BY THE WILL OF THE KING: MAJESTIC AND POLITICAL

RHETORIC IN RICARDIAN POETRY

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The stories we tell give meaning and coherence to our political situation; they reproduce, interrogate, and, at times, challenge the discourse of authority. Thus, when the political situation changes so do our narratives. In the thirteenth century, responding to a majestic rhetoric of *vis et voluntas* (force and will), the barons strengthened the community of the realm by turning it into a powerful collective identity that fostered political alliances with the gentry. *By The Will of the King* demonstrates how Ricardian poetry was shaped by and responded to the conflict between majestic and political rhetoric that crystallized in the politically turbulent years culminating in the Second Barons' War (1258-1265). By placing Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in dialogue with this political tradition, I demonstrate how narrative became a site of conflict between vertical, cosmic descriptions of power and horizontal realities of power, a conflict from which the contours of a civic habit of mind began to emerge.

Over the past twenty years, scholars have begun to investigate the evolution of this habit of mind in the late Middle Ages. By looking at the narrative practice of Gower and Chaucer through the lens of thirteenth-century political innovation, I extend and fill in this depiction of a nascent political imaginary. Each poet responds to the new political

circumstances in their own way. Gower, placing the political community at the center of Book VII of the *Confessio,* rigorously reworks the mirror for princes genre into a schematic analysis of political power. For Chaucer, political rhetoric becomes visible at the moment that the traditional majestic rhetoric of kingship collapses. *The Canterbury Tales*, as such, restages the conflict of the thirteenth century in aesthetic terms—giving form to the crisis of authority. Ultimately, Ricardian poetry exposes and works through an anxiety of sovereignty; it registers the limits of a majestic paradigm of kingship; and reshaping narrative, aesthetic, and hermeneutic practice, it conjures a new political imaginary capable of speaking to and for a community which had emerged during the reign of Henry III.

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For my parents

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: POLITICAL REALISM AND THE COSMIC FRAMEWORK

The dotage of Edward III, the 1381 Uprising, the Wonderful Parliament, the

Merciless Parliament, the deposition of Richard II, and finally the accession of the

Lancastrian dynasty—it can be said, with little hyperbole, that the years between 1377-

1399 constitute one of the most tumultuous periods in the history of English authority.

Much of this turmoil was caused or exacerbated by Richard II's failure to adopt a rhetoric

of kingship that could maintain the king-nobility networks necessary for the stability of

sovereign authority. Richard projected an image of kingship, which, emphasizing royal

dignitas and prerogative, "recall[ed] the Angevin world of *vis* and *voluntas*"(Saul,

"Kingship" 37)—a vision that exasperated the nobility. Rather than drawing his baronage

into his inner circle, he excluded them and surrounded himself with courtiers that shared

his vision.[1]

Frustrated by the diminishment of the role of the baronage, Arundel at the

Salisbury parliament in 1384 openly denounced the king's governance:

> You are aware, my lords, that any kingdom in which prudent government is
> lacking stands in peril of destruction; and the fact is now being illustrated before
> your eyes . . . Unless remedies are promptly applied for its relief . . . there is
> reason to fear it will very soon suffer enormous setbacks and crippling losses,
> leading to its total collapse. (*Westminster Chronicle* 68-9)

Arundel's open critique of English governance does not simply *describe* a threat to the

English community of the realm;[2] it demonstrates the "collapse" of those "complex lines

of interdependence within the hierarchy [that] supplied the crucial social cement," a

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[1] The Westminster Chronicle describes one parliament in which the lords openly complained that he "excluded the wholesome guidance" from his lords and "clung to unsound policies" (54).

[2] Nigel Saul Richard II reads this speech as a response to the diminishment of the barons' role in governance (*Richard II* 129-131).

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cement necessary to hold "the medieval political order together" (Hanson 73). That is, Arundel's rhetoric should not be taken at face value. It is not meant only as condemnation of the king's governance, but it is also a call to arms. In this short speech, we see Arundel begin to create a coalition capable of challenging or, at least pressuring, the king's authority. The discourse of sovereignty was dominated by conflict rather than the kind of unity that "held the medieval political order together" (Hanson 73), and by the end of the fourteenth century, "the very identity of authority—and consequently community—was not clearly defined" (Staley, *Languages* 100). One may reasonably suggest that the outline for the 1399 revolution, which would lead to the deposition of Richard II, was emerging before he had reached his full majority.

Given these conditions, it is no accident that Ricardian poets frequently told stories exploring the nature and problems surrounding kingship and lordship. There was, as Lynn Staley suggests, a "perceived need to develop a language that could define the nature of royal power or describe the regal image" an image that was "inevitably bound up with the construction of community (75-6)." I do not mean to suggest that their poetry announced some kind of "worked out" idea of kingship but rather, by depicting sovereignty as responding to various exigencies, their poetry is a 'working out' of the hermeneutic strategies, perspective, and language necessary to address the anxiety of sovereignty. Like Arundel's speech in front of the Salisbury parliament, there is a sense of urgency in their poetry, a sense that they are writing in the face of "collapse." However, the quarrel between the magnates and Richard II was largely a clash between royal *superioritas* and dignity accorded to lordship. The poetry of Chaucer and Gower, on the other hand, registers an anxiety of authority that goes well beyond the egos of

kings and barons and demonstrates how the regal image is "bound up with the construction of community."

The concept of a meaningful political community was a rather novel one. The dominant image of society was still one of king and *subjects*; it was still a society founded on the submission to hierarchical authority. Unlike Dante or Boccaccio whose poetry was born out of the great civic tradition of Florentine Piazzas, the poetry of Gower and Chaucer manifests and shapes a political consciousness that had descended from the king-*comitatus* power structure.[3] However, the political conflicts of the thirteenth century led to the development of a political, quasi-constitutionalist, rhetoric that challenged the "Angevin world of *vis* and *voluntas*" (Saul, "Kingship 37). By establishing a meaningful *communitas regni* (community of the realm) that was seen as both a source and restraint of regal power, the barons expanded the political class in order to gain leverage against the king. To understand the nascent political consciousness in Ricardian poetry, then, scholars need to look beyond the quarrel over insulted majesty between Richard and his baronage, and towards the rupture in the discourse of sovereignty caused by an emergent political constitutionalism in the thirteenth century.[4]

While the community-building and civic commitment play a largely insignificant role in the plotting of their tales, I will argue that Ricardian poetry registers a civic habit of mind rising out of the political innovations of the thirteenth century, particularly the

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[3]As Warren Ginsberg points out, Gower lacks the "civic habit of mind" fostered in the public piazzas of Florence nourished by the municipal chronicle and Roman political philosophy). As a result, Gower "generates an erotics rather than a discourse of politics" (233). Ginsberg's observations point to the formidable constraints foisted onto the English political consciousness in fourteenth-century England. In this dissertation, I examine how Chaucer and Gower began to push against these constraints.

[4] Political constitutionalism should not be confused with constitutionalism. Political constitutionalism is a line of thought that all rights and laws are grounded in political alliances capable of creating coercive force to ensure their authority such that the law was "a statement about a power relation" (Griffith 19).

development of a more robust community of the realm. On a conceptual level, one encounters this nascent rhetoric in those tales in which prudence assumes a more political dimension, where the conventions of tyranny or the *Fürstenspiegel*-prince are finely tuned to explore the limits of particular sovereign actions, or those tales that focus on kingship being underwritten by the *trouthe* bond rather than cosmology. Since the source of sovereign authority is bound to ideas of time, language, and cosmology, the author's attitude towards kingship inevitably shapes the aspects of his or her narrative (and vice versa). As a result, the emerging rhetoric manifests not only in the content of poetry but also in the narrative architecture of the tales. As the political imaginary *begins* to shift from theocratic explanations of power to social ones, historical time and contingent circumstances assume a more important role.[5] Similarly, language, instead of referring to some "ontological truth," must serve an increasingly social, provisional, and performative function. Language does not tell truths; it creates peace. It is this privileging of historical time and contingent circumstances as well as the development of a social hermeneutic that I refer to as political realism.[6]

Like most "realisms," political realism is best understood by contrasting it with the idealistic tendencies that appear commonly in the dominant narrative model. In this case, Gower and Chaucer are responding to what Ad Putter has described as Ciceronian idealism. Putter uses the popular philosophical work *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, which draws heavily from *De officiis*, to provide a working definition of Ciceronian idealism. According to the *Moralium* the good deed is paid back in kind such that

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[5] For discussion of this shift in terms of historiography, see Patterson, *Chaucer* 84-99.

[6] What I refer to as political realism draws from Burrow's suggestion "that the prevailing *modus sigificandi* of Ricardian narrative is not allegorical but literal" (*Ricardian*, 82). I call it political realism, however, because the "literal level" manifests as a disruption of the allegorical mode—what Andrzej Wicher calls "disconcerted allegory" (59).

even though the beginning seemed dangerous, the end was good. Thus you may see that an honest thing, however it appears in the beginning, is always profitable in the end and that a dishonest thing will never be profitable either in the beginning or the end. (qtd. in Putter 154)

This philosophical stance was particularly popular among twelfth-century humanists because it established a universe in which "moral and religious obligations" could be worked out without "denouncing the ways of the world" (Putter 152). However, Chaucer and Gower would not have to be steeped in twelfth-century humanist philosophy to respond to this philosophical tradition. This philosophy thoroughly permeated medieval literary production. It was fundamental to *chansons gestes*, works of *clerus-miles* tradition, and advice books. It was part of the English romances tradition and it was perfected in the romances of Chretien.

Putter's reading of *The Knight and the Cart* provides a clear illustration of how Ciceronian idealism manifests in both the narrative content (i.e. its plot points) and narrative architecture. Lancelot must cross a bridge as sharp as a sword in order to save Queen Guinevere from Meleagant. When Lancelot looks across the sword bridge and sees two lions, he bravely asserts, "I have such faith and trust in God that He will protect me everywhere. This bridge and this water are no more terrifying to me than this solid land." When he crosses the bridge, the sensorial world, the world of lions, turns out to be an illusion: "He looked around and saw nothing to harm him, not even a lizard" (Chretien 208). The sword bridge and the lions only *seemed* dangerous and "any conflict between the morally right and the expedient is in the final analysis only chimerical" (Putter 154). If the suffering is not purely chimerical, it is, at the very least, transitory. Good heroes and heroines may cross the sharp Sword Bridge, but their hands will heal.

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By the twelfth century, the balance between the "power of human drama" and the "power of the philosophical solution" had become a significant literary expectation (Salter 180). Barbara Nolan similarly argues that "aventures" are not only products of "fortune and destiny but also of individual responsibility and divine vengeance" (249). Chaucer acknowledges the narrative pressure in Prudence's citation of the Decretals: "Seelden, or with greet peyne, been causes ybroughte to good ende whanne they had been badly biggonne" (VII.1404). Indeed, if we look at bare bone plot-lines (the actions and outcomes), we see how moral actions in these idealized political fictions tend to yield expedient results; *and yet*, when we read something like the *Clerk's Tale*, we cannot help but feel that the good turn is not *quite* paid back, that "the honest thing . . . is [not] always [*quite*] profitable."

By using this word "quite," I want to stress how these tales leave us with considerable psychological discomfort. In the *Clerk's Tale*, for example, Walter, the Marquis of Saluzzo, marries Griselda, a peasant, to satisfy his subjects' need for a stable lineage. Walter then pretends to kill her children and after ten years of tormenting this hapless wife sends her back into poverty with the pretense of marrying someone of more noble blood. She accepts the king's judgment saying: "My child and I . . . /Been youres al . . . /werketh after youre wille" (IV. 502-504). The king drops the pretense, accepts the Griselda as his wife again, and they live "happily ever after?" It is true that Griselda's patient resistance to her husband's tyranny eventually concludes with her family reunited and her social elevation, but the lengthy descriptions of her humiliations and sufferings make the "happy" narrative resolution ring false. Walter's crimes bother the reader, Griselda's patience bothers the reader, but most importantly the narrative logic disturbs

us; we are bothered, that this ending is supposed to "resolve" the initial injustices. We can, through our panoply of ingenious hermeneutic strategies, 'explain away' the anxiety, but we must acknowledge, as the Clerk does himself, that there is anxiety that needs explaining.[7]

Broadly speaking, I examine this generative anxiety within the discourse of sovereignty, not in order to reduce the Ricardian aesthetic "in the last resort" to politics or ideology, but rather to emphasize the creative and aesthetic work necessary to foster a public space, a civic habit of mind, and a commonwealth. As such, I conceive of Ricardian poetry not as a particular reaction to topical events or, even as part of a broader history of ideas (e.g. identifying Chaucer's political philosophy), but rather as "ideological ensembles" that register the disentangling of an emergent political consciousness from the more ancient, yet still dominant, majestic image of the king who was recognized in law books as the "Vicar of God" through which all power was derived (Bracton 2:33). Ciceronian idealism, as described by Putter, had been shaped in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to support majestic models of kingship. However, the development of a robust *communitas regni* made inroads on the royal *superioritas* of the king, and similarly the narrative structure became more grounded in the actual conditions of power rather than its cosmic justifications of power.

Ricardian poetry reproduces the anxiety of sovereignty—i.e. the conflict between a dominant majestic model of kingship and an emergent political model. In order to examine how these texts embody this anxiety, without reducing them to a particular

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[7] One might object, as Charlotte Morse has, that this reading is "presentist" and a kind of affective fallacy; however, the "discomfort" is not just the readers', but something the Clerk repeatedly acknowledges, a point I will discuss at length in Chapter IV.

ideological expression, I will draw upon Macherey's concept of the symptomatic reading

in which

> the concealed order of the work is . . . less significant than its real *determinate* disorder (its disarray). The order which it professes is merely an imagined order, projected on to disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth. (155)

The text not only embodies its projected order but also, through conflicting themes and

narratives, it exposes the anxieties (the ideological conflicts) that shape the text (i.e. the

"incoherence and incompleteness" of the fictive order that is "obvious in the very letter of

the text"). I examine how Ricardian literature mediates and refracts (in its *particular*

way) the incoherence within the *historical* discourse of sovereignty.[8] Generally, the

disorder could be described as part of an unsettled question of profound historical

importance, namely: what authorizes authority? The conflicting answers to this question,

"fictive resolutions" (i.e. cosmic framework, the ancient constitution, the common profit)

all point to a more unsettling, but more likely *possibility*, that there is no absolute ground

for authority. In Macherey's terms, the absence, or non-said (*le non-dit*), conjures

"fictional resolutions;" thus, in practice, the disorder is not experienced as absence of

meaning but rather as the competing projections of meaning.[9]

 The determinate disorder—what I call the embarrassment of authority—produces

the need to consistently generate authority rhetorically; that is to generate authority by

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[8] As Terry Eagleton notes, one of the weaknesses of Macherey's approach to the highly "autonomous" text is that he tends to create too much separation between the text and history (Eagleton 141-3). I have tried to address this weakness without producing a reductive account of the epistemic limits of a particular age. Instead, using the critical vocabulary of Raymond Williams, I have tried to simply depict the discourse of sovereignty itself as comprising emergent and dominant answers to the question:"what authorizes authority" (Williams 121-127)?

[9] One can only experience absence in relation to presence; thus, "the work's significance lies in its relation to what is not, and so, paradoxically is at once interior and absent simultaneously" (Eagleton 138). For afull discussion of the non-dit ("not said"), see Pieters 210-214.

inducing cooperation around a particular image of kingship. This brings me to a crucial question raised by Georges Duby's *Les trois ordres: ou l'imaginaire de féodalisme*: how is the political imaginary "connected with the concrete relationships within society" (Duby 8)? In order to answer this, I examine the rhetorical aspect of these models of kingship: that is to say, I conceive of "fictive resolutions" not as truth-claims, but rather as a means of organizing, building or reinforcing the coalitions necessary to maintain sovereign authority.

Ultimately, I will contend that the poetry of Chaucer and Gower registers the emergence and intensification of a *political* rhetoric. In order to understand the political dimension of narrative structures, one must situate these texts firmly within their own context. Since Chapter I will fully describe these political tensions, I will keep my remarks here rather general. Perhaps the most important thing to emphasize is that "the Middle Ages," as S.B. Chrimes argues, "were by far the most creative of all ages in the art of government; for they created the basis of modern government" (*ECH* 67-8). This fact can be, and often is, glossed over, because the crystallization of medieval political innovation into institutions largely occurs in the Early Modern period.

I have, until now been deliberately cagey, and somewhat loose, in the way that I have used the word "political," precisely because this dissertation examines how particular narrative moments are freighted with an anxiety that manifests and arises from a nascent, and thus not fully formed, awareness of politics as a distinct science. The political anxiety present in Ricardian narratives are, in part, the birthing pains through which the autonomous field of politics is born. As Gerald Harriss points out, "politics"

was not a "rationally and morally autonomous" field or mode of thinking, but rather it

was treated as part of

> the cosmic framework, whose *raison d'etre* was the fulfillment of God's purpose
> for mankind. Authority was instituted for this end and political action (policy)
> evaluated in these terms . . . The king was the pivot of this relationship in secular
> matters, at once God's viceregent and the officer of the people . . . There was no
> awareness of the science of politics, of where power was located, whence it was
> derived, how it was apportioned, through whom it was channeled. (12-13)

While Harriss acknowledges the development of a "political consciousness" between

1370 and 1470, a development evidenced by the number of manuscripts dealing with

governance, he simultaneously suggests that this consciousness was hemmed in by, what

Foucault might call, the epistemic boundaries of political discourse. In fact, Harriss

concludes that the literary political imagination was "stereotyped and blinkered" such

that the medieval political imagination had not, because it could not have, separated

political aims from the "cosmic framework." The distinction that Harriss is alluding to is

not new.[10] Scholars from Burckhardt to Greenblatt have relied upon the assertion that an

autonomous "science of politics," and the questions that inhere to this science (i.e.

"where power was located, whence it was derived, how it was apportioned, through

whom it was channeled") were largely inventions of the Early Modern era.[11] This line of

reasoning emphasizes how the "cosmic framework" elided the ways in which sovereign

power was embedded in a field of social forces—forces that, in reality, often created real

political power. To this end, crises of governance were attributed to moral, rather than

political failings and thus, as Elizabeth Porter describes it, "politics was an extension of

ethics" (154).

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[10] Foucault describes this development in his essay "Governmentality," see 97.

[11] Lee Patterson in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, provides perhaps the most developed explanation, see 18.

The development of overtly political tensions, which had accelerated since the beginning of Second Barons' War, created a demand for a rhetoric that spoke more aptly to the political situation. The attempts to apprehend and perhaps resolve the conflicts and anxieties inherent in the political atmosphere force an encounter and negotiation of the terms of traditional modes of thought. The old narratives of power no longer sufficed. The discourse of sovereignty does not represent a unified mode of thought but rather a plurality of such modes.

The underlying principle of this dissertation is that sovereignty, itself, is a *product* of rhetorical operations, a product of what Kenneth Burke described figuratively as an unending historical conversation.[12] That is, sovereignty is essentially the threat or *application* of coercive force, which being embedded in a historical conversation of conflicting ideologies, political conventions, histories and so forth, assumes an air of legitimacy; and equally, it is the *construction* of coercive force through a sense of legitimacy founded upon the same historical conversation of conflicting ideologies, etc. The former can be seen in the deposition of Richard II, the latter in the accession of Henry IV. If sovereignty were a thing, like a rock, a tree, or a dirty windowpane such a definition could be *accused* of circularity, but since sovereignty exists conversationally, circularity is its function.

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[12] In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Kenneth Burke imagines discourse as an unending conversation:
> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress." (110-11)

More importantly, unlike Augustine who suggests that earthly sovereignty is little more than banditry, I am not proposing a cynical view of sovereignty; the dialectical production of sovereignty ensures that legitimacy not only generates coercive force, but that coercive force generates legitimacy. While the failure to employ an effective rhetoric of legitimacy can induce violence, it can equally (and perhaps more frequently) restrain people from acting violently in the first place. Penelope weaves and unweaves, waiting for the ideal king to return home, but permanent equilibrium is always in the offing. Nonetheless, the *potential* volatility inherent within the discursivity of sovereignty should not be confused with *actual* volatility. The fundamental propositions and institutions that shape sovereignty precede the actors on the historical stage at any given moment and thus the conversation shapes the speaker and stabilizes the discursivity of sovereign authority.

Within this broader and agonistic discourse of sovereignty, I differentiate between two competing rhetorics (i.e. two modes of inducing cooperation) that are salient to the analysis of Ricardian literature, namely majestic and political rhetoric. My distinction between these rhetorics is not particularly novel; indeed, my terms share many features in common with the terminology deployed by other scholars invested in the political analysis of literary texts—for example, Foucault's Foucauldianism (discourse of *sovereignté/ gouvernmentalité*), Strohm's political structuralism (horizontal/vertical), or Kendall's use of gift theory (reciprocalism/magnificence). The common ground between these terminologies suggests that there is a recognizable difference between the way that political relationships were constructed, and I will suggest, more importantly, the way they were represented.

Broadly, majestic and political rhetoric are two different modes of inducing cooperation. Majesty, an idea entwined with royal *dignitas*, imagines reflected authority that attains its ideal (though rarely truly accepted) form in the sacral kingship. On a grand scale we find Richard's own declaration on a royal charter that the barons, like jewels on a crown, reflect his light. On a more domestic level, this "reflected authority" influences the development of medieval law. "Politics," on the other hand, as Bernard Crick observes, "arise from a *recognition* of restraints. The character of this recognition may be moral, but more often is simply prudential, a recognition of the true power of social groups and interests, a product of being unable, without more violence than one can risk, and stomach to rule alone" (Crick 16). Political rhetoric emphasizes that sovereign authority *derives* from the *communitas regni*, which in the ideal (though rarely desired or expressed) form establishes sovereignty on the ground of popular consent. The distinction between the two rhetorics can be summed up by the question: what authorizes authority?

The discourse of sovereignty cannot be reduced to an either/or; at any given point both rhetorics coexist—at times peacefully, at times antagonistically. For lack of a better metaphor, imagine these rhetorics as a small sphere within a larger one. When majestic rhetoric was dominant (i.e. the larger sphere), political rhetoric existed (silenced, effaced) within the sphere of majesty. The kings had to accommodate baronial power (which is a political act) but they did so in a way that effaced the political act. When Richard II grants land to his barons in a charter, he declares that the nobility are like gems reflecting his own luster. Of course, the land grants created the alliances necessary for luster. When kings failed to accommodate the power brokers, political rhetoric was unleashed

and resulted in civil wars and sometimes depositions. Thus, when political rhetoric was

dominant, it likewise contained majestic rhetoric—a rhetoric of obedience to power that

is necessary to ensure that the machinery of power works. In both cases, the dominant

rhetoric does not eliminate the lesser rhetoric but rather silences or effaces it. Indeed, one

can still see this same power relationship today in England's parliamentary democracy

that has repeatedly employed royal prerogative to establish some form of executive

authority within a parliamentary system. This terminology, though abstract and

schematic, provides a starting point for articulating the relationship between literature of

the fourteenth century and the emergence of political consciousness.

While I agree that a fully developed "science of politics" matured in the Early

Modern period, I will suggest that narrative moments from late medieval texts recognize

the political *condition* of power and, as such, anticipate a modern political view of the

world. To deny the epistemic limitations of medieval political thought, particularly as it

had been articulated in contemporary authoritative sources regarding political philosophy

(i.e. *De regimine principum* or *Policraticus*), would actually diminish the truly innovative

political dimension of these poems; that is, these poems achieve their political aesthetic

by brushing up against the limitations of political thought. These limitations provide the

fundamental tension of the poetry; they are the cause of the political aesthetic that

attempts to transcend the conditions that constrain its point of origin. The anxiety and

improvisation that erupts at the moments of narrative crises demonstrate a kind of feeling

one's way forward towards a largely buried mode of thinking, a mode of thinking

obscured by the epistemic pressure of the "cosmic framework." Nonetheless, these

moments demonstrate attempts to negotiate this older framework while at the same time sensing its very outmodedness.

Several scholars have shown the ways in which, Chaucer and Gower in particular, have both critiqued Richard's majestic discourse, or deployed a more political rhetoric. In the past, critics have tended to attribute one of these opposed rhetorics to a poet or a text—i.e. Chaucer employs either majestic or political rhetoric in his handling of the Clerk's Walter. I want to suggest that these narrative moments are not merely political statements, but rather that they make visible the generative paradox at the center of the discourse of sovereignty, and make visible a political thinking that both brushes violently against the cosmic framework, and reaches towards something just beyond its purview. Indeed, this is the way that J.C. Holt describes the arduous creation of the most famous document of English political history, Magna Carta:

> Many of its provisions had no precise meaning. It was not an exact statement of law . . . but a political document produced in a crisis. It was a product of intermittent negotiations . . . It was the culmination of hard bargaining and skilful manoeuvering. Perhaps it registered too the weariness of the negotiators in the face of the intractable character of the king, the intransigence of some of his opponents and the hard facts of English administration (6).

Likewise what we encounter in Ricardian poets are not polished rhetorics, but deeply conflicted ones.

Chapter II explores the relationship between representative political documents and events from that crucial period between 1258 and 1265 when many English barons, led by Montfort, rebelled against and even momentarily seized power from Henry III—a period of time that historians often refer to as the genesis of English political consciousness. By analyzing a discreet moment during which the rhetorics of majesty and politics were, quite literally, at war, I can provide and expand upon two observations

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about the complex relationship between majestic and political rhetoric and the relationship between these rhetorics and the "material" conditions of power (Duby 9). That is, while political rhetoric had slowly developed since Magna Carta, majesty had already established powerful coalitions necessary to maintain a stable sovereign authority. Political rhetoric was a rhetoric of resistance that had to overcome vast structural disadvantages—namely, those coalitions of power reinforced by convention, tenurial obligation, and family history.[13] In Chapter II, I examine how an alternative rhetoric was forged to overcome these limitations through political alliances: How did Montfort's rhetoric acknowledge, appeal to, and reinforce the "power of social groups and interests" outside the traditional sphere of majestic authority? What kind of power base did this rhetoric try to establish and how? Chapters III and IV examine how Ricardian poetry is a site replete with the contradictions and conflicts arising from the development of these two rhetorical traditions.

By analyzing political realism in Ricardian narratives, I am less interested in the statement of the poet, the statement that resolves a crisis of authority, and more interested in the poem as a site of conflict: how do these works negotiate and maneuver in the face of an intransigent and dominant model of the "cosmic framework?" In particular, Chapter III examines how Gower extends the ideas of Ciceronian idealism to their logical conclusion (indeed moving closer to what Cicero himself would have envisioned). By focusing on the political mechanisms through which a moral universe is maintained, his poetry becomes increasingly engaged with the power of the law and limits of kingship.

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[13] Power is at the center of the matrix of shared ideas and beliefs: that is, it generates and is generated by ideas, words and utterances, which establish the social bonds that hold together cultural institutions. The tautological principle that power "generates and is generated by" language is the motor of socio-political change. André Burguière describes Fustel's belief that institutions "rest on utterances, beliefs, or principles by which members of a group come to an agreement and commit themselves to one another" (72).

Political expedience is no longer part of a transcendent machinery, that, making the lions disappear, imagines peace through pure submission to hierarchy. Instead, desublimating the language of kingship, Gower's tales examine, more closely, organic mutual obligations between the different levels of hierarchy, demonstrating how legitimate sovereign actions bring about good results through political means.

In Chapter IV, I argue that Chaucer, unlike Gower who is willing to accept that ethical and political overlap, comes closer to Boethian worldview where moral actions do not necessarily produce *politically* expedient results. The relationship between Providence and history must be understood in terms of the health of "the inner spiritual life of man" not the political community. Richard II ruled and was deposed by providential mechanisms. However, the language of Providence is not, as it is in Gower, interpretable. Creation is God's poem, but man cannot read it.[14] Thus, unable to write in God's language, Chaucer, in *Knight's Tale*, *Clerk's Tale*, and *Melibee*, grounds language in its socio-political function—its ability to create peace. Chaucer's poetry separates the Christian function of poetry (i.e. the establishment of peace) and the majestic model of sovereignty; indeed, in the poems studied in this dissertation, the embarrassment of majestic authority is exposed. Ricardian "political" philosophy (here in the broader sense of the word) depends upon its ability to disentangle itself from the cosmic framework and imagine a political community.

Ricardian literature achieves new heights of narrative complexity precisely because it reveals the contradictions at the margins of political thought in the late Middle

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[14] Lee Patterson describes how Augustine thought that the "historical life bears a meaning that remains resolutely unavailable to them and for whom the translation of secular history articulates a meaningless pattern of ceaseless rise and fall" (*Chaucer* 97).

Ages, contradictions that themselves presage (but do not establish) a third term in which these contradictions will be dissolved; that is these contradictions anticipate the development of politics as a separate discipline or knowledge. Thus, in order to understand this relationship between majesty and politics in Ricardian literature, we must avoid reducing it: majesty or politics are not simply rhetorics that the poet consciously employs in a particular situation. Instead we must examine how particular narrative moments operate between these poles within the discourse of sovereignty.

Ultimately, this is not an attempt to write a political history, nor even to revise Harriss's concept of a "literary political point of view;" such attempts at periodization around a particular political ideology are, I would suggest, bound to fail, precisely because the Ricardian "period," if we can call it that, represents a moment of profound political confusion, or better a confusion from which the political is emergent. If we are to construct a period, then we must discover the ways that the literature expresses an anxiety surrounding the discourse of sovereignty—we must find the ways that the literature remains deeply troubled and attempts to apprehend and resolve what Chrimes poetically called th "primeval chaos" of English government.

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND BARONS' WAR AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE POLITICAL

COMMUNITY

Ricardian poetry was shaped by the conflict between majestic and political
rhetoric that crystallized in the politically turbulent years leading up to and culminating in
the Second Barons' War (1258-1265). This chapter examines the historical development
of these rhetorics in the thirteenth century: how they were used to expand or restrict the
political class, how they generated power by establishing lines of cooperation, and how
the tension between these rhetorical systems created an anxiety of sovereignty that would
eventually shape late medieval literature. In particular, I will examine that period between
the Provisions of Oxford (1258) and the Mise d'Amiens (1264). During this period the
barons led by Simon Montfort entered into a political alliance with vavasour class (i.e.
knights and lesser tenants). In a common effort (popularly called the Common
Enterprise), they sought to limit the authority of the king and create a robust and
meaningful community of the realm (*communitas regni*). I will look at this moment both
in itself and as an intersection of rhetorical strands—from Neoplatonism to Roman law.

In December of 1263, the barons and the king appealed to Louis IX for arbitration
of differences that precipitated the Second Barons' War. Both the king and the barons
gave a list of grievances, or *gravamina*, to Louis. Louis IX issued the settlement or the
Mise d'Amiens on January 23, 1264. The Mise, alongside the written grievances of both
the king and barons, depict the clash of Henry III's majestic rhetoric with the political
rhetoric of the barons. They document the story of a nascent political philosophy, which,
although limited in both theory and vocabulary, challenged the "cosmic framework," a

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framework so pervasive that it has often been treated as the medieval "world-view."[1]

The Barons' Gravamina, their written grievances to Louis IX, exemplifies the rhetorical struggle to establish the authority of the *communitas regni* as the source of kingship by creating political mechanisms to safeguard the rights of the community of the realm and a coalition devoted to maintaining those safeguards.

A Working Framework: Rhetorical Analysis of the Discourse of Sovereignty in Thirteenth-Century England

While this study has elements of history and political science, it is more accurately described as a rhetorical analysis of the discourse of sovereignty. I should probably begin with a few remarks about "rhetoric" since my use of this term is very particular. By "rhetoric" I do not mean "flowers and colours of speech" nor do I mean the kind of deceitful speech that landed in Brunetto Latini in Dante's seventh circle of hell. I use the word rhetoric in the comprehensive sense described by Kenneth Burke in *Rhetoric of Motive* as "rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols"(43). In particular, I examine how certain *representations* of sovereignty challenged or reproduced the lines of cooperation necessary to maintain sovereign authority (i.e. how these representations implied certain audiences which included some and excluded others). Majestic or political rhetoric describe the kind of "social cohesion" induced by a particular system of symbols.

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[1] The dominant image of medieval worldview is what Walter Ullmann describes as the "descending theme of government" (see *Individual*, lecture I; particularly 25-31). This was the view reproduced by the "rather thin upper crust of society" (53).

These rhetorical representations existed simultaneously and I use the term

discourse of sovereignty (much like sociolinguistists' use of "linguistic marketplace") to

signify the aggregate of competing rhetorical strategies used to legitimize or challenge

sovereign authority. This discourse is not uniform and in order to describe its "internal

dynamics" I borrow Raymond Williams' idea that any cultural system consists of

dominant, residual and emergent rhetorics.[2] Specifically, this chapter describes how

political rhetoric emerged from the dominant rhetoric of majesty based on *nobilitas.*

Through this process the notional idea of the *community of the realm* became

increasingly important to descriptions of political authority. The Mise and its immediate

context offer a lens through which we can see how members of the political *class*

deployed the discourse of sovereignty to vie for power. By looking at the same moment

in history, we see how the king deploys a rhetoric aimed at consolidating his authority

while the barons' representation of kingship fostered new lines of cooperation necessary

to reinforce or challenge sovereign authority.

The events and documents surrounding the Mise d'Amiens demonstrate the

relationship between rhetoric (particularly the discourse of legitimacy) and the realities of

power on the ground. As Immanuel Wallerstein argues:

> sovereignty is more than anything else a matter of legitimacy . . . requiring
> reciprocal recognition. Sovereignty is a hypothetical trade, in which two
> potentially (or really) conflicting sides, respecting *de facto* realities of power,
> exchange such recognitions as their least costly strategy. (44)

Wallerstein's definition of sovereignty as "a matter of legitimacy" allows us to see how

Burkean rhetoric (as a system of cooperation-inducing symbols) plays a crucial role in

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[2] Since Williams is interested in more than the symbolic systems, he uses the word hegemonies. By focusing on "rhetorics," I am looking particularly at the way language articulates certain groups and individuals within a social formation. For discussion of "emergent" and "dominant" hegemonies, see Williams 120-7.

the discourse of sovereignty. The "reciprocal recognition" and the production of legitimacy necessary for a stable sovereign authority are rhetorical. For example, in times of stability, majestic rhetoric provided barons a language to curry favor with the king, who in exchange gained the barons' loyalty. The rhetoric masked a system of material exhange and created a united front between kings and barons that stabilized sovereignty. This material exchange provided the "least costly strategy" for both sides to maintain their authority. Moreover, the solidarity between kings and barons discouraged the development of a rhetoric of resistance. The king-magnate coalitions diminished the effectiveness of resistance and thus impeded the development of a resistance rhetoric.

At the end of the thirteenth century, the barons began demanding increased control over the administrative machine and when the king balked, the "reciprocal recognitions" necessary to maintain sovereignty were disrupted and a new language of legitimacy, with new "hypothetical trades," was formed. When one or both parties fail to recognize the tacit expectations established in these subtle negotiations (i.e. the conventions of legitimacy), it results in a weakened authority which encourages local powers (i.e. barons, gentry) to form new political alliances and to assert their own authority. The new language of legitimacy creates coalitions capable of either seizing control over the regime (as Montfort does briefly in 1261) or redefining the powers and limits of authority. Before proceeding to a rhetorical analysis of the discourse of sovereignty in the thirteenth century, I must point toward the relationship between these languages of legitimacy (political and majestic rhetoric) and the "*de facto* realities of power."

Majestic rhetoric, the dominant rhetoric of the thirteenth century, evolved out of the Germanic chieftain-*comitatus* relationships that sprung up amidst the ruins of the Roman Empire.[3] According to Hanson, the "contraction of Roman military power opened up endless opportunities . . . for large scale settlement on the lands of the Empire" which allowed for the Germanic *duces*," to become kings; thus:

> from the beginning of the history of [Western] successor kingdoms . . . we are confronted with a society structured in terms of personal allegiance; one which was markedly aristocratic and severely hierarchical. (Hanson 50)

People needed protection and the price was obedience. Nonetheless, this "hierarchical" and "aristocratic" authority had no actual ground for its own power—what I have called the embarrassment of authority.[4] As a result, the nobility adopted theocratic justifications of their power. These theocratic models are frequently identified as the "descending" model of kingship.[5] Majestic rhetoric, particularly its theological myths, reproduced and consolidated power in the hands of the elite few. These ideological fictions worked, not because the people were superstitious (as they are frequently caricatured), but because

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[3] For Hanson the seeds of double majesty are in the earliest relationship between the leading men (i.e. *comitatus*) and the chieftain of the Germanic tribes. The chieftain retained power precisely because his leading men supported him and vice versa. In the time of the Roman Empire several of these chieftains were conscripted as *duces* in the outer provinces. The 'government' by these *duces* "amounted to the institutionalization of the forms and values of the *comitatus*; it was a government by *princeps* and *comites*." (50). E.A. Thompson argues in many cases the native nobility had stronger ties to the Roman government than to their own people (108). These Germanic *duces*, alongside their *comitatus* began to seize Roman lands. For a discussion of how a severe hierarchical model developed out of this chieftain-*comitatus* relationship, see Hanson 42-50; Thompson 106-108; Wallace-Hadrill 25-48; and Whitelock 29-38.

[4] Jolliffe describes the actual conditions of power and the limited role of "custom" in Angevin England: "the holders of certain lordships were the sole effective voice within the *curia* and if they were disposed to act by will without the court's judgment there was nothing but rebellion that might restrain them. There was nothing but custom to govern the King and nothing but what influence his own court could exert to enforce custom." (5).

[5] The church provided the theological doctrine necessary to transfigure the "martial values of the aristocratic warrior" (Hanson 43) into a theocratic regime. For example, Georges Duby's account of the development of tripartite ideology (*oratores, bellatores, laboratores*) reveals how clerics organically developed hierarchical ideologies to protect the "the good society," a society that was "authoritarian, hierarchized, firmly established on the necessary basis of inequality" (36). For a discussion of the organic development of theocratic ideology, see Duby 21-43; for a useful précis of Duby's argument, see Burguière 238-239.

those fictions reproduced coalitions that could secure a relative degree of civil order.[6]

While Henry III uses this hierocratic rhetoric against insurgent members of his baronage,

it is not inherently royalist, or absolutist; indeed, during stable periods of governance,

majestic rhetoric created an elitist vision of power that reinforced the majesty of both

king and barons.

Political rhetoric, on the other hand, created authority through alliances.[7] The

word "political" has many meanings. I use it to refer to discursive practices that exhibit a

nascent understanding of sovereignty and law similar to what we now call political

constitutionalist thought.[8] That is, the emergent political rhetoric of the thirteenth century

contributes to the demystification of power in which laws increasingly become "a

statement about a power relation" (Griffith 19). J.A.G. Griffith describes how an

individual claim assumes authority in such a political society:

> As an individual I make claims on the authorities who control the society in which
> I live. If I am strong enough—and I shall have to join others to be so—my claim
> may be recognised within certain limits. It may even be given legal status. There

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[6] Larry Scanlon argues that "the force of common opinion assures the arbitrary association it [this "ideological fiction"] makes between riches and the right to rule becomes an actuality" (112); J.G.A. Pocock describes this *process* of becoming an actuality as "presumptive reasoning" (Pocock, *Machiavellian* 24)—a phrase he draws from Edmund Burke's political philosophy. Burke posits that one ought to favor institutional continuity over innovation: "It is a *presumption* in favor of any settled scheme of government against any untried project, that a nation has long existed and flourished under it. It is a better presumption even of the *choice* of a nation, far better than any sudden and temporary arrangement by actual election. Because a nation is not an idea of local extent, and individual momentary aggregation, but it is an idea of continuity, which extends in time as well as in numbers and space" (E. Burke *Works* v.5 405). The continuity functions precisely because it is over time that a people foster the institutions and procedures necessary for stability.

[7] I have used the terms "consolidation" and "alliance" in reference to majestic and political rhetoric, respectively, in order to echo Bourdieu's analysis of matrimonial strategies for social reproduction in *Outline to a Theory of Practice.* Bourdieu's analysis allows us to differentiate two modes of generating power and authority. Those families who can afford it attempt to marry within the family as a means of consolidating their power; while families with less resources (most families) use marriage to create exogamous political alliances. This language aligns with majestic rhetoric that aims to consolidate power in the hands of the elite members of the aristocracy created new networks of power; see Bourdieu 58-71.

[8] Obviously, the rhetoric of the thirteenth century does not reflect the ideas of twentieth-century political constitutionalism predicated on notions of expanded franchise, a separation of Church and State and a free press. However, the vocabulary of political constitutionalism allows us to imagine how conventions and laws as rhetoric aimed at creating coalitions capable of reproducing or challenging sovereign authority.

is a continuous struggle between the rulers and the ruled about the size and shape of these claims. (17)

Political rhetoric, then, is a rhetoric of articulation (in the sense of joining together), not simple reproduction. One needs to make a claim and "join others" to give the claim the strength to be "recognised" or gain legal status. Simply put, what is legal must be enforceable. The "claim" has political power insofar as it articulates individuals into coalitions. Under the aegis of the community of the realm, the barons leveraged the claims of the vavasour class (and to a *much* lesser extent all classes) to reinforce their own power in national matters.

