grammar knits sentences together; Rhetoric does not understand arguments but joins in the debate; Geometry makes circles and squares; Astronomy refuses to engage in the worldly.

The author of *Mum and the Soothsegger* parodies the university curriculum in order to make the case that innovation in learning is coming from elsewhere (from London’s learned poetry, for example). He ignores the role of the university, Oxford in particular, in fostering debate about clerical and political reform. It is true that Oxford and Cambridge continued to emphasize the trivium and quadrivium more than the University of Paris in the late middle ages: qualifying for a BA continued to begin with lectures on the trivium and quadrivium, all of which were associated with particular books to be learned at lectures (i.e., Boethius on Arithmetic and Music; Ptolemy on Astronomy; Priscian on Grammar). By the late fifteenth century, however, the three philosophies (natural, moral, and metaphysical) had already become entrenched parts of the university curriculum so that students reading for a BA would have had access to “newer” knowledge engendered by the scholastic rediscovery of Aristotelian and pseudo-Aristotelian works. The narrator of *Mum* ignores the fact that university qualification actually required disputation—here identified with his extramural soothsaying quest rather than the university—rather than simply rote learning of the allegedly stagnant and unresponsive seven sciences in order to invest his quest and his poetic method with intellectual and political value. Intellectual innovation and its product (capable and
courageous political counsel) emerge from the poetic narrator’s quest and not from inadequate instruction at the hands of university masters. Universities are not being urged to reform: they are being identified as irrevocably outdated and unresponsive institutions.

A learned chair of the university becomes the vehicle of academic critique in the poem. The learned chair holds the students of institutions up to ridicule. Although “thay bisien thaym on thaire bookes and beten their wittz” (367), they study to no other purpose than basic literacy. They have no desire to “soutille ne to siche” (370). Instead, they immediately put their allegedly elementary knowledge of texts to “practike and plaisance of wordes” (389). The university and its masters and students are not the only institutions and professions that come under critique, so do friars, monks, preachers, free men, franklins, bondmen, bourgeois, knights, the commons and craftmen. No institution in Henry IV’s England possesses the answer to the “matter of Mvm.”

Instead, the pastoral figure who represents the possibility of an ethical life and who purveys authoritative wisdom models a new clerisy that reinvents the natural philosophy that Langland associates with Ymaginatif. Mum and the Soothsegger trades in political knowledge and it climaxes with political learning that makes an analogy between the society of bees and that of humans: its political learning comes from a clerical book, the Franciscan friar Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ Latin encyclopedia, On the Properties of Things (De proprietibus rerum, ca. 1240-5). Mum and the Soothsegger’s gardener refers to the encyclopedia by name twice: “The bomelyng of the bees, as Bartholomew vs telleth” (1028); “As Bartholomew the Bestiary bablith on his bokes” (1054). The mischaracterization of a hermeneutic guide as well as a compendious
reference work intended to “help the itinerant preachers of the new mendicant orders prepare sermons” (448) as a bestiary suggests the new ways in which clerical writings are being put to use in extramural contexts.\textsuperscript{28} Instead of using a Latin work to understand and to explain the Latin bible, the gardener of the poem draws a political allegory from the book that explains why it is crucial to purge the community of its “wasters.” Furthermore, Bartholomew’s “bestiary” babbles just as the narrator of the poem does, conflating therefore the language of a nostalgically-invoked clerk and the language and form of poetry.

The gardener acts almost like the translator and cleric John Trevisa (1342-1402), whose vernacular translations included a middle English version of \textit{De Proprietibus Rerum} (1398). As Ralph Hanna reminds us, the act of translating a work like Bartholomaeus’ encyclopedia transforms its use: “Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ \textit{De Proprietibus Rerum} has a clear function in Latin culture: it carefully collets materials that can be used either to unravel the mysteries of scriptural symbolism or to resymbolize things of this world as moralized sermon \textit{exempla}. In contrast, John Trevisa’s \textit{Properties} is an almost purely informative text, an introduction to the wonders of nature.”\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Mum and the Soothsegger} gestures towards the use of “Bartolomew’s bestiary” in clerical culture: it is not simply “an introduction to the wonders of nature” but a source of political allegory in which, to paraphrase, the bees of this world become moralized, secular sermon exempla. Ultimately, \textit{Mum and the Soothsegger} does not make use of the encyclopedic work in order to make a point about the text of the bible “that grovnd is of lore” (76).\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Mum and the Soothsegger}’s intellectual program does not repudiate the
knowledge of the clerks but appropriates the same knowledge for a different, equally urgent political use.