Read in this light, the articles of Magna Carta, for example, are not just ideas of what is right (i.e. a kind of natural law), they are not just the terms of peace between the king and baronage (i.e. legal constitution), rather they are also the means of creating a coalition between the barons and the gentry necessary to assert the document's authority, its legal status. Unlike majestic rhetoric—which consolidated power by closing down the political class—political rhetoric expanded this class in order to create coalitions to protect baronial power from royal encroachment. Despite their willingness to address the aspirations of the vavasour class, the barons' political rhetoric did not endorse an ascending or bottom up model of government. The nobles did not treat the gentry as equals; rather they secured their aristocratic privilege from royal encroachment by imagining *themselves* as the protectors of the gentry's interest.[9] Their rhetoric can hardly be called anti-hierarchical, and it is not at all representative, populist, or democratic. In

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[9] The barons sought to control the expansion of the political class so that they would not lose their power. Throughout history those who deploy political rhetoric attempt to constrain its potential. Holt's description of Magna Carta captures the magnate position later in the century: "The barons did not talk of free men out of loftiness of purpose, or make concessions to knights and burgesses out of generosity. They did so because the political situation required it and the structure of English society and government could allow them to do no other" (295).

fact, the community of the realm might best be understood as an imagined community that articulated baronial ambition and gentry interest to create a new foundation of aristocratic authority, a foundation of a new hierarchy.

Moreover, political rhetoric, developing *out of* and *alongside* majestic rhetoric, shared a semantic space with it. Majestic rhetoric was the dominant rhetoric of kingship; nonetheless, from at least the Conquest to the thirteenth century, there was always (no matter how marginalized or limited) a countercurrent of *communitas*-rhetoric within the discourse of sovereignty that emphasized that the king's power was constrained by his legal obligation to the community.[10] German thinkers, such as Rufinus of Sorrent, argued: "when the king is instituted, he enters into a tacit agreement [*pactio quaedam tacita*] with the people, with a view to ruling the people in the humane manner" (*De bono pacis* ii.9; trans. Ullmann, *Principles* 82).[11] The idea that the king ought to rule the people in a "humane manner" was largely seen as an *ethical* obligation of the king—one heavily represented in mirrors for princes and chivalric romances.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, these wooly ethical obligations hardened into specific laws and liberties constraining the Crown, the "conventions of the Constitution" that through "usage" had become "more or less a rule" (Chrimes, *ECH* 8-

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[10] The "coronation had been widely thought of as sacramental up until the twelfth century" (Miller 68); see also Kantorowicz 44-45. In terms of governance, Chrimes argues that until the majority of Henry III, almost all power and administrative machinery could be understood as an "expansion of and within the *Curia Regis* itself" (*Introduction* 33). J.C. Holt traces the political strains of "thought which emphasized the responsibilities of the prince" into the eleventh and twelfth centuries (89). For example, Ranulf Glanvill argued "the lord king neither wished nor dared to attack or alter such ancient and just customs" established in the charter for the monastery at Abingdon (*Chron. Monasterii de Abingdon* II.298, (trans. in Ullman, *Individual* 82). The legal idea of placing custom above royal will predates the thirteenth century; however, this idea of custom applies to specific parties who *purchased* these liberties. In the thirteenth century, "consuetudines" became a broader term protecting the rights of the community of the realm rather than a specific lord or monastery.

[11] Manegold of Lautenbach makes the case for cession suggesting that a people can "free itself from the rule and subjection of the king . . . who had first broken the contract (*pactum*) by which he was made king" (qtd. in Ullmann, *Individual* 82).

9).[12] The barons' explicit demands in Magna Carta, the Provisions of Oxford, the Good

and the Merciless parliaments (not to mention the depositions and threats of deposition)

began to institutionalize the previously notional *pactio tacita* between the king and the

community of the realm. The tacit agreement resembles what historians have called "the

ancient constitution" that emphasized the legal obligations of kingship, restrained royal

power, and treated the prerogative as "politically" (not just morally) bound to the needs

of the community. The overlap between majestic and political rhetoric (between the

king's moral and political obligation to the community, respectively) would complicate

my argument, if I were writing a rigid taxonomic description of these languages of

legitimacy. However, my argument depends upon how ideas like the *tacita pactio*

represent the fertile tension between these two rhetorics, a tension that has a profound

effect on medieval narrative and hermeneutics.

There is one caveat about discussing historical documents in relation to political

and majestic rhetoric: namely, no one thought of political rhetoric as an alternative model

of kingship. While there were different factions among the baronage, these factions did

not think of themselves, or at least represent themselves, as supporting *different* models

of sovereignty. I introduce the terms "political" and "majestic rhetoric" in order to

differentiate elements within a discourse that rarely *admitted* to having any differences.

As Matthew Giancarlo, in his description of parliament, points out:

> division was at best a fault, at worst an evil. Unanimity was the surest defense
> against accusations that one was speaking or acting for private or singular
> interests. It was also an implicit index that the assembly as a whole was operating
> with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that its decisions were divinely
> sanctioned. (56)

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[12] From ths point forward, the abbrevation *ECH* refers to S.B. Chrimes, *Constitutional History*.

Even though kings, lords, and gentry had different ideas about the nature of kingship—indeed two civil wars were fought over these differences—they did not portray their visions of kingship as different because unity and unanimity were crucial to the medieval concept of "divinely sanctioned" authority.[13] Even when political and majestic models of kingship erupted into civil war: the magnates did not argue that they had a different idea of kingship from Henry III, but only that the king (deceived by wicked counselors) failed to accept the unanimously understood principles of kingship. Closely examining the rhetoric of both the insurgent barons and the king during this period, however, reveals that they did, indeed, have two different operative theories of kingship.[14]

The conflict between majestic and political rhetoric can be detected in varying degrees throughout English history perhaps most famously in Magna Carta (1215); however, in this study, I primarily examine the tension between these two rhetorics in light of the Mise d'Amiens (1264) because in this document, the barons transformed the practical articles of Magna Carta into principles through which they could reimagine royal authority as legally bound to the community. In this we see the development of political rhetoric in which sovereign legitimacy was founded on community rather than cosmology; the study of this development lays groundwork for chapters III and IV in

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[13] The importance of unity is emphasized in the legal code. For example, *Leges Henrici Primi* stresses that "an agreement supersedes the law and amicable settlement a court judgment" (49, 5a); Even after a court judgment has been made, "the parties concerned may proceed by way of friendly agreement, if they wish to have complete freedom of friends to come and go" (76, 5b). Clanchy argues that "freedom and security" could only be maintained through agreement (*Law and Love,* 47-51.) As Richard Firth Green shows this unity was necessary for survival of early English society. This society depended upon arriving at compromises that reinforced communal bonds rather than establishing more rigid statutes and writ-systems (Green, *Crisis* 82-87); see also Clanchy, "Law and Love 47-51"; and Giancarlo 46-56.

[14] One should not conflate baronial and political rhetoric; majestic rhetoric after all is a baronial rhetoric as well. I use the word 'insurgent' to indicate the baronial circle of Montfort who aimed to expand the political class. Unlike the Ricardian barons whose resistance to Richard was predicated largely on increasing "the power of the leading magnates" (171), the resistance led by Simon Montfort showed a deep "commitment to counsel, law, and their right to defend them" (Valente 68); see also 78-90 and 177-87.

which I examine how literature, gravitated toward a kind of political realism—a realism that registers the evolution of the *pactio tacita* into commonwealth.[15]

After a brief summary of the events and conditions surrounding the Mise, the bulk of this chapter will be divided into two sections. In the first section, I will look at the Mise as a culmination of Angevin majestic thought and its sign-system. The second section examines how the insurgent barons, led by Simon Montfort transformed an emergent, and thus institutionally weaker, political tradition into a rhetoric that could effectively challenge the dominance of majestic rhetoric. The Mise will be the centerpiece of this chapter; nonetheless, I will situate the rhetoric of the Mise-documents within the wider context of events, ceremonies, political texts and personal ambitions that surrounded them—i.e. how do the Mise-documents fit in with legal theory or the coronation ceremony? How do these things speak the same language?

The Road to The Mise d'Amiens: Majesty and Politics Go to War

In 1264, the barons and King Henry III were on the precipice of civil war; and, just as in the tumultuous reign of Richard II, conflicting rhetorics of legitimacy assumed center stage. Historians most commonly interpret the Mise d'Amiens as a last ditch effort to arrive at a political resolution for the quickly deteriorating situation, but it must also be read as a final attempt to draw up the lines of the rhetorical battlefield, an attempt to build

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[15] Political realism shares much in common with the increased intellectual investigations into "practical wisdom" or "prudence" as "a kind of knowledge upon which actions are based" (Burnley 53); for full discussion of prudential knowledge, see 52-7.

the coalitions for the real war on the horizon.[16] Broadly, the historical circumstances at the beginning of the thirteenth century kindled baronial ambition in England. During the ten years of Henry's minority, the nobility had considerable influence over the regency, which was reinforced by the fact that his minority began in the throes of a civil war that compromised the administrative networks (sheriffs, bailiffs, and castellans) necessary for the king to exert royal force locally.

Henry III gained his majority in January of 1227. Between 1231 and 1234, he made a concerted effort to regain control over the administrative machinery in what was popularly called the palace revolution. According to R.F. Treharne, having "found his aims thwarted by the great officers of state, justiciar and chancellor, and by baronial officials. . . . [Henry III] aided by Peter des Roches and Peter des Riveaux . . . directed his attention to the removal of these obstacles" (Treharne, *Simon* 6). Perhaps the biggest obstacle was the chief justiciar, Hubert de Burgh. Since the time of Henry II, the chief justiciar was the most powerful minister of the king and often provided a strong check on royal power. During his time in this position, de Burgh gained strong support from the barons, which afforded him considerable independence from the king. More importantly, de Burgh, who was a justiciar under King John and reappointed by the rebels at Runnymede, carefully balanced the rights of the king (*iura regis*) with the limits of kingship established in Magna Carta.[17] Pushing back against this moderating influence, Henry, in 1232, dismissed de Burgh and many of the curiales who had supported him.

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[16] While both the barons and king were hoping for a favorable ruling, neither seemed particularly inclined to accept an unfavorable ruling, and both were prepared to fight the ruling; see Powicke, *King Henry III* ii.450-55; and Jobson 101-5.

[17] For discussion of de Burgh's role in regard to Magna Carta and his moderating influence on the kingship of Henry III, see Denholm-Young 5-20.

The dismissal of those members of the court, who were most beholden to the principles of Magna Carta, was crucial because "the exercise of political power at a national level remained essentially with those who were closest to the king" (Givens-Wilson 17). The removal of de Burgh signified a shift promoted by Peter des Roches toward a majestic model of kingship that would characterize the reign of Henry III and his conflict with his baronage.[18] De Burgh's moderation was replaced by the politics of des Roches, a man who "proclaimed contempt for English custom and [had] a dangerously exalted view of royal power," a contempt that would manifest in a "spate of disseisins *per voluntatem regis* from which Hubert de Burgh and Marshall ally, Gilbert Basset, suffered" (Carpenter 58). The act of stripping nobles of their land by the will of the king, which was the most dangerous use of the prerogative, anticipated the struggle between Henry III and the community of the realm (Carpenter 58).[19]

Instead of building political alliances with a broad swath of barons by making concessions, Henry III sought to consolidate power—a point made clear in the Parliament of 1248.[20] After incurring considerable debt, the king was forced to convene a parliament

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[18] At the time of the palace revolution, powerful magnates controlled many local offices because of the First Barons' War. Henry III, according to Powicke, felt that "he was being defrauded of his rights—rights in lordship, rights in forests, rights in dues, and other customary payments" (45). The removal of de Burgh and rise of des Roches was part of the larger effort to restore Angevin majesty. Much of my account of the palace revolution comes from Carpenter 45-60 and Powicke, *King Henry III* i.42-83. Chrimes argues that the fall of Hugh de Burgh actually hastened the end of the development of an administrative machinery firmly entrenched in the *Curia Regis*. Peter des Roches's attempt to reestablish the Angevin ideal of the prerogative met heavy resistance from the barons from which arose an administration more independent of the royal household (*An Introduction* 33).

[19] In fact, the disseisin of Gilbert Basset "provoked Richard Marshal's rebellion, and enabled him to stand as the upholder of the rights and customs of the realm" (Carpenter 58).

[20] The king having incurred heavy debts from Pope Innocent IV as part of a plan to seize the Sicilian crown—what is known as the Sicilian Affair—for his son Edmund, held a parliament in London at the beginning of the year. In 1258, Pope Alexander IV issued an ultimatum demanding that Henry III fulfill his promise regarding the Sicilian or suffer excommunication this seems to have driven Henry to accept the barons' demands; see Treharne, *Simon* 94-107.

in order to "seek pecuniary aid" (255).[21] Originally convened in February, the parliament

was prorogued until June of the same year because of a conflict between Henry and his

baronage. The parliament reprimanded the king for a whole list of offenses ranging from

"indiscreet expenditure" to "seizing wax and silk stuffs." Two baronial complaints, in

particular, reveal the stakes of this parliament. First they complained that the king had

"scattered the property of the kingdom;" and second, he had refused to seek the "advice

of the kingdom in general" preferring to listen to his appointees who "obeyed his pleasure

in everything" and favored personal gain over "the advancement of the common weal"

(Paris 255). The king's response to these complaints, when parliament reconvened in

June, demonstrated the practical claims of majestic authority:

> All you, the chief men of England, have endeavoured to bend your lord and king to your will . . . and to impose on him a very servile condition . . . every father of a family [*paterfamilias*] is allowed to appoint any one soever to this or that office in his house, or to suspend or even to depose them; but this liberty, forsooth, you rashly presume to deny your king, especially as servants ought not to judge and bind their master to their conditions, nor ought vassals their prince, but those are considered as inferior ought rather to be ruled and governed at the will and pleasure of their lord. For the servant is not above his lord, nor is the pupil above his master; and your king therefore, would be no longer so, but would be, as it were, a slave, if he were thus to incline to your will. Wherefore he will not dismiss either chancellor, justiciary, or treasurer, as you propose arranging it, nor will he appoint others in their stead. (Paris v.2: 266-67)

In this speech to parliament, the king's metaphors stress a one-way power relationship

between the king and the magnates.[22] Ignoring all the barons' concerns, he set his rights

as *paterfamilias* above all the concerns of the realm. Moreover, his aggressive response

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[21] All translations from Matthew Paris's *Chronica Maiora* are from *Matthew Paris's English History. From the Year 1235 to 1273.* Trans. J.A. Giles.

[22] This speech aligns with what Michael Clanchy saw as Henry III's "insistence that the magnates were as much Henry's subjects as anybody else in the kingdom" an idea, he argues is "confirmed by his speech in the exchequer in 1250" ("Did Henry" 208); see also *The Constitutional History of England* Wilkinson 16-17. I would suggest that Henry III projects a majestic image of kingship described by Clanchy and Wilkinson, with one caveat: his policies, as Carpenter argues, are far from absolutist (Carpenter 76).

suggests that Henry III recognized, and pushed back against "the notion of a public interest . . . recognized, defended and represented by parliament" (231). He pushed back against an institution that "could be convincingly identified with the community of the realm" (Maddicott, *Simon* 232).

Henry imagines the king as a father, a master, and a teacher. As such he does not need to respond to the presumption of the lords to "bind their master;" indeed, the king argues that if he inclined to the will of lords he would become a slave.[23] Henry III subtly weaves this one-way power relationship into the cosmic framework by incorporating scripture: "a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (Matt. 10:24). After this line, which alludes to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, the king's 'therefore' places his authority in the same sacred context—as the student to the pupil, disciple to Jesus, so is the magnate to the king. This rhetoric is not simply a matter of honor—though it would have been perceived as that too—but it was also a matter of practical power. The king's majestic rhetoric (patriarchal, biblical, and cosmological) creates a mythic description of the king's personal will (*voluntas*) synonymous with his authority to alienate land and make his own appointees. While this rhetoric limits the king's economic power (i.e. the barons refuse Henry's request for "pecuniary aid"), it nonetheless consolidates official power in the court and protects the king from magnate encroachment. The king's mythic description pushes back on political attempts by the magnates to imagine royal authority embodied more by an

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[23] The metaphor of the king being reduced to a slave is a crucial metaphor. The barons will take it up and suggest the opposite: that the king can become a slave not only to external lords, but worse to his own perverse will. I discuss this at length in my discussion of the *Song of Lewes* below.

impersonal crown (i.e. inalienable demesne and a court appointed by lords) than a flesh and blood king.[24]

What made Henry's appointments so galling was that he elevated and surrounded himself both with his wife's kinsmen, the Savoyards, and with his own notoriously troublesome half-brothers, the Lusignans, whose lawlessness often required the protection of the king.[25] For example, Henry had pressured the clergy to elect his foreign-born half brother Aymer de Lusignan to the position of Bishop of Winchester against strong baronial opposition. Henry got his wishes, but Bishop Aymer, like most of Henry's Lusignan half-brothers, frequently found himself at odds with the English aristocracy. Most notably on April 1, 1258, in an event that may have catalyzed the Common Enterprise, the Bishop's men attacked some of the servants of John Fitz Geoffrey, one of whom died. The attack seemed motivated by a dispute over an advowson in Shere. When the matter came before the king, Henry "wholly denied him justice" (qtd. in Carpenter 192-93).[26]

The barons had repeatedly demanded increased control over the administrative machine. In 1258 the king's coalition had finally frayed to the point where the barons

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[24] The barons suggest that the king does not have the right to alienate those lands belonging to the royal demesne, the lands which are meant to maintain the king's own household. The idea of an impersonal Crown developed, in part, out of the ideas of inalienability. Inalienability, as Kantorowicz points out, may have been part of Henry III's coronation oath; at the very least, Pope Gregory IX alluded to this part of the oath on two occasions (Kantorowicz 347). By the thirteenth century, the ideas of non-alienation were thoroughly ingrained in the church and got its strongest representation in the decretals of Honorius III. During the reign of Richard II, secular jurists promoted the ideas of non-alienability that were popular among thirteenth-century canonists; see Kantorowicz 356-57.

[25] Matthew of Paris notes that the barons accused the king of violating Magna Carta, in part, by exalting his uterine brothers and protecting them from "any process issued against them from the court of Chancery" (2:279). For a fuller discussion of Henry III's impartiality and the Lusignans violence, see Maddicott *Origins* 17 and Carpenter 190-2.

[26] The quoted material comes from the Hugh Bigod Eyre Rolls June 1258 - February 1259 (Just/1/1187, m1). The anxiety over Henry III's partiality was a central concern of the barons. In a letter to the Pope Alexander IV in 1258, the barons protested that "if anyone brought a complaint and sought judgment against [the Lusignans] . . . the king turned against the complainant in a most extraordinary manner, and he who should have been a propitious judge . . . became a terrible enemy" (*Annales de Burton* 459; trans. by Carpenter 193).

could overtly challenge the king's claims to authority.[27] Alongside insulted lordship, a number of contributing factors such as the famine of 1258, a failed Welsh military campaign, the Sicilian affair, increased taxation, increments on farms and general mismanagement of the royal demesne created an environment suited for radical reform.[28] In 1258, about a week after the violent dispute between Bishop Aymer and John fitz Geoffrey, the Parliament of Westminster was summoned; during this parliament King Henry III asked for one of the heaviest taxes to fund his efforts to secure the Sicilian throne for his son Edmund, an effort that the barons of England regarded as deluded ambition of a imprudent king (Carpenter 187). The baronage, assuming a threatening posture, came to the Parliament at Westminster "most fortified with arms and prepared with swords."[29] Facing the thinly guised threat of armed insurrection, King Henry III, on May 2, 1258 issued a proclamation agreeing to submit to all of the recommendations to be proposed by the council of twenty-four at the Parliament of Oxford in June of that

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[27] The demands for increased control had been discussed at parliaments in 1244, 1248, 1249 and 1255 (Carpenter 183). The barons frequently link the king's promise to obey Magna Carta to a demand for control of the administrative apparatus (i.e. "the permission to choose for themselves, *by the general opinion of the kingdom*, a justiciary, chancellor, and treasurer"), see for example Matthew of Paris 119-20.

[28] My argument focuses on the broad outlines of political rhetoric. However, the general downturn in England's domestic and international affairs made this rhetoric particularly suasive in 1257-8. As Maddicott points out, "the military successes of the Welsh and new papal demands for men and money for Sicily, with the possibility of excommunication and interdict in the event of non-payment, created a threatening background which again reflected unfavourably on the king. But the misdeeds of the Lusignans transcended these other issues (*Simon* 152-4). In 1258 the barons rebuked Henry III openly for his foolish plan to conquer Sicily at the pope's request, pointing out the impossibility of fighting a kingdom that was separated from England by "so many kingdoms using various languages, by so many principalities, by so many cities well provided with soldiers and arms, by seas and mountains and by an extent of country" too toilsome to traverse (Matthew of Paris 271-72). For a discussion on how Henry III's failure to secure the marches further alienated Marcher barons, like Earl of Gloucester, Gilbert Clare, who were instrumental to the early successes, see "Henry III (1207–1272), *king of England and lord of Ireland, and duke of Aquitaine*" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* Alongside the failed Welsh campaigns and the Sicilian Affair, the harsh winter of 1257 led to a deadly famine killing thousands across the countryside, which caused widespread unrest (Matthew of Paris 283-84). This unrest made it easier for the barons to call attention to the plight of the villeins as part of their political agenda.

[29] Translation mine. The full Latin context from the Tewksbury Chronicle is as follows: "Die vero tertia illucescente, horaque diei tertia appropinquante, accesserunt ad curiam, scilicet apud Westmonasterium, viri nobiles ac strenui, comites, barones, et milites, armis peroptime muniti et gladiis praecincti, ad introitum tamen aulae regiae gladios deponentes, et coram domino rege apparentes, ipsum ut dominum regemque honore debito devote salutantes" (*Ann. Mon. i,* 163-64).

year. Those recommendations were called the Provisions of Oxford. In short, the old terms of kingship had collapsed and the Provisions formalized the new arrangement of power, the new "mutual recognitions" necessary to maintain sovereignty. The Provisions were at the center of the conflict that led to Mise d'Amiens.

By itself, this timeworn *power-struggle* between magnates and the crown would, by no means, offer a unique illustration of conflicting *rhetorical* models of kingship. The conflict between king and magnates over feudal politics (escheats, marriages etc.) had occurred for centuries (most violently during the anarchy of Stephen) often with very little impact on the constitution of authority. In these disputes, lords and kings were fighting over majestic rights they possessed as the *paterfamilias* of their estate. Many clauses in the Provisions of Oxford did focus on aristocratic frustration over fair distribution of feudal rewards: they reversed patronage bestowed upon the Lusignans, established controls over feudal reliefs (i.e. escheats and advowsons), regulated royal influence in local politics (i.e. shrieval regulation) and gave the barons an unprecedented degree of *formalized* authority; and these reforms were most important to the conservative element in the reform movement. What made the provisions unique from these king-lord conflicts was the way that lords established and protected liberties granted to the entire realm—liberties that offered protections from both kings and lords. Indeed, Montfort's relationship with many of the conservative barons began to fray in 1259 when the Common Enterprise sought to protect vavasours from aristocratic abuses as barons

like Hugh Bigod and Richard Clare of Gloucester were less interested in creating protections for the vavasour class.[30]

Simon Montfort broadened a conflict of aristocratic ambition and patronage into a social revolution that addressed "grievances coming explicitly from the small and middling men of localities" by attempting "to reform both local government and seigniorial administration in their interests" (Maddicott, *Simon* 242-3). This responsiveness to "middling men of localities" established a political authority based on a meaningful (rather than just notional) community of the realm. In the opening sentence, the Provisions announce that the "the lord king and the Lord Edward his son . . . submitted themselves, for correction and reform both of their own affairs and of the state of the realm" (*DBM* 99).[31] This rhetoric is not empty. The king's submission establishes the power relation between the king and parliament—a relation that made the king beholden to the "state of the realm." The Provisions *articulated* the complaints of the magnates with "the concerns of knights and lesser landholder.[32] They opened the king's courts to tenants who had serious complaints about trespasses and injuries caused by regal officers such as sheriffs and bailiffs.[33] They sought to reduce bribery by requiring

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[30] The loosely connected legislative reforms, referred to as the Provisions of Westminster dealing with local abuses by the barons themselves marked the "zenith of the reforming movement" (Maddicott, *Simon* 184-85). The extent of the reforms were strongly opposed by, perhaps the most powerful member of the coalition—Richard of Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hereford. Thus, while the Provisions were adopted by the October Parliament of 1259, the "unanimity of the baronage had been shattered beyond repair" (Treharne, *Simon* 107); see also Carpenter 221-2.

[31] From ths point forward, the abbrevation *DBM* refers to *Documents of the Baronal Movement of Reform and Rebellion*, ed. R.F. Treharne.

[32] Adrian Jobson likewise points out that "it was this shared sense of grievance, uniting both magnates and the lesser landowners, which formed the bedrock whereon the reformist programme was constructed" (23). Carpenter explains how Montfort's affinity and Church connections allowed him "to recognize popular issues and turn them to his advantage" (230); for full discussion of this affinity, see Carpenter 219-239.

[33] Although the wandering eyre of Chief Justiciar Hugh Bigod "had created expectations which they could not satisfy," the eyre had addressed many local concerns and demonstrated the potential of the barons' legal reforms (Maddicott, *Simon* 164-5).

sheriffs to be "a vavasour of the same county" where they worked and by limiting their appointment to no more than "one year at a time" (*DBM* 109). The Common Enterprise shaped their demands to account for needs and desires of those outside their immediate circle; and, by targeting practices most damaging to the gentry, the reforms allowed the barons to style themselves as the protectors of the *communitas regni*.

Most importantly, the Provisions restructured the administrative machine necessary to ensure the effectiveness of these reforms. Indeed, the Common Enterprise must be understood as part of the lengthy struggle for local and national control of the administrative apparatus. Unlike most of Western Europe, the discourse of sovereignty in England focused on the control of royal administration rather than a freedom from it (Holt 28-29). The development of administration was fundamental to Angevin power. Since Henry II, the Angevins developed an administrative apparatus capable of exerting royal influence throughout England. During the early years of Henry III's majority, he fought to regain control over the administrative apparatus; and, from 1258 forward, the barons sought reforms that increased their own administrative oversight.

The barons assumed a significant role in the day-to-day workings of government by creating a fifteen-member Privy Council that established a direct link between parliament and the executive authority of kingship. This baronial council appointed and oversaw the chief justiciar, the chancellor, castellans, and the treasurer (*DBM* 105-107). Like both sheriffs and bailiffs, these positions were one-year appointments to be reconfirmed by the council on a yearly basis. By seizing control of the courts, chancery, castles, and the exchequer, the Provisions of Oxford, for all intents and purposes, put the regal powers of the king into conciliar receivership. Most importantly, Clause 21 of the

Provisions formalized the power of the *communitas regni*, by establishing three scheduled parliaments every year. As Treharne notes, the provisions "converted" parliament "into a political institution," transforming what was "a vague untechnical colloquialism" into "a clearly defined and precise constitutional term (*Simon* 223). The parliament was no longer summoned at the will of the king.

The Provisions of Oxford established a functional, if tentative, power-sharing arrangement, between the king and the barons. Moreover, the provisions were so popular throughout the realm that Henry sent his sheriffs throughout the shires to deny that he had any intention of abrogating his oath at Oxford (*Foedera*, I.i 433).[34] Nonetheless, this was Henry's endgame. Despite the popularity of the Provisions, the baronial coalition, as early as 1259, began to face internal challenges from the conservative reformers and external challenges from the king. Henry III began to exploit "the sharp hostility which had sprung up" between Simon and Gloucester over the Provisions of Westminster (Treharne, *Simon* 111). The Westminster Provisions, the logical extension of the Provisions of Oxford, protected the gentry from the abuses of lords. Although Gloucester initially opposed these new provisions, eventually he accepted them with reluctance. The king, eventually, was able to draw Gloucester into the royalist fold in large part because majestic rhetoric secures the rights of the barons against the encroachment of political reform (such as the Provisions of Westminster). Conservative barons, such as Gloucester, sought in the Provisions immediate fixes to what they saw as temporary problems. Their frustration with the king's lenient treatment of the Lusignans was not enough to convince them that the royal prerogative must be *permanently* bound to the kind of direct baronial

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[34] See also Maddicott, *Simon* 256.

oversight proposed in the Provisions of Oxford. More importantly, they recognized that the king's favor offered more advantage, and less risk, than trying to bind the king's authority more directly to community of the realm.[35]

The king was able to exploit the tensions in the Baronial party when, in November of 1259, he travelled to France. The absence of the king actually weakened the power of the barons at a time when the rift between conservative and radical reformers was widening (Treharne, *Simon* 109-118). Since many members of the Privy Council travelled with the king to France, the presence of radical reformers was weakened at home. Their absence allowed conservative barons to undermine many of the reforms. When the king originally left, it was expected that he would be back for the mandatory Candelmas parliament set for February 3. However, by extending his trip in Paris, the king tested the resolve of the barons to oppose his will and on January 26 he wrote a letter demanding that the parliament be postponed until he returned. The fault lines in the baronial party crystallized when the conservative reformers accepted the king's demand that the magnates "make no arrangements for a parliament and permit none to he held" (*DBM* 169) until after the king's return.

As Treharne explains, the king's demand in contravention with Clause 21 of the Provisions (viz. that parliament was to meet three times independent of royal summons) "reduced [parliament] to the position . . . it had occupied before 1258 . . . an assembly which met and dispersed at the royal will" (*DBM* 29). Simon Montfort's attempt to convene a 'parliament' during Candelmas demonstrates that he recognized that the king's

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[35] In all likelihood, as Treharne points out, Henry III's majestic authority maintained silent support, even at the zenith of the reform movement: "We do not even know that it was a majority of barons [that supported Simon], for although Henry found no English support in his extreme need, it seems probable, from what followed, that many, possibly even most of the barons were neutral or at best lukewarm to Simon's cause" (*Simon* 150).

demand for postponement was an assault on the "common provision [the Provisions of Oxford] made by the king and his council" and an attempt to undermine the work of *la comune emprise* (*DBM* 206-209).[36] Parliament and the *communitas regni* were reduced once again to "a vague untechnical colloquialism" that did not exist outside the will of the king. The tension between majestic and political models of power manifests itself in the king's assertion that his royal presence in parliament supersedes the needs of the realm. The fact that no official parliament was convened in February shows the relative force of majestic authority even during the conciliar years.

Four years later, in January 1264, Henry III and the remaining insurgent barons each presented a schedule of complaint to Louis IX for arbitration. On the brink of war, it is no accident that these two documents stake out very different, and rather rigid, visions of kingship that sketch out a conflict concerning the role of *dignitas regi* and *communitas regni*. These documents brazenly reveal (what was implicit in the Provisions) the emerging fault lines within the discourse of sovereignty by raising, openly, critical questions such as: What are the rights and responsibilities of a king? When is a king (or *can* a king be) in dereliction of duty? Where does the king's authority come from? Louis IX not only ruled in favor of Henry III but he also quashed the Provisions of Oxford.

As a political resolution, the Mise was an utter failure. Louis IX's lopsided decision favoring Henry III left no remedy for the political grievances of the barons and ultimately precipitated the Second Barons' War. While Henry will win the war, the conflict registered in these documents shapes the political and rhetorical atmosphere for

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[36] At his trial, Simon defended his decision: "in the common provision made by the king and his council, it is provided that three parliaments shall be had each year, of which one is at Candelmas and to keep his oath the earl came there along with the other sound councilors who were in England" (*DBM* 207); see also Maddicott, *Simon* 193-6.

the rest of the medieval period. The civil war that followed the Mise, ultimately,

strengthened the bonds between those groups invested in political reform to such a degree

that the ideas of reform continued to shape the rhetoric and policy of Edward I and later

contributed to the deposition of Edward II.[37]

The suasive effect of the rhetoric of the Common Enterprise is registered in a

contemporary London-based chronicle's account of Louis's lopsided arbitration: "And

altogether the whole community of 'middling people' [*mediocris populi*] of the English

kingdom, who, to be sure, did not set themselves before the king of France, spoke against

his already declared arbitration" (*Lib. De Ant. Leg*).[38] The chronicler's assertion that the

mediocris populi largely rejected his arbitration demonstrates how the political rhetoric of

the Provisions and Common Enterprise created lines of cooperation among the middling

class. Moreover, they reject the French king's decision to support the English king

because "they had not been party." This highlights the illegitimacy of majestic authority

(both Louis's and by extension Henry's) and emphasizes the belief that legitimacy

depends upon the involvement of a wider community.

A Rhetorical Analysis of Majesty

The sharp divide between the rebels' political rhetoric and the majestic rhetoric of

Henry's coalition is apparent in the King's Gravamina entitled "Per ista subscripta

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[37] As Clanchy points out, the Mise d'Amiens had the paradoxical effect of uniting forces against the king (*England* 279-280). Treharne and Powicke similarly argue that, although he won in the court of Louis, he lost in the court of public opinion that favored Montfort. Powicke suggests that in England the award stoked "fears of French intervention" in English affairs and thus was more of a "call, not to submission, but to more resistance" (455). The popularity of Earl of Leicester remained so high that after his death his torso became a relic at Evesham abbey and some even claimed that they had been healed by this relic, see *Miracles of Simon de Montfort* 67-110. For a dissenting view, see William Blaauw, 116-17.

[38] Translation mine. The original text: "et fere omnis communitas mediocris populi regni Angliae, qui vero non posuerunt se super Regem Franciae, praedictum arbitrium suum contradixerunt" (*Lib. De Ant. Leg*).

grauatur Rex Anglie" (the king of England has suffered harm in the following ways")
(*DBM* 252-3).[39] The first seven clauses outline the specific accusations of Henry III. In

Clause Eight, the king petitions for damages. Despite his declaration to uphold the

Provisions before sailing to Amiens, Henry asks Louis to quash them. His complaint,

typical of the Angevin majestic rhetoric, reframes baronial claims primarily in terms of

lésé majesté that emphasizes his "control over temporalities" and his incontestable legal

authority:

> The chancellor and the treasurer, who have a special duty to safeguard the king's
> rights [*qui iura regis specialiter conseruare debent*], and who can easily subvert
> those rights at the instance or for the profit of others [*et qui iura ipsius leuiter
> subuertere pro voluntate*], are appointed by these same councilors, whereas the
> king himself ought to choose and appoint them, and was always accustomed to
> choose [*eos eligere et ponere debeat semper consueuerit quatenus eos*] those
> whom he knew to be the best and most faithful to himself. And also that the
> sheriffs, who especially are bound to preserve the king's rights in their bailiwicks
> from other people and by whose connivance the magnates and others will be able
> to encroach upon the king's rights and to appropriate them to themselves, are
> appointed by these same councilors, whereas the king himself, and his ancestors,
> *were always accustomed to appoint* [*eos semper ponere et deponere
> consueuerunt*] and to remove them at their own will [*pro sua voluntate*]. (*DBM*
> 253)

Henry III seeking to restore the personal kingship of his Angevin and Norman

predecessors makes a case grounded in the *dignitas* of the king. The argument is simple,

if somewhat tautological. Instead of referring to the barons' grievances or even the *iura

regi*, the king emphasizes the barons' insult to *iura regis*. The king emphasizes his

authority to act *pro voluntate sua* in five of the eight clauses of his grievance. The

justification for authority is tradition: "the king himself, and his ancestors, were always

accustomed to appoint" these local and national administrators. The Provisions were

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[39] All translations of the Mise, the King's Gravamina and the Barons' Gravamina are from R.F. Treharne's *Documents
of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion*.

wrong because they oppose a customary hierarchy; the barons, as Henry had complained in 1248, sought to put the "disciple above the master." Alongside a majestic diction, the king's appeal to Louis provides the syntax of majesty. The relative clauses such as *qui iura regis specialiter conseruare debent* above shows that all power derives from the king. Likewise, all illicit power is a subversion of the relative clause. Henry III's complaint exemplifies the majestic discourse of the thirteenth century in which kings and royal supporters had appropriated and were developing Innocent III's assertion in *Per venerabilem* of 1202 that "the king recognizes no superior in his temporalities" into a justification for increased majestic authority (Dunbabin 490).[40]

The majestic rhetoric of Norman and Angevin kings from William the Conqueror to Henry III focused on creating and controlling an administrative apparatus capable of enforcing the king's will in the English shires. In Henry III's robust defense of the right of appointment (i.e. *eos eligere et ponere debeat semper conserverit quatenus eos*), the king himself recognizes that this use of prerogative was central to Angevin power first asserting that the king and his ancestors were accustomed to these rights and then acknowledging how the prerogative was necessary to avoid inappropriate subversion of power "for the profit of others." The king speaks in general terms, but he is talking about important mechanisms of power. For example, the control over the chancellorship was a control over lines of income such as escheats, wardships, and widows. The king's use of these additional lines of income to bolster the fortunes of his half-brothers and his wife's relatives had caused considerable frustration among the barons. Without these lines of

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[40] It should be noted that those in the monarch's camp wrested the phrasing of *Per venerabilem* which was meant to stress the subservience of kings to the papacy.

revenue, the king would have a more difficult time stitching together coalitions powerful enough to maintain his own sovereignty.

Ideally, Angevin kings sought to appoint efficient and docile curiales drawn from the middling nobility (the second son of a lord etc.), people who were influential enough to manage local politics but weak enough to be dependent upon the king. If the magnates chose the chancellor, then they could appoint someone who not only supported magnate ideas, but someone who had a powerbase that allowed him to act more independently. He could reduce royal influence in the shires and even refuse to seal certain orders of the king by claiming that they would harm the king (as Ralph de Neville had in the early part of Henry's rule). [41] The King's Gravamina in 1264, like his speech before parliament in 1248, was relitigating Henry's initial demonstration of his "exalted view of royal power" (Carpenter 58) in the palace revolution of 1234. As in 1234 and 1248, the majestic rhetoric in the King's Gravamina attempts to restore and secure the mechanisms of power through which kings extended the jurisdiction of the Crown.

Henry III's forceful defense of hereditary *iura regis* and his freedom to choose ministers *pro sua voluntate* draws from the civilian tradition that had become more prominent both on the continent and in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The reintroduction and dissemination of civilian law throughout Western Europe strengthened majestic rhetoric by providing an intellectual basis for royal aspirations—in particular, the expansion of legal jurisdiction and reinforcement of the concept of prerogative. Two famous civilian maxims, ubiquitous in the Middle Ages,

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[41] Ralph de Neville, Henry's Chancellor from Magna Carta to 1244, had repeatedly resisted actions that seemed to run against the customs of the realm, see Denholm-Young, "The Paper Constitution" 415; and Carpenter 62-63. Similarly, Chancellor Scrope in 1382 refused to comply with Richard's distribution of the Mortimer estate. Scrope claimed "the king was impoverishing himself by such profligacy" (Saul 111). In other words, the king's profit could be used by strong chancellors to actually thwart the king's stated will.

demonstrate the majestic claims at the core of the civilian model of sovereignty: *princeps legibus solutus est* and *quod principi placuit legis habet vigorem.*[42] The justification of this authority was justice. Civil law increased legislative and judicial authority of the king in order to maintain *pax regis* so that in the words of Glanvill the "glorious king may . . . [crush] the pride of the unbridled and the ungovernable with the right hand of strength" (1).

Henry III mobilizes this construct of sovereignty against the model advocated by the barons. I will speak more fully about the barons' customary model of sovereignty below, what is crucial to understand now is that majestic rhetoric of civilian law (*lex*) provided an important justification for the appropriation of power and jurisdiction that had been described in terms of custom (*consuetudines*).[43] Thomas Aquinas identifies the tension between *lex* and *consuetudines* in his so-called "Treatise on Law" (questions 90-108 of the *Summa Theologica*). He describes law as established both by "an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community" and as something that "happens many times" such that "it seems from the deliberation of reason [that] this custom has *the force of law*" (ST, I-II, q. 90, art. 4). In his discussion on the mutability of law, Thomas negotiates the potential conflict between *consuetudo* and *lex*, which separates common law (that may have *vim legis*) from the *lex* of the legislator. Although these two statements are not necessarily antithetical, they point to two different

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[42] These maxims should not be read literally. They represent majestic ambition, but ignore the real world forces that constrain royal power. That said, they also suggest considerable flexibility of royal power (read: "what pleases the king has the force of law" as long as it did not anger many powerful barons).

[43] For example, in his Laws, Alfred declares "I king Alfred, have collected these laws, and have given orders for copies to be made of many of those which our predecessors observed and which I myself approved of. But many of those I did not approve of I have annulled, by the advice of my councilors" (See "The Law of Alfred" Section 49; p.26). What is crucial here is the near unfettered nature of the king's legislative power. As Hanson points out, the consultation process was so informal that one could hardly distinguish it from Tacitus's description of the *comitatus* (58).

sources of power that could come into conflict—and indeed, in 1265, in England they

did. The words *lex* and *consuetudines* have different valences that create specific lines of

cooperation through which certain powerbrokers were mobilized and sovereignty

legitimized.

The majestic rhetoric of the Mise, with its emphasis on the unbounded *iura regis*,

reflects a particular shaping of civilian law, a rhetoric central to Angevin kingship. For

example, we encounter this majestic description of regal power in FitzNigel's *Dialogus*

de Scaccario (*Dialogue of the Exchequer*)*:*

> Much of this wealth comes to kings not by strict legal process, but variously by
> ancestral laws, by the secret machinations of their own hearts, or even by their
> arbitrary judgment [*sue uoluntatis arbitrio*]; nevertheless, it is not for the king's
> subjects to question or condemn his actions. For princes, whose hearts and
> consciences are in God's hand, and to whose sole care God himself has entrusted
> his subject, stand or fall, by divine, not human judgment. (FitzNigel 3)

The exchequer was one of the three major administrative apparatuses through which

sovereign power was translated. Coming at the beginning of the *Dialogus*, this passage

establishes the authority of exchequer as completely circumscribed by royal power—the

exchequer, like all civil service, serves the king who surpasses all secular authorities.[44]

The *Dialogus*, thus, shows how civilian principles that set the king above the law

translated into administrative authority. The authority of the king's *voluntas arbitrio*

echoes in Henry III's vigorous assertion of his prerogative to choose curiales *pro sua*

voluntate. The *Dialogus* is particularly significant because it seems to enshrine the

majestic ambitions of Angevin kingship throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The book, originally written during the reign of Henry II, the first Angevin king of

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[44] As J.C. Holt comments one of the few attempts to reconcile the royal will and the law. More importantly, this
passage shows the how the majestic Neoplatonic model of kingship was connected to the practical concerns of state
such as finances and defense

England, still had considerable currency during the reign of Henry III. Indeed all the extant manuscripts of the *Dialogus*, three in all, come from the years of Henry III. While the sample size is too small to draw any definitive arguments, it makes sense to see the reproduction of this manuscript as a response to baronial incursions on administrative affairs (Amt xxix-xxx).[45]

Despite the emphasis of the king's autonomy in the *Dialogus* or the King's Gravamina, the central conflict between majestic and political rhetoric was not between absolutism and constitutionalism; indeed, neither Henry nor his baronage would have understood this language. The difference was a matter of emphasis. Both, in fact, allude to the importance of the *communitas regni* and customary law. Embedded in the *iura regis* was a historically-accepted responsibility *for* the community, but it was cast as an ethical responsibility *to* God—"princes' hearts and consciences are in God's hand." This short-circuits the baronial argument that the king can be judged or coerced to act for the common profit. The royal prerogative (*iura regis*) supersedes all jurisdictions except God's alone. Authority derives from a sacred and legal right handed down from his *antecessores* as part of his estate. While it is natural, indeed easy, to read a theoretically unbounded *iura regis* as a justification for autocracy, the measured deployment of this "theoretical" power tempered the contemporary perception of majestic rhetoric.[46]

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[45] In her introduction to the *Dialogue of Exchequer*, Emilie Amt explains how the work fit within a thirteenth-century context: "not only had concerns with record-keeping come to be of prime importance to the royal administration at this time, but the extent of royal power was the great political issue of the day . . . The *Dialogus* represented a positive and venerable tradition of loyal service to the king's best interests. As such it was a text of interest not only to clerks, but to anyone inclined to promote views of the royal party in the ongoing discussions of royal prerogatives" (xxix-xxx).

[46] Majestic rhetoric is not the same as absolutist policy. D.A. Carpenter has argued at length that Henry III does not blatantly exercise extralegal authority, which he sees as the main tenet of absolutism, see 77-81. Nonetheless, the policies of Henry III, which Clanchy and Wilkerson identify as absolutist, do reflect the majestic ideal of kingship and it is this ideal that informs the introduction to the *Dialogus*.

In fact, the ethical expectation that the king would curb his power was, itself, formalized in civilian law as *lex digna*:

> It is a word worthy of the majesty of the ruler that the Prince professes himself bound to the law: so much does our authority depend upon the authority of the Law. And truly, greater than the imperium is the submission of the principate to the laws. [47] (*C.1, 14,4*)

Lex digna suggests that the law of the land offered some resistance to untrammelled regal power. [48] This idea of an external authority that bound the king's power was, as Robert and Alexander Carlyle have shown, a medieval commonplace. Moreover *lex digna* did not merely assert that the king was morally bound by the law but also, on a practical level, that the king's power and authority 'depended' upon "the submission of the principate to the laws." The practical point, which was not lost on medieval jurists and theologians, was that medieval kings did not have the instruments of coercion necessary to suppress the social unrest that violent disregard for custom would cause. Indeed, Chaucer quietly tucks this bit of wisdom into Prudence's observation:

> And the juges and sovereyns myghten in hir land so muchel suffre the shrewes and mysdoers/ that they sholden, by swich suffrance, by proces of tyme wexen of swich power and myght that they sholden putte out the juges and sovereyns from hir places,/ and atte laste maken hem lesen hire lordshipes. [49] (VII.1474-6)

The "proces of tyme" points to (while simultaneously masking) the ways that social unrest, caused by "suffrance" of injustice, weakens sovereign power. It points to the

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[47] Translated by Ernst Kantorowicz in *The King's Two Bodies* (104).

[48] For the text of *lex digna,* see *Corpus Civilis Iuris* (C. 1,14) 4. For a discussion of *Digna Vox*, particularly as it is developed by fourteenth-century jurists and Ricardian poets, see van Dijk 96-97. For example, he points out that Baldus, one of the chief jurists in the fourteenth century, affirmed *lex digna* when he wrote: "The prince ought to live according to the laws for from the law he receives his own authority" (qtd. in Van Dijk 97). Schulz argues that this passage, which has caused much confusion, clearly meant to suggest that the king had a moral obligation to the law while still recognizing that he was "not legally subject to the law" (160ff). According to Tierney, Schulz's distinction fails to grasp how the king's obedience to the laws of the land was the rational basis of his authority—"so much does our authority depend on the authority of the law." Thus, *lex digna* had a coercive element: the failure to adhere to the law would undermine the king power to rule ("Bracton" 298-302).

[49] This same threat is made more explicit in Gower's "Folly of Rehoboam," see discussion of the tale in Chapter III.

political grounds of authority. Although civilians tended to be more sympathetic to royalist authority, some of them asserted that the people, when transferring authority to sovereign retained the right to "revoke this for a reasonable cause" (67) and some, like Odofridus, went even further by asserting that the people in transferring imperium to the prince, did not abdicate their own power as a collective (Carlyle 66).[50] Likewise theologians and canonists acknowledged that legislative authority derived from both *princeps* and *populus*.[51] In other words, jurists by the thirteenth century had developed a legal infrastructure for the principles of ancient constitutionalism; and, as Brian Tierney argues, the convention of following the law was, at least, as natural to kingship as the freedom from coercion (*Accursius* 391-92).[52]

So what do we make of these seemingly contradictory descriptions of sovereign power? I would suggest that the perceived contradictions stem from a modern desire to pin down the precise nature of royal authority. Instead, these legal descriptions of sovereign power depict the field of forces that constrain the unlimited authority of the king—the practical reality that sovereignty, depends upon the appearance that of the "submission of the principate to the laws." So the king must always cast his assertions of *iura regis* as the will of the many turned into one; the credibility of this assertion is the

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[50] The majority of civilian lawyers agreed with Placentinus's interpretation of Ulpian's definition of sovereignty as the transferal of *imperium* from the people to the emperor. Placentinus argued that once the people transferred the imperium to the emperor, he alone had legislative authority, see Hinsley 42-3; and Carlyles 66. English kings, from the fourteenth century until the James, funded the study of Roman law in order to buttress their own prerogative; see Cobban 256-58. For citations of Odofridus and Andrew of Isernia as well as a lengthy discussion of civilian arguments for the legislative authority of the *populus*, see Carlyles Ch. 6, particularly 66-67.

[51] Aquinas in his treatise of law states that "the making of a law belongs either to the whole people or to a public personage who has care of the whole people" (*ST* I-II.Q90.A3); Canon law equally emphasized that "the human race is ruled by two things: namely, natural law and custom" (*Decretum,* D.1 d.a.c.1).

[52] Discussing Accursius's gloss of *lex digna*, Brian Tierney shows how the authority of law *should* supersede the prerogative rights of the king. For Accursius, however the king's was not an "act of superogatory virtue. He laid down as legal fact . . . that the emperor did in fact do so" ("Accursius" 392).

limit of majestic rhetoric. Read in light of *lex digna*, Henry III's claims that he has the

right to act *pro sua voluntate* is not a defense of untrammelled power. At no point does

Henry III explicitly state that his authority transcends the authority of the Law. Instead,

Henry III would have seen himself as defending the traditional model of Angevin

sovereignty in which the relationship between the king and the law was an ethical

obligation (i.e. "the Prince *professes* himself bound to the law") and that the barons had

no right to question or condemn his actions. The Provisions, then, were, from the king's

point of view, an incursion on royal jurisdiction—an attempt to make the king's will

subject to "human judgment."

The claims that the king is "under the law" and that the barons had no right to

question or condemn his actions creates a *practical* ambiguity. Simply put, what is the

law without the authority or the power to enforce it.[53] This ambiguity is not accidental.

By accommodating competing strategies of interpreting and maintaining sovereign

power, it effectively tables the ideological argument, which boils to the surface from time

to time.

At the heart of this accommodation of majesty lies a crucial, indeed dangerous,

embarrassment; namely, majesty has no foundation—it is strategic, traditional and

functional, but there is no *essential* principle to arrive at the proper interpretation.

Majestic rhetoric, in Macherey's terms, is an "ideological fiction" that attempts to

resolve, but in fact only papers over the "determinate disorder," in this case the lack of

foundation for legitimate authority, the embarrassment of authority.

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[53] This was a central concern for Ricardian authors like Gower, see van Dijk 71-2.

Many scholars (both modern and medieval) point to religion to establish the foundation of medieval political thought. Theology was used to defend both political and majestic modes of authority. Henry III thought he had a sacred responsibility to protect the prerogative; Simon Montfort cast the Common Enterprise as a holy crusade. Theology is a symbolic language that (most often) reproduces the realities of power by describing and reinforcing the hierarchical power structure. When the king appropriated scripture to defend his right to alienate lands or appoint members to his own court, his interpretation *situates* his own office in the same sacred context as Jesus and his disciples. The hermeneutic act creates and reinforces the relationship between religion and regal power. However, the barons will invoke this same *magister-discipuli* power structure when they argue that the will (*voluntas*) of the king should never act against his reason (*ratio*) and that when it does the barons have a duty to *save* the king.

Religion does not provide a stable foundation for medieval political thought, but rather it offers a mythic language deeply entwined with hermeneutic strategies of those coalitions that it reproduces and creates—strategies that overlap with narrative practice of poets. As Walter Ullman shows in *Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages* the theological roots of majestic rhetoric derive "genetically" from those ideas central to the consolidation of papal authority in the fifth century, a consolidation occurring at the same time that princes "shed their *Gottkaisertum* [i.e. emperor as God on earth] and . . . adopted the standpoint more appropriate to a Christian ruler, namely that they were emperors by the grace of God" (49). The Neoplatonic doctrine of the fifth century (particularly the work of pseudo-Dionysius), which deeply informed medieval

ecclesiology, was easily redeployed to validate the severely hierarchical structure of fifth-century principates.[54]

Adapting the works of Proclus for a Christian audience, pseudo-Dionysius develops a cosmic hierarchy out of the principle that all things are united in God, what Ullmann calls, the *principium unitatis*:

> "God as its leader of all understanding and action . . . causes it members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light . . . Therefore the hierarchic order lays it on some to be purified and others to do the purifying, on some to receive illumination and others to cause illumination, on some to be perfected and other to bring about perfection, each will imitate God in the way suitable to whatever role it has. (pseudo-Dionysius 154)

Perhaps the most important contribution of pseudo-Dionysius is the transformation of the personal journey to the One into a social structure (an ascetic and ecstatic journey where the soul purifies itself by casting off the phenomenal world). The "ascent" is no longer a personal journey but rather a series of subordinated powers each either being "purified by" or "purifying" those below. Thus, religion underwrites a social organizing principle such that God, at the top of this hierarchy, was the "leader of all understanding and action" and that each individual member of this hierarchy "reflected God's "primordial light" in a degree "suitable" to him. In the Neoplatonic view, all power is concentrated at the top, and all power of *subditi*, or subjects, was reflected.

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[54] The theological doctrine supplied "ultimate justification" for what Hanson saw as the more "proximate source of authority," namely the king and his magnates. Hanson glosses over the gap between "ultimate" and "proximate source" of authority (44-45). I will argue that thirteenth-century thinkers began to revise what Weaver would call, the "God-terms" as they sought to create a new foundation for the proximate source of authority. Walter Ullmann gives a full description and genetic history of the theological principles undergirding majestic rhetoric in Chapter 2 *Principles of Government in the Middle Ages*. Richard II, who was intent on restoring Angevin ideal of kingship, portrayed himself in hieratic pose (Scheifele 263-4) and encouraged regal addresses that emphasized the "theocratic character of the king's or prince's rule" (Saul, "Kingship" 46). For a description of how Richard II's hierocratic rhetoric intersects with his use of Aegidian philosophy and Roman law, see Saul, *Richard II*, 249-50.

Translated into the discourse of sovereignty, all authority came from God and, mediated by the king, was distributed throughout the hierarchy in a "way suitable" to each person's position. Walter Ullmann refers to this appropriation of Neoplatonism as the "derivational thesis of all power" (*Principles* 53-6). The theological idea that the king's heart and conscience were "in God's hand" reinforced the legal construct of kingship as a "corporation sole," an estate all to himself, and as such could not be held responsible for his actions by any human authority. Of course, the king was human and thus both fallible and amenable to counsel, however royal *voluntas* stood below only God (and in some matters the pope) alone.

This paradigm defined the way authority was understood. In his description of spiritual purification, pseudo-Dionysius describes authority in terms of a "hierarchic order" that "lays it on some to be purified and others to do the purifying." Some act, others are acted on. This description of the angelic order foisted onto medieval society produces a Neoplatonic social order that embodies three critical aspects about majestic rhetoric: first, all *earthly* authority derives from the king's will, second the latitude of one's authority depends upon their place in the hierarchy and finally, this authority is defined as a power over.[55] The authority of a baron, knight and most lowly subject was the reflection of the king's *voluntas* (read: "primordial light") and their placement in the hierarchy determined to what degree they had power over others. Two related corollaries to the "derivational thesis" had a chilling effect on public debate. First, any attempt to encroach upon the authority of a superior was an act of lésé majesté, "an offense against the semi-religious aspect of the royal persona" (Saul, *Richard II* 249); and second, the

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[55] Ullmann describes how pseudo-Dionysius's model of hierarchy shaped ideas of governance. It should be noted that medievals believed that pseudo-Dionysius was a direct disciple of St. Paul; see *Principles* 46ff.

idea that all authority was reflected left no room for dispute—there was no room for a public forum.[56] The mystical social paradigm underwritten by pseudo-Dionysius reinforces the narrow hierarchical structure in which the king and his elite barons controlled all national political power.

This theologico-social paradigm (crucial to majestic rhetoric), in which submission is virtue, is embodied by those characters whose quest is to submit themselves to the "cosmic framework" (i.e. narratives that involve an obvious ascent like Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, romances that require a return from a fallen order in which the errant knight must wander through a maze of "and-thens" such as medieval *Orpheus* or *Havelok*, or tales, such as the *Pearl* and *Sir Gowther* where the protagonist subjugates himself to the proper authority).[57] It is this paradigm that, according to James Simpson, underwrote the political imaginary of twelfth-century humanists who describe political authority in hierarchical terms:

> the self achieves integration through submission to the highest most incorporeal faculty of the soul . . . and if the concord of the soul is effected in this way, then the operations of concord in the political realm would imply that the realm finds its integration through submission to its highest, most incorporeal member, the king   . . . The transcendent intellect stands as figure for the transcendent power of the king. (278-79)

The trope of "integration through submission" in medieval literature, which mirrored the ideological claims of political and religious institutions, had two critical effects on the

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[56] These corollaries provided powerful ideological tools that the king could deploy against both the barons and commons. The threat of being accused of lésé majesté had a chilling effect on public debate insofar as made it difficult for the baronage to explicitly oppose the king's will without first creating a significant coalition to guarantee their own safety. The Neoplatonic model mapped perfectly onto a severely hierarchical society in which "the possibility of public policy dissolved" (Hanson 50). The theocratic image of kingship, alongside the concomitant development of Roman law, which only accelerated in the fourteenth century, were part of the larger attempts of Angevin kings to free themselves from 'feudal' restraint; see Cobban 256-8.

[57] This narrative model, as Patterson shows in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, finds its historiographical parallel in those chronicles that imagined history as the work of Providence.

workings of causation in narrative.[58] I will expand on these effects in future chapters; it is enough here to point out two crucial ways they overlap with majestic political imaginary.

First, the idea that ethical and social integration were achieved solely through submission diminished the kind of political power that was constructed through alliance. Since the king's power was divorced from the community, there was no functional space for public debate. The king's status as Vicar of Christ meant that political tracts were often manuals of *ethical* self-governance advising the king to restrain his own desires.[59] This inhibited the development of a political science capable of describing the social constructions of power, constructions that underwrote the operative political strategies of the magnates in the Second Barons' War. In short, the king's authority was not derived from and nor responsive to the community.

Second, narrative was largely divorced from historical time. Neoplatonic philosophy conceived of progress spatially as an ascension toward the One, or God. As such, the hermeneutics of Neoplatonism presents temporal events in eternal terms and thus renders the 'secular' narrative little more than "a series of symbolizations" with "expository significance" (Pocock 8). This Neoplatonic influence on the discourse of sovereignty played a significant role in the "radical devaluation" of "causal modes of historical explanation or explorations of the relation of the individual to the course of

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[58] The idea of virtuous submission shaped most medieval institutions—from fealty rituals to monastic rules. In other words, the "derivational thesis" was part of the institutional practices reproducing majestic hierarchical ideology throughout medieval society. Duby shows how the doctrine of Gregory, Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite were all transformed into social doctrines that justified the inequalities that, in turn, justified hierarchical authority and demanded submission to it; see 66-69.

[59] Book 7 of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* significantly breaks with this tradition by disenchanting sovereign authority. Gower imagines power as founded on political alliance, a *trouthe* between the prince and the governed. While his tales tend to demonstrate the expedience of the virtuous exercise of political authority, they emphasize the political mechanisms through expedient end is brought about.

historical events" (Patterson 86, 88). In terms of narrative, majestic rhetoric diminishes

the social dimension (making political science impossible), and looking at history as "full

fledged *Heilsgeschichte*" diminishes the importance of contingency and the events of the

temporal world.[60]

The "derivational thesis of power" manifests most clearly in Henry III's blatant

assertion of the sacred authority of the king. While scholars are torn over whether Henry

III had a specific absolutist agenda, most willingly admit that he increased royal influence

in church affairs. Treharne even claims, "no previous king had gone so far in breaking

the spirit of the church as the cowardly, pious Henry III" (*Simon* 56). Historians tend to

characterize Henry's intrusion into ecclesiastical business as part of the historical

narrative concerning the secularization of authority; however, as Clanchy points out, the

anti-clericalism of Henry III arises from his *pious* belief that the king was part of the

sacred hierarchy and thus "he was obliged by the sanctity of his office to supervise

clerical affairs"("Did Henry III" 212). The intrusions were power plays that reinforce the

sacred idea of the sacramental kingship. [61]

For example, he repeatedly intruded into the ecclesiastical jurisdiction by granting

the 'writ of prohibition court Christian' generously to all petitioners. This writ allowed a

defendant to claim that the case should be tried in secular courts instead of an

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[60] *Heilsgeschichte* is the interpretation of history (usually ecclesiastical history) as the working out of God's salvific plan. Lee Patterson explains how, during the twelfth-century, intellectuals began to interpret secular events as evidence of God's saving acts. Patterson rightly suggests an increasing interest in secular events during the twelfth century (*Chaucer* 86-99). However, one must recognize that this model of history, like the narrative model described by Simpson, reinforced the idea of subordination through integration where political crises were interpreted as a "*moral* failure of each estate." (Harriss 13)

[61] Matthew of Paris frequently portrayed Henry III as usurping or complaining about Church authority. For example, in 1250, Henry III sought to secure the bishopric of Winchester for his half-brother Aymer, although he was considered by many to be unqualified. In order to secure his election, Henry III actually went to the cathedral church of St. Swithin in person and entering "the chapter, as though he were a bishop or a prior, and taking the seat of the presiding prelate" he delivered a sermon (Paris 395). For more on Henry III's sacerdotal view of kingship, see Clanchy, "*Did Henry III*" 212-215.

ecclesiastical court. Henry III continued the Angevin tradition of expanding the judicial authority of the king. For Henry III, the sacral kingship, then, was not some ideological fig leaf but rather part of his broader goal of centralizing justice in order to broaden the reach of regal power and to add to the royal coffers. In 1242, for example, when Henry III issued a writ barring Robert Grosseteste from prosecuting the canons of Lincoln, he claimed, "the all Highest has constituted us defender of the church."[62] The king's arrogation of ecclesiastical justice based on an authority "constituted" by God, demonstrates how the king's claim to be "vicar of Christ" intersects, in a very practical way, with legal and economic concerns. These 'intrusions' establish the sacred nature of his power, much like the pope's unique authority to canonize saints demonstrated that he had "a leg in heaven and a leg on earth" (Ullmann, *Principles* 39).[63]

We must be careful, however, not to conflate majestic rhetoric with absolutism. That is, we are always warned—and rightly so—that continental absolutism fell on a more barren ground in England. The maxims of Roman law or the sacred titles were evocative, but did not accurately reflect the operative strategies through which sovereignty was secured. Nonetheless, we should not dismiss the importance of this majestic rhetoric as it shapes the Angevin *vision* of kingship that might be, for our purposes, usefully described in terms of Bourdieu's habitus:

> One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is the production of a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity secured by the consensus of the meaning (*sens*) of practice and the world, in other words the harmonization of

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[62] The passage drawn from the Close Rolls 1237-42 (435) is quoted and translated in Clanchy *Did Henry* 212; see also Flahiff 292.

[63] Ullmann describes the way papal rhetoric was mobilized by kings and emperors to assert their own descending authority: "genetically the fifth century demands attention not only as regards the permanent fixation of the principle of papal primacy by the papacy itself, but also in regard to the philosophic and theological buttressing of the papal theme by non-papal writers, who thus powerfully supported the descending theme of government" (*Principles* 45).

agents' experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each them receives from the expression, individual or collective (in festivals for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences. (80)

Majestic and political rhetoric describe two competing strategies that create "consensus" and "harmonization" necessary for reproducing or challenging the social structure. Indeed, majestic rhetoric can be seen as a kind of "commonsense" because even the opponents of Henry III cannot escape the authority of this dominant rhetoric. The maxims of Roman law, the coronation ceremony, and all the religious pageantry surrounding the kingship is to a degree a "transfigured expression of . . . economic and political facts" (Bourdieu 61) of the dominant model of sovereignty.[64] The religious claims of "cosmic framework" and the "derivational thesis of all power"—claims that consolidate power into the hands of the few—manifest in practical aims of maintaining strict control over the royal demesne, increasing the jurisdiction of *coram rege*, controlling administrative positions, and maintaining his choice of counselors. Such a mythic representation of kingship was readily believable precisely because the "consensus of the meaning (*sens*)" mirrored the realities of power and because this 'meaning' satisfied the aspirations of those members of society capable of disrupting the received order.

After the Conquest, the distribution of power created an environment particularly amenable to the centralizing majestic rhetoric of the Norman and Angevin kings. The manorial system in post-Conquest England was hostile to the development of political discourse because there was almost no cohesive community capable of challenging the king's authority. The system of financial and military obligations between tenants and

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[64] Bourdieu describes how symbolic systems interact with the realities of power (i.e. how majestic rhetoric provided a way of describing and authorizing the hierarchical system of governance evolved from the chief *comitatus* relationship).

kings created very little political cohesion between the barons; in fact, the manorial

system most often kept people divided amongst their individual holdings. Earls had lost

their role in the administration of shires, and the extensive earldoms they once controlled

were reduced considerably.[65] Moreover, from the Conquest to the beginning of the

Angevin line of kings, the royal demesne, and thus the king's influence was dispersed

throughout the kingdom. The king's presence throughout the realm made organized

adversarial discourse almost impossible (Holt 28). The ubiquity of royal authority

combined with the Angevin king's use of household knights compensated through the

royal chamber reinforced the independence of the king. Reducing the king's dependence

on the feudal services of enfoeffed knights, restrained the development of baronial

military forces capable of challenging the king.[66] The Neoplatonic models of kingship

(i.e. "derivational thesis of all power" or the idea of the king as "vicar of Christ") provide

a powerful ideological fiction supporting the "*de facto* realities of power"(Wallerstein 44)

in post-Conquest England.

Prior to the thirteenth century, the chief men of the realm were not put off by the

claims of king's special dignity or prerogative, largely because this rhetoric aligned with

their own historically conditioned aspirations. The isolating effect of the manorial

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[65] One of the most significant differences between Old English and Norman regimes was that "the suppression of the greater earldoms destroyed any tendency there may have been towards provincial autonomy and promoted centralised administration" (Richardson and Sayles 26).   Holt explains that the "compact and distinct baronies," unique to England, "deprived the Anglo-Norman aristocracy of one of the most important conditions for the maintenance of honorial justice and administrative and political resistance to the pretensions of the Crown" (Holt 28). For example, Morris explains how after the Anarchy of Stephen, Henry II and his sons quickly built up the office and presence of sheriffs necessary for "institutional absolutism" (111).

[66] By utilizing mercenaries, the king was able to reduce the fighting class's loyalty to the aristocracy. David Rollison, for example, suggests that the arming of the peasants, an idea put forth in *Policraticus*, was part of "constitutional" progress in so far as it increased the ability of the community to resist the authority of the king (100-105). Chris Givens-Wilson likewise argues that these retainers were part of an "outer circle of warriors of the king's *familia*, closely bound to the king and easily assimilated to the domus" (*Household* 8). For a full discussion of how demonstrates that the composition of armies influences "constitutional and social change," see Michael Roberts 13-29; Stone 361-80.

system combined with England's unique distribution of royal lands created a situation where the baronage *willingly* surrendered their prerogative in order to gain "the advantages of a centralized and efficient exercise of jurisdiction" (Holt 28).[67] Majestic rhetoric, for the local powerbrokers was more a means of upward mobility than a limitation of their ambition. Powerful landowners concentrated on gaining various feudal rewards and honors (escheats, heiresses, wards, etc.) rather than sovereign power. Majesty was the water they swam in and it was through royal favor and patronage that many sought advancement. Thus, while there was a substratum of feudal politics that consisted mostly over charters and land claims, the governance of England could be described more aptly as an efficient employment of administration, which was itself largely indistinguishable from the *curia regis* (Chrimes, *Introduction* 18-27). Aside from the most-narrow circle of royal advisors or barons vying for honors and patronage, the idea of political rhetoric had little meaning.

The coronation ritual was the most visible example of the sacral language that conditions the discourse of sovereignty. During this ritual the king publicly accepts the accoutrements of power, the *royal regalia* including the sword, the mantle, the sceptre, and most importantly the crown. Several of these symbols of power are carried in the procession by "three dukes and three earls . . . near the royal stock" at the beginning of the ceremony. The ritual dressing of the king emphasizes the transformative—almost

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[67] Bourdieu allows us to see how the willingness to cede certain privileges is conditioned by the habitus itself such that what is not likely is never desired (77). The acceptance of majestic privileges happens below the surface such that the political structures described by Jolliffe and Holt condition, but are not explicitly spoken of in, majestic rhetoric. The political class accepted the king's special dignity and rights because they shared in this discourse. J.C. Holt explains that all these rights were "accepted because the Crown's tenants-in-chief, those namely who could oppose them most effectively, depended on these same rights for the maintenance and effective exploitation of their own estates" (29). For a discussion of how Angevin kings capitalized on the fragmentation of power, see Joliffe 1-6.

sacramental—power of the office.[68] In fact, originally the king only became a king

through this ceremony. [69] In the coronation ceremony, luxurious objects and vestments

symbolize the principles of good kingship. For example, Henry III's pall of red samite

covered in precious stones is redescribed in the Archbishop's prayer:

> Receive this pall with four Corners, to let thee understand that the four Corners of
> the World are subject to ye power of God: and that no man can happily reign upon
> Earth, who hath not received his authority from Heaven. (*ECR* 261) [70]

The coronation ceremony is a spectacle of royal authority that embodies the legal and

sacred claims that underwrite the Angevin theory of sovereignty. The bishop's prayer

over the mantle emphasizes the central organizing principle of the coronation as a

whole—the king is subject to God alone and as such the world is subject to him. Indeed,

almost every item of clothing or symbol of power reminds the king that he has "received

his authority from Heaven." While invoking the idea that the king has "one leg in

heaven," the bishop admonishes the king that he can only "happily reign," if he

recognizes his responsibility to God. However, even this prayer emphasizes that the

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[68] The text of the coronation ceremony, the *Liber Regalis*, repeatedly draws attention to the king's garb. The king rides from the Tower of London to the palace at Westminster the day before his coronation wearing suitable attire. The next day the king is "clothed with spotless apparrel, so his soul may shine" (*ECR* 113-4). One sees how power, virtue and sumptuary thinking are conflated into a justification of power. At his coronation, the king will adorn various accoutrements of power such as a "tunic and dalmatic of red samite, with a jewel and with precious stones in the orphrey" and sandals and stockings of red samite with an orphrey, and symbolic accessories from the jewel encrusted gold crown down to a pair of golden spurs, see *ECR*, "The Reglia of Henry III" 55-56. King Richard II frequently uses clothing as a way of expressing his power both over his magnates and even in foreign affairs (Saul 352-57). For a contemporary defense of magnificent display necessary for the prince, see Roger Dymock, *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardum* 293-5.

[69] The coronation ceremony became a ritualistic language of great importance during the twelfth and thirteenth century. In Europe, at this time, there was considerable debate over during the twelfth and thirteenth century over when the prince became *verus imperator*. These debates, usually centered around the Holy Roman Emperor, shaped the debates over kingship.   The Roman jurist, Accursius gave the conservative opinion that "the Prince's privileges are not valid before his coronation." Those jurists who supported the Emperor argued that "emperors existed before there were pontiffs and that the emperors in former days had full power even without a consecration, because all power was from God anyhow (Kantorowicz 319-24; 324). Richard II made his own subtle modification to the coronation ceremony. By swearing the oath before the acclamation of the people, Richard II, "emphasize[d] the people's allegiance to a king who was already their ruler *de jure*" (Saul, *Richard II* 25)

[70] From ths point forward, the abbrevation *ECR* refers to English Coronation Records, ed. Legg. I have modernized all of the Legg's English spellings.

royal prerogative stands outside all jurisdiction save that of God. As such, the coronation ritual with its ethical admonitions is a theatrical performance of a mirror for princes. Through this quasi-sacrament the king assumes his *character angelicus* and becomes the hinge between the divine hierarchy and temporal hierarchy; the king receives his authority from heaven, and the magnates, knights, and bailiffs reflect "the glow of primordial light . . . in the way suitable" to his "role." The king as the source of earthly authority becomes, as it were, "the Immutable within Time" (Kantorowicz 8).

More importantly, the sumptuary logic of the ritual also validates the whole hierarchical structure in which wealth and authority were intimately bound. That is, while it seems *obvious* (even today) that expensive objects such as a jewel encrusted mantle would be used in a symbolic investment of authority, the "obviousness" only belies the degree to which people have naturalized an aristocratic language of power, a language in which authority is equated with visible signs of wealth.[71] The red samite mantle justifies not only the authority of the king, but of the nobility as well. Indeed, the prayers of the bishop frequently allude to the nobility as a class with special importance (i.e. "protect him and his nobles with thy shield" and "that he may be amiable and loving to the Lords and Nobles") (Legg, p. 256, 258).

Moreover, by making the nobility part of the pageant, the gaze of the audience was turned not only to the king but also to the nobility surrounding him. The gaze of all spectators and participants in the ceremony mirror the Neoplatonic social hierarchy.[72]

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[71] For example, in the latter half of the fourteenth century, the relationship between wealth and power manifests in the 1363 Statute of Diet and Apparell that created a dress code based on income and wealth, see Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* 4-7.

[72] One of the most significant twelfth-century changes to the coronation ceremony (and crown-wearing ceremonies) was the "growing tendency to associate services rendered at a coronation (using the word in its widest sense) with the

The elevation of the king both subjected the lords to the king and confirmed their own authority; the king's majesty confirmed their majesty. In fact, during most coronations, the king 'magnanimously' conferred new titles and honors to his baronage. Thus, the ritual performs the kind of "mutual recognitions" through which the king and baronage agree to the structure of power—a structure that elevates the king above all, but simultaneously reinforces the social order that benefits the nobility.

Following the *Fürstenspiegel*-logic in which peace and prosperity were imagined as submission to the cosmic framework, the coronation ceremony intimately ties royal majesty with the stability and prosperity of the realm. Handing the king the scepter with the cross the Bishop prays:

> That thou may governe thyself aright, and defend the holy Church, and Christian people, committed by God unto thy Charge: punish the Wicked, and protect the just: and lead them in the way of righteousness, that from this temporal Kingdom, thou may be advanced to an eternal Kingdom. (*ECR* 263)

The claim that the justice of the realm depended upon the strength of the king was not a vain pretense of those who benefited from the majesty system, not just an attempt to justify their own power; it was a central tenet of Angevin policy.[73] Angevin kings had built up "central and itinerant courts capable of subjecting the whole nation to the king's law and government" (2). This centralization of the law allowed Angevin kings to curb

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tenure of certain lands. The conception of the twelfth century was that certain functions at a coronation were appropriate to earls, others to barons and others to knights" (Richardson, "Coronation" 131). While Richardson demonstrates that these practices had no traditional provenance, he explains that they were easily accepted because "they fitted into the pattern of contemporary thought" (133). Moreover, coronation ceremonies, frequently involved the elevation of members of the nobility. Thomas of Woodstock, for example, became the Earl of Buckingham at the coronation of Richard II.

[73] J.C. Holt describes three basic tenets of Angevin royal policy. The first "tenet" was that they "exploited many functions attached to feudal lordship as financial resources for their wars and as instruments of political discipline to compel support" (28). Through various legal innovations, the Angevin kings appropriated manorial justice and turned it into a royal "commodity." These tenets were not part of a conscious plan, but rather were conventions of rule that had developed organically since the time of the Conquest.

the suzerainty of the lords, which bound the legal control of lords more firmly to the crown. The king's benches had quite literally become the fountain of justice (26). While local government handled some of the smaller crimes and misdemeanors, justice was primarily meted out through appointees of the crown (Baker 23). Only the court of assizes, the wandering eyres, and the various courts in Westminster could hope to contain the dangers of local legal disputes between landed people—disputes that could impact entire communities. While this royal presence, at times, caused some grousing, the increase in pleadings suggests that people, on a whole, appreciated the royal courts.

The association between the king and justice should not be described purely in institutional terms because the authority of the law and its institutions, to a considerable degree relied upon the acquiescence of the people.[74] The king simply did not have access to the coercive force or power of surveillance necessary to maintain true autocratic rule. As we see in the Mise d'Amiens, the terms (literally the boundaries) of this authority was constantly being negotiated. Majestic authority depended upon an effective rhetoric that established the "mutual recognition" (Wallerstein 44) between crown and commons through which order was maintained. However, the king could draw from the deep well of historical precedent to defend the *iura regis*. This customary authority of the king "is self-validating; its own existence and its own presumed longevity are the main reasons for presuming it to be good and well suited to the needs and nature of the people," or as Edmund Burke flippantly observed "the multitude, for the moment is foolish; but the species is wise and, given time, as a species it always acts right" (Pocock 18, 24).

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[74] Richard Firth Green explains that folk law was less about enforcement than creating a system that all members recognize and accept as part of their social duty (75-77). In such a system the rhetorical idea of "legitimacy" plays a crucial role in maintaining peace. For a full description of the workings of folk law, see Green, *Crisis* Ch. 3.

The stabilizing power of majesty is best seen through negative example at the moment when "mutual recognitions" deteriorate and the king's sovereignty is, thus, undercut. After Louis IX's judgment had ended all conciliatory possibilities, the inevitable war broke out between the king and the barons. The barons and Simon Montfort, in particular, tried to avoid engaging the king. Aside from the fact that the king's army would be militarily imposing—the king's presence created a political threat more dangerous than the swords. How can you attack the anointed one? How can you attack majesty? Even though they won the battle and captured the king and many of his allies, the open assault on majesty weakened Montfort's position significantly.[75] The rebels' open challenge to king's justice, an offense to the king's majesty, caused a breakdown in custom and order described by the *Furness* chronicler:

> Indeed such horrible deeds touching many parts of England, and old disagreements, renewed [*veteres discordiae*], erupted between neighbors, while it seemed that it was permitted with impunity for any more powerful to steal and oppress the weaker and inferior, because there was common war throughout the province. From which father rose up against son and son against father, brother against brother, and neighbor against neighbor, by the devils machination [*diablo machinante*].[76] (*Furness Chronicle* 545)

Notably this attack on majesty was experienced religiously as an inversion of the natural order, the *diablo machinante* that set father against son, son against father, and so forth. The *diablo machinante* set off by the encroachment of royal majesty provoked three imbricated reactions that undermined justice and stability. First, the willingness to

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[75] As Maddicott points out, "victory in battle may have given divine legitimation to his power, as the author of the *Song of Lewes* believed, but it also meant that his regime had been established by force and lacked the free consent of the defeated" (284). The lack of legitimacy for Montfort's regime manifested in the refusal of the Marcher barons to support Simon, the threat of French Invasion, and giving license to continued spoliation, see Maddicott, *Simon* 282-89.

[76] Translation mine. Original text from Howlett, Richard *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*: Talia quippe horribilia alibi per plures partes Angliae contigerunt, discordiaeque veteres inter vicinos renovatae proruperunt in medium, dum impune licere videbatur cuilibet potentiori [spoliare] atque opprimere debiliorem et inferiorem, eo quod communis esset guerra per universam provinciam. Unde pater adversus filium et filius contra patrem, frater in fratrem, et propinquus contra propinquum, diablo machinante, insurrexit (*Furness Chronicle* 545).

commit lawless acts increased because the principle of justice is no longer held as valid.

The attack on the king translates almost immediately into the renewal of former feuds

throughout the whole of England.[77] The renewal of these feuds was largely opportunistic.

In other words, the assault on majesty created a license for theft and rapine. Second,

undermining the king's majesty diminished the strength of local institutions because of

the uncertainty created. In fact, several local communities had two competing sheriffs.

As Claire Valente argues that the political and institutional reforms of Montfort could not

stem local violence and "uneasy victory had turned a political strategy of reform into

something akin to despotism." Finally, the lack of international support diverted

resources from attempts to bring about domestic security, which in turn weakened

institutions necessary to maintain stability. Behind the willing acceptance of a sacral

kingship, a belief that the king as the conduit of divine justice, was a *sense* that offending

majesty would disrupt the stability and cause violence within local communities. A sense

conditioned by a long history of such outbreaks of lawlessness that the king, the

hierarchy, the status quo were holy.

The Suasive Force of Political Rhetoric

The temporary reforms (and consequent coalitions) from 1258-63 brought on by

frustration with Lusignans, baronial ambition, widespread dissatisfaction and sincere

reformist zeal accelerated the development of political rhetoric. During Henry III's

kingship, particularly during the minority, the English baronage played an increased role

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[77] According to Maddicott the "disorders of 1263" caused many barons and knights to abandon Simon's coalition (250). This points to the discursive force of majestic rhetoric to maintain order itself. The open challenge to king's authority had led to outbreak of vendettas against various landed allies of the king. The violence in the shires, particularly during the summer of 1263, destabilized Montfort's regime. The disorder weakened the support for the Common Enterprise; see Jobson 96-98.

in the administrative functions of government. This increased role clashed with Angevin strategy of filling administrative positions with lesser nobility who were easily manipulated. In order to legitimize their claim for increased authority, the magnates needed to reshape the discourse of sovereignty. To this end, they combined the need to control the administrative apparatus of government with a series of reforms aimed at helping the gentry. This articulation of magnates with subordinate classes created a political coalition with enough coercive force to challenge the dominant rhetoric of majesty.

The viability of political rhetoric at the close of the thirteenth century depended upon the strength of the coalitions it formed. Although he was one of the most powerful earls in England and even frequently outside the country, Simon had a significant grasp on domestic issues concerning the vavasour class. His immediate circle of advisors, including several influential landholders such as Peter de Montfort (no relation) and Walter Cantilupe, had frequent interactions with the knights and gentry and thus intimate knowledge of the concerns of knights and gentry. Simon was able to use his awareness of local concerns to develop strong ties between the dissident barons and local communities (Carpenter 230-2) and to fashion the political rhetoric necessary to create a broad coalition between barons and gentry. While the role of the gentry in reshaping the authority of the *communitas regni* was informal, as they served the barons solely in an advisory capacity, these informal relationships were not superficial.[78]

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[78] The real strength of Montfort "lay in its leader's close relation with prelates and schoolmen. They brought to his service dialectical skills, practical support in negotiating and preaching, and a reputation for probity and intellectual distinction which the royalists could not match (Maddicott, *Simon 250*-1.