*Mum and the Soothsegger* never displays any anxiety about the poetic narrator’s right to continue with the labor of making intellectual progress. God himself authorizes the poetic narrator’s quest with a safe-conduct that allows him to wander the land in spite of his decidedly indeterminate profession. When the dream interlocutor authorizes the project of “boke-making” (1281), he is also investing the unrecognizable, childlike, vernacular babbling of the soothsayer with value. Readers are being taught that not all “clergie” (1032) is purveyed in clerics’ technical language. But the substance and style of poetry is neither natural nor easy (as every modern reader of *Piers Plowman* can attest): the poem’s narrator must be taught to understand the soothsaying gardener’s language. Initially, the gardener’s “wise tale” (1087) is far too “mistike” (1089) for the poetic narrator to understand and he defers knowledge of it to some later date. Knowledge, even when it comes in the form of a versified, vernacular tale can be difficult. *Mum and the Soothsegger* does not, like *Piers Plowman* defer knowledge indefinitely and it does not traffic in the value of frustration in study, but it does allow for time for the labor of accruing knowledge.

The poem’s confidence in the dreamer’s capacity for eventually learning truth to the extent that he can confidently teach it and make a book of it demonstrates the effects of an earlier generation of poets’ efforts to transform poetic vernacular writing into a vehicle for science. By the early fifteenth century, vernacular, Langlandian poetic writing has already accrued enough value so that further labors in study and writing that are
expected to bear intellectual fruit can be confidently written within the parameters of a London poetic tradition. The dream vision in the extant portion of Mum and the Soothsegger baldly authorizes poetic labor:

“I haue informed the faire loke thou folowe after
And make vp thy matiere, thou mays do no better.
Hit may amende many men of theaire misdeedes.
Sith thou felys the fressh letes no feynt herte
Abate thy blessid bisynes of thy boke-making.”
1277-1281

The dreamer is asked to bravely (with “no feynt herte”) continue (“folowe after”) his “blessid” labors (“bisynes”) in study and writing since it “may amende many men of theaire misdeedes.”

Mum and the Soothsegger makes the case for the appointment of wise counsel who are trained outside usual venues (Cambridge, Oxford, Orléans). The poet’s fictive avatar embodies this new, kind of cleric: he is on an independent search for truth that has taken up much of his adult life since he has not been able to find the right kind of training in the institutions associated with learning. Although he seems unqualified and (to yet unaccustomed ears) sounds unqualified (“For I am but lewed and lettrid ful lite” [652]), he is capable of speaking the truth, teaching it and gathering its materials into an authoritative “boke” of poetic counsel that draws upon the materials of poetry, the metaphorical book of natural philosophy.

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9 On study, see “Studying the Word” in Nicolette Zeeman, Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire, pp. 109-131.

10 Dame Studie, like John Gower, includes mechanical crafts in her articulation of the schemas of the sciences (x.170-223). See Chapter Three of this dissertation for Gower’s schema of the sciences and Chapter Two on Chaucer’s approach to the conflation of the mechanical and theoretical sciences.


13 On Langland’s relationship with the academy, see Andrew Galloway, “Piers Plowman and the Schools.”


22 Derek Pearsall writes unfavorably: “Imitation of Langland is close, both structurally and verbally, but some quite untraditional syntactical characteristics. Langland, it may be said, provides some verbal and structural tricks, but the essential tradition is that of venality satire” (182). See *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1977).