Montfort ensured the aspirations and needs of the gentry gained official representation in the Provisions of Oxford and Westminster. [79]   The Provisions of Oxford had extended the "rights and liberties" of the vavasour class giving them increased protection from crown and baronial curiales and increasing their access to the legal system through reform of the writ system. As a result, the Provisions created new lines of cooperation around the legal concept of a *communitas regni* that could push back against regal will. The barons described themselves as protecting "customary law;" however, the legal status really depended upon the size and strength of the coalition that underwrote it.[80] Indeed, even the king's agreement did not ensure their authority. Henry III accepted the provisions under duress and frequently pushed back, either rescinding them, ignoring them, or finally, in his written grievance to Louis IX, asking for them to be quashed. Nonetheless, the king's occasional acquiescence to the Provisions demonstrates that the strength of the alliance formed between the gentry and the barons was strong enough to make capitulation the "least costly strategy" (Wallerstein 44) for maintaining sovereignty.[81]

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[79] Simon Montfort refused to go back on his oath to uphold the Provisions of Oxford, even when it became apparent that they were impractical; see Maddicott, *Simon* 270-1; see also *Song of Lewes*: "For the Earl had first pledged his oath that whatever the zeal of the wise had provided for the reformation of the King's honour, and for the repression of wandering error, at Oxford, he would steadfastly keep it" (trans. ll. 227-231; p. 83).

[80] I use the phrase "legal status" to echo Joe Griffith's description of political constitutionalism in which the "legal status" is always a fiction underwritten by the coalitions capable of securing its "legality." The Provisions had popular support throughout the realm and extended the political class by uniting those members of the gentry with localized power with the insurgent barons.

[81] As Crick argues "politics arises from a recognition of restraints. The character of this recognition may be moral, but more often it is simply prudential, a recognition of the true power of social groups and interests, a product of being unable without more violence than one can risk and stomach to rule alone" (16). Aquinas provides a medieval example of this political thought *In libros politicorum* 2.7.245: The best government is a mixture of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy "because one government is tempered from the admixture of another, and less material is given for sedition if all have a part in the rule of the city, namely if the people dominates in something, the powerful in something and the king in something" (trans. in Blythe 49).

Through the development of a robust political rhetoric, the barons of the Common Enterprise established those "mutual recognitions" necessary to legitimize their authority (Wallerstein 44) and to challenge the king's authority. Entitling their document "Grauamina quibus terre Anglie opprimebatur" ("Grievances which oppressed the land of England") (*DBM* 269-70), the insurgent barons focused on a broader coalition-building concept—*terre Anglie*. In the body of the Barons' Gravamina, the barons repeatedly invoked the corporate health of the English people through words such as the *communitas regni, status regni, regni utilitatem,* and *regni consuetudine.* Evoking the widespread dissatisfaction in *terre Anglie,* they countered the king's complaints of lésé majesté with a corporate language that formed and arose out of this new baron-gentry coalition, a coalition capable of challenging and disrupting the king's majestic claims to sovereignty.

Fashioning themselves as the voice of *terre Anglie*, the insurgent barons demanded that the king respond directly to the needs of the community of the realm. Whereas the king had argued that officers such as the chancellor and treasurer "ought to protect the rights of kings," the barons *bind* these officers to the needs of the realm. The Barons' Gravamina explains that because many chancellors have issued writs

> against right, and customary forms of the chancery, for courtiers and certain aliens and other influential men who had the ear of the court, while other writs, which by right and custom of the realm ought to have been granted to individual plaintiffs, could in no wise be obtained against these people . . . and as many other perils arose from the carelessness of chancellors, it was necessary for all these reasons to apply a suitable remedy to this running sore. (*DBM* 261-63)

The claim that "certain aliens" and "influential men" can take advantage of the court system points to the real and perceived abuses of the Savoyards and the outrageous behavior of the Lusignans, both who were elevated by the king to the great displeasure of the English barons. Invoking the popular dislike of these two families, the barons accused

the king's *appointed* chancellor of failing to provide equal access to the royal courts. The argument against the chancellor fits in with the broader argument of their complaint that the king had failed to deliver justice to England. This critique cuts at the most fundamental principle of the monarchy, namely that the king "punish the wicked, and protect the just" (*ECR* 263).[82]

On the grounds that his appointees subverted justice, the barons challenged the king's right to appoint ("eligere et ponere") his own counselors. Their appeal was a legal challenge to the royal prerogative.[83] By emphasizing that the king's appointees benefited "certain aliens," the barons present the unbound prerogative as alien and a threat to the common profit, a belief supported by the sense that Roman law was an imported threat to the ancient customs of the realm. That the king recognized this, as an assault on his prerogative is clear in his own schedule of grievances that repeatedly insists that his right to act *pro sua voluntate* came from his ancestral claim (*sui antecessores*). By claiming that his power derived from his ancestors, the king was arguing that the barons have no legal jurisdiction to judge his acts. Whether the barons' accusations were right or wrong was immaterial. Their revolutionary (and imaginary) act was to claim *the right to accuse* and respond to regal crimes against the community of the realm.

The failure of the chancery and perils that it causes to the realm made it *necessary* "to apply a suitable remedy." Indeed, each stipulation of the barons' document points out that their acts were justified *because* of regal failure. While this may seem to be a

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[82] When the king was accepting the scepter, the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered the following prayer: "the rod of the kingdom, the rod of virtue, that thou may govern thyself properly, and defend the holy Church, and Christian people, committed by God unto thy charge: punish the wicked, and protect the just" (*ECR* 263). I modernized the spelling.

[83] For a discussion of the connections between prerogative, royal dignity and the appointments, see Jobson 96.

function of the document itself, it is worth noting that the king, in his grievances, rarely makes use of causal arguments. Instead he accuses the barons of encroaching on his rights immemorial without describing the *effects* of this encroachment. *Communitas*-rhetoric, in the Mise d'Amiens reconfigured the responsibility of the king, imagining it not as an ethical responsibility to God (and thus notional responsibility without meaningful safeguards) but rather as being "in service of those governed" (Foucault 96).[84] It began to imagine kingship within a field of lateral obligations. Although the Common Enterprise failed, the barons forged an oppositional rhetoric that established imagined lines of cooperation necessary to resist majestic authority and exposed the political realities inherent within majestic rhetoric. The barons' political rhetoric legitimized the imaginary construct of the community of the realm through which royal power could be assessed and judged, a rhetoric that transformed the ethical obligation of the *Fürstenspiegel*-prince into a legal obligation. Moreover, by conflating the *communitas regni* with the "rights and customs of the realm," the barons assumed the duty and authority to interpret and protect what amounts to the ancient constitution of the realm.

However, political rhetoric cannot be understood simply as a language of "customs and rights," since much of this language was already nominally part of the dominant rhetoric of majesty. Indeed, what I am calling political rhetoric has often been treated merely as part of a practical evolution of administrative reforms necessary to limit royal abuse. While the barons *might* have seen their reforms solely in this practical light,

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[84] Foucault describes a shift from the discourse of souvereignté to a discourse of gouvernmentalité (96), which he locates in the fifteenth century. Foucault's distinction between souvereignté and *gouvernmentalité* resembles my split between majesty and political rhetoric. However, I focus more on the way that political rhetoric (*gouvernmentalité*) evolved out of and created resistance against the structures of *souvereignté*.

it is crucial to emphasize that these reforms develop a language of the "customs and rights," that introduced a more robust *communitas regni*" capable of resisting regal authority.

A study of the subtle shifts in significance within this shared vocabulary points to the "active creation" of an authoritative *communitas regni,* a community that, in 1215 and again in 1265, would challenge the king's authority on the battlefield. Quentin Skinner has suggested that "a new vocabulary" is the "clearest sign that a society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept" (x). I would propose a useful corollary: when two groups fight violently over and within a single vocabulary, then, in all likelihood, one should look for an emergent rhetoric being shaped out of the dominant rhetoric. Majestic rhetoric was the dominant language. By "resignifying" and "proposing new applications" for the inherited terminology of this rhetoric the barons created a political rhetoric (Strohm, *Politique* 7).[85]

The language of "customs and rights of the realm" is an ancient language. For centuries it had been the language of *Fürstenspiegel* and romance depictions of the ethical king. Political rhetoric is performative; it transforms the language of ethics into royal obligations in order to form coalitions capable of restraining the king. We must understand *how* the barons transformed a discourse of customs into an authority to limit the prerogative of a sitting king, how they gave an old argument new and increased force. What I propose then is to give a brief history of the shared terms of political and majestic rhetoric in order to trace out how the barons' political rhetoric creates "new

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[85] Discussing linguistic strategies for identifying new ideas, Paul Strohm argues that "pressured by the exigencies of its context or circumstances of articulation, the individual utterance may be itself innovative, reinstating a superseded usage, resignifying an inherited term, proposing a new application" (*Politique* 7).

significances" and "applications" for a vocabulary once controlled and deployed in the service of majestic sovereignty—to show how the barons reshape a language of regal benevolence to a language with the authoritative force to strike at a sitting king.

The assertion that a king must protect "rights and liberties" of his subjects for the sake of the common good was axiomatic. In Henry II's Coronation Charter, the king restores all the liberties and free customs granted by Henry I. The charter begins with a formula that first acknowledges the king's primary responsibilities to the honor of God and Church and then a secondary but important responsibility for the improvement of the commonalty (*ad honorem Dei et sanctae ecclesiae et pro communi emendatione*). While the king has a holy duty to protect the interests of the commonwealth, the rights and liberties of the realm are, nonetheless, depicted as royal gift:

> Therefore, I will [*volo*] and strictly require that [*quod*] the holy church and all the earls and barons, and all my men should have and hold all those customs and grants and liberties and free customs, freely and quietly [*libere et quiete*], well and in peace, and completely, from me and my heirs to them and their heirs, as freely and quietly and fully in all things as King Henry, my grandfather, granted and conceded to them and by his charter confirmed them.[86]

Henry by ignoring the charter of his predecessor, Stephen, and alluding explicitly to the practices of Henry I, uses his own coronation charter to heal the rifts caused during the "anarchy" of Stephen.[87] The benevolence of Henry II's charter dovetails with his own reform of the Angevin legal system. During Henry II's reign, the crown began an

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[86] Anonymous translation at: http://conclarendon.blogspot.com/2012/09/coronation-charter-of-king-henry-ii.html. Latin text:
> Quare volo et firmiter praecipio quod sancta ecclesia et omnes comites et barones et omnes mei homines, omnes illas consuetudines et donationes et libertates et liberas consuetudines habeant et teneant, libere et quiete, bene et in pace et integre, de me et haeredibus meis, sibi et haeredibus suis, adeo libere et quiete et plenarie in omnibus sicut Rex Henricus avus meus eis dedit et concessit et carta sua confirmavit.

[87] When Henry II had "won the throne, division between foreign lords [Norman lords] and native subjects was as sharp and complete as it would ever be" (Rollison 46). This division, which Rollison sees as contextualizing the philosophy of John of Salisbury, also explains the need for Henry II's renewal of his grandfather's coronation charter; see also Holt 115-16.

ambitious program that developed new legal instruments desired by the king's subjects.

The rhetoric of emending the realm (*pro communi emendatione*) was part of the

substantial legal reforms through which the crown seized increased control over local

courts and thus garnered local power and revenues to the crown (Dunbabin 514).[88]

For David Rollison the language of these charters acknowledges the king's duty

to protect "the material and spiritual strength of the commonalty" (49). While these

charters point to the king's duty to the realm, the vague language of "customs and grants

and liberties and free customs," like the language of justice evoked in the coronation

ceremony or in *Fürstenspiegel* genre, avoids any objective standard against which the

king's actions or authority can be judged or limited. The ambiguity of royal diction is

itself part of a majestic rhetoric. Insofar as the king's will creates freedom and peace, it

secures "the material and spiritual strength of the commonalty;" and insofar as it refuses

to acknowledge any *specific* limits, it maintains the ideological illusion of an unbounded

prerogative. The king could claim to address the needs of the community of the realm,

but this community was "not the arbiter of how those needs ought to be satisfied"

(Dunbabin 515). This is a crucial distinction because the barons of the Common

Enterprise reinterpret the charters of Henry I and II as ensuring all the *specific* liberties

and rights that would be adumbrated in Magna Carta;[89] and thus, they imagine these

charters as part of an ancient constitution extending into time immemorial.

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[88] Dunbabin argues, "the meteoric rise of English and French kings in the second half of the twelfth century was owed principally to their acceptance of their subjects' view of justice, to their willingness to put legal sanction behind rights" (514). For example the use of royal commissions and justices of the peace made "county assemblies" less relevant such that "it might be said that in reality the Crown had taken the county from the sheriff and put it into commission;" see Baker 25).

[89] As Pocock points out, Matthew of Paris himself believed Magna Carta "contain[ed] little that is not in Henry II's charter or in the laws, which are called King Edwards," (*Ancient Constitution* 44). The passage from Matthew of Paris exemplifies the legal fiction that barons used to justify their resistance to John and Henry III.

The coronation charter exalts the king's position as the protector of justice. By granting these "liberties and free customs" into perpetuity, Henry I reminds his audience that "he *gives* and concedes [these rights] to them*"*—his law is a gift. Equally important, it allows Henry II to exercise his own will (*volo et firmiter praecipio*) in restoring and ensuring the continuation of these rights, in reasserting his authority after the anarchy of Stephen.[90] Like Henry I's charter, Henry II uses the concession of liberties and termination of evil customs to emphasize the idea that the king is fount of all justice.[91] This idea is built into the syntax of the charter itself: that is the primary verb "volo" (I will) guarantees the whole structure of rights that "the holy church, earls and barons and all" the king's men enjoy. The rights, which the nobility enjoyed (*habeant et teneant*), are part of a *quod*-clause dependent on *volo*; as such they are syntactically subordinated to the free action of the king to will. Without the king's will there would be no rights. Moreover, characteristic of majestic rhetoric, the subjects' proper subordination to this "will" creates the conditions for the realm to live *libere et quiete.* Through the reign of Henry II the customs and rights of the realm, quite literally, depended upon the bene-*volence* of the king. This traditional Angevin understanding of the royal will shapes Henry III's majestic emphasis on *voluntas* in his schedule of grievances.

Since its conception, Magna Carta (i.e. the Great Charter) has often been read as part of a continuous legal tradition expanding upon the ideas of previous coronation charters, a tradition guaranteeing and extending the "rights and customs of the realm."

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[90] Graeme in *Restoration and Reform* suggests that Henry II used his Coronation Charter "to present himself as the continuator of Henry I's reign . . . so that he could be free to recover the estates and reclaim the rights lost by the Crown since 1135" (2). In this sense, the "gift" was part of a strategy of recovering and reclaiming royal authority.

[91] Henry II exploited the idea of the king as the "fountain of justice," an idea that arose from the "revived study of Roman jurisprudence" in Bologna. The premise was that "while the Roman people were the ultimate source of all political authority, it had transferred its authority to the emperor"(Carlyles 5:83-84).

Interpreting Magna Carta in this light would have been essential to baronial reformers looking for some authority to justify their demands. However this ignores how Magna Carta, unlike the coronation charter of Henry II, *specifically* identifies liberties shared by the entire realm and how it imagines a coercive mechanism to guarantee these rights. Drawing on the gift-language of previous coronation charters, Magna Carta masquerades as a kind of benevolent concession: "we have also granted to all free men of our realm for ourselves and our heirs in perpetuity all these liberties written below" (Clause 1). However, Magna Carta is anything but a benevolent concession. For all intents and purposes, it is a peace treaty between the barons and the king. However, by identifying particular "liberties" such as protections against disparagement (Clause 8), rules about inheritances (Clause 1-7), forest law (Clause 47-48), the charter defines and establishes limits for the king's authority. Instead of the vague concept of royal restoration of liberties *pro communi emmendationi*, Magna Carta, with its specific demands, embodies public interest or common profit. It is an early intimation of public policy and a public more generally.

The language of Magna Carta does not show that the king's power was *actually* limited by this charter (in fact King John swiftly revoked it and had his oath annulled by Innocent III). What it does show is the rhetorical mechanism through which a king's ambiguous ideological claim of an *ethical* responsibility *pro communi emendationi* could be transformed into *legal* obligation. For example, in Clause 39, perhaps the most famous clause of Magna Carta, King John asserts that: "No free man will be taken or imprisoned or disseised or outlawed or exiled or in any way ruined, nor shall we go or

send against him, save by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land."[92]

The assertion that a free man cannot be punished without such judgment provides a clearer articulation of the principles of justice than the notional concept of *liberas* or *malas consuetudines* that Henry II, in his coronation charter, promised to maintain or quash respectively. Since all of this is part of a royal concession, the power to imprison can still be described as part of royal authority (i.e. a royal gift). However, the specificity disarticulates an aspect of sovereign authority (the right to imprison without lawful judgment) from the king's *personal* will.

By granting these liberties for him and his "heirs in perpetuity," King John redefines the relationship between king and commonwealth. The king's gift is the self-limitation of his own authority. In other words, the authority to imprison has been *imagined* as a royal institution, an institution that over time could not, without significant violence, be completely rescinded.[93] We see here an early understanding of the separation between the personal king and the Crown in which certain powers, such as the authority to imprison, derive from the impersonal authority of the Crown. The development of highly specified "conventions of the Constitution" that both authorized and limited the king's *voluntas* was a central concept of political rhetoric.

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[92] All citations are from Holt's translation of the original 1215 Magna Carta in appendix 6 of his book, *Magna Carta*.

[93] Although *Magna Carta* was revised continuously, often weakening enforcement clauses that felt onerous to majestic authority, it was never rescinded, and the document continued to offer a template for resistance rhetoric that was renewed in the Provisions or the Ordinances of 1311, or again during the trial of Edward II. It was even used, though somewhat cynically by the barons who deposed Richard II. As Nigel Saul points out, Magna Carta appears in the records of the Merciless parliament. After a document "appointing the 'continual council' for twelve months, in the form it which it was issued in letters to the sheriffs on 1 December 1386," the next document in the register is "an incomplete transcription of the 'Carta de Rounkemede' as it is termed – the 1215 Magna Carta - consisting of the opening address, clauses 1 and 2 and the security clause." http://magnacarta.cmp.uea.ac.uk/ read/feature_of_the_ month/Mar_2015_2. Viewed December 20, 2016. "Magna Carta and the Politics of the Reign of Richard II" from the *Magna Carta* project.

Much like the barons at Runnymede, the dissident barons of 1265 deployed a language of common law emphasizing rights, liberties, and customs. What made the barons' demands unique from Magna Carta was that a coalition formed within the rhetoric of "rights and liberty" seized control of the levers of power and made royal authority dependent upon the *communitas regni*. The Mise d'Amiens uses the communal rhetoric to legitimize opposition to royal power. In the Provisions and the Mise, the barons actualize the potential coercive force inherent in Clause 61 and develop a conciliar government capable of wielding sovereign power in the name of the king—a power that radically divorces the king and full sovereignty. Through this conciliar authority, the barons amplified the legal implications behind the concept of *communitas regni* in such a way the "needs of the commonalty" (Rollison 49) directly (and indeed explicitly) limited the scope of royal power. These were not royal gifts; they were direct interventions meant to address the needs of the realm.

Instead of imagining liberties and rights as magnanimous gifts of the king, the Barons' Gravamina is grounded in an authority that protected the rights and liberties of the community of the realm. The perceived needs of the community determine the necessary remedies to the administrative apparatus through which royal power was disbursed. This relationship between community and sovereign power is embedded in the syntax. Most of the clauses of Mise begin with a *propter*-clause outlining a deficiency in condition of the *communitas regni* and then conclude with a *necese fuit*-clause indicating the council's amendment. For example, we see this syntactic structure in Clause 7:

> "Because of [*propter*] the lack of justice . . . it was necessary [*necese fuit*] to
> create a chief justiciar who should have the power to correct all errors of lesser

justices and of all lower officials and of earls and barons and all other persons according to the laws of the realm." (*DBM* 260-1)

The *propter/necesse fuit* structure is a very different paradigm than the *volo* of Henry I and II. The lack of justice (*deffectum iusticie*) requires the creation of a chief justiciar, a new office with an old title. What is crucial here is that the king's authority depends upon his responsiveness to the community.

Through this "imagined community," the baronage claimed control over vast portions of the administration from national positions (such as the justiciar, the chancellor, the head of the exchequer) to local offices (like castellans and sheriffs). Political rhetoric was a mechanism for asserting control over the apparatus of sovereignty and ultimately discovering a method "to carry on administration in the king's name" (*ECH* 102). On the flip side, the effectiveness of this rhetoric depended upon "genuine accommodation" of the needs of some broader community. The barons achieved this through providing expanded access to a legal system that offered protections from lower officials and sometimes from more powerful landlords.

One may argue, as S.B. Chrimes has, that this represents more of a change of personnel than actual principle of governance. For the most part, the barons do not introduce new administrative positions or functions. Nonetheless, the Provisions of Oxford mark a significant change in the way that sovereignty was imagined: the needs of the *communitas regni* create lateral obligations that impinge upon sovereignty. The king had a legal duty to respond to the needs of the community and could be legally resisted if he failed. Thus, unlike Henry II whose concession of "rights and liberties" *pro communi emendatione* emphasized regal control over the legal system, the barons' *communitas regni* established a system that limited the scope of majestic authority. That is, the very

word *communitas regni* was no longer an important yet vague responsibility of the king, but rather, through the council, it became a means of judging, challenging, and intervening in sovereign decisions.

The amplified sense of *communitas regni* fostered an alternative and oppositional representation of the relationship between sovereign power and royal will. The barons' present royal authority not as unfettered will (i.e. *iura regi* or the ability to act *pro sua voluntate*) but more as 'will' that must be carefully protected from dangerous desires. The barons establish a rival rhetoric that emphasizes both the fallibility of the king and the standard of justice to which he is held, an emphasis that culminates in Clause 13:

> Therefore it seems that this provision or ordinance is sanctified and honest, and that it is made for the honour of the lord king [*honorem domini regis*] and for the common advantage of his kingdom, the king being bound to give justice to every one. As human malice [*malicia hominum*] grows this purpose could be achieved no other way; but those who strive to overthrow this provision or ordinance and to draw the lord king by snares of deception into the opposing party, are seeking to pull him into confusion, which heaven forbid, and his kingdom into ruin. (*DBM* 265)

The barons depict the provisions and ordinances as a way of protecting the "honor of the king" from wicked men who aim to infringe upon the king's authority through deception and flattery. Presumably, the king, failing to see the danger, will fall into their snare,s and thus his power will be used to bring ruin to the kingdom. The barons' rhetoric pivots from *dignitas regi* of hereditary personal kingship, stressed by Henry, to *honorem regi* as an idealized spiritual condition of the king that must be protected from *malicia hominum* and as will be suggested in the *Song of Lewes,* from the possible malice in the king's own earthly will. While the trope of the wicked advisor was a commonplace in political invective, meant to sidestep blaming the king directly, the barons brought this trope to its

logical conclusion, namely the fallibility of the king and the potential effects of that

fallibility justify a conciliar government that protects against human malice.

From Mise d'Amiens to *The Song of Lewes*

The establishment of a semi-permanent conciliar body capable of intervening in

the flow of sovereign *imperium* caused a paradigm shift that cut across discursive

domains from legal-political register of the Mise d'Amiens to a religious register in the

Song of Lewes, a poem celebrating Simon Montfort's unlikely victory over Henry's

forces in 1264. While the *Song* had no official function, it aspires to provide a

theologico-legal justification of barons' authority. In fact, as a literary scholar, the *Song*

of Lewes sticks out precisely because it is one of the few political poems, perhaps the

only one, that explicitly and extensively bridges the gap between grand political theory

and operative political practice in medieval England.

The *Song* provides the legal resolution that eluded the barons at Amiens. By

bridging legal and theological registers, the anonymous poet imagines the Battle of

Lewes as a kind of trial by combat in which God rendered the final judgment:

> Gladious inualuit, multi cecidereunt,
> Veritas preualuit, falsique fugerunt,
> Nam periuris restitit dominus uirtutum,
> Atque puris prestitit ueritatis scutum; (23-26)

> The sword was powerful; many fell; truth prevailed; and the false men fled, For
> the Lord of valour resisted the perjured men, and defended those who were pure
> with the shield of truth (Trans. Wright 73) [94]

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[94] All citations and translations of *Song of Lewes* from Wright, Thomas. *The Political Songs of England, from the Reign of John to That of Edward II.*

Rhyming the strength of the sword and the deaths of many (*inualuit*/*ceciderunt*) with victory of truth and the flight of falseness (*preualit*/*fugerunt*) presents the battle as a conflict between two opposing ideological systems. The false flee because the virtue of God withstands the perjurers. One of the central claims of Mise, the claim that the king and his men broke their oath to the Provisions of Oxford, becomes the legal complaint in this trial by battle. The deployment of the language of God's judgment (*periuris restitit dominus uirtutum*), the use of shame and valor (*Veritas preualuit, falsique fugerunt*) as modes of proving one's guilt or innocence, and the consistent reference to Henry's faction as "periuris" suggest that the *Song of Lewes* was meant to be read as a legal document.[95]

Trial by combat was seen as a way of resolving a conflict between two claims that seemed to have no other legal remedy, usually because both claimants were able to validate their claims, or, as in this case, because the barons could not appeal to a higher authority.[96] The *Song of Lewes* reprises the legal conflict; more importantly, however, it renders the legal conflict in more explicitly theological terms. The political imaginary of the *Song*—the imaginary through which the barons understood, represented, and justified their actions—derives from a strain of political Augustinianism that had been expressed most clearly in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*.[97]

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[95] These are not isolated examples. Henry III and his armies are repeatedly referred to as perjurers, and the strength and valor of Simon Montfort is carefully articulated as a proof of the justness of his claims. The description of the king and his men as perjurers establishes the legal context of the judicial ordeal in which those who are not oathworthy (i.e. perjurors) can only prove their innocence through ordeal, see Green, *Crisis* 62-3.

[96] As Green notes in his discussion of a ninth-century case from Orléans, trial by combat was a "last resort when rival legal systems were in hopeless conflict" (83).

[97] Trial by combat may offer the only way to bring charges against someone who exists outside of all jurisdictions. Maddicott notes that the *Song of Lewes* was the most elevated expression of the religious rhetoric and forensic power which . . . had come to characterise the public face of the reform movement;" see *Simon* 280.

In the *Song of Lewes*, the fundamental relationship between will and reason that

defines the barons' politics derives from Augustine's faculty theology. The tension

between will and reason manifests itself, at the beginning of the poem, in the tight

linguistic construction describing the king's bloody wrath: "Racio furori, vita cessit ensi"

(18). Emphasized by the use of zeugma, *furori*, in this oppositional structure, represents

the most dangerous and arbitrary expression of the king's will, as will entirely divorced

from reason. *Furori racio* collapses quickly into *vita cessit ensi*. The life yielding to the

sword, here, is both a result and judgment of the king's *furiori*. The will/reason dyad,

here described with some bias, as furori/racio, already not alien to legal language, derives

from Augustinian faculty psychology.[98] This psychological construct enabled political

reformers to reimagine the source of sovereign authority without explicitly denying the

claims of majestic rhetoric.

Faculty psychology, described at length in *De trinitate* and *De libero arbitrio*,

describes how faculties of the mind—memory, intellect and will—negotiate a world of

corporeal perception and divine illumination—what Augustine calls inner and outer man.

Notably, will or love, part of the mental trinity acts as the pivot between both inner and

outer man. When will bends toward reason, it moves away from the corporeal world and

toward "the participation in that highest light" (*De Trinitate* XIV.12.15), but when it

bends toward self-love or love of corporeal things it foolishly seeks "servile liberty"

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[98] Augustine's faculty psychology shaped one of the most important texts that informed medieval psychology, Boethius *Consolation*: "Human souls are of necessity more free when they continue in the contemplation of the mind of God and less free when they descend to bodies, and less still when they are imprisoned in earthly flesh and blood. They reach extremity of enslavement when they give themselves up to wickedness and lose possession of their proper reason" (118).

(XI.v.8).[99] This line of theological thought continues to shape Christian views of literary thought throughout the Middle Ages. For example, Robert Grosseteste, archbishop of Lincoln and friend of both Henry and Simon Montfort, expounding on Galatians 5.18 "if you are led by the spirit, you are not subject to the law" describes Christian liberty in the following terms: "if you follow the guidance of the higher reason that is conformed to the Holy Spirit, you are not under the law, that is, you do not follow the law through fear of punishment, but being with the law you follow it through love of justice" (Grosseteste 184).[100] What is important, for the legal application of this psychology is that it creates new ways of imagining liberty and servility. Grosseteste does not connect this passage to sovereignty. Nonetheless, the Pauline principle that following "higher reason" actually frees you from the law, provides an interpretive lens through which the civilian maxim, *princeps solutus legibus est* assumes a whole new meaning.

There is, of course, something ironic about Augustine providing the foundations of resistance rhetoric, since Augustine generally advocated political quietism even in the face of tyranny.[101] For Augustine the proper alignment of the faculties led to *vera iustitia*, however, this justice was predicated upon the heavenly city that had little need for earthly justice; indeed, Augustine contrasts *vera iustitia* with the Cicero's more political *summa iustitia*, a justice more dependent on *consensus iuris* and *utilitatis communio* (Parel 71-74). John of Salisbury, using a register similar to Augustine, describes a model of justice in which "the will of the ruler is determined by the law of

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[99] All translations of *De trinitate* by Stephen McKenna from *The Trinity.*

[100] Translations from McEvoy, J. J. *Robert Grosseteste.*

[101] Augustine advocated a kind of quietism very popular in medieval political theory: "For whatever injury wicked masters inflict upon good men is to be regarded, not as a penalty for wrong-doing, but as a test for their virtues" (*De Civitas Dei* 4.3).

God and does not injure liberty. By contrast, the will of the tyrant is the slave to desires

and, opposing law which supports liberty, it ventures to impose the yoke of servitude

upon *fellow* slaves" (*Policraticus* VIII.22). We might assume that John's "law of God" is

divorced from the laws of the realm, if John did not make it clear that a king's tyrannical

and enslaved desires "impose . . . servitude" upon others. The tyrant's will perverts

justice for others. More importantly, when it perverts justice, when it makes others into

slaves, the king's will is not the will of a prince. That is, insofar as the tyrant is enslaved

by desire, this desire cannot even be described as his will.

John's description allows for the will of the tyrant to be perceived not only as a

threat to others, but to the king himself; the language of the king's plaint to Louis IX—

his invocation of *iura regi* and his right to act *pro sua voluntate*—becomes ambivalent.

This distinction is crucial because it allows the barons to act in the name of the king, to

seize control of the administration in the name of the king, to rule in the name of the king

and to do all of these things to save the king. Members of the barons' coalition (with

greater or lesser sincerity) could legitimately claim that they had "no designs against

kingly honour," but rather that they sought "to reform and magnify the kingly condition"

(*Song of Lewes* 536; 537-38). The reformation of the "kingly condition," as an abstract

principle, to which the corporeal king was bound, establishes an early and somewhat

vague concept of state.

The barons' reformation of the kingly condition is different not only from

Augustine but also from *Policraticus*. Much like Augustine's *vera iustitia*, John's "law

of God" is not imagined as the subordination of the will to a public entity. While John

makes a case for tyrannicide, the actual "sword of god" is not a public entity. God's

avenger acts privately and within the bounds of Church. The barons' big achievement

then is to imagine an institutional protection and institutional measure of the "kingly

condition;" they reimagine a language of *communitas regni*, long part of the political

discourse, as a lateral obligation (i.e. "*qui tenetur omnibus dare iusticiam*") limiting royal

authority. The *Song of Lewes* imagines the barons' obligation to protect the community

of the realm in political and theological terms:

> There be permitted to a king all that is good, but that he dare not do evil,—this is God's gift. They who keep the king from sinning when he is tempted, they serve the king, to whom he should be grateful that they deliver him from being made a slave; so that those by whom he is led do not overcome him. But he who should be in truth a king, he is truly free if he rule rightly himself and the kingdom; let him know that all things are permitted him which are in ruling convenient to the kingdom, but not such as destroy it. (687-696)

This is not *mere* rhetoric. The idea of keeping "the king from sinning" establishes a

religiously-sanctioned and coercive, legal authority. This coercive authority stops the

poem from devolving into the ethical instruction of a *Fürstenspiegel*.

While the king saw any legal obligation as impinging on his prerogative, the

relationship between law and freedom was more ambivalent. The king's freedom from

the law, much like Grosseteste's Christian liberty, is ultimately an absolute freedom to

serve the law. The barons imagine this theology in public terms. The conciliar

government safeguards the king's honor by stopping the "king from sinning" and ensures

that the king "rule rightly" and thus ensures the king's freedom. Put another way, the

barons' conciliar government is *protecting* the royal prerogative by maintaining his

freedom. Equally important is that the "material and spiritual condition of the

commonalty" provides the barons with a moral obligation to protect the both the realm

and "kingly condition" (i.e. *honorem regi*).

The transformation of faculty psychology into a public state apparatus is one of the momentous rhetorical achievements of the barons. The barons' claim that a conciliar government is meant not to limit the prince's will but rather to protect his will from the corporeal desire that enslaves the tyrant. The barons' use this concept of "higher reason" to separate the justice of the prince from the arbitrary "furor" of the tyrant. Read in this light, the king is conferred with the duty to protect the commonwealth and, insofar as the king protects the commonwealth he is acting as a prince and is not "under the law;" however, when the king harms the commonwealth then he turns away from higher reason and is wallowing in a kind of "servile liberty." In short, he has become a slave.

Thus, in order to protect the *honorem regi* the barons must seize control of the administrative apparatus and do justice to the commonwealth to save the king. The prince becomes an abstract principle divorced from the physical king himself. The prince is the murky beginnings of the state itself. This psychological construct of sovereign authority shapes the political aesthetic of Ricardian England: it is the psychological space inhabited by Chaucer's Walter, Gower's Lycurgus, and countless other imaginary Ricardian characterizations of sovereignty. Each character in their own way reflects the anxieties alive within the discourse of sovereignty—anxieties that shape and were shaped by the Second Barons' War.

While kingship remained hereditary and hierarchical, the political imaginary in *Song of Lewes* established a potential (imaginary) construct in which legitimate authority can be imagined as psychological alignment of the king's moral universe—an alignment that can be (and is) used to justify conciliar authority and even deposition. It presents us with a potential that exists within, and yet, stands apart from the "worldview" that

dominates the medieval political scene. This alternative model emerges from potential to actual for a brief moment, is memorialized in the *Song of Lewes*, garners the support of a few chroniclers and then is crushed out by Henry III. While the actual political institutions are undone, Edward I appropriates and deploys political rhetoric to strengthen his own kingship. What is important for this dissertation is not the success or failure of the barons' revolution but rather the continued existence of alternative rhetoric struggling to articulate a public arena—the struggle to establish a civic consciousness.

It is tempting to conclude this chapter with bulleted lists neatly separating majestic and political rhetoric, but this mistakes the "working out" for the worked out. It would be to replace one dogma with another. The reality is far murkier. Political rhetoric is an emergent rhetoric. It rises out of the sale of liberties meant to fund foreign wars and the ambition of Angevin kings to increase regal authority by establishing a larger and more efficient administrative and judicial apparatus. Political rhetoric emerges from majestic rhetoric. And yet, the Crown could sell these liberties and expand its authority precisely because the people desired these political boons. There was, and probably always is, some natural impetus for political liberties.   From the Coronation Charter of Henry I to the *Song of Lewes* we find traces of an evolving political language. Henry plays to the aspirations of "his people," using the *communitas*-rhetoric to expand his own regal powers; one century later, it is this rhetoric revised and strengthened that the barons deploy to constrain the authority of the king.

Political rhetoric in the Middle Ages, since it is still being worked out, cannot be reduced to definitions, it can only be understood as motivated and thus moving toward: it cannot be reduced to coordinates, but must be understood as a vector. When we try to

understand the political imaginary of Ricardian poets we must look beyond the cosmic

framework and certainly beyond prince pleasing rhetoric. This chapter provides a picture

of the discourse of sovereignty in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries so that

we can understand Ricardian political imagination as complex, ridden with anxiety,

driven by aspiration, and ultimately confused as it reaches toward a language not yet

created.

CHAPTER III

FROM ETHICS TO LAW: THE REVISION OF THE PRINCE'S MIRROR IN THE

CONFESSIO AMANTIS

In his earliest work, the *Mirour de l'Omme,* Gower describes the "crisis of

authority" that shaped his later work.[1] Towards the end of the *Mirour*, the narrator

allegorically interrogates the world about the origins of evil. Gower describes evil as a

dispute within the discourse of sovereignty:

> Nowadays men by common dispute, argue and pretend to be wise men, each
> upholding his own argument. You say it is the fault of the nobles, I say it is the
> priests, through whom our world is becoming evil. Someone else says the
> common people behave badly and do not fulfill the obligations of their estate.
> But whoever thinks reasonably must well realize there is no advantage in
> chattering idly like this.
>
> When the foot rises up against the head, this is very dishonorable; and likewise
> when the people rise up like savage beasts in a multitude and a tempest against
> the lords, it is a great error. And yet the little people say that their superiors give
> cause for the disturbance that is their common clamor. But all this is only folly,
> which gives no remedy to the world.[2] (trans. of ll. 27217-40; p. 357)

Gower's pragmatic analysis of the political landscape in this allegorical interrogation of

the world points to his dedication to the political perspective focused on the actual

conditions of power. The rhetorical division between those blaming the "nobles" and

those blaming the "common people," which sounds remarkably similar to the discourse

of sovereignty in 1265, reflects the anxiety that is the subject of this book, the tension

between political and majestic rhetoric. Gower's description of the actions of the little

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[1] Yeager suggests that the *Mirour* serves as a "suitable introduction to Gower's methods and to what he expected his audience to notice" (R. Yeager 83). While he argues that the text illuminates Gower's literary project, I would suggest that the *Mirour* shows the *development* of Gower's political imagination. His pronouncements in the *Mirour*, much like *Vox Clamantis*, assume a transcendental perspective. The *Confessio* does not allow this transcendental perspective. We see what Anne Middleton may argue is a movement from a narrator with a "transcendent status" to the common voice (99).

[2] All translations of the *Mirour de l'Omme* are from William Burton Wilson's *Mirour De L'omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*.

ones as "very dishonorable" as the behavior of "savage beasts" and as "great error"

acknowledges the value of a strict hierarchical organization of society—the kind of

hierarchalism that underwrites majestic rhetoric.   He clearly favors this over the "little

people['s]" rebellious claim that "their superiors give cause for the disturbance." Gower's

conservative image among scholars is well earned.[3] However, the accusation that the

commoners fail to "fulfill the obligations of their estate" (much like the complaints of

commoners against nobles) provides "no remedy" for the fault, the social division. It

offers no practical "advantage." In a very real sense, the narrator's interrogation of the

world and worldliness, alongside his sidelining of majestic rhetoric as worthy but not

practical, mirrors Gower's development of a political rhetoric through which social

division can be both represented and resolved.[4]

Gower's poetry embodies the historical friction between majestic and

'constitutional' rhetoric in the late Middle Ages, a transitional moment fraught with both

conflict and ambiguity. Although political rhetoric often conflicted with majestic claims,

this rhetoric did not emerge fully formed and separate from majestic rhetoric, but rather it

'emerged' from within majestic rhetoric over time. J.C. Holt has described the

development of this political thought as a "educative process"(51) through which

liberties, once little more than the wishful thinking of the disgruntled and powerless,

became commodities "given" by the king (usually for a few hundred pounds sterling),

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[3] See Strohm "Form" 26-29; Kendall 60-2; Giancarlo 93; and Arner 45-8.

[4] Recently Georgiana Donavin's "Rhetorical Gower: Aristotelianism in the *Confessio Amantis's* Treatment of 'Rethorique'" and Allan Mitchell's "Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Natural Morality and Vernacular Ethics" have explored Gower's use of practical rhetoric. Like Middleton, they emphasize the strategies through which Gower separated his narratorial voice the cosmic models we see in writers like Alain de Lille. Mitchell, for example, argues that the *Confessio* provides "a distinguished alternative . . . example of serious philosophical and ethical reflection" to the "customary privileging of a metaphysical foundation" of "medieval ethical theory" (137).

which in turn became "universal" rights delineated in Magna Carta.[5] Holt is clear

however, that the "learning process" was one of trial and error, a process of a feeling their

way in the "darkness of corporate liberties" (73). There are two crucial points to

highlight here. First, the development of constitutional thought was worked out within

the epistemological limits of majestic rhetoric; it was a revision of the king's gift.

Second, the jagged learning process through which the king's gift becomes a universal

and legal obligation involved imaginative reconstructions of the social order. This

tension between new and old is apparent in Gower as well. That is, like the insurgent

baronage of Henry III who thought they were protecting the *traditional* rights of the

communitas regni, Gower, in all likelihood, thought of his own work as part of traditional

discourse of kingship rather than part of an emerging rhetoric aimed at the reformation of

sovereignty; and yet in his turn towards the practical, in his turn towards the world,

Gower develops a powerful narrative form that destabilizes the metaphysical façade of

sovereignty and rendered an increasingly political order intelligible. He reimagines

majestic ideals such as strength, justice, *trouthe*, and law within a more political

framework.

The purpose of this chapter is to imagine Gower's poetry as part of an "evolving

political consciousness" (Chrimes 109) imbued with a nascent constitutionalism. By

constitutionalism, I mean the "older traditional view in which the word was applied only

to the principles to be deduced from a nation's actual institutions and their development"

(McIlwain 2-3), what Pocock describes as the "ancient constitution." Gower imagines a

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[5] Holt describes Magna Carta not as "a sudden jump into the darkness of corporate liberties but rather the last strides of
a long journey which had started far back in the history of the English kingdom and which had been illuminated in the
twelfth century by increasing confidence with which men sought and granted such liberties" (55); see also Chrimes
ECH 60-1; and Jolliffe 3-5.

body of laws, of "ancient liberties" possessed from time immemorial, that could not be denied *per voluntatem regis* (Pocock, *Ancient* 45-56). Gower's attempt to heal the social division described in the *Miroir* takes a constitutional form, insofar as it imagines authority not as a reflection of the cosmic framework, but rather as *constituted* by relationships within society. Scholars such as Elliot Kendall, Conrad van Dijk, and Lynn Staley have begun to demonstrate how a social construction of power informs Gower's poetry. By and large, these studies examine how Gower opposes the abuse (and thus supports the limitations) of royal prerogative. Indeed, Conrad van Dijk argues that Gower opposes the prerogative so vigorously such that "little appears left of the idea that the king is *legibus solutus*" (127). Aside from van Dijk's analysis of Gower and the law, these studies, reading Gower against the backdrop of the events leading up to the Merciless Parliament, tend to depict Gower as supporter of baronial political agenda (Olsson 150-6; Staley, *Languages* 25-7). They highlight his politics rather than his poetics.

James Simpson's *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*, to my knowledge, gives one of the only comprehensive descriptions of Gower's constitutional poetics. Simpson's study initiates an important exploration into how constitutionalist thinking transforms narrative and hermeneutics. According to Simpson, Gower works out a "constitutional compromise between the demands of the body and those of reason" by making the "secular science of politics" the organizing principle of his work (Simpson 273). Developing this line of reasoning, I show how the development of "secular science of politics" in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries manifests in a new narrative form.

Since narrative embodies the ideological relationships necessary to maintain a particular social order, it was only natural that it slowly transformed as a result of changes in the discourse of sovereignty occasioned by the constitutional violence of the thirteenth century. J.G.A. Pocock's description of the dominant narrative structure (and the interpretive approach it encourages) reveals the ideological relationships embedded in majestic narrative that was under pressure after the thirteenth century. Like many medieval scholars, Pocock presuming that medieval politics was a derivative of theological thought (rather than vice versa), describes medieval hermeneutics and narrative as related to an eternal order:

> Christian thought concerning a succession of particulars . . . tended to consist of a succession of efforts to relate the particulars to universals, carried out by means that might be philosophical or poetical, typological, anagogical, or analogical—there was an impressive, even majestic array of devices existing to this end—but operated so as to view each particular in its relation to eternity and to pass the succession of particulars itself as revealing nothing of importance. (*Machiavellian* 8)

What J.G.A Pocock describes here, Ad Putter saw in traditional romance (Ch. 4), and Donald Hanson discerned in political tracts: a narrative structure in which cause and effect operate on a higher plane in which "praiseworthy or reprehensible conduct [gets] its just deserts" without showing any "orderly progress from premises to conclusions" (Hanson 41). Such a model is found in Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* where an "understanding of politics is inseparable from an understanding of the justice which informs the cosmos and the soul" (Simpson 219). The reader interprets a text in relation to an "eternal order" that diminishes or excludes altogether the temporal accounts of

cause and effect, a textual practice that effaces historical order.[6] For example, in the

Knight of the Cart, Lancelot crosses the hazardous Sword Bridge safely because his faith

in God is "praiseworthy;" insofar as worldly realities exist—i.e. a razor sharp bridge—

these temporal facts are illusory. The relationship between Lancelot and God determines

the outcome of this scene, a relationship that parallels the majestic relationship between

subject and king (Putter 149-55).[7] The reader must separate *sensus litteralis* from *sensus*

spiritualis, an interpretive procedure popularly described in the Middle Ages as

separating the grain from the chaff.

Interpretation subjected the particulars to a universal that was *assumed*, not

constituted. The act of interpretation required a subjection to power and authority

external to human jurisdiction. Of course, this cosmic jurisdiction reproduced the

traditional hierarchical relationship between lord and liege. The theocratic aspect of the

majestic hermeneutic develops out of and reinforces "the stark realities of social and

economic power"(Wallace 287).[8] The kings and lords in Europe after the fall of Rome

had the economic and social power to demand obedience from their subjects and

eventually this obligation of obedience was encoded into Christianity (Hanson 47-50).

This "privileging of metaphysical foundation" (Mitchell 137) provided a way of thinking

about and (to a degree) securing a government grounded in the principles of "double

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[6] Lee Patterson describes the history of "the radical devaluation of both historiography and the historical life;" see 86-99; quotation from 86).

[7] James Simpson, likewise, describes how poets such as Alain de Lille relying on Neoplatonic philosophy was used to show "justice in human affairs finds its "'fons et origo' in natural justice of the cosmos" (106)—an idea that Simpson connects with the absolutist political thought of *Anticlaudianus*, see 98-116; Harriss 6-13; and for a developed example, see Putter's discussion of *Knight of the Cart*, 149-55.

[8] David Wallace is specifically describing the magnificence of the "noble theatre" where Palamon and Arcite will fight in the *Knight's Tale*. The "theater" creates a symbolic system that creates a sense of transcendent religious authority born out of "the stark realities of social and economic power." For a discussion of magnificence-rhetoric, see Kendall 24-25. Kendall's language of magnificence closely aligns with what I have called majestic rhetoric.

majesty," that is a government controlled by the king and the most elite circle of magnates. By excluding or diminishing historical time, majestic rhetoric reduced the significance of socio-political constructs like community of the realm.[9] In short, power was authorized in eternity, not by the community of the realm. Book VII of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* challenged this hermeneutic.

When you change the construct of sovereignty from one authorized by God to a construct *dependent* on and *constrained* by an invigorated and expanded concept of a *communitas regni*, power becomes subject to human jurisdiction and the importance of the world and historical time increases. In searching for a practical "remedy to the *world*," Gower rarely invokes the "cosmic framework" to validate a particular action. At the beginning of Book I, Gower declares that he will limit the scope of the *Confessio Amantis*:

> I may noght strecche up to the hevene
> Min hand, ne setten al in evene
> This world, which evere is in balance:
> It stant noght in my sufficance
> So grete thinges to compasse,
> Bot I mot let it overpasse
> And treten upon othre thinges.
> Forthi the Stile of my writinges
> Fro this day forth I thenke change
> And speke of things is noght so strange,
> Which every kinde hath upon honde
> . . . .
> And that is love, of which I mene
> To trete. (I.1-11; 15-16)

Gower's poetic approach mirrors constitutional thought in that it imagines poetic authority as constituted, and thus limited, by relationships within society. As many

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[9] Donald Hanson emphatically states that because of the severe hierarchical structure "there was no 'public' only a partly overlapping series of personal and familial dependencies" (50).

critics have recognized, the love story is a metaphorical vehicle for describing politics and "social behavior in general." In particular, "love drunkenness" of individual characters and Amans point towards "the failure of self-regulation which has undermined personal and worldly order" (Strohm, "Form" 27). In Book VII, self-regulation becomes more political as his tales focus on the tensions between the individual "self" and the common profit.

Gower's prologue makes clear that his love story will turn towards more worldly matters. Acknowledging what is not in his "sufficance," he turns to "othre thinges." This "turning" is a crucial point in the poem. It not only sets the stage for Gower's more earthbound perspective, but it also anticipates a central aspect of Gower's political imaginary—namely the idea that the lover-citizen must recognize the limits of his authority. This "turning" is the political turn, a turn that is discussed by Anne Middleton in terms of the development of the "common voice" that is "less exclusively detached and cosmic, more implicated in, and circumscribed by, the mortal world" (102). I will demonstrate how the *Confessio* itself constructs this voice, how it creates a political voice by disengaging majestic rhetoric.

Gower's modesty *topos* (i.e. his decision to "noght strecche up to hevene/Min hand") anticipates Amans-Gower's recognition that he is not "sufficant" to hold love's "covenant." The poet's self-limitation authorizes his work much like Amans's recognition of his impotency allows him to escape his love drunken state. The idea that the *Confessio Amantis* promotes self-limitation is axiomatic. However, in this chapter, I demonstrate that these limits assumed a more political character. They were more political because they were grounded in mutual obligations formalized by law. While

'Moral Gower' never loses sight of ethical dimension, he focuses his attention on the political effects of ethical decisions.[10] The *Confessio* elevates the importance of the *communitas regni* as the foundation of sovereign authority. Developing the political rhetoric occasioned by the Second Barons' War, he resituates Augustine's handling of will and reason within a political framework by aligning *willful* power with an impotency that "overstrecche" the worldly limits of authority that ultimately renders this kind of sovereign power not "suffcant" to hold the "covenant."[11]

This emphasis on the worldly limits of authority (on poet, lover and prince) shapes the narrative structure of each of his tales. Gower frequently translates classical and biblical material from tales that "strecche up to hevene" into practical narratives of authority that operate within a more secular king-community power structure, often by removing or naturalizing cosmic intervention. Even when divine intervention is a part of Gower's story, the logic that impels the narrative forward, the narrative motor, is the effect of a specific act on the community. Gower uses narrative to translate (i.e. resituate and reinterpret) the ethical kernel into a political context so that one reads sin as a breach of *trouthe* with the *communitas regni*. For example, in the "Tale of Horestes" (III.1885-2216), Gower's translation of Aeschylus' cosmological drama, Gower focuses on

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[10] Ethics provides a platform for Gower's political ideas. In *Vox Clamantis* Gower writes, "Fortune can afford no salvation to the unjust man, for Creator and creation stand together in opposition" (2.6; p.104). The *Confessio* focuses on how creation stands in opposition to the unjust man through *political* mechanisms. Translations from the *Vox Clamantis* are from *The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The Voice of One Crying, and the Tripartite Chronicle*. Trans. Stockton, Eric.

[11] "The modern reader of the *Confessio Amantis*," Russell Peck explains, "would do well to keep in mind the traditional model of faculty psychology which stands behind Gower's vocabulary for the mind's behavior." Sin is most often the result of "a rebellious Will . . . assuming a sovereign position over Memory and Intellect to exact some private end;" see Peck 2-3.

whether Horestes's punishment of his mother was becoming for a king?[12] Fittingly,

Gower transforms the tragedy of Aeschylus into a political drama that is ultimately

resolved in parliament. Even in the "Tale of Vulcan and Venus" (V.635-746) where all

the main characters are gods, Gower focuses so heavily on the effects of adultery on the

Olympian *community* that one might easily imagine these gods as mortals without

affecting the story. These are by no means rare examples.

This reduction in scope enables Gower to construct a "center of authority" that is

not transcendent—a common voice replacing divine sanction of authority with the needs

of the community. Gower makes the community of the realm the moral touchstone of his

exemplary tales. Much like the political rhetoric of the Common Enterprise, Gower

imagines the king's authority as grounded in sacred covenant *with the community*. The

morality of any action is, accordingly, measured against the effect it has within this

community. Occasionally, Gower even treats naive innocence as punishable.[13] The ethics

of a sovereign act, its legitimacy, and its register are understood within time. To examine

how political rhetoric shapes Gower's narrative we must ask: How does Gower

recalibrate the register of sovereignty to fit within a temporal-political sphere? How does

he reimagine ethics in relation to its temporal effects on the community? Ultimately, how

does this practical commitment to the "world" redeem narrative time?

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[12] This seemingly forced political reading of the Orestes material led Derek Pearsall to suggest, "Gower is simply not equipped to cope with it. It is difficult to know . . . exactly what lies behind his telling of the story of Orestes (III.1885-2195). Purportedly an exemplum against murder, it fails completely to make its point or even to extract any single story line, and the pressure to provide motives and to relate cause to effect in a moral sphere results in a sad mangling of high tragedy" ("Gower's Narrative Art" 483).

[13] Celestine shoulders part of the blame for Boniface's deceit (II.2803-3049) and Carmidotirus must suffer the capital consequences for forgetting that he still had his sword (VII.2845-2888). The point here is that legal oaths had hardened into "absolute formalism" (Green 288). In other words, we see a kind of legal positivism taking shape, see Green 137-41.

In order to identify and describe the characteristics of Gower's political rhetoric, we must show how his poetry departs from majestic affirmations of royal authority, and how it challenges and redefines kingship. When Gower was composing the *Confessio Amantis*, the majestic position was most popularly staked out by Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*. For example, by affirming the metaphysical relationship between imperial hierarchy and the eternal order, the French monarchy used Giles's text "linked Aristotelian thought . . . to its own realization of benign absolutism" (Staley 29). When we imagine these texts in dialogue with each other we recognize how Gowerian narrative emphasizes a political relationship driven by what Wallerstein identified as the "hypothetical trades" and "mutual recognitions" necessary to legitimize sovereignty in a way that alters both the narrative structure and the register of sovereignty (Wallerstein 44).[14]

Reading Gower against Giles: *Trouthe* and the Rhetorical Situation of the *Confessio*

Partly due to a dearth of well-known medieval political theory, readings focused on Gower's royalist leanings tend to conflate the political thought, structure and appeal of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* with the most well-known political treatise of the period—Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*.[15] Written shortly after the Second Barons' War for Prince Phillip of France, *De regimine* provides a full-throated expression of the kind of majestic authority to which Henry III aspired.   The text, which was popular in

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[14] For more on Wallerstein's definition of sovereignty, see 44. Tales such as "Lucretia," "Virginia," and "Folly of Rehoboam" show how insult or harm to the community delegitimizes authority and destabilizes kingship, see discussion of "The Folly of Rehoboam" in Chapter III. For more on Gower's revision of political register of sovereignty see Burnley 52-55.

[15] Porter 142. For the lack of political texts, see Dunbabin 477-479.

Ricardian England, shows how the ideas at the center of the Second Barons' War were still at the center of the discourse of sovereignty.

Elizabeth Porter in her detailed account of the philosophical underpinnings of the relationship between the political macrocosm and the ethical microcosm describes the central role of Giles in the political thinking of the *Confessio Amantis*.[16] Gower derives the general connection between the "lesser world" of the individual and the wider "universe that he inhabits" from the popular *Secreta Secretorum*.[17] However, whereas the *Secreta* focuses solely on the "ethical hierarchy within the man," the *Confessio* situates the ethical microcosm within Gower's contemporary political macrocosm (136). Gower derived the link between ethical and political spheres from Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* (c. 1285). According to Porter, Gower's division of *practique* into Ethics, Economics and Politics, which Giles used to structure *De regimine*, demonstrates his sympathies with Giles's political thought.   Employing metaphysical arguments that model kingship on the spiritual hierarchy, the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition, as practiced by the scholastics like Giles of Rome, commonly used natural law to create an absolute moral authority for kings in the temporal sphere that is identical with spiritual powers. Thus, Giles repeatedly asserts that politics should be modeled on the divine plan so that the people "as under oon God that ordeyneth alle thinges . . . shal be ordinat" (II.iii.16.10).[18]

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[16] What follows is based on Elizabeth Porter's "Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm."

[17] Simpson points out that the microcosmic-macrocosmic theory might have been derived from more sophisticated sources such as Gregory's *Moralia* VI.16 (PL 75, col. 740), Calcidius' commentary on the *Timaeus*, and Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* VI.41-140; see Simpson 217-219, particularly 218n25.

[18] Unless otherwise noted, citations of Giles of Rome come from John Trevisa's Middle English translation. *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa's Middle English Translation of the De regimine Principum of Aegidius Romanus*, eds. Fowler, David *et al.*

By modeling kingship on the divine order of the cosmos, Giles imagines the king as the lynchpin for the stability of the hierarchy, and consequently suggests that ethical self-restraint is the only viable method of assuring justice and peace in the realm. This tradition promotes regal kingship in which the king treated as semi-*deus* cannot be restrained by external pressure. It is important to acknowledge that Giles, like Gower, drives a wedge between the secular authority of the prince and the ecclesiastical authority of the pope. However, Giles replaces one metaphysical superstructure for another; whereas Gower imagines sovereign authority as derived from the *communitas regni*, Giles argues that the king's power is authorized by its relationship to a cosmic framework that makes the king the intermediary between God and the political community. This has important implications regarding the constraints put on sovereignty. Most importantly, for Giles, the only plausible constraint of sovereignty is the ethical appeal to *self-restraint*, an appeal that relies on a pedagogical rhetoric and the good faith of the king. Elizabeth Porter tracing out Giles's influence on the *Confessio Amantis*, argues that Gower's "remedy for political disorder is that each man should practice that . . . ethical self-governance . . . expounded in *De regimine principum* as the foundation of good governance within the political community" (142). The good of the realm "radiat[es] outward" from the ethical king. Although Porter emphasizes the importance of restraint, it is always self-restraint.[19] In other words, the only check to royal power is a good king—the king who restrains himself. Consequently, all rhetoric must be either a pedagogical or supplicatory appeal to that restraint

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[19] The idea of regal self-restraint reinforces the majestic ideal of power that foreclosed the concept of a public policy by "encouraging readers to adopt a stance of what the *Confessio* codes as benevolent paternalism" (Arner 63). As James Blythe argues, the principle of "self-governance" as "expounded in *De regimine*" "pave[d] the way for the genuine theories of absolute monarchy that reach their apex in early modern times" (70). See also Strohm, "Form" 38.

By this reasoning, Gower's *Confessio Amantis* figures restraint as a kind of magnanimous act of self-fashioning rather than a bowing to external pressure. This magnanimity resonates with the legal concept of *lex digna* in which the king ought to avow (*profiteri*) that he is bound to the law (*lex alligatum*).[20] As the word *profiteri* suggests when the king acts *lex alligatum* this is only a choice, a choice that actually reinforces the fact that the king is *supra leges*. It is precisely this point that Kurt Olsson makes when he describes the circumspect critiques of Richard II's tyrannical behavior. He argues that, by urging "self-restraint," Gower employs a soft mode of correction that ultimately "affirm[s] the king's superior power"(148). Larry Scanlon in *Narrative, Authority and Power*, makes the point even more vigorously by linking the discourse of self-restraint in the *Confessio* directly to the royal prerogative. Moreover, the prerogative is not just a right of the king, but his primary obligation. Only the king's free submission to the law produces the authority necessary to secure secular power. The king's obligation to protect his prerogative stabilizes the hierarchy and ensures distributive justice.[21]

Describing Gower's politics as an extension of personal ethics underestimates the external forces that threaten the legitimacy of the king's sovereignty. I will argue that Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis,* a book that describes four depositions, Gower makes an appeal with more teeth—"self-restraint" cannot really be called a "choice" when the

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[20] Kantorowicz translates *lex digna* in *King's Two Bodies:* "It is a word worthy of the majesty of the ruler that the prince professes himself bound to the law: so much does our authority depend upon the authority of the Law. And truly, greater than the imperium is the submission of the principate to the laws. (*C*.1, 14,4). Schulz suggests that *lex digna* only had moral force, see 160ff. Brian Tierney, on the other hand, suggests that jurists such as Bracton and Accursius recognized it relied upon a practical understanding of the workings of power and as such offered a practical description of power, see "Bracton" 298-302.

[21] By adopting the Aegidian concept of a king that is both "exemplary" and "superjust," Gower "continually presents monarchy as a form of exemplary self-restraint whose overriding purpose is maintaining first its own privilege and then the privilege of those who share his power" (Scanlon 286).

alternative is deposition. Gower transforms the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition to emphasize

political consequences such that self-restraint is not "endless ideological power;" it is

self-preservation.

These obligations, much like the matrimonial *pacta* described by Giles,

emphasize constitutional definitions of kingship and thus constrain the king's "unlimited

power" to the legitimate power of the *office* of the crown. Not unlike the Barons'

Gravamina and Robert Grosseteste's theological interpretation of law, Gower, in *The Tale*

of the Three Advisors, deploys the will/freedom dialectic to show that willful actions are

part of the royal prerogative only when they coincide with reason: the tyrant is one who

tyrannizes because he himself is tyrannized by an errant will. Ultimately, much like

Aristotle and those who adopted his metaphor, Gower imagines *trouthe* as married love, a

love that operates within an institutional structure. In Genius's description of justice,

Gower shows how this principle—the *trouthe* of Alceste—in turn, establishes the

foundation for the institution most capable of protecting the common profit—the law.

Gower changes the ethical question "what makes a good king" into a legal one—"Do

lawe awey, what is a king?" (VII.3075).

The deposition narratives, particularly the "Folly of Rehoboam," demonstrate that

authority *depends* upon the *troth*plight between king and subjects. Once the *trouthe* is

broken, kingship collapses. Thus, ethical behavior is right, not because it aligns with

some absolute metaphysical morality, but because by diminishing the threat of violence

and unrest, it strengthens the commonwealth. That is why, in the negative exempla of

Gower's *Fürstenspiegel*, crimes against the common profit are punished by the public

and external discord that the crimes cause—from Cyrus' public shame to Tarquin's exile.

I am not arguing that Elizabeth Porter is wrong, nor am I suggesting that Gower does not promote self-restraint, but rather that, unlike Giles of Rome, Gower's *Fürstenspiegel* emphasizes political restraints that go beyond the ethical realm of personal choice—restraints that are fundamental to the development of a constitutional rhetoric.

The comparison between Giles and Gower is an important one; indeed, the *Confessio* invites this comparison by imagining Book VII as part of the Aristotelian discourse of politics—a discourse whose chief representative in fourteenth-century England was still *De regimine principum*. At the end of Book VI, Amans asks Genius to tell him what Aristotle taught to Alexander (2411-12). That is, Amans is asking Genius to summarize the *Secreta Secretorum*, which presented itself as Aristotle's letter to the Alexander. After admitting that he is not an authority and that the "scole" of Aristotle "is noght to the matiere/ of love" (VII.7-8), which is the reason that Venus sent him, Genius, accedes to the wishes of Amans. After modestly admitting that he is not "al cunnynge/ upon the form of this wrytynge" (2437-8), Genius develops his authority by attributing his ideas to Aristotle, drawing heavily upon the *Secreta Secretorum* and alluding structurally Giles's *De regimine*.[22] Larry Scanlon, in *Narrative, Authority and Power* describes Book VII as Amans's "entrance into the philosophical discourse which authorizes royal power" (283).[23] Gower organizes this "philosophical discourse" by using three successive frameworks nested like matryoshka dolls. First, he breaks up Aristotle's matter into three "sciences of philosophie"—*theorique*, *rhetorique* and *practique*. Then,

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[22] See Porter 135-62; and Staley, *Languages* 28-30.

[23] Lynn Arner makes a similar point suggesting that "what is innovative . . . is to understand the *Confessio* as legitimating itself by investing its contents with a cultural authority akin to Bourdieu's formulations of cultural capital and to argue that *Confessio* attached a version of cultural capital to English literature in its embryonic moments" (49).

using the structure of Giles, he subdivides the science of *practique* into *ethique*, *iconomique* and *policie*.

However, many scholars have been content with citing Gower's allusion to Giles and then reading Giles's absolutism into Gower's political philosophy.[24] Nigel Saul imagines that Gower rather uncritically "derived . . . many ideas" from *De regimine* ("John Gower" 94)*,* while Alistair Minnis provides a more nuanced suggestion that *De regimine* played a crucial role in Gower's "selection and structuring of materials" ("Moral" 74).[25] *De regimine's* organization assumes a kind of ideological content because, through this creative structuring of Aristotelian and pseudo-Aristotelian material, Giles uncovers the natural and divinely ordained order that governs all hierarchical structures, particularly the regal or absolutist kingship. These accounts do not explain the way that Gower's royal virtues displace any trace of Aegidian absolutism.

In order to understand Gower's political thought, we must explore how Gower distances himself from the texts that he appropriates. Unlike Giles, Gower depicts the constitutional limits of royal power. This change in emphasis is mirrored by the fact that he reduces Giles's extensive descriptions of ethics and economy to a mere 28 lines and spends the rest of Book VII focused on policy, or the art of politics.[26] But even Gower's handling of "policy" significantly departs from Giles's work. Gower eliminates Giles's use of family to naturalize regal authority and replaces this with exempla illustrating the

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[24] The emphasis on *De regimine's* influence over Gower's political thought at least partially accounts for interpretations of Gower as royal absolutist who in Paul Strohm's words fostered a "view of a hierarchically organized state ruled by the firm hand of a monarch who reconciles all strife."(Strohm, "Form" 38). See also Olsson 149; Dunbabin 485; and Porter 142.

[25] For discussion of Gower's use of Giles, see Minnis, "Moral" 72-75.

[26] Burnley suggests that Gower's study of "policie" is one of the most schematic examples of the development of practical reasoning in the latter half of the fourteenth century, see 54-55.

five royal virtues—Truth, Liberality, Justice, Pity and Chastity—which are "essentially of his own devising" (Porter 155). More importantly, the exempla imagine the royal virtues in terms of mutual *social* obligations rather than in terms of the "metaphysical foundation" of "medieval ethical theory" (Mitchell 137) that underwrites the scholastic *Fürstenspiegel*.

In his discussion of "Policie," Gower inserts an entirely new framework that governs the actual arrangement and content of the tales. In other words, Gower both claims the authority of Aegidian philosophy—an authority grounded in Aquinas and Aristotle—and uses the five royal virtues to overwrite this authority. Once Gower shifts the structural principal of Book VII from Giles to the "fyf pointz . . . for worthi governance" in line 1706, he begins his own *On the Governance of Princes and Kings*.[27] In fact Gower's ability to appropriate Latin authorities has been a focal point for much critical discussion: Rita Copeland, for example, has argued that Gower's translations of Latin material are so novel and dominant that the *Confessio* effaces the authors it alludes to and produces a "full-fledged rhetorical appropriation . . . [that] asserts its own canonical authority" (202). In a similar vein, Winthrop Wetherbee argues the *Confessio Amantis* challenges and assimilates "the authority of the penitential discourse" ("John Gower," 599) and J. Allan Mitchell suggests that Gower appropriates Latin texts to construct a pragmatic "vernacular ethics" (144).[28] I will suggest the effect of embedding the royal virtues within Giles's framework is the same: Gower effaces the text of Giles

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[27] Rita Copeland identifies a similar pattern noting that Gower's translations of Latin material are so novel and dominant that the *Confessio* effaces the authors it alludes to and through this strategy, Gower produces a "full-fledged rhetorical appropriation . . . and asserts its own canonical authority" (202).

[28] Diane Watt argues that Gower is creating "a new vernacular authority" (29); Similarly, Larry Scanlon argues that the clerical tradition of the penitential is being substituted by a secular tradition; see 251-2.

and appropriates his authority. If, alongside Larry Scanlon, we assert that Book VII is

Amans's entrance into the "philosophical discourse, which authorizes royal power" (283)

then we ought to recognize this entrance does not lead to a simple recapitulation of

Aegidian philosophy, as Scanlon suggests, but rather that Amans's "entrance" allows

Gower to rewrite that philosophical discourse.[29]

The phrase "philosophical discourse," however, may be misleading. *De regimine*

was not just part of a conversation between schoolmen and philosophers, it was also an

integral part of the governing discourse of Richard and his ministers. Unlike his more

literary appropriations, Gower's abbreviation of Giles allows him to insert this literary

text into the contemporary discourse surrounding this book, the discourse of kingship.[30]

Giles of Rome's work was, if not well-read, well-owned among aristocratic circles and

was directly connected to one of the larger political trends in fourteenth-century

politics—namely a distinct shift towards rigorous absolutism on the continent (Saul,

"Kingship" 38).[31] Charles Briggs suggests that *De regimine* may have been a status

symbol for the owners it was a text connected with continental court culture (6).[32] Within

aristocratic and royal circuits, the text, even if it was not read, was almost certainly

known as a vigorous defense of "benign absolutism" (Staley, *Languages* 29). Originally

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[29] Scanlon often suggests Gower is rewriting power. However, he seems equally content emphasizing the similarity between Gower and Giles; see also Simpson 205-7.

[30] Nigel Saul states the case more emphatically by arguing, "the courtiers, the higher nobility and many of the senior administrators knew their Giles of Rome" ("John Gower" 94); see also Rigby, *Wisdom* 66. Jones suggests that even if Giles did not directly influence it, *De regimine* is a convenient text that draws together and summarizes the attitudes of the men that comprised Richard's court (161).

[31] For more on the French attitude towards sovereignty, see Dunbabin 489. Moreover, it should be noted that Richard II was raised in the court of the Black Prince in Aquitaine and, as Richard Jones points out, was surrounded "men, whose experience was more European than insular" (131). Scattergood suggests that *De regimine* can be seen as part of "a distinctive aristocratic and knightly taste in literature" (36).

[32] See also Scattergood 36-8.

composed for Phillip the Fair, *De regimine* had long been identified with the model of "benign absolutism" where "some are naturally lords, and some naturally servants" (qtd. in Blythe 76).[33] Charles V, actively promoted the Aegidian philosophy, by making it part of the Crown's vernacular translation program.[34]

While England did not have program of vernacular translation, the number of extant medieval manuscripts of English origin or provenance point to an aristocracy invested in Giles (Briggs 46). Historians have often suggested that *De regimine* was formative text in Ricardian politics, with Saul even calling the kingship of Richard II "a textbook example of Aegidian ideas in practice" ("John Gower" 94).[35] These studies frequently point to the tonal similarity between Giles's absolutism that calls for strict obedience and the repeated language of "obedience" employed by Richard and his ministers.[36] The moral universe depended upon each thing accepting its proper place in the cosmos (Rigby, "Aristotle" 240) and the king, who must obey God and God's law, should rule as "God ruleth and governeth al the worlde" (I.i.13). The structure of the kingdom depends upon a model of hierarchy where each individual submits appropriately. Similarly, Michael de la Pole in his 1383 address to Parliament declared obedience "the sole foundation of all the peace and quiet of the realm" (Saul, "Kingship" 52).

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[33] Blythe suggests that this passage demonstrates Giles's opposition to mixed forms of government. While he recognizes different "organs" of government "he does not envision any balance of these elements or any tempering effect" (76).

[34] Thirty-one extant copies of Henri de Gauchy's translation and a handful of less popular translations remain (Briggs 16).

[35] See also Jones 144.

[36] Giles suggests reading "the book on the rule of princes, both so that princes themselves might be instructed in how they should rule, and that others might be taught how to be obedient to princes" (2.3.20). The editors added this passage into the Trevisa text, as there was a lacuna in the original MS.

The language that Michael de la Pole employs echoes Giles's paternalism: "þe rewelynge of children is ilikned to þe rewelyng real, for þe fader is aboue þe children not by couenantes and foreward but by his fre wille. For bytwene þe sogette and þe souereyne is no couenant imaad" and "this rewlyng of children cometh of love" (II.ii.3). Having established the connection between father-son relationship and royal government, and having set the foundation of this relationship as paternal love, Giles concludes children "scholde be obedient and soget to hem [parents]" (II.ii.4). The paternal king rules "by his fre wille" and his love for his subjects naturally constrains the king's will and thus this love demands that his subjects "scholde be obedient and soget" to the king in order to secure the "peace and quiet of the realm."

By figuring royal authority as paternal love, a love that exists in the absence of legal "covenantes," Giles presents us with a king-subject relationship in which the only check on royal power is rhetorical. When kingship is personal, politics is ethical instruction. Giles repeatedly praises noble virtues of the good king. Through usage and repetition, words like "noble" or "good king" become a kind of "ideological fiction" with a suasive force of its own. As Scanlon points out, Giles creates an ideological fiction where nobility is an imagined construct that through repetition and usage becomes reality. The ethos of nobility, apotheosized by chivalric romance, became the only way to discern the difference between the king and the tyrant, who otherwise were structurally the same. (Scanlon 112).[37]

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[37] It is worth noting that the same concept underlies Olsson's suggestion that Gower uses a soft mode of correction in which Gower must compose the king rather than accuse him. This composition is achieved through "analogies of parallels."

Imagining Gower's *Confessio Amantis* as an English *De regimine principum*, a book of ethical instruction for the young English king Richard II, Larry Scanlon argues that the tales present Gower's "fyf poyntz" (*trouthe*, largesse, justice, pity and chastity) as "effects of king's personal behavior" (Scanlon 283). By this reasoning the common profit is an extension of the king's virtues and vices; and the political, insofar as it exists at all, exists in the domain of ethics rather than any institutional or legal structure. In one important sense Scanlon is right: since there did not yet exist a language capable of imagining the legal office of the king separate from his person, the "king's personal behavior" was in a very real sense political action.

In Book VII, Gower repeatedly develops this rhetoric of resistance by depicting "the king's behavior" in the face of particular external conventions that were in the process of becoming "conventions of the Constitution" (*ECH* 7).[38] Although Gower believes in a monarchy, he emphasizes the external standards, and sometimes the institutional authority necessary to limit royal power. When identifying the constitutionalist strain of thinking in medieval poetry, what is at issue is not royal power, but rather the mechanism of ensuring the king's appropriate behavior. The belief that "self-restraint" is that mechanism is a central tenet of benign absolutism, a discourse at dialectical odds with nascent constitutional ideas. In his allusion to the coronation oath and his handling of the "Tale of Lycurgus," Gower as I will argue below, contributes to the imaginary force needed to institutionalize kingship, and to conceive of the Crown as having public obligations.

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[38] This is what historians generally refer to as the ancient constitution; see McIlwain Ch. 4; and Pocock, *Constitution* 46-55.

Whereas the ministers of Richard II and the Gower's *Vox Clamantis* emphasize the moral failings of unruly and disobedient subjects, the *Confessio,* particularly Book VII, focuses on the dangers to the common profit caused by the failures of the king's good governance.[39] Gower shifts his focus from the virtue of obedience to the power of "*trouthe*" or the bonds of fidelity involved in covenantal relationships between the ruler and the ruled.[40] It is crucial to recognize that the king in Gower's *Fürstenspiegel* "is not the main imagined audience, but an occasion for gathering and formulating what is on the common mind" (Middleton 107). We do not encounter the mature "civic habit of mind" (Ginsberg 233) of Italian poets, nonetheless the imagined "king" and 'king-talk' develops a political language and perspective that was largely absent from the English political imaginary.[41]

Gower's "fyf pointz" replace Aegidian benign absolutism with a form of political kingship focused on the formal and institutional restraints necessary to prevent tyrannical acts.   He signals this shift by calling *trouthe* "the vertu soverein of alle" (VII.1776). Gower's merges his description of *trouthe* with the symbolism of the crown evoking the royal and sacred *trouthe* forged in the coronation ritual.[42] In late medieval England, this ritual had become an important arena for the rhetoric of royal authority. The symbols and oaths in the coronation were used to reconcile the interests of the magnates, the Church,

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[39] Warren Ginsberg points out, I think rightly, that "history" in Gower's *Vox Clamantis* "is regressive, the occasion for moral condemnation, rather than forward looking in its concern for the ethical formation of the polis" (*Italian* 234). The *Confessio Amantis*, I would suggest, shows the evolution of a "civic habit of mind" occurring in Gower's later works.

[40] For discussion of *trouthe* as a "compact" or covenant, see Green, *Crisis* 18-20.

[41] See Staley *Languages*, 26-27; Scanlon 252; and Middleton 107.

[42] For discussion of Gower's narrow ethical definition of *trouthe*, see Green, *Crisis*, 17.

the gentry, the King, and to a much lesser extent the community of the realm.[43] Although

the coronation usually only happens once, the authority of that ritual is frequently

appealed to throughout a king's reign. As such, the coronation oath becomes an

accountability mechanism, a mechanism strengthened by the deposition of Edward II.

The introduction of the fourth clause occurring at the beginning of the fourteenth century

shows the influence of thirteenth-century ideas; while the rest of the oath was hallowed

by long usage this fourth clause, introduced in 1307, showed a new attitude towards

kingship.

The language of oaths and crowns played a crucial role in the discourse of

sovereignty. Indeed at the very outset of Richard's kingship, his ministers recognized

that the fourth clause added to the 1308 coronation oath substantially weakened the royal

prerogative and strengthened the magnates' political power and they attempted to

diminish its effect by inserting the words "juste et rationabiliter" into the official records

(Saul, *Richard II* 25).[44] About eleven years later, after the Merciless Parliament in which

the Lord Appellants forced Richard II to execute members the *curia regis*, the

Appellants, according to the Westminster Chronicler, seem to have required the king to

renew his coronation oath in order to reaffirm the "proper relationship between the king

and the law" (Saul, *Richard II* 195). Gower's invocation of the coronation inserts the

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[43] Ullmann describes the ideological power of the coronation ceremony in advancing theocratic claims for kingship see *Principles* 127-31. For example, towards the end of the Merciless Parliament the Archbishop of Canterbury delivered a sermon emphasizing the importance of oaths before Richard renewed his own coronation oath; see *Historia sive narracio de modo et foma mirabilis parliamenti* 24; Richard II was well aware of the power of the coronation ceremony. Richard's advisors attempt to have the king assume his regality before the acclamation of the people in order to emphasize that his authority came from God alone; see Staley, *Languages* 115-116.

[44] In fact, the clause was completely omitted from the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, which otherwise provides an accurate account.

Confessio Amantis into a highly charged debate concerning prerogative, law and obligations.

In order to understand Gower's description of the crown, we must turn first to the coronation ceremony. During this ceremony the prayer over the crown (like many objects representing the king's power) invests the king with certain powers:

> God . . . bless and sanctify this crown, that . . . is adorned with diverse *precious stones*, so this thy servant [who] weareth it, may be filled with thy manifold graces, and all precious virtues, through the King eternal thy son our Lord Amen (*ECR* 261)

The coronation ceremony emphasizes that the king "was set apart from other mortals . . . He was God's anointed" (Saul, *Richard II* 26). The only hint that the Crown places obligations upon the king is in the word "servant," and, even then, imagining the king as "servant to God" actually diminishes the political obligation to the community. The prayer *infuses* the king with the "manifold graces" and "precious virtues" that make him worthy of the office he holds.

In its most extreme form the king through "the power of the sacrament of consecration" became what Norman Anonymous regarded as *christus Domini* (Kantorowicz 117).[45] The sacramental language emphasizes the relationship between sovereignty and God and mystifies the relationship between the king and the commonwealth. When the community of the realm does appear, it is merely as a ward of the king. Richard II understood the ideological power of the coronation ceremony. For example, when he deigned to reconcile with the Londoners in 1392, part of the pageant included two angels coming down from a palace and crowning him (Maidstone 275-

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[45] For a discussion of the king as "christus Domini," aee Kantorowicz 42-61, particularly 49n13.

300).[46] The crowning forcefully reinstates the proper relationship between subject and sovereign and, thus, reconciles the Londoners to Richard. Richard's invocation of sacramental crown attempts to recover the majestic rhetoric of the Plantagenet kings throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

By analyzing the symbolic significances of each part of the crown, Gower's consciously picks up the majestic rhetoric found in the coronation:

> The gold betokneth excellence,
> That men schull don him reverence
> As to here liege soverein.
> The Stones, as the bokes sein,
> Commended ben in treble wise:
> Ferst thei ben harde, and thilke assisse
> Betokneth in a king Constance,
> So that ther schal no variance
> Be founde in his condicion (VII.1751-9)

First, Gower acknowledges and respects the king's *regalie*; the gold signifies the king's "excellence," a quality that does demand "reverence" from his subjects. Gower does not stamp out the idea of the regality of kingship. He frequently describes hierarchy in majestic language of "reverence" due to the king as the pinnacle of the state. However, Gower revises the concept of the regal king—he politicizes it—such that one is left with a political model of kingship that looks nothing like the regal kingship imagined by Giles of Rome. As we will see, Gower replaces Giles's cosmological foundation for sovereignty with the community of the realm; thus situates regal authority within an increasingly legal register.

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[46] In the form of angels a boy and a girl descend "enwrapped in clouds, suspended in the air."
> The maiden then presents the warden with the crowns
>   He holds them in each hand, and then he speaks these words:
> "O king illustrious and noble queen," he said,
>   May God guard both of you and keep you safe and sound!
> May He, who gave you crowns of rulership on earth,
>   Reward you too with heaven's everlasting realms! (Maidstone 297-300)

Unlike the ceremonial prayers over the regal objects, Gower's description of the crown does not instill virtue or authority but rather represents the ethical obligations of the good king. Gower's uses the ethical register of the *Fürstenspiegel*-tradition to describe the crown and stones as symbolically representing three qualities of a good king—constancy, honesty and a good name.[47] The *Fürstenspiegel* genre, however, also develops a language capable of critiquing the king; it is in this sense that Conrad van Dijk suggests that ethical obligations of the *Fürstenspiegel* constitute what might be called a "quasi-judicial" genre.[48] I am arguing that the political energy let loose by the revolutionary political ideas of the thirteenth century transformed ethical ("quasi-judicial") principles of the *Fürstenspiegel* into increasingly legal constructions—legal constructions that begin to separate the person of the king from the institution of the Crown. In Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis,* Gower reshapes the mirror genre to forcefully engage with political rhetoric. Majesty is revised, not written away.