23 The *Mum*-author identifies the King and his virtues:

Now is Henry—is hovs holsumly y-made
And a meritable meyny of the most greet,
And next I haue y-named as nygh as I couthe,
And the condiciones declarid of alle,
Rehersing no rascaille ne riders aboute.
But he hymself is sourrayn, so mote he longe,
And the graciousist guyer goyng vppon erthe,
Witti and wise, worthy of deedes,
Y-kidde and y-knowe and cunningyng of werre,
Feers forto fighte, the feld euer keith
And trusteth on the Trinite that trouthe shal hym helpe:
A doughtful doer in deedes of armes
And a comely knight y-come of the trettist,
Ful of al vertue that to a king longeth,
Of age and of al thing as hym best semeth.

204-220

24 The dream interlocutor of the poem waxes poetic about a time when the knights of the
shire could speak in parliament about the “sores of the royaulme” (1120). He then speaks
of the suffering of the people which are not spoken as the “boicches and blaynes” or boils
and blisters of the heart (1122).

25 The poem constantly announces its confidence that the value of the truth will announce
itself eventually:

Right as the cockil cometh fourth ere the corne ripe,
With a cleer colour, as cristal hit semeth,
Among the grayne that is grene and not ful growe,
Right so fareth falsnesse that so freysh loketh
Thorough the colour of the crosse that many men incumbreth.
But whenne trouthe aftre tornement hathy tyme forto kerne
And to growe fro the grounde anone to th’ende,
Thenne fadeth the flour of the fals cockil.
That lykne I to lyers, for atte the long goyng,
Of euery segge-is sawe the sothe wol be knowe.

61-72.

He elaborates upon this same example in ll. 165-203.

26 On the vocational and professional nature of English university training, see Allan B.
Cobban, The Medieval English Universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c. 1500
(Aldershot, UK: Scolar, 1988). See also R. W. Southern’s comments in “From Schools
pp. 1-36. Southern writes that the founding and growth of Oxford, in particular, was a
response to the rapid growth from the twelfth century onwards to the need for well-
trained, literate men for clerical, business, and bureaucratic institutions.

27 The poetic narrator even usurps the place of the preacher in the poem, identifying
himself as better capable of identifying the right uses of tithe and correcting, in the poem
itself, the matter and method of preachers:

For I am but lewed and lettrid ful lite,
And yit me semeth the sentence that I shewe couthe
And teche how the tithing shuld trewly be departid,
For in thre lynes[lith] and not oon lettre more.
That ye clepe God-is parte let God-is men haue hit,
Reseruyng for yourself sustenance for your foode,
And the ouerplus ouer that for onementz of the churche.

655-9

The poetic narrator transforms the preacherly matter of tithing, being explained from a
gospel text, into an occasion for virtuoso poetic performance (i.e., I can tell you the truth
that the preacher won’t tell you in precisely three lines). For a list of the non-clerical
persons to whom he turns, see ll. 788-93.

28 See Traugott Lawler, “Encyclopedias, European” in The Dictionary of the Middle
Lawler explains why Bartholomaeus’ encyclopedia became so current and popular in the
later middle ages. For an account of the life and scholarship of Bartholomaeus Anglicus,
see M. C. Seymour, et al, Bartholomaeus and His Encyclopedia (Aldershot, UK:

29 See “Compilatio and the Wife of Bath: Latin Backgrounds, Ricardian Texts” in
Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts (Stanford, CA: Stanford

30 Book VIII (De animbalibus) of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ De Proprietibus Rerum
actually begins with the animals of the bible, thereby demonstrating what a Latin
encyclopedia is intended to do, that is be an aid to understanding the scripture. When
John Trevisa translates De Proprietibus Rerum from Latin into “our vulgayre language,”
he maintains the idea that the work is intended as a hermeneutic aid for a Latin text: he
argues that knowledge of the properties of things will help readers who are ‘desyrous to
understond the obscuretees or derknesse of holy scriptures whiche be giuen to us under
fygures, under parables and semblances or liklihodes of thynges naturelles and
artyfycyelles.” Mum and the Soothsegger does not traffic in this fantasy, willfully
inventing the arena of politics as an object of study that should be subjected to the kind of
scrutiny that clerks devote to study of scripture.

31 See ll. 584-91.