Gower translates the ethical demands that a king be constant, honest and worthy into a more explicitly political system by shifting the symbolic function of the crown from a sacramental object that fills the king with "manifold graces" to a legal object—a "tokne of al the londe." In the Middle Ages, the legal token—whether a clod of earth (used in charters) or a hunting horn (used for forest rights)—provided a visible and thus mnemonic symbol of *contractual* agreement between parties, which could be "called

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[47] Olsson connects Gower's description of the stones to the language of the coronation ceremony, see 152.

[48] Conrad van Dijk saw the *Fürstenspiegel* as quasi-judicial in its tendency to establish the philosophical grounds of the kingship (Ch. 4). The word quasi-judicial usefully reminds us that political limits (what Chrimes called "conventions of the Constitution") developed through usage. The ancient constitution was not systematized. Nonetheless, I argue that during the thirteenth century, the language of kingship and the ethical values of the Mirror for Princes genre became increasingly formalized.

upon in court and other juridicial proceedings" (Gurevich 1985, 176).[49] In this passage,

the crown is legal symbol of the contractual arrangement in which king guarantees "al the

lond withoute" that he shall protect and guide it well. The contract distances the personal

king from the impersonal Crown by making the authority of the Crown dependent upon

the king's performance of his duty to "kepe and guye."[50] Similarly the stones (7.1754-

1770) signify that "in a king . . . ther schal no variance be found," that a king "schal ben

honeste." The word "schal" (i.e. should) strips the coronation of sacramental graces that

empower the king; and placing the onus on him, it aligns the coronation tokens (i.e.

crown, scepter, etc.) with the more secular and legal coronation oath.[51] The Crown does

not *infuse* the king with "precious virtues," but rather *obliges* the king to act virtuously.

Gower's allusion to coronation discourse desublimates the authority of kingship

and establishes the hierarchy on the more constitutional ground of *trouthe*. Unlike most

mirrors for princes, Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis*, repeatedly invokes external

political conventions and developing political institutions such as parliament, separation

of king and Crown, a more positive concept of law, and the threat of cession. So while

Gower engages in language of *regalie*, it is less the regality of the Prince than the Crown.

In Trevisa's English translation of *De regimine,* a scholastic mirror, the word *trouthe*

rarely appears. When it does, it never assumes this quasi-legal sense that binds the king

to the people. Since the best form of government mirrors the father-son relationship, the

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[49] For discussion of tokens in trothplights, see Green, *Crisis* 50-57.

[50] We see this possibility to some extent begin to emerge in *Policraticus* where he seemingly limits the king's power to keeping the law by accusing flatterers of proclaiming that "the prince is not subject to law, and that his will has the force of law not only in establishing legal right according to the form of equity, but in establishing anything whatsoever" (4:7); see also Kantorowicz 355-56.

[51] It is clear that barons used the oath to challenge the king's authority. When Richard II was formally deposed he was repeatedly accused of crimes that were "expressly contrary to justice and to the laws of his realm, and to his oath" (Chris Given-Wilson, "Record" 172-84; quotation from 174.

basis of governance is paternal love from the father and obedience from the children; authority moves in one direction, top-down. *Princeps solutus est legibus*. While Gower is no democrat, the concept of *trouthe* as described in Book VII binds the free will of the king and through the an oath that binds him to the laws. Gower's mirror resembles *De regimine*, insofar as it employs Aegidian "economic" metaphors of kingship, in particular the use of marriage to represent, what Giles considered, a debased form of kingship - *rex politicus*. In this way, Gower is also most unlike Giles because, as we will see in "Darius and his Advisors" the marriage covenant represents the ideal model of kingship.

The Tale of Darius and his Three Advisors

In "The Tale of Darius and His Three Advisors," the one tale dedicated to describing the sovereign virtue of *trouthe*, Gower uses an apocryphal story from Esdras to analyze the extent of regal force. In the original tale, three guards put advice beneath the pillow of the tyrant Darius in order to gain his favor. The first writes wine is strong, the next, the king is stronger, the third, women are strongest, but truth overpasseth all. In Gower's version, Darius asks his three advisors, "which strengest is/ the wyn, the woman or the king" (VII.1812-13)? Gower shuffles the order of the counselors' answers: Arphages argues that kingship is strongest, Manchaz wine, Zorobabel women.[52] Zorobabel, unlike Arphages and Manchaz, uses exemplary tales to support his answer. He narrates tales of women who are closely connected to royal power—Apame, Cyrus' concubine, and Alceste, Duke Admetus' wife. By introducing the tale with an account of the king's power and concluding with the exempla of the tyrant Cyrus and Duke

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[52] Gower's order seems to come from Peter Comestus's *Historia Scholastica* (L. Burke 6).

Admetus, Gower creates a chiastic structure (royal power-wine-women-royal power) in

which the responses of Manchaz and Zorobabel critique and revise Arphages' definition

of royal strength. In the process of debating which entity is strongest (king, wine, or

women), Gower revises traditional notions of strength and refashions the discourse of

kingship in relation to questions of obedience and freedom.

The tale begins with Arphages pointing out the political reality that undergirds the

absolutist model of kingship:

> . . . it semeth noght,
> He seith, that eny erthly thing
> Mai be so myhty as a king.
> A king mai spille, A king mai save,
> A king mai make of lord a knave
> And of a knave a lord also:
> The pouer of a king stant so,
> That he the lawes overpasseth. (VII.1832-39)

Arphages argument that the king "overpasseth" all laws reflects the belief held by

medieval jurists in the absolutist camp that is summed up by the Roman maxim *princeps*

legibus solutus est. As we have seen, Giles of Rome provided a coherent philosophy that

authorized the king's monopoly on coercive authority in which the king could *licitly*

disobey law. Arphages position, contrary to Giles's metaphysical explanation of regal

authority, establishes the king's freedom upon the king's coercive force rather than any

moral authority to licitly disobey the laws of the land.[53] The king "stant himself of lawe

fre" (VII.1845), because of the fact that he can "spille" or "save" any "erthly thing."

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[53] We get a similar account of the king's power in relation to the law from John of Gaunt "it was shameful for a king in his own kingdom . . . to avenge himself by means of private murder when he was himself above the law and had the power to vouchsafe life and limb with a nod, or if he were so minded, to take them away" (*Westminster Chronicle* 114-115).

Without the naturalizing economic metaphor of Giles, we are left with Arphages bald account of absolutism in which the king's freedom from laws depends upon brute force.

Instead of Giles's analogical justification of royal prerogative, in which the king is compared to a loving father who should be obeyed, Arphages presents the strength of the king in Bractonian terms in which "the will of the prince has the *force* of law" (2.305); Bracton's analysis of the prerogative carefully distances the prince's *voluntas* from the ethical authority of law by saying only that it has the amoral *force* of law. More importantly, even as he recognizes that the king's will has the force of law, Bracton does not reify this coercive force, but rather recognizes it as a political reality.[54] It has the force of law, but it is not the same as law. By showing the connection between authority and brute force, Arphages' description of regal strength exposes the political reality that majestic rhetoric mystifies.

Gower alerts the reader to the dangers of this unconstrained force by depicting the sweeping breadth of royal power over life and the social order in seven lines. Arphages' use of *spille/save*, in particular, recalls Genius's explanation that a king must learn the virtue of *trouthe* because the power to "bothe save and spille/ . . . stant upon his wille" (VII.1715-16). Here Genius explicitly connects the power to "save" and "spille" to the king's will. While Arphages does not say, "will," it is clear in phrases like "his pouer stant so" that he too imagines the king's authority to save and spill connected to will. This repetition of *save/spille* alliteration in different contexts concerning royal will reveals the importance of this construction in his political orientation. The *wille/spille*

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[54] The king *is* the coercive authority of law and as such he is "necessarily removed . . . from the sphere of coercive jurisdiction" (Tierney, "Bracton" 303). This illustrates how the "de facto realities of power" (Wallerstein 44) underwrite theories about jurisdiction.

rhyme, in this earlier passage, calls attention to the dangerous power of king's free will. Arphages ignores the potential danger and sees will, solely, in terms of strength. [55] The remainder of the tale interrogates Arphages conclusion and shifts the authority of the king from the rickety foundation of force to the stronger foundation of *trouthe*.

Just as Gower overwrites Giles's *De regimine principum* with his own virtues of kingship, he starts this exemplum of *trouthe* with Arphages' crude idea of absolutist power and then critiques this model of sovereignty through the responses of Manchaz and Zorobabel.[56] Their advice exposes the transgressive freedom inspired by wine and women – a freedom of will that John of Salisbury calls the "fictitious liberty" of the tyrant. Throughout the "Tale of Darius" the appearance of constructive results makes the fictitious liberty of wine and women alluring to both the king and the reader; however, Gower consistently signals that these "constructive results" are unnatural and thus, either illusory or fragile.

After Arphages describes the strength of kingship that "overpasseth lawes," Manchaz describes the liberating effect of wine. Manchaz, who says, "wyn is the strengest," describes how wine allows people to step beyond the limitations established by the body: "it maketh a blind man to behelde,/And a bryht yhed seme derk" (VII.1856-57). This "use of contrast and oxymoron" has led critics to assert that Gower "interweaves the theme of possible beneficence as well as destructiveness in all three

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[55] R.F. Yeager argues that Gower's repetition of certain rhymed and alliterated words lines throughout the *Confessio Amantis* point to Gower's thought patterns and predilections (Chs. 1-2).

[56] Kurt Olsson similarly argues that, through Arphages answer, Gower "follows leading medieval political thinkers, including Giles of Rome" who represent the king as 'an half god;' that 'passeþ oþere men in dignite and in myht." Olsson argues that the "Tale of Darius" does in fact "interrogate" this position, but that he draws the same absolutist conclusions as Giles. Larry Scanlon goes even farther suggesting that Arphages' "maximalist interpretation of *lex regia*" aligns with Gower's own view of royal authority (Scanlon 284-86); see critique of Scanlon's position in van Dijk 101-6.

entities" (L. Burke 8). After all, the power of wine to make the blind man "behelde" *seems* constructive. However, the constructive results of wine and women really only reflect the alluring dangers of the "fictitious liberty" of tyrannical will. The blind man cannot see, but he transgresses the boundaries of his body because the wine takes "reson fro the mannes herte." Wine is the strongest because it "mai the hertes *binde*/well more than the regalie" (VII.1869-70 emphasis mine). Gower implies that actions outside the bounds of reason ironically bind the person "be weie of kinde" (1869). Sight in the blind man is a defect of reason. Actions are only free when they align with reason. Likewise the coercive authority of the king only offers freedom when the decisions of the king align with reason. For some transgression is immediately and apparently harmful (i.e. "bryht yhed" are blinded), but for others the transgression gives the appearance of "beneficence." The obvious signals that differentiate transgressive and natural freedom in Manchaz's response, prepare the reader to make the more difficult distinctions necessary to understand the strength of women.

Unlike Arphages and Manchaz, Zorobabel gives two answers and tells two tales. The two tales analyze politics and "social behavior in general" (Strohm, "Form" 27) through the prism of two love stories—one between a king and courtesan the other between a lord and his wife. Similar to Manchaz, Zorobabel's first tale represents strength as a transgressive force. The courtesan, Apame, subdues the will of the king, Cyrus. Cyrus becomes a tyrant by accepting a servility in which "manhede,/ thurgh strengthe unto the wommanede/ of love . . . obei shal" (1877-1379). The "love" represented in these lines is a degraded form of "love" that unnaturally transforms the man into a woman (much like wine makes the blind sighted), and alters the gendered

power structure by making the man obedient to the woman. This gender transgression

directly borrows from the tyrant/king discourse in which tyranny is often figured as

sexual deviance as in medieval depictions of Caligula, Nero and Holofernes.[57] The

tyrant's unnatural lust and submission to a woman represent the unnatural submission of

the king's reason to the tyrant's will.

At first, Zorobabel exemplifies the strength of women by emphasizing the

positive effect that Apame has on the tyrant:

> Whan he was hotest in his ire
> Toward the grete of his empire,
> Cirus the king tirant she tok,
> And only with her goodly lok
> Sche made him debonaire and meke,
> And be the chyn and be the cheke
> Sche luggeth him riht as hir liste (VII.1887-93)

On the surface, Zorobabel focuses the reader's attention on mollifying effects of desire

where beauty through a "goodly lok" calms the "ire" of the tyrant and seemingly instills

virtue by making him "debonaire and meke." Gower intentionally tones down the

violence of Esdras material – in all the other analogues of this tale Apame slaps the king

publicly rather than tugging him by the cheek. As Linda Burke points out, Gower's

revision "suggests the perversion of an affectionate gesture as means of domination"

rather than simple violence" (11). By softening the violence, the reader can more readily

accept the way that Gower recasts the story within the tradition of courtly love: the

"goodly lok" of the beloved makes the violent warrior suddenly "debonaire and meke."

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[57] In Book VIII of *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury describes Caligula's "lewdness" and "lustfulness" (204); he shows how Holofernes's reason is overcome by his own lust towards Judith (208-209); Gower similarly stresses these tyrants' sexual deviance in Book VIII of the *Confessio Amantis,* first with a discussion of Caligula (VIII.199-212) and then with "Apollonius of Tyre" (VIII.271-2008).

He makes this point explicit in his summary to the tale of Apame and Cyrus "thurgh hem [women] men finden out the weie/ To knighthode and worldes fame" (VII.1994-5).

Arising out of vice (i.e. the king's lust), the "debonaire" and "meke" quality of the courtly lover is suspicious. The relationship between Apame and Cyrus, between courtesan and king, shows how courtly love masks a power structure grounded in domination and tyranny.[58] Although Gower accentuates the mollifying *effects* of lust, his depiction of the besotted and foolish king signals the dangers underlying the *appearance* of virtue. As Gower's *meke/cheke* rhyme emphasizes, the reality is that Cyrus' "debonaire and meke" posture is not an expression of the king's will but the will of the courtesan, who literally reduces Cyrus to a dog lugged by chin and cheek "riht as hir liste." [59]

Lechery represents both the *willful* violence of tyranny—a violence that breeches contracts and cultural mores—and the utter servility of the tyrant. The sin of lechery is both symptom and symbol of tyranny because in the figure of the tyrant will and servility become synonymous. If the illicit violence of the crown bearer is not in fact done of his own will, but is actually an expression of will chained to vices, then can we consider this

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[58] For Olsson, Apame is a rhetorical figure of fickleness, a fickleness that Olsson reads into the descriptions of Richard II's psychological profile. Olsson argues that Apame, as Dame Fickleness, ultimately derives from Boethius' Fortune; see 158-9. I would suggest that Apame as an embodiment of fickleness, more specifically, signifies tyranny. She is not just an allegorical figure but also a person that appropriates the power of kingship.

[59] The "beneficent powers" of the courtesan are recast in chivalric terms:
>
> Thurgh hem men finden out the weie
> To knihthode and to worldes fame
> . . . .
> Thurgh the beaute of hem is fyred
> The Dart of which Cupid throweth,
> Whereof the jolif peine groweth,
> Which al the world hath under fote.
> (1904-5; 1908-11)

For more on the beneficent powers of love, see L. Burke 11. Instead of showing the "beneficent powers" of courtly love, Gower makes clear the dangerous desire that grounds this singuler love. This parallels the love-drunkenness of Amans, who frequently is doing the right things for the wrong reasons, see Gallacher 102-105. For more on how Gower chastens courtly love, see Shuffelton 74-84; and Robins 169.

violence to be the king's prerogative? It is precisely this question that is at the center of

the both the Barons' *Gravamina* and the *Song of Lewes*. The tyrant-courtesan

relationship between Cyrus and Apame, though ending with less violence, resembles

John of Salisbury's account of the tyrant-concubine relationship in his handling of

Holofernes and Judith. In both cases, the tyrant appears to wield supreme authority and

instill fear into his subjects. But this authority is a "fictitious liberty," though he seems

powerful, there is in fact no "condition more servile than tyranny . . . indeed [the tyrant]

is weighed down by a most miserable servitude" (John of Salisbury 190). The tyrant, in

both cases, cedes his power to a female—symbolically reason cedes power to will. Cyrus

becomes a fool; Holofernes is slain by Judith.

Zorobabel's original answer that "women ben the myhtieste" is not his final

answer. He goes on to assert, "trouthe above hem alle is myhtiest." The use of mightiest

to refer to both truth and women seemingly creates a logical problem – how can both

women and *trouthe* be mightiest? This logical problem led Patrick Gallacher to suggest

that "women" is a synecdoche for *trouthe* itself (102-5). However, such an explanation is

unnecessary because Zorobabel does not actually contradict himself: his first answer

responds to the king's question: "of thinges thre which strengest is,/ the wyn, the

womman or the king?" The king's question is a closed question that forces the counselors

to adopt one of three possibilities; it creates a grammatical power structure.[60]

Zorobabel's second answer, "trouthe is myhtiest," however, provides an answer that

stands outside the king's assumptions of the question—*trouthe* is a kind of syntactic

grace, something bound to the initial question and yet beyond the form in which it was

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[60] Russell Peck, who argues that *trouthe* commonly reaches outside the expected terms, compares this moment to Amans's recognition of the truth (i.e. that he is too old to be a lover); see 149-50.

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posed. While the king's involvement and interest in intellectual problems creates a more

flattering portrayal of Darius than the Esdras material, the king's question also allows

Gower to present Zorobabel's second response as outside the king's control.

Unlike the biblical material, Zorobabel, still arguing, "womman is the mannes

bote," provides another "ensample" of women as "myhtiest" drawn from the *Ovidius*

Moralizatus (Mainzer 222). Alceste's husband, Duke Admetus is dying of some

sickness. Alceste asks Minerva how her lord "recovere myhte his hele ayein" and

Minerva answers that Alceste must suffer the illness and die in his place. Alceste without

pause chooses "hir deth and his livinge . . . with al hir hole entente." Instead of a woman

who controls the king "as hir liste," Alceste is willing to sacrifice her life to save the life

of the king with "hir hole entente."[61] Zorobabel's second answer, "trouthe is myhtiest of

all," establishes a paradigm of strength born out of, rather than divorced from, the free

acceptance of the limits of authority what John of Salisbury calls "the yoke of

subjection." Zorobabel's two depictions of strong women point to the insufficiency of

the king's question. Strength is not in the entities themselves: strength is not in the king,

in the wine or in the woman. Instead, strength arises out of proper use or relationship.

Indeed the crucial detail between the two stories hinges on the relationship between lover

and beloved. Zorobabel tells a love story of a courtesan and a king followed by the love

story of a lord and his wife—a tale of *fin amour* followed by married love.

Placing the tale of Alceste's sacrifice immediately after Apame and Cyrus

encourages the reader to transpose the two lovers: would Apame sacrifice her life for

Cyrus? This question elucidates the political valence of *trouthe*. Because of the power

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[61] Gower's exclusion of Hercules rescue of Alceste emphasizes the queen's selfless devotion (L. Burke 13)

dynamics that shape these two "love" stories, it is hard to imagine Apame taking on

Alceste's sacrificial role. Alceste's sacrifice depends upon *trouthe* to her husband, on the

mutual obligations initiated by marriage. Apame's relationship, on the other hand, is

grounded in dominance. If we see Apame's domination symbolically as the will's

domination of reason, which produces tyranny, then Alceste reverses this model by freely

choosing to sacrifice her life for the life of her husband, a sacrifice that negates her future

will.[62] Her sacrifice demonstrates that political kingship, represented by the marriage

covenant, is stronger than Cyrus's displays of power. The two tales of Zorobabel enact

the conflict at the center of Book VII, a conflict between majestic and political rhetoric,

figured throughout the *Confessio* in terms of *fin amour* and married love.[63] "The Tale of

Alceste" establishes pattern of political *trouthe* overturning majestic modes of

domination central to Gower's refashioning of the *Fürstenspiegel* genre upon the

foundation of the political kingship.

Whereas Apame's will (i.e. "hir liste") upsets both political and sexual mores and

thus, represents the tyrannical domination that strives for a fictitious freedom, Alceste

represents a proper bond ("al hir hole entente"). Recognizing the "yoke of subjection"

she freely accept her obligation (*Policraticus* VIII:17). After he acknowledges the

trouthe of women or love" as strongest, Zorobabel, following Esdras identifies *trouthe* as

the most powerful of all. However, Gower excises the passage where the third advisor

uses *veritas* to incite Darius to resume construction of the Temple of Jerusalem and

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[62] Alceste's pledge reflects the medieval concept of the vow, articulated in Dante Paradiso (V.25-33) in which the oath the free choice to forfeit one's free will. This becomes particularly important for Gower who suggests that the coronation oath is one of these oaths.

[63] Genius's exempla of Apame and Alceste address Amans's love-drunk condition and anticipate the critical moment in the frame narrative. The Apame-Cyrus relationship represents the besotted condition of Amans, while Alceste-Admetus relationship represents the civic love that the fictive John Gower discovers.

chooses to conclude the tale by grafting a pagan story onto the biblical account.

Moreover, unlike Esdras in veritas is "virtually equated with God," Gower uses *trouthe* in the sense of fidelity (often legal fidelity) to one's word or lover.[64] We might expect a more conservative thinker, such as Giles, to keep truth as God and thus make the king only beholden to divine law and thus, suggest that the king restrain his own actions following divine precepts. Gower, on the other hand, by switching from the biblical to a secular register places the office of king in a binding relation not to God, but to the people.[65]

Manchaz and Zorobabel do not merely present different answers from Arphages; their answers indirectly refashion the terms of Arphages response. They redescribe the transgressive strength in Arphagus's answer as "fictitious freedom" and subtly impose limits to the king's coercive authority to "save" or "spille." The choice to *spille*, for example, can only be made freely when that choice corresponds to the dictates of reason and thus does not transgress the liberties of others. When it does not correspond to the dictates of reason, when the king acts "willfully," then the king is enslaved to passion and becomes a tyrant. Gower shifts self-restraint from a language of personal ethics to one of law and politics where the act of self-restraint can be interpreted, in Wilks' terms, as the

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[64] The Wycliffe Bible uses the word "treuthe" to translate "veritas," but the context particularly the advisor's connection of veritas to the reconstruction of the temple reveals a very different function of *trouthe*—than the *trouthe* that drives Alceste to self-sacrifice. Richard Firth Green argues that the theological sense of truth as "absolute truth, God or the God head" was "fairly recent" and the "intellectual sense of the word truth" as "correspondence to reality" was "very new indeed." Linda Burke discusses the difference between veritas in Esdras and *trouthe* in *Confessio Amantis,* 8-9.

[65] Gower's concludes his translation of the Esdras material before it reaches its "psalm-like" conclusion that "would have drawn the story back to his subject kingship, raising it to a height suited to its dignity (Olsson 163).

initial "voluntary act of abdication of absolute power" that both establishes,

acknowledges and limits regal authority (216).[66]

While the political potential of this story lies beneath the surface, an astute reader

of the *Confessio* must always read love politically, just as he must read politics erotically.

Since Gower calls *trouthe* the sovereign virtue of the prince, it is obvious that Gower's

use of the Alceste material does not merely valorize married love. Married love must

perform some political work. The figurative work it performs originates from Aristotle's

Politics that had been translated around 1260.[67] After this translation, a number of

scholastic *Fürstenspiegel* and an even larger number of advice manuals led to the rapid

and wide dissemination of a political metaphor that would deeply influence the social

imagination: namely, that modes of government could be represented through household

relationships.[68] In *De regimine,* for example*,* Giles, employing Aristotle's metaphor from

Politics, describes political kingship in terms of the conjugal relationship between a

husband and wife:

> For conjugal kingship is similar to political rule: because wives ought not to be
> presided over simply through will [*arbitrio*], but ought to be presided over as the

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[66] In *The Problem of Sovereignty*, Michael Wilks explains that "the ruler's restriction of his own authority puts his power into the category of private right: and here he is on par with his people and therefore not only morally but also legally bound to observe the law…this voluntary act of abdication of absolute power comes to be seen as the first act of kingship" (216-17). Larry Scanlon gives a more ethical reading in which Gower repeatedly exemplifies the "monarchy's inherently self-regulating character, the paradoxical but inevitable logic whereby the absolute prerogative produces its own self-generated restraint" (265).

[67] In *Politics,* Aristotle describes household management through political language explaining that "the science of the household management has three divisions, one the relation of master to slave . . . one the paternal relation and the third the conjugal—for it is part of the household science to rule over wife and children (over both as over freemen, yet not with the same mode of government, but over the wife to exercise republican government and over the children monarchical" (I.v.1-2).

[68] Giles's use of economics as a model for discussing kingship was picked up by Nicholas Oresme's *Yconomique*, which discusses the household in strict monarchical terms. *Yconomique*, in turn, "sparked a vogue for books of household management during the fourteenth century" (Staley, *Languages* 90-1).

laws of matrimony [*leges matrimonii*] require and through those mandatory and honest pacts, which intervene between man and wife.[69] (II.II.3; 291)

In the larger context of the *Fürstenspiegel*, the Alceste myth not only depicts married love but also hints at a mode of kingship—*regimen politicum*. The central difference between *regimen politicum* and *regimen regalis* is that the political king, like a husband bound to *leges matrimonii*, must abide by the laws of the commonalty; the king is, as Bracton says in one part of his work, *sub leges*.

If married love in Alceste myth alludes to political kingship, then "The Tale of Darius" can be read as tale in which political kingship trumps regal kingship. Unlike, Giles who treats political kingship as inferior to regal kingship, Gower makes the relationship between the husband and wife the strongest bond of all—certainly above Arphages' definition of royal prerogative.[70] If the allusion to political kingship seems tenuous in "The Tale of the Three Advisors*,*" the "Tale of Lycurgus," 500 lines later, foregrounds the political dimension alluded to by Alceste legend, by replacing the "trouthe of love" with the "trouthe of governance" (VII.2925).

Justice in Gower's *Fürstenspiegel*

During the reign of Richard II, *trouthe* based on mutual obligations was challenged on both ends of the hierarchical spectrum by the Uprsing of 1381 and the Appellants rebellion of 1388. By 1386, while Gower was writing the *Confessio Amantis*, Richard II was just entering his majority. The barons, like they did in 1227, lost power

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[69] Passage from Giles of Rome II.II.3: "Nam regnum conjugale assimilatur regimini politico: quia uxori . . . non quis debet praesse debet ut requirunt leges matrimonii, et ut potius per pacta debita et honesta, quae interveniunt inter virum et uxorem."

[70] While Giles acknowledges marriage as "natural," the relationship between a father and son is *more* natural still and as such the regal kingship is the most natural mode of authority; see Blythe 67; and *De regimine* 2.14.155.

simply because Richard, upon coming of age, turned increasingly towards his own *curia*

to make important decisions. Again like Henry III, Richard elevated members of his

inner circle (e.g. Simon Burley, Robert de Vere and Michael de la Pole), gave generous

properties to each of them, and expanded their role in local politics. Through these

elevations, he sought to increase royal presence and diminish the power of the lords

within their dukedoms and earldoms. As in 1258-1265, the assertion of royal power

created tensions between him and his magnates and made England into a hotbed for

constitutional ideas that would otherwise lie dormant.

For Gower the solution to this crisis of *trouthe* does not lie in any political faction,

but rather in the abstract principle of the law itself. At the center of Genius's sermon on

the five points of policy is justice, and it is under the rubric of justice that *trouthe* is given

its most overtly political treatment. In Gower we see the a self-conscious development of

the "ancient constitution" as a kind of covenant through which powers of the king were

limited and certain liberties were guaranteed. The law was the formalized agreements

between the members of society that created unity and peace. This fixed law, resistant to

the more fickle prerogative of both kings and lords, provided the cornerstone for

constitutional government, or what Gower in the "Tale of Lycurgus" calls the "trouthe of

governance."

In Book VII, Gower emphasizes the political rather than the ethical dimensions of

justice. Indeed, all the tales under the rubric of justice focus on the social relationship

between the subjects and the king *through* the laws, rather than the ethical function of the

law itself. Most notably, in the "Tale of Carmidotirus," a king makes a law banning

weapons in the senate on pain of death. After he accidentally breaks the law, he insists

upon his own execution so that "Rome sholde nevere abreide/His heires, whan he were of dawe/that here Ancestre brak the lawe" (VII.2882-84). The tale invokes a standard convention of kingship: the king ought to be subject to the law.

Gower rarely departs from a conventional discourse of kingship. Carmidotirus' defense of the law, however, is not an *ethical* argument for justice because the king's moral culpability is never in question. Instead, Gower explains this convention in terms of its *political* effect of this on the larger community. Carmidotirus insists upon his own execution in order to maintain the future integrity of the law and secure the relationship between the kingship and those who must themselves respect the law so that there can be no reason to "abreide" his heires.[71] The origins of the word "abreiden," which at the beginning of the fourteenth century meant to "cast down or destroy" (*MED*) hints at the political importance of this relationship. In the tales of deposition ("Rehoboam," "Lucretia" and "Virginia"), we see the practical necessity of keeping the law. The abstract principle of an unchanging law firms up the *trouthe* between the kings and his subjects and thus, strengthens the commonwealth. In Book VII, the highest good is the good of the state, what Cicero calls *summa iustitia.* In other words, politics is not an extension of ethics, as Porter suggests (154), but rather ethics often operate within a political framework.

The "Tale of Carmidotirus" exemplifies a constitutional vision of law that cannot be abridged or rescinded. The law provides a contractual foundation for the *trouthe* between the king and his subjects—establishing the rules of the game, so to speak. It is precisely this foundation, that Genius describes when in his introduction to justice he

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[71] Gower provides an ethical argument in the voice of the senators who urge the king not to hold himself to the law. They argue that it was not intentional and therefore he should not meet such a harsh fate.

claims that "the lawe mai comune/ The lordes forth with the commune,/ Ech hath his propre dueté" (VII. 2709-11). Again, Genius emphasizes the political, rather than the ethical nature of the law: that is, the primary purpose of the law is to unite or "commune[n] forth" the lordes with the commoners. More importantly, Gower gives the law agency: the law acts upon the nobles, not the other way around. This points towards a kind of legal positivism that can act upon the lords, that resists interpretation by both lords and kings, and that, ultimately, establishes a constitutional *trouthe* between community of the realm and lords.

Genius does not mention the king in this line because, technically, the king's "pouer stant above the law," which is to say the law cannot act directly upon the king. The king's position above the law, posited by *lex regia*, was a primary tenet not only of Roman law, but of common law as well appearing throughout Bracton's *De legibus et consuetudinibus Angliae.*[72] Bracton's work is complicated and at many points he suggests that the king is bound by the laws—a legal problem that Conrad van Dijk has called the "Bractonian dilemma:" how can the king be both above and below the law at the same time? Gower resolves the Bractonian dilemma, as I will discuss more below, by conflating the power of the king with the law—*rex* and *lex* meld into one entity. Similar to the marriage pact, the power and limits of regal authority occur simultaneously. The man becomes husband only after having agreed to the terms of the marriage, which limits the kind of authority he has over his wife. While many *Fürstenspiegel* suggest that a king should consent to be governed by the law, Gower's mirror shows why the king's

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[72] For discussion of king and law, see Bracton 2:33.

power depends upon the law. He rebuilds the mirror genre around a *trouthe* formalized

in the law.

As Genius himself asks on two occasions, what is the authority of a king in a land

"Where that ther is no lawe in londe" (VII. 2699)?[73] In other words, the king's power

cannot be questioned by the law, but without the law the king's power simply does not

exist. Gower acknowledges the king's hereditary authority, his "hihe worthiness," and

that his "pouer stant above the lawe," but he also carefully defines his role. The king

guides the law ("he which shall the law guide" (VII.2717)). Gower's choice of the word

"guides" rather than "creates" pushes back against the strident royalist rhetoric that often

made use of civil law to foster a continental model of benign absolutism.[74]

Gower's limitation of the king's legislative authority, which is the repeated theme

in Genius's handling of justice, develops the 'constitutionalist' discourse surrounding the

coronation oath which explicitly defines the king's relationship to the law in the first

clause:

> Sire, will you grant and keep and by your oath confirm to the people of England
> the laws and customs given to them by the previous just and god-fearing kings,
> your ancestors, and especially the laws, customs, and liberties granted to the
> clergy and people by the glorious king, the sainted Edward, your predecessor?
> (*ECR* 117, 251)[75]

and again in the fourth:

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[73] The other instance occurs when Genius, making a more extended argument about the relationship between the king and law, asks, "Do lawe awey, what is a king?" (VII.3075)

[74] In particular, the idea that the king governs as one who guides, rather than makes, the law pushes back against the notion that *par in parem non habet imperium.*

[75] The language above appears in *Liber Regalis*, but the *English Coronation Records* in order to save space refers the reader to the full text of the oath in *Coronation Ordo of Charles I.* The first page number then refers to the place in the *Liber Regalis* that the full text would appear and the second page refers to where to find the language.

> Sire, do you grant to be held and observe the just laws and customs that the *community of your realm* shall determine, and will you, so far as in you lies, defend and strengthen them to the honour of God? (*ECR* 117, 252).

The oath was frequently treated as a key component of the ancient constitution that limited the king's legislative authority. [76] That is, the king has absolute power to execute and defend the law, but he has very little legislative authority and he can only make new statutes if the entire realm agrees with the law. The law, in theory at least, derives from the consent of the people and thus is a "convention of the Constitution" (Chrimes 8) resistant to abrupt change that clearly identifies the nature of regal authority. These clauses of the coronation oath were added for Edward II and were evoked in his deposition and later in the deposition of Richard II. In this sense, the coronation oath was not merely a *pro forma* ritual but rather the cornerstone of constitutionalist political theory.

Gower's concentrated critique of the royal prerogative has caused many critics to align him with the Appellant cause. Book VII is often read in light of the events of the Merciless Parliament, since this rebellion provides the most spectacular manifestation of the tensions between the Lords and the King. This reading, however, tends to focus on the factional politics between the king and lords rather than the political conditions that made the Merciless Parliament possible. This is particularly important because pro-Appellant readings of Gower tend to read the *Confessio* as a polemic against

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[76] There was considerable anxiety surrounding royal legislative authority. Elliot Kendall, for example, suggests that Gower's "Tale of Lycurgus" "locates ideal legislative activity in the past" (215). The actual effect of the oath on legislative authority is up for debate. For lengthier discussions on the relationship between the oath and royal legislative authority; see Green, *Crisis* 241-2; and Saul, *Richard II* 25. Most historians agree that the clause was essentially an ideological tool that could be ignored when kings and magnates worked together, but that, barons could, when needed, use the clause to defend any action that seemed to limit the king's prerogative. I would suggest that during the thirteenth and fourteenth century these clauses of the oath are becoming "convention of the Constitution" (Chrimes 8). In 1399 the "Record and Process," which records the charges brought against Richard II, make frequent allusion to the oath.

centralization, which leads to a distortion of many of the important characteristics of

Gower's "trouthe of governance." Elliot Kendall, for example, reading the poem through

pro-magnate lens, argues that Gower's desire for "traditional conceptions of law"

founded upon *trouthe* lead him to critique an increasingly bureaucratized and centralized

king's law (211). Comparing Gower's tales of justice to his description of the "Golden

Age" in the Prologue, Kendall argues:

> [the] ideas of law in the *Confessio* are equally nostalgic. The concept of a
> kingship that preserves a fixed and monumental body of law, and guarantees this
> preservation by the power of sworn trouthe, finds an apotheosis in the tale of
> Lycurgus. (214)

For Kendall the maintenance of the law requires the decentralization of the legal system

so that law is part of "asymmetric reciprocalist" relationships. Based selectively on

Robert Firth Green's complex study of the evolution of the concept of truth in the Middle

Ages, Kendall separates the asymmetrical reciprocal relationships formed through

trouthe-bonds from "the judicially enforced written contract" (Green xiv).[77]

Kendall thus portrays Gower's position as closer to one nostalgically longing for

the loosely organized political structure of feudal England, a structure that resembles

feudalism more than constitutionalism. By emphasizing the "nostalgia" of Gower's

thinking, Kendall paints a picture of an "extremely conservative" author, who deeply

distrusts the king's law and desires to return to a legal system based on personal *trouthe*

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[77] For Kendall the *trouthe*-bond necessarily refers to old feudal bonds. The conflict in Gower's text thus mirrors the conflict between baronial networks and royalist centralization; see 28-35. Richard Firth Green, however, shows how these *trouthe* bonds were becoming the basis of a written legal code in the fourteenth century; see *Crisis* 44-50. Moreover, as I have suggested in Chapter II, the barons themselves did not look to stop centralization, but rather to seize increased control over central administration.

in which justice was managed by "local aristocratic networks."[78] The old fashioned oath

is central to Gower's *Confessio*, but only insofar as it undergirds a more modern

centralized judicial system. As we will see more clearly in the "Tale of Lycurgus," the

oath that Gower discusses is not a unique troth-plight between a knight and his lady (the

kind of *private trouthe* that Gower undermines in the Tale of Zorobabel), but rather a

public oath that binds Lords, commoners and the king publically to one law, and thus

makes that law sovereign. This imaginative expansion of the trothplight to the whole

realm mirrors the leap necessary to imagine liberties as universally enjoyed in Magna

Carta or the Provisions of Oxford.[79] Gower's fictional nostalgia fashions a new model of

trouthe in terms of a legal relationship. Adopting the common voice, Gower recasts

majestic ideas into more political terms. He reorients the discourse of majesty and shifts

the reader's attention from the person of the king to the "office" of kingship.

    At times, he advances positions similar to the rhetoric of the Appellants.

Nonetheless, occasional agreement between Appellant propaganda and Gower's poetry

should not be read as collusion; and certainly, we should not read all of Gower's ideas

through a pro-Appellant lens based on these few points of agreement. I will suggest that

Book VII reveals that Gower does not view either Richard's position or the position of

the lords so favorably that he assumes one of these models will resolve the political

tensions of English governance that stretched back to at least William the Conqueror.

Like the Appellants, Gower acknowledges the threat of Ricardian absolutism particularly

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[78] Elliot Kendall discusses how Lycurgus represents the "reciprocalist great household discourse [that] imagines the law as a basically unified and unchanging authority that is always mediated by (and thereby subordinated to) personal *trouthe* according to certain normative forms of personal relation and local networks" (210).

[79] The big achievement of Magna Carta was not the creation of liberties but rather the "shift from individual to communal or corporate privilege" (Holt 55).

in the king's application of civil law to appropriate legislative authority and assert his position above the law.   At the same time, however, Gower's exemplary tales of justice advocate a strong centralized legal system that establishes a unified law under the guidance of the king, a legal system in which "asymmetric reciprocalist relationships" would be replaced by abstract principles. Gower does not support the Appellants against the king; he fashions a rhetorical position through which (he imagines) the realm can unite and part of this vision relies upon a legal construction of sovereignty based upon the coronation oath.

The Tale of Lycurgus and the Primacy of Law

"The Tale of Lycurgus," a tale likely adapted from Justinus's *Epitome Historiarum Philippicarum P. Trogi,* is Gower's most lucid vision of a constitutionalist kingship.[80] The tale, told frequently in the Middle Ages as an exemplum of good kingship, describes a king, Lycurgus, who establishes good laws for his city and then aims to make those laws permanent. He decides upon a trick. He convinces the people that his laws came from a god—usually Apollo, but in Gower, it is Mercury. He tells the people he must meet with this god on the island of Crete and that he wants the people to swear an oath to uphold his laws until he returns. The people swear the oath and the king goes into exile "nevere to be founde;/ So that Athenis, which was bounde,/ Nevere after scholde be relessed" (VII.3003-5). But whereas Justinus, Valerius Maximus and John of Salisbury focus on how Lycurgus's laws imposed a stringent code that promoted labor

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[80] Scanlon suggests that this must have been Gower's source because of its connection to the ruse; see 287ff.

over luxury, Gower valorizes the king's sacrifice of royal prerogative for the common profit by amplifying the king's self-imposed exile.[81]

Gower dramatizes the king's sacrificial exile, which I will argue is the original constitutional gesture, by focusing his source material through the lens of Augustinian psychology. Thus Gower, stripping the original material of both the history of Lycurgus (i.e. how he assumed the throne) and the specific content of his laws, ennobles the sacrifice of temporal power for the highest political good—the common profit. Gower describes Lycurgus's sacrifice entirely within a secular register in which *trouthe*, not mere obedience, is affirmed through self-sacrifice. The sacrifice of sovereign power for the common good provides the cornerstone of Gower's constitutionalist aesthetic.[82]

As we have already seen in the "Tale of Darius and his Advisors," Augustinian psychology plays a crucial role in Gower's constitutionalist thought. For Augustine, the faculties of the mind inhere in Wisdom when the will shuns selfish interest (its own lights) and seeks "participation in that highest light" (*De Trinitate* XIV.12.15). Even though Augustine shows no sympathy for constitutionalism—he does not advocate any resistance theory against tyranny aside from prayer and passive suffering—and ultimately shows no faith in the state's ability to administer justice, political discourse surrounding

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[81] Typically, the laws of Lycurgus emphasize the value of discipline and the danger of luxury. For example: "He enjoined frugality on all, thinking that the toils of war would be made more endurable by a constant observance of it. He ordered all purchases to be made, not with money, but by exchange of commodities. The use of gold and silver he prohibited, as being the origin of all evils" (Justinus III.ii). In John of Salisbury, Lycurgus "abolished the use of gold, silver and all other wicked materials" so that "those things which nature . . . commends as useful would alone be valuable" (*Policraticus* IV: 3, 5). Valerius Maximus in Memorable Doings and Sayings says that "Obeying the austere laws of Lycurgus, for some long time it drew the eyes of its members back from gazing at Asia, lest ensnared by her seductions they should slide into a daintier style of living. For they had heard that from Asia flowed elegance and extravagance and all kinds of unnecessary pleasure, and that the Ionians had invented the custom of providing perfume and garlands at dinner and serving dessert, no small stimulants to luxury" (Valerius Maximus II.vi.1)

[82] As Russell Peck notes, the "abandonment of self-interest so that the 'commune' might profit is the primary lesson" of the "Tale of Lycurgus," see 148-49; quotation from 149. The legalization of this "abandonment of self-interest" is the turn towards constitutionalism that I have been arguing.

the royal prerogative (i.e. *voluntas regi*), not surprisingly, absorbed Augustinian

psychology of the will. Without a distinctive field of politics, the theology of the will

provided a way of speaking about the relationship of the king to the law; more

importantly, since absolutism depended upon theocratic principles, the appropriation of

Augustine challenges its religious authority. John of Salisbury developed this political

usage of Augustinian psychology in *Policraticus*:

> For the will of the ruler is determined by the law of God and does not injure
> liberty. By contrast, the will of the tyrant is the slave to desires and, opposing law
> which supports liberty, it ventures to impose the yoke of servitude upon fellow
> slaves. (VIII.22)

John of Salisbury clearly identifies the ruler's desire to "impose the yoke of servitude" as

a form of political oppression and an act against the law. The word "law" carries both the

sense of the "law of god" and laws of the ancient constitution that guarantee the liberties

from time immemorial. Unlike Augustine, for whom "liberty" and "servitude" could

only be determined by one's relationship with justice of God, liberty and servitude in

Policraticus are the effects of the ruler's will upon the state. Turned inside out, the

effects become a means of measurement and those acts that "injure liberty" are acts

against the law of God—it is precisely this type of thinking that allows Hobbes, centuries

later, to conclude that "all actions and habits are to be esteemed good or evil by their

causes and usefulness in reference to the commonwealth" (Hobbes Behemoth 45). By

aligning the "law of God" with civic benefits, John bends Augustine's *vera iustitia* back

towards Cicero's civic ideal of *summa iustitia*.

Similarly, in "The Tale of Lycurgus," Gower reimagines Augustinian will in

political terms by emphasizing the king's submission to the law. But unlike the "law of

God" from John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, Gower emphasizes the king's obligation to

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the secular laws of the land.[83] The opening description of Lycurgus's laws is Gower's

most forceful statement about the possibility of establishing an idyllic community by

means of an objective, central and secular law that eliminates those social maladies

caused by selfish interest:

> Hou he the lawe in every cas,
> Wherof he scholde his poeple reule,
> Hath set upon so good a reule,
> In al this world that cite non
> Of lawe was so wel begon
> Forth with the trouthe of governance.
> Ther was among hem no distance,
> Bot every man hath his encress;
> Ther was withoute werre pes,
> Withoute envie love stod;
> Richesse upon the comun good
> And noght upon the singuler
> Ordeigned was, and the pouer
> Of hem that weren in astat
> Was sauf . . .   (VII.2920-34)

As in the works of Augustine and John of Salisbury, true liberty comes from the

submission of a dangerous will (i.e. the "singuler") to a higher authority, but in place of

vera iustitia or the "higher law of God," Lycurgus's law focuses on the secular good of

the community. It is concerned with matters such as the equitable distribution of wealth

("richesse") "upon the comun good." That is the law regulates the relationship not

between man and god, but between individual members of society. Gower replaces the

sacred foundations of justice with a secular 'comun good,' but he retains the structure of

justice defined by the submission of a selfish will to an abstract principle. He does not

explicitly look at will in terms of a theological good and evil, but rather focuses on how

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[83] As John Dickinson argues, John of Salisbury gives significant power to the Church, rather than the law, in
determining the rightful authority of the prince (318). I argue that Gower increasingly imagines the secular restraints
of kingship coming from the community of the realm.

the selfish will causes the social evils (such as war and envy) that infect the commonwealth. Political virtue arises from a historically contingent relationship between the individual and the community that requires the subordination of the "singuler" to the "comun good"—a relationship formalized by law. The law creates a communal and secular standard to which subjects of the king (whether nobles or commoners) can subordinate their own selfish desires so that "Ther was withoute werre pes;/Withoute envie love." Much like Augustine, Gower suggests that the *singuler* ultimately punishes itself by breeding social evils such as war and envy. As a result, those seeking *singuler* profit are, in fact, working against their own self-interest, as the common good is identical with the good of the individual.

This conflation of the good of the commonwealth with the good of the individual is axiomatic in nearly all iterations of resistance theory and English constitutionalism. As we have seen in Chapter II, this collapse of will into law began as the impotent political grumblings of the dispossessed under Norman and early Angevin kings; it then played a critical role in legal grievances against the crown, and finally expanded into a full-fledged resistance theory that undergirded English politics and was made manifest in Magna Carta and subsequently strengthened in the revolutions of 1265 and 1327. This binary, fundamental to *Confessio*, was so widespread that it surfaced "in [the] everyday thinking of and arguments of articulate laymen" and was eventually formalized in prominent legal compilations such as the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris*: "right and justice ought to rule in the realm rather than the perversities of will; law is always made by right but will and

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violence and force are not right" (qtd. in Holt 102).[84] This legal appropriation of

Augustinian will exhibits two principles crucial to constitutionalist rhetoric: first, the "not

right" will is associated with social hazards such as "violence and force" and second,

employing a rhetorical move, recurring in resistance discourse, the *Leges* conflates law

and justice by arguing that human law is made by right (*ius facit*).

The "trouthe of governance" arises through the subordination of the factitious will

to "the comun good." Thus *ius et iustitia*, instead of providing the *essential* foundations

of law, are themselves historical products of a dynamic relationship between the

individual and community mediated through laws. Again, Gower emphasizes political

outcomes. As a result, Gower establishes a narrative space that prepares the ground for a

"secular science of politics" (Simpson 273). By ensuring peace, love and the common

good, Gower's *lex* becomes synonymous with *ius* and thus his near apotheosis of the law

becomes a metaphysical foundation of governance that stands in contrast to traditional

scholastic approaches that put the king in this position.[85]

In the same way that absolutism often relied upon theological models of

kingship—models that identify the king as the vicar of Christ or even, as Giles puts it,

semi-deus—constitutional theories often imagine the law as an "absolute and

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[84] For example, Gerard of Wales deploys this nascent constitutionalist distinction between will and law: "A king, who gets his name from ruling, is held to rule first himself and then the people under him. But it is the nature of the tyrant . . . to oppress the people with his furious sway" (*De principis instuctione*, cap XVI; trans. in Holt 99). The language of tyranny, here, is general. J.C. Holt discusses the pervasiveness of these ideas in the twelfth century and shows how these notional criticisms at a time when "authoritarian impulses ran deep" (89). Gower and Chaucer specify and tune this language to reimagine royal power. In particular, Gower's exempla, operating much like the legal exempla used to train lawyers, articulate the parameters of licit authority.

[85] S.E. Thorne argued that "the terms in which an act was phrased had gained greater importance . . . and they could not easily be augmented without parliamentary action" (45); see also Green, *Crisis* 137-41.

unchanging" principle synonymous with *ius*.[86] The need for a fixed, yet secular,

foundation for authority helps explain why Gower separates the law even from Lycurgus.

In Gower's source, Justinus repeatedly focuses attention on Lycurgus's active role in the

creation of law:

> He *ordered* [*iussit*] all purchases to be made, not with money, but by exchange of
> commodities (3.2.1.11);

> The use of gold and silver he prohibited [*sustulit*], as being the origin of all evils
> (3.2.1.12).

> He divided [*divisit*] the administration of the government among the several
> orders (3.3.1.1)

Justinus' Lycurgus establishes the law, he orders and divides it; the law is emphatically a

human product. In contrast, Genius focuses the reader's attention on the power of the

law rather than the lawmaker. Instead of ten active legislating verbs such as *iussit* or

divisit, Gower's lone legislative verb "set upon" diminishes the role of the king and

stresses the agency of law itself. Thus, even in the creation of the law, Gower distances

the king from the legislative process. Moreover, by using the passive "ordeigned was,"

in line 2932, Gower emphasizes the invisibility of Lycurgus's legislative authority. After

Lycurgus "set upon" the law, the king's primary role is to execute it in "every cas," and it

seems as if the law itself manages the commonwealth without "distance" or "debat."

Literary critics, however, have often read constitutionalism, as a simple foil to the

royalist agenda. These kinds of Appellant/king interpretations, what Ferster describes as

"bipolar" readings, simplify the complexity of Gower's political thought (Ferster 102).

Although Gower limits the prerogative and legislative authority of the king, one should

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[86] Elliot Kendall explains, "along this line of thinking, the role of the king as supreme power was not to make law but
guard it as an absolute and unchanging value" (212).

not assume, as some critics suggest, that Gower presents an "extremely conservative" view of royal *judicial* authority in which justice ought to be administered *by* local aristocracy (Kendall 215).[87] While Gower clearly favors justice that ensures that "the pouer/of hem that weren in astat/ was sauf" (VII.2932-34) and suggests that this protection of magnate power *partially* assures that there would be no strife or "debat" among the commonwealth, his support of magnate "astat" should not be conflated with the desire to decentralize authority. The limitation of the prerogative and legislative authority of the king were part of political reform, but they were not motivated by dislike of the monarchy but rather designed to create security through positive law. While barons may have desired more control over judicial authority, the king's justice was a necessary component for the commonwealth since it provided a check against the abuses of baronial prerogative. There is no evidence in *Confessio Amantis* that Gower believes the king should cede judicial authority to local powers.[88]

Thus, Kendall is only partly right when, apparently ignoring the conjunction in line 2932, he argues, "the uncontested authority of those who are "in astat" ensures that the laws scarcely need administering" (214). Gower clearly argues that the law eliminates "debat" through a *combination* of distributive justice that ensures aristocratic authority *and* stringent assurances that "richesse" be distributed for the common good. Instead of reading Gower against some imagined feudal time, we see here the alignment

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[87] For Kendall, this "extremely conservative" nostalgic view of self-restraint in which local political circumstances trump the centralization of justice that was occurring in the later Middle Ages benefits the aristocracy.

[88] The only tale that comes close might be the "Tale of Demetrius and Perseus," in which Gower shows describes how Perseus corrupts the royal court to have his brother killed so that he might be made king. This tale simply reveals the dangers of close relationships within the judicial process, and, in fact the tale concludes by going to a higher and more centralized court of the Empire to resolve the crisis. In other words, Gower suggests that the solution is always distance between the judge and those adjudicated. For discussion of "Tale of Demetrius and Perseus," see van Dijk 65-73.

of Gower's thought with the political thinking behind the Provisions of Westminster that protected the commoners in general, and the gentry more specifically, from the majestic abuse of lordship. That is, "the laws scarcely need administering" not only because of the "uncontested authority" of the great household but also because it protects the common good from predatory *singuler* actions, including the "singuler" acts of the lords. The laws do not create some kind of radical equality but rather establish what Aristotle called distributive justice, a kind of "proportional equality" (Blythe 20) that ensured each person had specific rights under the law as pertains to his *general* status; thus, the law protects the subject against abuses of both royal and baronial prerogative.[89]

The assurance that the aristocratic "astat was sauf" and the fair distribution of 'richesse' were conditions of good laws that "scarcely need administering," but in order to understand the relationship between justice and the king, we must remind ourselves that they are the effects of the king's initial law. Elliot Kendall argues that Gower was concerned with restoring and enhancing the 'reciprocalist' authority of the great household, especially against the onslaught of 'magnificent' authority employed by Richard II. In his reading these theoretical terms take on almost an either/or partisan quality—one supports either a reciprocal or magnificent brand of politics, when in reality both forms of authority had their place. Kendall equates Gower's tendency of favoring 'reciprocal' exchanges with a belief that Gower supports the baronial local distribution of justice. However, while Gower does advocate distributive justice that protects the power of the magnates, the poem simply does not support the belief that judicial authority should be applied more locally. Everyone has his "increase" because there is a uniform

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[89] For a discussion of distributive justice, see Aristotle *Politics* III.vii.

rule that can be used in every case and, indeed, the very fact that aristocratic power is

"sauf" derives from this uniformity.[90] The confessional mode advocates an

institutionalized conscience of the state that produces this uniformity.

While the "trouthe of governance" eliminates "distance," protects everyone's

"encress" and creates a temporary peace, Lycurgus's laws do not have the binding

authority necessary to be considered a constitution because they do not permanently

establish the relationship between the king and law—that is, Lycurgus's personal

relationship with the law is still a matter of choice.   Lycurgus wonders, "Hou that his

lawe . . . /Mihte afterward forevere laste"(VII.2945-46). This question in fact is the

central question of constitutional thought: how does one create a law through which the

ease of the people might be guaranteed forever?   Lycurgus strikes upon a plan in which

he will get all his subjects to swear oath that they will "kepe and holde" his laws until he

"come ayein," but he does not "come ayein" (2991-95). Instead he goes into a self-

imposed exile so that his "goode lawe [nevere] cessed"(VII.3006).   The king's exile

combined with this oath establishes a permanent ordering of Athens. Genius explains the

purpose of Lycurgus's exile:

> To do profit to the comune,
> He tok of exil the fortune,
> And lefte of Prince thilke office
> Only for love and for justice,
> Thurgh which he thoughte, if that he myhte,
> For evere after his deth to rihte
> The cite which was him betake. (VII.3011-17)

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[90] John Fisher suggests that "the concept of one law for a various population is the shadow line that divides the modern world from the medieval" (199); van Dijk discusses the tension between "O lawe" and his ideal of the prince as *legibus solutus* in the *Confessio* (102-6); see also Peck who describes the relationship between law and the individual in more ethical terms (215-217).

Genius emphasizes the importance of Lycurgus exile by neatly rhyming the king's

"fortune" with "profit to the comune." Unlike his source material, which provides

detailed descriptions of Lycurgus's equitable laws—laws that ensure that everyone eats

publicly, laws that forbid the use of money to buy things—Gower dramatizes the heroism

of Lycurgus's kenotic sacrifice, the emptying out of his sovereign authority in an act that

makes him his laws.[91] Lycurgus laws are equitable. They eliminate "werre" and "envy,"

"debat" and "distance" but it is only his exile—his willingness to sacrifice all his power

"for love and for justice"— through which he might "for evere after his deth to rihte/The

cite" so that "thilke goode lawe [never] cessed" (VII.3006). In this tale, Gower does not

merely advance a constitutional agenda: he creates the constitutional hero who, similar to

Augustine's Christian hero, bends his own will to a higher power. But unlike

Augustine's Christian hero, this power is the law that ensures the common profit.

Scholars traditionally describe this bending as advising royal self-restraint. As I

have argued, the idea that Gower assumes what Olsson calls a "Nathan-esque" role

actually reinscribes the Ricardian concept of absolutism, namely royal justice is always

magnanimous (Olsson 145-47).[92] For example, Larry Scanlon, convinced that Gower was

an absolutist, suggests that Lycurgus, "Gower's ideal monarch," still fits the Aegidian

mold of benign absolutism: the king has absolute authority over the government, but

since power depends upon self-restraint he achieves this power kenotically through

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[91] By spending roughly 19 lines describing the laws and 93 describing Lycurgus's exile, Gower changes the focus of his source material; instead of describing the actual laws, Gower dramatizes heroism of Lycurgus's self-exile through which he dissolves regal legislative authority in perpetuity, see Scanlon 287-88.

[92] For a discussion of Gower as circumspect Nathan-figure, see Peck, *Kingship* 149-150: and Porter 135-162. For a more legal look at Gower's work, see Simpson 217-230.

sacrificing his power.[93] The abdication of his own authority brings about both the

commonwealth and the law. This magnanimous submission of authority resembles *lex*

digna in which "the king is above the law but *ought* to act like one below the law;" and,

like *lex digna*, the conditional subjunctive makes the existence of law part of a plea in

which Lycurgus operates as pedagogical exemplum teaching all kings self-restraint.

Scanlon suggests that Lycurgus's exemplary action shows the subject's "endless

responsiveness to the initiatives of a self-producing, self regulating monarch" (Scanlon

289). In these terms, the king brings the law and commonwealth into existence, and in

theoretical sense, he is right. Only it is more accurate to say that the king brings the law

and commonwealth into existence by swearing an oath through which he voluntarily

subordinates his absolute authority to the law at the same moment that he becomes the

king of the land. His authority legally depends upon his oath to give up authority.

In response to Scanlon's argument that the king authorizes the law "through

sovereign generosity"(286),[94] Conrad van Dijk makes an important distinction by

pointing out that the "Tale of Lycurgus" does not provide an exemplum of "hou a worthi

prince is holde/The lawes of his lond to holde" (VII.2911-12), precisely because

Lycurgus is not an exemplary hero but an exceptional one (125-128).[95] The kingship that

Lycurgus inherited, much like the kingship predating Henry III, was a personal kingship

that, in theory, was not bound by laws. After his exile, the Athenian monarchy shared

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[93] Peck likewise argues that authority is secured "by exiling egotism" (*Kingship* 149).

[94] For Conrad van Dijk's argument that Gower, in the "Tale of Lycurgus," separates law and king, see 125-128.

[95] Van Dijk draws upon Peter Nicholson assertion that Lycurgus's "conduct would no doubt be difficult for any king to imitate, but he is the clearest example of how even the king is subordinate to a higher truth and of how he occupies a particular place and performs a particular function in gods order" (353).

more in common with the permanence of the ancient constitution embodied in Magna Carta or the Provisions of Oxford than Angevin *vis* and *voluntas*. Lycurgus's exile is not to be imitated because it initiates a fixed law.[96] No future king could make Lycurgus's sacrifice, precisely because Lycurgus sacrifice institutionalized the limits on royal power and you sacrifice what you don't have.

The simultaneous obtaining and abdicating absolute authority stands at the center of the theory of governance born out of the Magna Carta and developed in the Second Barons' War. Through the coronation oath, and the exceptional king who takes it, Gower imagines the terminal point of a personal kingship and suggests a time in which the royal prerogative is constrained by the law. By using both an old story and the traditional mechanism of the oath, a mechanism that had become a political weapon during the reign of Edward II, the "Tale of Lycurgus" reimagines sovereign authority. For Kendall the oath reaches back to England's golden age when peace was maintained through asymmetric networks of *trouthe*. Gower redeploys the nostalgic concept to imagine the translation of royal authority to the abstract principle of law—a law which is the promise to an eternally absent king. The oath becomes a means through which the newer concept of an abstract positive law can be grasped. As Lycurgus set a parliament in which he asks the people to:

> . . . assure and seie
> With such an oth as I wol take,
> That ech of you schal undertake
> Mi lawes for to kepe and holde.
> . . . .

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[96] The "Tale of Lycurgus" examines on "how the law gains authority and how that affects later rulers" (van Dijk 125). For Kendall the idea of an "absolute and unchanging" (212) law was the lynchpin of baronial political theory that aimed at limiting of the king's legislative authority (210-15); I have argued, using Wilkes terminology, that the coronation oath, which institutes the king's power includes "voluntary abdication of absolute power" (216) an abdication that cannot be undone by royal will; thus, the legal sphere is carved out of royal will.

And therupon thei swore here oth,
That fro the time that he goth,
Til he to hem be come,
Thei scholde hise lawes wel and plein
In every point kepe and fulfille. (VII.2988-2991; 2993-7)

In the traditional medieval narrative, like *Sir Orfeo* or *Havelok*, we might expect the king

to transfer power to a seneschal and bind this seneschal by oath. What gives the "Tale of

Lycurgus" so much imaginative possibility is that the subjects swear to "kepe and holde"

the laws from the point of his departure to the moment of his return. Since he never

returns, no one, including future kings, has the authority to undo Lycurgus's laws.

Unlike transference of power to the seneschal or Justiciar, which maintains the Ulpian

concept of the personal kingship, the tale of Lycurgus subordinates everyone, including

future kings to the law. Such a transference of power was not only a political

mechanism, but rather it was part of a much wider cultural shift in attitudes towards law.

In his careful anatomy of the concept of *trouthe* during the Ricardian period,

Robert Firth Green explains this shift as linguistic movement "from a truth that resides in

people to one located in documents" (Green, *Crisis* xiv) The change, as Green explains,

is not just a change of medium but rather a change in nature, from personal relationships

to abstraction. Through the oath, Gower registers this seismic shift as the *communitas*

regni swears fealty to a king, who, through his self-exile, becomes a non-personal

principle, an institution; the oath becomes the vehicle through which Gower imagines the

transference *imperium* to an institutionalized law that exists in the absence of the king,

from a relationship between *subditus* and *rex* to a relationship in which subject and rex

are bound to one another by the idea of law. Personal *trouthe* becomes public *trouthe*.

By emphasizing the legal constraints on the office of kingship, the tale pushes back at

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those powerful Roman ideas that had long infiltrated English legal theory: *princeps solutus est legibus* and *par in parem imperium non habet*.

Van Dijk's practical assessment is indispensable to understanding the political logic of the tale because it emphasizes the importance of institutionalized law that limits the legitimate authority of the king. Gower, however, not only envisions the king obeying the law—not only restraining himself—but actually imagines the law continuing to function in the king's absence and binding future kings. Through his depiction of fealty to an absent sovereign, Gower reimagines the web of relationships between king, lords, commoners and the law. That is, Lycurgus's exile develops a permanent relationship with the center that binds all the citizens of the realm. Much like the barons who designed *Magna Carta*, Gower extends ideas once applied locally to "the community of the realm" (295) so that all English men should be bound by "o lawe."

The earliest liberties were the gift of the king—*Magna Carta* itself was framed as royal largesse—and it was through these liberties that the people (first palatinate tenants, then lords, then subtenants and knights) slowly learned to exert political force and claim increased political authority. Larry Scanlon, in *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, likewise, argues that Gower "define[s] justice…not as protection of existing rights secured by correspondence to external standards and regularized institutional procedures, but as king's gift" (268)." While Gower represents justice as royal largesse, he *also* imagines the "external standards" and "institutional procedures" as manifestations of the "king's gift," or perhaps more accurately we should call it the "Crown's gift." The point is that a political language of law begins to emerge from the dominant *Fürstenspiegel* representations of justice. As J.C. Holt points out, the English understood rights and

liberties not as divinely endowed but rather as acts of regal self-limitation and that kings granted the "control of the administrative functions of the Crown" through charters and royal statutes (29). There are two things to note about Holt's account: namely, that the rights and liberties were seen as royal gifts of "self-limitation," *and* they involved the ceding of royal authority to "external standards and institutional procedures." Through this procedure much of the king's authority became the institutionalized authority of the Crown.

As an exceptional hero, the character of Lycurgus establishes the relationship between the king and law in England; and the "royal sacrifice," although—or perhaps because—it is part of a ruse, represents an idealized constitutionalist narrative that elides the tumultuous history of constitutional practice: it elides Runnymede, and "The Common Enterprise;" most of all, it elides the deposition and execution of Edward II. That is, there was no Lycurgus in England. Instead, the proper relationship between law and king was established through continued resistance to royal overreach that established, through repetition what Chrimes has called the constitutional conventions. At those historical flashpoints where the "mutual recognition" necessary to sovereignty collapsed, the relationship between the monarch and the commonwealth was often redefined—most notably in Magna Carta, the Oxford Provisions, the Westminster Provisions and the Oath of Edward II. Whether the will of the king was being expressed or extorted, the language of politics was the language of king's gift. Lycurgus is the idealized and the fictitious self-restraint of King John in the Magna Carta, Henry III in the Oxford and Westminster Provisions, and Edward II in the fourth recension of coronation oath.

Just as it is easy from a modern vantage point to imagine Gower as either a royalist or an Appellant sympathizer, it is equally easy to argue that both van Dijk and Scanlon are right—either the king is limited or he can exercise boundless "ideological power." However, when we try to understand how constitutional thought could arise out of a muddle of conflicting charters and legal agreements between kings, tenants and sub-tenants, I would suggest they both emphasize different aspects of the same solution: van Dijk emphasizes how Lycurgus represents limits of kingship inherent in the "ancient constitution," while Scanlon recognizes the cultural vehicle through which constitutional thought could be brought about—i.e. the "king's gift." If we look at outcomes (by looking at the past from the future) the importance of Scanlon's analysis here might be overlooked—in both cases the king's power is limited. So what purpose does calling it the "king's gift" serve? As we have seen in past attempts at reform, the English simply did not have linguistic or conceptual framework to imagine authority existing outside monarchical government. Thus, in order to imagine positive law that binds the king, Gower does not envision a new world order but rather pushes against the political framework. By transforming the oath into positive law and reimagining the concept of legitimate sovereign actions in relation to this law, Lycurgus's exile provides a critical resolution to the Bractonian dilemma. The "king's gift" is a way of imagining institutional limitations of kingship in a way that makes sense in a *trouthe*-oriented culture. The king's turn from his rule to the future, achieved through his exile, signifies the turn from law to constitutionalism. In "The Folly of Rehoboam," Gower explores how this constitutionalism is sustained by the practical limits of authority.

"The Folly of Rehoboam" and the Consequences of Majestic Rhetoric

"The Folly of Rehoboam" is a rarely discussed tale. When it is discussed it is used to demonstrate Gower's condemnation of the rule of Richard II. Judith Ferster has shown that Rehoboam frequently provided a code for royal critique and that Rehoboam's heavy taxation of Israel as well as his reliance on young counselors resembled the burden of taxation foisted upon the English and the king's favoritism of Robert de Vere, respectively. Thomas of Wimbledon lengthily compared Richard II to Rehoboam in a sermon delivered in both 1386 and 1388. The Richard-Rehoboam comparison seemed so apparent and the deposition message so radical to Wim Lindeboom that he argues that Book VII must have been written after Richard's deposition.[97] However, even if we accept (and I do) the assertion that the poem alludes to contemporary events, the interpretation and evaluation of those events requires a particular rhetorical stance; here I return to Gower's practical reconfiguration of sovereignty. For Gower, the conditions on the ground shaped not only a new way of thinking about *a king* but also a new way of thinking about *kingship*.

"The Folly of Rehoboam" imagines sovereign authority as circumscribed and contingent upon the community of the realm. Whereas the traditional majestic posture emphasizes the relationship between king and god, Gower shows how this king-God relationship is mediated through creation. At first glance, the distinction may seem subtle. After all, in both cases God's will sustains sovereignty. However, by imagining sovereignty as mediated, Gower both naturalizes (i.e. demystifies) sovereignty and introduces a third term, the people. Through this third term Gower reconfigures authority

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[97] Lancastrian propaganda explicitly used the archetype of Rehoboam to defend the deposition of Richard II. "The Folly of Rehoboam" is likely the most topical political tale in the *Confessio Amantis*.

as a sacred *political* bond (a *trouthe*) between the people and the king. Like other medieval authors, Gower depicts the ethical as effective. The idea of an unethical effective act (i.e. a necessary evil) is not part of Gower's political thought. Nonetheless, what makes his approach innovative is that the sovereign act is either punished or rewarded in and by creation. That is, the illegitimate act brings about its own punishment from the community. This allows Gower to create a political hermeneutic, a way of interpreting sovereign legitimacy in relation to a *practical* political structure. The ethical sovereign act makes the "hypothetical trades" necessary to maintain the "mutual recognitions" that allow the king, in the words of the his old counselors, to his "regne achieve."

In order to construct this political hermeneutic, Gower modifies the traditional function of the exemplum: he shifts the focus from *the* interpretation (i.e. the meaning) to the *act* of interpreting. After the thirteenth century, the exemplum became a popular preaching device to reach lay audiences, but its function was limited to conveying a moral. James of Vitry in a thirteenth-century sermon describes the function of the exemplum as follows:

> When we are speaking in Latin, in a convent and to a congregation of the wise, then we can say many things, and do not need to descend to particulars: to laymen, however, it is necessary to demonstrate everything as though to the eye, and in a way perceptible to the senses. (qtd. in Runacres 117)

Since laymen cannot grasp "many things" understood by the congregation of the wise, preachers must employ the exemplum genre to communicate these difficult ideas through a concrete language that makes the moral "perceptible to [their] senses." Charles Runacres broadly describes the split as narrative (the particulars) and moral (the abstract

idea). [98] For the medieval preacher, the particulars of the narrative are a necessary evil, something to "descend to" for the sake of "simpler audiences" (Runacres 117). The particulars, in the last instance, are not important and the wise can seemingly do without them altogether. The exemplum reflects an attitude towards history and narrative that has been at the center of this book: the belief that the validity of a "succession of particulars," of history or narrative exists only its "relation to eternity."

The narrative tells how the people of Israel petitioned King Rehoboam for relief from the heavy "yoke" of taxation imposed by his father. After seeking the advice of his older and younger counselors, Rehoboam takes the advice of his young counselors and maintains the heavy taxation of his father. The Israelites rebel and the kingdom is split. If we accept Genius as our preacher, then we must equally accept that the moral of the tale is about listening to the wisdom of old advisors over the hotheaded young ones—a platitude that seemingly supports Coleman's dreary assessment of Gower as someone who provides an encyclopedia to the moral saws of his day. Reducing the narrative of "The Folly of Rehoboam" to its explicit moral ignores how Gower reworks the biblical narrative to redefine legitimacy as a political relationship between the king and community. Gower's exemplary narratives train the reader 'how' to interpret the particulars of narrative. That is, the reader judges morality and legitimacy of Rehoboam's actions by their particular effects. As such, Gower's exemplary narratives train the reader to adopt a political perspective that points towards a political science that examines power as cause and effect within the world of contingency. This perspective is

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[98] What follows borrows heavily from the interpretive strategy described by Charles Runacres. The choice of narrative and moral translates Runacres use of *narracio* and *moralitas*, which he drew from collections of medieval exempla; for a lengthy discussion of this terminology, see Runacres 109ff.

far more important than the "moral saws" that Genius's exempla purportedly demonstrate.

The Kings-writer emphasizes that Rehoboam loses all of Israel except Judah because God is punishing the sin of Solomon: "the king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill his word" (I Kings 12:15).[99] King Solomon worshipped the gods of his concubines and thus lost the favor of God. The biblical account lends itself to a majestic approach to sovereignty in which power is described solely as an *immediate* relationship between the king and God: the civil war arises because King Solomon disobeyed and thus, lost the favor of God. Gower, on the other hand, removes Solomon's idolatry and God's direct role in the story and thus can write the history of Rehoboam in purely political terms: a sovereign act (i.e. Rehoboam's taxation) causes a political effect (i.e. civil war). The outcome, not God's prophet, provides the interpretive lens through which the narrative and sovereignty must be understood. By amplifying direct discourse and removing divine intervention, Gower accentuates the political elements within his biblical material and challenges the reader to arrive at the ethical moral by thinking through how the actions of the narrative affect the community, to construct a political ethics within "experience and history" (Runacres 108).

As in the "Tale of the Three Advisors," Gower's removal of divine intervention places the community and the material world at the center of Gower's political drama. After hearing the king's "malice and manace" the people began to "rave:"

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[99] Again, when Rehoboam considers fighting the people, God warns him through Shemaiah: "Thus says the Lord, you shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this is from me."(I Kings 12:24)

> For as the wilde wode rage
> Of wyndes makth the See salvage,
> And that was calm bringth into wawe,
> So for defalte of grace and lawe
> This poeple is stered al at ones
> And forth thei gon out of hise wones;
> So that of the lignages tuelve
> Tuo tribes only be hemselve
> With him abiden and nomo:
> So were thei for evermo
> Of no retorn withoute espeir
> Departed fro the rihtfull heir. (VII. 4111-4122)

Although Gower, like the Kings-narrator, recognizes the role of God's "grace" in the Tale of Rehoboam, he nonetheless minimizes the function of divine intervention reducing it to a single sentence in which he attributes the rebellion to "the defalte of grace and lawe." Whereas the biblical account focuses on the role of divine intervention in history, Gower focuses on the political motivation of people—"the defalte of lawe." Crucially, Gower does not divorce the divine and the political, but rather allows the ideas of grace and law shade into each other. Through the syntactic conjunction of law and grace, Gower gives law a religious connotation not uncommon in the Middle Ages in which law functions as "regulating and animating force of society," or as the Visigoth Laws of the seventh century state "*Lex est anima totius corporis popularis*" (law is the soul of the body of all the people) (Ullmann, *Individual* 47).   Shifting the narrative to political analysis, Gower interrogates the most vulnerable point within majestic rhetoric: the potential tension between principles of prerogative and law. Gower is unequivocal. The law—a Lycurgian compact with the people—is given primacy over royal prerogative.

Characterizing Rehoboam's act as a "defalte of grace and lawe," an absence that both causes and legitimizes the revolution by the common people. Gower thus turns away from the dominant majestic idea that the king is the law personified (*rex est lex animata*)

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towards ancient constitutionalism in which the law is soul of the kingdom. The tale

implies that one who does not embody the law is *ipso facto* not a king regardless of their

father. The implication was dangerous, but not uncommon. Thomas Wimbledon publicly

recites Rehoboam's exemplary crimes in a sermon delivered before the Merciless

Parliament in which many of Richard's own court were convicted of treason.

By blending grace into law Gower can naturalize his description of the

rebellion—the sin against God and his retribution occurs within the natural sphere of

creation. Most notably, Gower replaces the voice of God with a natural simile: the

"wilde wode" of Rehoboam causes the riot of the people as the winds bring the calm seas

to violent waves. These similes situate sovereignty and community within a natural

discourse of cause and effect; the violence of the king *naturally* destabilizes the

community making the "See salvage" such that they "gone out of hise wones." In the

King's narrative, Rehoboam cannot defeat the people; he does not even challenge the

people "because it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord." The loss of grace

leads to the loss of authority through divine punishment. In the *Confessio*, power is like

wind on the waves and like wind and waves; it can be studied. The importance of the tale

is less in the *moral* than in developing a *science* of power in which the social reality of

sovereignty can be analyzed and a *political* ethics created from a study of the effects of

power on the community. Gower's use of direct discourse, more analytical than

dramatic, shows an astute awareness of, or, at the very least, a natural attunement to a

science of power. Gower's Rehoboam, unlike his biblical counterpart, simply does not

have coercive force to turn back the tides of revolt that he started. Rehoboam is a bad

king because he acts in a way that naturally weakens the community and undercuts his own sovereign authority.

In the Bible, the debate between the king and the Israelites depicts Rehoboam as a cruel king who oppresses a just people, a depiction that Gower certainly maintains. However, Gower provides a much more nuanced analysis of sovereignty and the sovereign act by amplifying the central speeches. Direct discourse not only marks Rehoboam's tyranny but also introduces many of political questions that Gerald Harriss felt were absent from the medieval literary model: what acts are valid uses of power? What criteria validate the use of sovereign authority? What is the source of sovereign authority? How is sovereign power properly channeled? The speeches in the *narrative*, which have little to do with the *moral*, train the reader to interpret the public sphere (Harriss 13).

About a third of "The Folly of Rehoboam" consists of speeches (mostly direct discourse) that analyze the political act of taxation (specifically), and the nature of sovereignty (more generally). Gower renders the two critical speeches—that of the "comun poeple" and that of the "yonge conseil"—in direct discourse. The other two speeches (the speech of the old counselors who support the commoners and the speech of the king who "confourmed" to the young counselors) are reported in indirect discourse. It should be noted that even though the purported moral of the story is that a king ought to listen to the advice of his older wiser counselors, Gower's *narrative* gives greater length and weight to the voice of the common people. The speech of the commoners is 27 lines of direct discourse, while the speech of the olde conseil is reported in five lines of indirect discourse. Gower amplifies and modifies the text of the speeches from I Kings

12 such that they come to embody the anxiety between political and majestic rhetoric—the commoners and the young counselors respectively. Since these speeches mirror the conflict that is the subject of this book, it is worth quoting them at some length.

The first speech delivered by the commoners with "comun vois" in "Parlement" introduces the crisis of the tale. In the Bible, the people's speech is relatively short: "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you" (I Kings 12:4). Gower extends this speech by including nine lines of verse in which he explains that Solomon taxed the people and made their yoke heavy in order to build the temple. While many medieval texts depict tyrannical kings oppressing their people through taxation, Gower shifts the emphasis to a subtler question: what makes an act of sovereign authority tyrannical? Instead of isolating the burden, the heavy yoke that we encounter in the Old Testament speech, Gower accentuates the political question of utility. He demonstrates how utility places a limit on sovereign authority. Since the purpose of the taxation has been fulfilled and temple is "al mad" there is,

> no maner nede,
> If thou therof wolt taken hiede,
> To pilen of the poeple more,
> Which long time hath grieved sore.
> And in this wise as we thee seie,
> With tendre herte we thee preie
> That thou relesse thilke dette,
> Which upon ous thi fader sette.
> And if thee like to don so,
> We ben thi men for evermo,
> To gon and comen at thin heste. (VII. 4051-61)

The argument suggests that once the need of the taxation is gone the authority to tax is gone as well. The justness of the political act hinges upon its value to the community:

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since the temple is "al mad," and his father "riche deide" the continuation of these taxes can only be understood in terms of thievery ("to pilen of the poeple").[100] Unlike majestic discourse that treats royal justice as benevolence and authority as derived from above, the 'comun vois' clearly interprets the validity of sovereignty by its effects upon the common profit.

Gower initially constructs the relationship between people and king through a language of cautious humility—the people "beseche" and "preie" with "tendre herte." This is how society *should* look: the majestic structure of society is most natural. However, beneath this language of humble addresses, characteristic of the majestic tradition, Gower develops political rhetoric from the seemingly throwaway rhyme "taken hiede." This phrase poses an implicit (soon to be explicit) challenge to sovereign authority; it calls for "a recognition of the true power of social groups and interests." It calls political space into being (Crick 16). Gower appositely concludes this analytical narrative of political power with a conditional promise: "if thee like to don so,/ We ben thi men." The threat is that if the king does not listen to the people then they will not recognize his authority. The conclusion of their speech cuts through the majestic decorum of the tenderhearted entreaties and leaves the reader with a blunt analysis of sovereign authority as dependent on a political "if."

This "if" threatens the young counselors "lusti" concept of kingship. Instead of creating a legal *trouthe* with the common people (a *trouthe* resembling Admetus-Alceste marriage covenant) by accepting the conditional promise of the people to "bi thi men,"

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[100] That Gower actually spends a line assuring his reader that Solomon died rich suggests that Rehoboam should have no pressing need to tax the people further. This line emphasizes tyranny of Rehoboam's tax by emphasizing that it has no purpose.

the young counselors advise the king to don an appearance that will make the people fear

the king's power. The speech of the young counselors despite its bluster reveals the

weakness of majestic rhetoric:

> Sire, it schal be schame
> For evere unto thi worthi name,
> If thou ne kepe noght the riht,
> Whil thou art in thi yonge myht,
> Which that thin olde fader gat.
> Bot seie unto the poeple plat,
> That whil thou livest in thi lond,
> The leste finger of thin hond
> It schal be strengere overal
> Than was thi fadres bodi al.
> And this also schal be thi tale,
> If he hem smot with roddes smale,
> With Scrorpions thou schalt hem smyte;
> And wher thi fader tok a lyte,
> Thou thenkst to take mochel more.
> Thus schalt thou make hem drede sore
> The grete herte of thi corage,
> So forto holde hem in servage. (VII. 4079-4096)

The conflict between the young and old counselors turns on the proper relationship of

power and authority between a king and his subjects. The king is asking how he should

answer the demands of the commoners. They tell Rehoboam to deliver a rhetorical

performance that will strike dread into his subjects. He should "seie plat" to the

commoners: if you dare complain about Solomon's "roddes smale" you will find them

replaced with "scorpions." The counselors advocate a hyperbolic response that

emphasizes the power differential to shut down the political demands for compromise

and foreclose the threatening "taken hiede." They reject "mutual recognitions" between

king and people ('we ben thi men'), and replace this political exchange-rhetoric with a

majestic rhetoric in which the "requirement of the consent of the citizen was replaced by

the faith of the subjects. . . . The king . . . did not belong to the kingdom" (Ullmann, *Individual* 31). The king *holds* the people "in servage."

The schame-name rhyme that opens the speech points to the interpretive problem at the heart of the exemplum. The phrase "worthi name" is an English translation of the Latin word *dignitas*, a word central to majestic model of kingship. By acknowledging the requisite demands of the commoners, the king, according to these counselors, would lose *dignitas*, which they immediately associate with the loss of "riht" that his "fader gat." In this political context, the heritable "riht," which his "olde fader gat," points to the collection of royal rights and privileges called the royal prerogative. As we see in the Mise-documents, the quasi-legal concept of "riht" or *iura regis*, inherited through the father (*sui antecessores*), pressed uncomfortably against the political concepts of custom and community of the realm. King Henry III refused to respond to the barons' claims because he perceived in their *communitas regni*-rhetoric the threatening idea that the authority of the king was derived and conditional, that a king not only had an ethical responsibility but also a *legal obligation* to the community of the realm. The speeches in Rehoboam reenact this historical tension—a tension that had its modern counterpart in Richard II. Since the young counselors can only conceive of "name" as part of the majestic rhetoric, their register is entirely determined by this majestic orientation. "Schame," "name," "strengere" and "myht" can only be understood in terms of domination. Like Arphages in the "Tale of the Three Advisors" strength is external (i.e. power over) rather than internal (i.e. power between).

The ideal of dominion (power over) and its register actually constrain the king: Rehoboam "confourmed" to the advice of the young counselors, much as Apeman led

Cyrus around "bi his cheke." If the tone of the counselors' speech were less intimidating, then the word "confourmed" would be less pejorative. However, the counselors bully the king: if you don't do as *we* say you will lose your name, your "yonge miht" will be weaker than the strength of your "olde fader." In this context, the word "confourm" reads like capitulation; the insecure need of the young king to protect his name in front of his peers. In carefully calibrated words such as "confourmed," the reader encounters Gower's astute descriptions of the psychological dimension of sovereignty. In his attempt to demonstrate his dominion, the king reveals that he is a subject. Tyrannical acts are merely part of "fictitious liberty," and actual slavery. The psychological lens inverts majestic rhetoric and creates a political perspective through which the king himself can be judged.

"The Folly of Rehoboam," one of Gower's most overtly political tales, undercuts the majestic belief that sovereignty derives immanently from God because the people, in an action thoroughly naturalized by Gower, separate the king from his sovereign authority when he fails to "take hiede." But, more importantly, the tale trains the reader to understand sovereignty through a political lens. As in the *Mirour*, Gower treats sovereignty not as a metaphysical homology in which the king-subject relation mirrors God-people, but rather as part of a social system that brings unity, which in turn, brings about a strong kingship and strengthens the hierarchy. By emphasizing the conditional "if" involved in the relationship between Rehoboam and his people, Gower analyzes social mechanisms of sovereignty. Gower uses "The Folly of Rehoboam" to imagine a science of power whose object of analysis is the *social* reality of rule. Ultimately, Gower's "The Folly of Rehoboam" is not part of the divine *Kings* narrative that details

Israel's complex relationship with God; it is a tale about taxation, about measuring the utility of sovereign action, about the natural effects of what happens when a sovereign oversteps his authority—ultimately it is a tale that interrogates the source of sovereign authority.

Framing the *Confessio Amantis*: A Conversion Story

The *Confessio Amantis* ends as it began—as a love story. Focusing on this love story, and the character of Amans in particular, J.A. Burrows argues that Gower uses the confessional genre to "chasten" the aberrant and willful love of Amans specifically, and *fin amours* ideology, more generally ("Portrayal" 5-24). Genius addresses the love-drunk state of Amans in overtly confessional language:

> Tak love where it mai not faille:
> For as of this which thou art inne,
> Be that thou seist it is a Sinne,
> And Sinne mai no pris deserve,
> Without pris and who shal serve,
> I not what profit myhte availe. (VIII.2086-2091)

Like the penitent, Amans must turn away from sinful love and submit to that unfailing love—a love that Burrow defines in religious terms: "although the priest of Venus can hardly specify . . . the true object of such unfailing love, the Christian implication is clear" ("Portrayal" 16). Though one cannot deny the "Christian implication" in a love that "mai not faille," this love translates into and is expressed by a political love of community.

Entreating Amans to "tak love where it mai not faille," Gower seems to borrow from Jean de Meun's Roman de la Rose. Like Genius, de Meun's Reason exhorts the lover to find a love "all men may attain" (26.159-68):

If that love
Is unattainable, as well may be
In your case as in others, for your faults,
I'll tell you of another—no, the same
In different guise—which all men may attain.
It is a mere extension of true love,
Embracing all mankind, not only one.
Participating in community
Of love, you may love all in general,
And love all loyally. (159-68)

Jean de Meun describes a turning away from singular love towards a civic love. Unlike

de Meun's Reason, Gower's Genius makes no explicit connection between the unfailing

love and "participating in the community." In fact, Genius, adopting a religious register,

contrasts this unfailing love with "sinne" and later Venus gives Gower rosary beads "por

reposer." When Venus gives "Gower" the rosary beads she tells him to pray for peace.

The political imperative to turn love towards the common profit is couched within

theological diction and imagery.

The peculiar addition of Book VII, a mirror for princes, into a confessional genre

encourages the reader to interpret the Genius's "scheme of sin" and Amans's "moral life"

within a political framework. The conversion of Amans can be read politically as turn

away from "singuler" lust (mistakenly called love) towards civic love—a political

rendering of *caritas*.   Although both Gower and de Meun advocate civic love, Gower, in

Book VIII, *dramatizes* this turn towards "participating in the community." Amans turns

towards civic love only after he realizes the absolute limits of his desire:

For loves lust and lokes hore
In chambre acorden neveremore,
And thogh thou feigne a yong corage,
It scheweth wel be the visage
That olde grisel is no fole
. . . .
Er thou make eny suche assaies

> To love, and faile upon the fet,
> Betre is to make a beau retret;
> For thogh thou myhtest love atteigne,
> Yit were it bot an ydel peine,
> Whan that thou art noght sufficant
> To holde love his covenant.   (VIII. 2403-7; 2414-20)

The reality of Gower's impotence is a "historical" fact. His "beau retret" is brought about by the recognition that his will, which allows him to "feigne a yonge corage," simply is not "sufficant" to hold the "covenant." One might suggest that Gower concludes with a traditional joke at the expense of the *senex amans* and that civic love is simply the default mindset of the old lover that is no longer capable of physical love. However, Gower turns the conventional joke into a complex examination of the relationship between power and limits. Amans's civic love is not simply a passive response to impotency; it involves an active acceptance of the limits of his own power, which ironically generates his authority. The 'joke,' after all, is not that Gower is impotent, but that he realizes for the first time that he is old. He did not know his limits; he did not know himself.

The *Confessio Amantis* consistently teases out the ways in which authority depends upon an understanding of the limits of one's power. Darius learns the strength of mutual obligations; Lycurgus's ideal city depends upon a law that stood above kingship; and King Rehoboam's authority is diminished by his attempt to overstep the rational limits of authority. "The Folly of Rehoboam," in fact, provides a useful parallel to Amans's own folly. Much like Amans, Rehoboam feigns "yonge corage" and his desire for youthful strength leads him to accept the advice of his young counselors. He is under the illusion of his own potency. His illicit desire—illicit because it does not acknowledge the actual conditions of his power—allows his counselors to manipulate him and leads to

the rebellion that destroys his kingship. Rehoboam like Amans does not realize that he is impotent. Both figure irrationality as a failure to recognize one's lack of potency, a failure to recognize that *voluntas*, alone, *cannot* transcend the worldly limits of the body or body politic.

R.F. Yeager rightfully points out that this recognition is part of a conversion narrative anticipated by Amans's declaration to Venus "I am John Gower." As Yeager explains:

> the transformation of 'Amans' into 'John Gower' – an exchange of an intertextually referential, generic appellation meaning only 'Lover' . . . for a unique name of a 'real' person who receives both his identity and his life-role (to become a poet by praying for peace) [occurs] simultaneous with the death of his passion. (Yeager 234)

Yeager's description of *Confessio* as a conversion narrative, like Augustine or Dante, shows the way that the poem creates a kind of "Archimedean point" through which a dead past can be re-examined and thus re-incorporated. However, it is a complicated conversion that turns our attention not towards some new spiritual truth causing this "reincorporation," but rather towards the birth of the political man through the rejection of a "dead" and impotent majestic rhetoric. As a lover he could not have a role precisely because he sought profit without "availe." Once he has submitted his relationship to the community creates the "life-role" as Arionic poet praying for peace. The conversion is one that establishes his relation to the community. Gower's frame and poetic project as a whole can be best understood, not as a single conversion but rather as three imbricated conversions: on a literal level as a conversion of Amans (lit. Loving) to John Gower poet "praying for peace," on a narrative level as a conversion of *fin amour* ideology towards a political rhetoric, and on a thematic level as a conversion from majestic sovereign

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strength *sanctioned by* the "cosmic framework" to political strength *derived from* the community of the realm.

This refusal to relate narrative particulars of his exempla "to eternity" establishes the narrative time necessary for what Simpson calls "a secular science of politics" (Simpson 273) Gower refuses to embrace a narrative structure in which readers once they grasp the "kernel," or divine meaning of an event, can cast aside the "husk," the narrative itself. As we have seen in each of the tales discussed in this chapter, Gower's poetry exposes how majestic narrative form supported a *narrow* hierarchical structure in which the king and his elite barons controlled all national political power. Gower's poetry, shaped by a political rhetoric that emerged in the thirteenth century, turned the narrative conventions of *fin amour* literature into a site of conflict, and, from this conflict, the contours of political science began to come into view. By destabilizing the metaphysical façade of sovereignty Gowerian narrative embodies this emerging "science" and renders a new political order intelligible.

Gower's narrative time, like the *Song of Lewes*, allows him to reconfigure reason as a political principle in service of the community of the realm. Accordingly, the law, exemplified by Lycurgus, is the institutionalized conscience of the state. Law creates the "Archimedean point" through which king, lords, and commoners can be incorporated into a body politic—a body politic based on recognizing the social limits of personal power. Just as Richard in order to become king must promise "to grant and keep . . . the laws and customs given to them by previous just and God-fearing kings," Amans must submits to the court of Venus to become John Gower. Social conversion represented the creation of an individual identity through a submission of the will to the common profit.

This concept of conversion embodies the psychology of the state slowly constructed out of John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* in which the actions of temporal king can be judged against idealized prince.[101] During the Second Barons' War, those actions that harmed that realm were deemed as irrational and thus without authority. The king's authority was dependent on the community of the realm. Like Cicero, Gower frames reason as a civic faculty aimed at securing the common profit, or *summa bonum* of the community. As such, reason and sovereignty are represented as a *trouthe* bond with the community embodied by law and secured by the coronation oath.

Gower's construction of sovereignty, like the political model advanced by the Common Enterprise, imagines power as a sacred, dynamic and temporal bond between the king and the *communitas regni.* Even at the end of the poem, Gower refuses to "strecche towards hevene," but instead, turning back towards natural time, he promises to "wende unto trouthe." The vision of the poem frees Gower from the "peine" of his love-sin, but it does not release him from the secular (i.e. time bound) constrictions of the poem: he does not come face to face with the Empyrean, but rather the rejected lover and *senex amans* confronts the worldly limits of authority and laboriously continues his Arionic song.

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[101] It is important to recognize that this early model, primarily aimed at extending regal authority, provided very little in the way of actually constraining royal power and left the reader with the conventional language of the *Secreta Secretorum* in which the king ought to restrain his own will.

CHAPTER IV

FROM KING'S PEACE READER'S PEACE: CHAUCER'S SOCIO-POLITICAL

HERMENEUTICS

In this chapter, I examine how Chaucer's poetry arises out of a "crisis of authority."[1] However, this does not mean that I will be looking for the connections between Richard's tumultuous rule and Chaucer's poetry: I will not attempt to ferret out his allegiances, show how he responds to topical events, or examine his particular ideas about policy or the machinations of government. Instead, I will show how Chaucer's poetry negotiates the tension between political and majestic rhetoric, two modes of legitimizing authority that structure the way one perceives the world. What may be a source of confusion is how political or majestic rhetoric shapes narrative material that seems to have little to do with questions of governance. In other words, I will be arguing that political rhetoric not only shapes the obvious political moments of the *Canterbury Tales*, such as Prudence's *Fürstenspiegel* advice to her husband, but it also shapes more emotionally charged and seemingly apolitical scenes such as the death of Arcite.

Let me point to this death scene in order to demonstrate how narrative moments embody the anxieties of the discourse of sovereignty. Toward the end of the *Knight's Tale* Arcite, who has lived a life disordered by erotic passion, dies with stoic calm:

> What is this world? What asketh men to have?
> Now with his love, now in his colde grave
> Allone, withouten any compaignye.
> Fare wel, my sweete foo, my Emelye!
> And softe taak me in your armes tweye,
> For love of God and herkneth what I seye

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[1] The phrase deliberately echoes Lynn Staley *Languages* 98. Lynn Staley account of late fourteenth-century England refracted through the lens of Ricardian poets was an early impetus for this dissertation. The argument of this dissertation situates this crisis within the broader historical development of the languages of power.

> . . . .
> So Juppiter have of my soule part,
> As in this world right now ne knowe I non
> So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
> That serveth yow, and wol doon al his lyf,
> And if that evere ye shul ben a wyf,
> Foryete nat Palamon, the gentil man.
> And with that word his speche faille gan . . ." (I. 2777-82; 2792-8)[2]

It is unlikely that, at first glance, most readers would find anything in Arcite's mournful

dying speech they would call political. We experience, as we should, the pathos of

Arcite's existential confrontation with death; we sense the small heroics in the dying

lover telling Emelye to "foryete nat" the very person who, to some degree, caused his

loss; and through Arcite's eyes, imagining ourselves "in the cold grave/Allone," we

engage in a kind of *memento mori.*[3] One may reasonably ask what could Arcite's death

have to do with the royal prerogative or the common profit? We expect political readings

to focus on particular historical questions: how does Chaucer's poetry address the

Merciless Parliament? What was the effect of the 1381 Uprising? Who was Chaucer

supporting—Appellants? The king? And yet, I will suggest that Arcite's heroic pivot in

this passage, from grave to marriage—the same pivot Theseus makes in the first mover

speech—arises out of (or perhaps gives rise to), what I have called, the political

imagination; and in this same vein Arcite should be understood as a political hero who

calls for the continuation of community in the face of death.

The emotional effect of this speech depends upon a political perspective. Arcite's

brooding questions, meditation on death, and even his stoic farewell to his "sweete foe"

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[2] Here and throughout, citations of *The Canterbury Tales* are from Larry Benson's *The Riverside Chaucer.* 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

[3] This is particularly compelling because both Arcite and Palamon usually see the events of the story through the bias of their jealousies, a trait that Lee Patterson ascribes to their "Thebanness." This produces a kind of social blindness that leads to a cycle of violence (*Chaucer* 198-204). This political response disrupts the Theban pattern.

reminds the reader of Cicero's enjoinder: "to philosophize is to know how to die." The story of Arcite's love and death assume near cosmic dimensions: What is this world? What should people ask of it? However, these philosophical questions are frustrated by the concrete realism of Chaucer's line "Now with his love, now in his colde grave." As we move from loving to dying—from now to now—without so much as a conjunction or a transition, what meaning can make sense of this world? Unable to answer, "what is this world?" Arcite turns from cosmos back to community. After imaging the loss of "his love," Arcite imagines the absence of any "compaignye," a word that implies the wider community and, most obviously, the pilgrims of the frame who are "wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye" (I.24). Envisioning the loss of this community, Arcite does not turn his speech inward; he does not entreat Emeleye "foryete nat" *Arcite;* he does not, like his Theban predecessors, Oedipus or Polynices, curse or kill his cousin, but rather facing the meaninglessness of the "colde grave" he turns toward marriage—the marriage of Emelye and Palamon. The call for community, to appropriate a metaphor of Charles Muscatine, stands against death much like bulwark "against the ever-threatening force of chaos" (Muscatine, *Chaucer* 81).[4]

Arcite's yearning is answered with heavy silence. It is precisely this silence that will allow Chaucer throughout the *Canterbury Tales* to address political questions "without recourse to higher theological explanations" (Nolan 250n15).[5] More important than Chaucer's secular "explanations," what "he wants to say (*veut dire*)," is how his narrative reorients our perspective, how his narrative allows the reader to experience a

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[4] Muscatine is speaking particularly about the relationship between the style of the tale and its relation to the "noble life." I will argue that the resistance to chaos involves a political turn.

[5] See also Spearing 46.

shift from cosmic to prudential perspective—a shift that mirrors the change underway in

the discourse of sovereignty.[6] The emotional force of Arcite's death scene—like many

others in *The Canterbury Tales*—is governed by an abrupt turn from metaphysics to

'political realism.'[7]

Community, symbolized by earthly love, offers a provisional answer to Arcite's

questions—an answer that is both unsatisfactory and heroic precisely because it is

unsatisfactory. Arcite's use of the word "love" anticipates Theseus's application of the

Boethian chain of love in his first mover speech. Chaucer's addition of the "chain of

love," which Boethius describes as "the holy knot of marriage" which joins people "by

sacred bond of treaty," (2.m.8) accentuates the connection between marriage and

sovereignty central to the *Knight's Tale*, and, indeed, the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole.[8]

After all the violence, it is this love that Arcite calls for as his breath "gan faille." In

Theseus's terms—we see the very moment here that society "enduren by successiouns"

(I.3014).

In Chapter II, I examined how an "emergent" political rhetoric evolved from,

accommodated, challenged and often elided aspects of "dominant" majestic rhetoric.[9] In

short, I have demonstrated how this rhetoric gave rise to political imagination fraught

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[6] For an extended discussion of Foucault's separation of "veut dire" and a performative model of literature, see Macherey 147-56.

[7] As I argue in my introduction, political realism should not be mistaken with modern conceptions of realism (i.e. Flaubert or Hardy). Instead, it involves an increased awareness of the actual conditions of power in history, the natural mechanisms of power, and the forces of historical contingency, what Patterson calls "causal historiography" (*Chaucer* 86-99) Here, political realism is a turn away from a particular model of Christian historiography in which the "succession of particulars itself" reveals "nothing of importance." See J.G.A. Pocock *Machiavellian* 8. Barbara Nolan makes a similar observation regarding the "unromantic, clinical description of the death-in-process" of Arcite in *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)*,* 257.

[8] All *Consolation* citations from Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Victor Watts, trans., 2nd ed.

[9] The words dominant and emergent adapt "emergent and dominant hegemonies;" see Williams 108-115.

with anxiety and potential. The purpose of this chapter is to read moments such as

Arcite's death speech as part of the changing landscape of the political imagination:

Arcite's speech has political content, and more importantly this content requires a new

narrative architecture to express it. Here I will focus on how the political

experimentation of the thirteenth century fostered a new "social imaginary." Peggy

Knapp usefully defines the "social imaginary" as the "free play of possibilities" that

possess an "aesthetic force that binds loyalties and consolidates structures of feeling"

(157).[10] The relationship between loyalties and imaginary structures is crucial for my

argument, since rhetoric, and thus narrative (as a part of rhetoric), create the real and

imagined lines of cooperation necessary for political organization; new loyalties require

new aesthetics. Ricardian poets developed a narrative structure that accommodated the

changing structure of loyalties brought on by the expansion of the political class (i.e. the

class of people who had meaningful access to the levers of power).

      The relationship between political realities and narrative architecture carries broad

implications best understood as features of an 'imagined community,' to borrow a term

from Benedict Anderson.[11] For Anderson, loyalty—including the kind of loyalty you

will die for—is an imaginary construct. However, whereas Anderson focuses on

imagin*ed* communities ("worked out" ideas of State), my argument examines the

discursive process of imagin*ing* a community—the "active moment of creation."[12] Let

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[10] Knapp discusses the relation of the social imaginary to narrative that Paul Ricoeur discusses in *From Text to Action*.

[11] For an extended discussion of "imagined community" in the Canterbury Tales, see Knapp 155-75.

[12] Robert Venturi suggest that historiography rarely accounts for the transformations (the "moment of active creation") necessary to bring about new "structures mentales" (14). In Ricardian poetry, we see the working out of the problems of sovereign legitimacy that are, as Anderson points out, central to the development of nation in the long eighteenth century.

me be clear, I do not think, as some do, that Chaucer had a fully developed vision of the

English nation, but rather, by imagining political kingship, he *engages* the questions at

the heart of the modern idea of nation—he is participating in what might *now* be called

the discourse of nation. Political rhetoric aligns with the discourse of nation insofar as it

shifts loyalty from a personal king toward an administrative Crown. However, as the

metaphor 'Crown' itself suggests—a metaphor quite obviously imbricated with the king

who wears it—this transformation of loyalty from the personal to the institutional,

required a lengthy period of disengagement and a reworking of shared language.[13]

The shift from a world ruled by a personal king like Henry III to a political

kingship transforms not only the nature of government but also the conception of the

universe and one's place in it. And consequently it changes the stories we tell and how

we tell them. As Anderson points out, the modern *idea* of the nation to arise only after:

> three fundamental cultural conceptions, all of great antiquity, lost their axiomatic
> grip on men's minds. The first of these was the idea that a particular script
> language offered privileged access to ontological truth . . . second was the belief
> that society was naturally organized around high centres – monarchs who were
> persons apart from other human beings and who ruled by some form of
> cosmological (divine) dispensation . . . Third was the conception of temporality in
> which cosmology and history were indistinguishable (Anderson 40).

What is particularly compelling about Anderson's "imagined communities," from a

literary standpoint, is that the community depends upon the structures of the narrative

imagination—time, cosmology and language. In Chapter II, I have shown how the

development of political constitutionalism in the thirteenth century began to challenge

these "fundamental cultural conceptions . . . of great antiquity." In this chapter, I intend to

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[13] Broadly, Ernst Kantorowicz argues that the Crown allows jurists to separate the private will of the personal king from the corporate public entity of the king. Specifically, he traces the discursive separation of personal king and Crown to the seventh century, suggesting that the distinction is a variation of *princeps-respublica* and papa-papatus from the papal tradition; see 336-382, particularly 359n159.

demonstrate how Chaucerian narrative accommodates and fosters these socio-political

changes. In elaborate and often schematic meditations on prudence, authors and political

thinkers of the late fourteenth century developed an increasingly "practical wisdom" of

politics.[14] Chaucer's political poetry and his narrative adaptations shape and are shaped

by the development of a prudential rhetoric.   While I do not discuss Chaucer's decision

to write in the vernacular, a matter too broad and well traversed for the confines of this

work, I do examine how Chaucerian language emphasizes the distance between

experience and "ontological truth."[15]

Political rhetoric shares much in common with what has been regarded as the

middle class ethos. Anne Middleton's definition of "public poetry" or "bourgeois style"

provides a lucid outline of many of the values I locate in political rhetoric:

> a coherent set of ethical attitudes toward the world—experientially based,
> vernacular, simple, pious but practical, active—and the poetry that gives
> expression to this essentially high minded secularism. (Middleton 112)

Middleton usefully demonstrates that an "experientially based, vernacular, simple, pious

but practical, [and] active" voice characterizes Ricardian poetry. These "attitudes" are

part of a political rhetoric that rejects "presumptive reasoning" that had reproduced a

cosmic framework throughout the early Middle Ages.[16] In other words, public poetry is

the aesthetic crystallization of the political rhetoric. This crystallization was part of the

"working out" of a new civic consciousness that affected not only the content of narrative

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[14] J.D. Burnley shows how Chaucer's depictions of prudence and ire, particularly in the *Knight's Tale* and *Melibee* are part of a larger shift in the fourteenth century in *Chaucer's Language and the Philosopher's Tradition* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 44-63.

[15] It is important to note that "ontological truth" had little to do with actual nature of being. Instead, Anderson means those truths, jealously guarded by the elite class, ideas deployed to maintain hierarchy.

[16] Citing Edmund Burke, J.G.A. Pocock defines "presumptive reasoning" as a process in which "the goodness of a good custom can be inferred from its preservation" (15).

but its architecture as well.[17] Middleton often describes "public poetry" as a category,

indeed as almost a genre of Ricardian poetry—claiming for example that Gower's plaints

fit the model of "public poetry" better than Chaucer's satires. The term becomes a mode

of categorization rather than a historical tool, which Middleton herself admits.[18]

Historicizing Middleton's argument, I will treat "public poetry" as a rhetorical

outgrowth of political constitutionalism. By looking at "public poetry" as political

rhetoric (i.e. performative language aimed at creating political coalitions), I am more

interested in the "conditions of literary production:" how this poetry is rooted in,

structurally entangled with, and in perpetual conflict with majestic rhetoric (a

performative language that reproduces elitist coalitions of power). I use Middleton's

description of public poetry to analyze ways that "ethical attitudes" and "high minded

secularism" (what I have preferred to call political theology) are part of a continuing

internal dynamic within the discourse of sovereignty driven by the engine of political

constitutionalism. Chaucerian aesthetics bends away from the "fundamental cultural

conceptions" of the cosmic framework toward "experientially based" social order.[19]

This chapter begins with an analysis of The *Knight's Tale,* precisely because, as

the inaugural tale, it registers the shift in language, cosmology and temporality from a

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[17] Whereas majestic narratives, informed by pseudo-Dionysian cosmology, fostered a hermeneutic in which "each particular in its relation to eternity and to pass the succession of particulars itself as revealing nothing of importance" (Pocock, *Machiavellian* 8), Chaucer elevates what Middleton calls "worldliness" and historic time (94-114).

[18] Middleton briefly suggests that guilds or the efflorescence of a middle class may have led to the production of public poetry but concludes saying, "I leave it to others to speculate, beyond these brief suggestions, as to the causes, both in social fact and social myth, that made the last quarter of the fourteenth century especially congenial to the development of a poetic "common voice" (112).

[19] What is often referred to as "secular" is really part of a political theology that emphasized that the prince had a divine obligation to the *communitas regni*. As a result narrative focuses more on the relationship between the king and the realm than the king's role as Vicar of Christ. I will often use the word 'secular' because it fits my work into the larger scholarly discussions about Chaucer's secularization of ethics such as A. J. Minnis's *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, A.C. Spearing's *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, and Barbara Nolan's *Chaucer and the Tradition of the Roman Antique*.

majestic rhetoric (more in line with pseudo-Dionysius) to a political (prudential) rhetoric

that secures authority.[20] Next, I show how the conflict between majestic and political

rhetoric manifests as a tension between allegorical and 'realist' readings of Walter in the

Clerk's Tale. And, fittingly, the chapter ends with the *Tale of Melibee*, Chaucer's most

nuanced rendering of political rhetoric—a tale in which Prudence's rhetoric most clearly

addresses the actual conditions of power.

What I am calling the political perspective has often been described under the

aegis of a new middle class voice—a theory some call 'the middle class thesis.' This

makes sense since the idea of nation is, itself, often tied to the rise of the middle class.[21]

Crucially, this thesis (particularly as developed by Paul Strohm and Anne Middleton)

focuses attention on the relationship between political conditions and poetry; and many of

the common beliefs of the English late Middle Ages that Middleton or Strohm identify as

born out of a middle class ethos (i.e. social tolerance, aversion to violence and

commitment to pacifism) are products of the longstanding conflict between majestic and

political rhetoric. Since my discussion of political rhetoric borrows from the middle class

thesis, it is imperative to address not only how I will expand upon this scholarship, but

also explain how the term "political rhetoric" more accurately reflects the historical

conditions that give rise to "public poetry."

Let me begin then with a précis of the middle class thesis. While it can be found

as early as G. K. Chesterton's description of Chaucer as a figure that "bestrides the gap

between" "bourgeois" and "chivalric" systems, it is Paul Strohm, in his *Social Chaucer,*

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[20] For a full discussion of the pseudo-Dionysian cosmology and the secular justification of kingship (and its fifth century origins), see Ullmann, *Principles* 146-56.

[21] For lengthy discussion of the middle class or middle strata introduced new values, see Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Ch. 1.)

who provides the most developed and often cited expressions of this thesis (Chesterton 39). Broadly, Strohm argues that an anti-hierarchical attitude erupts from "the middle-strata.[22]   For the most part thirteenth- and fourteenth-century descriptions of society remained "deferential to the principles of hierarchy." However, some practical documents reveal "alternative" descriptions of society developing in the fourteenth century—descriptions that he suggests develop out of the changing fortunes of the middle strata in the fourteenth century (Strohm 5). For example, the 1367 Statute of Diet and Apparel, establishing the proper dress for each class, proclaims that "those who 'clearly' possess 'biens & chateux" to the value of 500L are entitled to attire themselves in the manner of esquires and gentlepersons with lands and rents worth L100 annually" (Strohm 5-7). The statute points to the development of a dual hierarchy in which a 500L member of the "middle strata" is—at least in sumptuary terms—equal to a 100L nobleman. According to the typical formulation of the middle class thesis, the dual hierarchy and the Chaucerian aesthetic are spontaneous attempts to negotiate the contradictions between "chivalric" Chaucer and "bourgeois" Chaucer;[23] that is, the conditions that necessitate a solution have precedent, but the solution is seen as novel.

However, this statute not only shows the formation of a dual hierarchy but also reveals that the alternative "social description" is entangled within the traditional description of majestic authority—the language of clothes. Anxiety over clothing arises out of the sumptuary logic majestic rhetoric most vividly expressed in the coronation

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[22] The term "middle strata" allows us to imagine a disorganized group of people that share characteristics without being part of a class in any meaningful sense. I would suggest that the rhetoric aimed at expanding the political class turned this "strata" into a class.

[23] For a discussion concerning Chaucer's particular position within the social hierarchy, see Strohm, *Social Chaucer,* 10-13:10-11.

ceremony. What Strohm calls 'the alternative descriptions of society' did not arise naturally out of the amorphous middle strata, but rather embodied the tension between majestic ideals of nobility and the political need to incorporate select members of the middle strata into the political class.[24] The statute embodies a political solution to a majestic conflict, which helps illuminate Pocock's tautological description of language as that which "determines what can be said in it, but is capable of being modified by what is said in it" (*Concept* 20). The middle strata were not solely, or even primarily, responsible for the vocabulary, terms, or conditions for a "middle class" rhetoric or ethos. In fact, one may reasonably say the "middle class ethos" was not created *by* the "middle class," but *for* them, as a rhetoric aimed at creating lines of cooperation between the aristocracy and upper echelon of the middle strata.[25]

Ricardian cultural production did not arise spontaneously as part of the formation of a new class, but in fact arose out of a political ideology. By understanding the "bourgeois style" or the ideals of "felaweshipe" not as associated with the defined interests of a specific group, but rather as an imaginary construct aimed at forming new coalitions, we get a better sense of the kind of social problematic that Chaucer's poetry engages. To this end, Lee Patterson comes closest to describing the source of this new voice when he argues Chaucer's style arises from an emergent gentleman-bureaucrat

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[24] The Poll Tax, for example, shows the desire to maintain a separation between nobility and non-noble wealth, but recognizes the need to take their money at proportional rate.

[25] The association of the political rhetoric with the middle class—such that its sympathies may even be seen as spontaneously arising from the middle class—makes sense because the political rhetoric of the thirteenth-century barons sought to articulate the middle class to the Commun Enterprise. In other words, the rhetoric imagines a middle class by interpellating it. For example, while critics stress the anti-hierarchical nature of the "bourgeois style," they must embarrassingly admit that once you get beyond the relatively more associational overtures of Chaucer's universe, most of his poetry reinforces hierarchical social organization in which parliaments and public meetings tend to produce foolish advice (i.e. *Clerk's Tale* and *Melibee*). What has changed, in fact, is not hierarchy, but the foundations of hierarchy—not vertical/horizontal, but majestic/political.

mentality that was grounded in civil service. Patterson, like those who advocate the

middle class thesis, suggests an aesthetic arises from this new group to meet its apparent

needs. Reversing the polarity, I would suggest that the new bureaucratic group and its

ethos does not innocently express the aspirations of Ricardian *arrivistes*, but arises out of

a thirteenth-century political rhetoric aimed at creating lines of cooperation between the

aristocracy and the middle-strata.[26] The translation of thirteenth-century political rhetoric

(i.e. the obligations of the barons to oppose Henry III *for the sake of* the community of

the realm) into fourteenth-century juristic thought manifests in jurors' attitudes toward

the obligations of the king and administration toward the Crown.[27] The gentleman-

bureaucrat constitutes the exact point of articulation between the nobility and select

members of the middle strata.

Chaucer's and Gower's political perspectives are consistent with political

constitutionalism of the thirteenth century. Their poetry does not merely address new

conditions, but arises out of and is conditioned by a particular historical rhetoric. Unlike a

class movement where we would expect exertion of pressure (i.e. supporting 1381

Uprising), this rhetoric aims for peaceful integration while simultaneously developing a

critique of royal prerogative. Proponents of the middle class thesis tend to map aesthetic

forms onto imagined new social configurations (indeed often using literature to imagine

these relationships). David Wallace, for example, suggests that Chaucer's middle class

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[26] According to Patterson, Chaucer was part of an influx of lay administrators into government positions that began in the fourteenth century and became common in the early 15th century. Chaucer's poetry is informed by a civil servant ethos in which the "distinction between personal service to the king and administrative service to the Crown" was becoming increasingly apparent (37); see *Chaucer* 37-9. For an important discussion of the developing ethos of the civil servant and the "gentleman-bureaucrat," see Storey 90-129.

[27] For example, Baldus asserts: "all kings in the world have to swear at their coronation to conserve the rights of their realm and the honor of the Crown," and Petrus de Ancharano "the king, at the time of his coronation swears not to alienate the things of the kingdom" (qtd. in Kantorowicz 357-58).

politics and poetics of the associational polity made him a kindred spirit with the fierce

republican polemicist Albertano Brescia, who wrote the *Liber Consolationis*, a book that

indirectly became Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*.[28] However, this downplays the caution and

circumspection with which Chaucer' "engages the ethics of history by deflecting the

consequences of its demand for public commitment" (Warren Ginsberg 263).[29] His

circumspection is not merely a product of self-censorship, but is consistent with civic

ideals of the gentleman-bureaucrat. Chaucer's associational polity is not Albertano's

republic, but a measured form of political kingship focused on unity and unanimity. In

her review of *Chaucerian Polity*, Louise Fradenburg asks us to reevaluate the intersection

between political interests and the Chaucerian political aesthetic embodied through her

critique of Wallace's term "associational polity":

> whose ethical or political vision is being served when Chaucer is read as a poet
> distinguished above all by his ability to balance social antagonisms, to effect a
> 'conjunction of court, religious, urban, and commercial worlds' and, thereby,
> create a 'handbook for go-betweens.' [30] (221).

Fradenburg's question forces us to look for a more nuanced understanding of the

Wallace's "associational polity." I will suggest this "associational polity" is a rhetorical

fiction that shapes and is shaped by political constitutionalism. Insofar as this serves the

interests of the middle class, it does so by advocating a kind of political quietism meant

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[28] David Wallace 212-23.

[29] While I agree with Ginsberg's argument, I think it is important to stress that Chaucer fosters a new civic imagination even as he minimizes the demand for "public commitment."

[30] Louise Fradenburg argues that Wallace's description of Chaucer and Albertanus as "kindred spirits" elides significant differences between the two authors: "Wallace's detailed account of Albertano's political circumstancing helps to explain why Chaucer, struggling to negotiate forms of polity, might have found Albertano's work moving. But, at the same time, Wallace's account makes ineluctably clear the gulf that separates the two men. Albertano did not spend his career avoiding Usk-like fates or balancing hierarchical versus associational claims from within monarchical culture; he took enormous risks to defend republican polity." Louise Fradenburg. "Chaucerian Polity (Book Review):" quotations from page 15.

to ingratiate this class with nobility. In this sense Chaucer's "associational polity" does

not represent the radical republicanism that landed Albertano of Brescia in prison, but

Robert Peel's "enlightened conservatism" that insulated England from the revolutionary

politics that embroiled the continent in the 19th century.[31] Chaucer is not advocating

rebellion, but reminding the king that legitimate power is strong precisely because it is

not undermined by the erotic violence of power (Arcite and Palamon), because it does not

succumb to the myth of its own absolutism (Walter), and because it balances its own

desires against the conditions of power on the ground (*Melibee*).

Chaucer had ties with both Ricardian and Lancastrian factions: he was a civil

servant for the king, and gentleman-bureaucrat at a time when the prestige of civil service

was increasing and the authority of the Crown/King was threatened.[32] However,

Chaucer's poetry does not litigate the crisis of authority. Chaucer's political rhetoric

addresses the deep fissures within the discourse of sovereignty without advocating civic

activism, revolution or taking a side in the king-baron crisis. One cannot, satisfactorily,

read it as either royalist or Appellant. The king was concerned with his prerogative, the

barons with their prerogative—no one was talking, like Montfort, of expanding the

political class. However, it is exactly this voice that shapes Ricardian poetic sensibility—

a new "public poetry" born out of the rhetoric of political kingship that flourished among

fourteenth-century juristic thought.[33] Chaucerian narrative embodies the political

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[31] For a discussion of "enlightened conservatism," see Wallerstein 64.

[32] For Chaucer's specific relations to political factions, see Strohm, *Social Chaucer* 24-46.

[33] Kantorowicz describes the fourteenth-century rhetoric of the impersonal crown particularly as it draws upon ideas of inalienability 354-58.

sympathies and world-view born out of thirteenth-century political constitutionalism—a model that simultaneously induces and resolves the "crisis of authority."

Whether telling stories about kings or querulous wives, Chaucer's tales focus on questions of sovereignty at a time when any idea of sovereignty was itself fractured. While I could look at the issues raised by the Wife or Harry Bailley, I have chosen, for this chapter, to examine those tales about lords and kings (the *Knight's Tale*, the *Clerk's Tale* and *Melibee*) not just for their overt representations of majestic and political authority, but more because these representations inspired "disenchanted" narratives giving new space for civic values of Ciceronian prudence.[34] Often through the reenactment of the collapse of majestic rhetoric, Chaucer develops a social aesthetic that accommodates political rhetoric. In the *Melibee*, Chaucer even fosters a new civic register. In the end, this is not a matter of provenance—of nailing down the right origins of the Ricardian public poetry; it is about creating a lens that helps us understand many of the aspects of public poetry that seem mismatched—the quietism of Chaucer's antihierarchalism, his disdain for associational structures in poetry so engaged in the associational polity, a model of sovereignty that gains power by divesting itself of power, and a consistent reinforcement of hierarchy working alongside some of his more leveling rhetoric.

I demonstrate how political thought (what might be seen as the explicit political content of the tales) shapes the narrative architecture. Of course, when attributing any meaning to narrative architecture, one ought to recognize that a narrative structure can

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[34] Marshall Leicester describes disenchantment as "the perception that what had been thought to be other-originated, the product of transcendent forces not directly susceptible of human tampering and subversion, is in fact humanly originated, the product of human creation" (26).

become a blank screen upon which the critic projects their whims and fantasies.[35] For

this reason, I have looked at the *Knight's Tale*, the *Clerk's Tale* and *Melibee*—tales

where both tale and teller seem directly concerned about questions of sovereignty as they

relate to lordship or kingship (as opposed to the Wife of Bath's explicit desire for

domestic sovereignty). Instead of looking at the general narrative features of the

Canterbury Tales, I focus on how the political content shapes the narrative changes

within the tale: How the Knight has Theseus adapt his narrative structure to

accommodate new realities of power, how the Clerk's critiques of Walter shape the

reader's perception of majestic authority and how Melibee's failed understanding of

authority force Prudence to adopt new argumentative methods.[36]

The *Knight's Tale*: The Collapse of Majesty and Intimations of a Political Order

  The *Knight's Tale* is one of Chaucer's more lengthy meditations on the complex

intersection between language and power—what Staley has aptly called the "semiotics of

power" (Staley 2).[37] I will demonstrate the tale self-consciously addresses the semiotics

of power by looking at two rhetorical developments that shape the tale: first how Theban

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[35] See Stanley Fish's critique of stylistics in "What is Stylistics and Why are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It? –Part II," 129-146.

[36] My work on Chaucer focuses on a problematic similar to the one Lee Patterson examined in his groundbreaking study *Chaucer and the Subject of History*. However, by making the gentleman-bureaucrat part of a vanguard movement, Patterson, treating Chaucer as a proto-Marxist critic, shows how his tales and their narrative architecture critiques the received discourse of sovereignty. What is missing from Patterson's analysis is the positive political vision that Chaucerian narrative suggests. He does not acknowledge the importance of thirteenth-century political thought to the Chaucer's positive worldview. So the *Knight's Tale* is a critique of chivalry, *Melibee* the failure of the Fü*rstenspiegel* genre, and even his assertion that the *Clerk's Tale* is a critique of majestic authority ignores the political rhetoric that shapes this critique. I think it is time to revisit this the question with an eye toward how Chaucerian poetics espouses and enacts the political constitutionalism born out of the thirteenth century and embodied in the fourteenth-century gentleman bureaucrat. For Patterson's take on the *Knight's Tale* see *Chaucer* 165-230; for his discussion on the *Clerk's Tale* and the *Tale of Melibee* see *Temporal Circumstances* 97-128 and 51-65 respectively.

[37] According to Lynn Staley the political violence from Merciless Parliament forward disrupted traditional modes of representing power. Poets Gower, Chaucer, and Clanvowe and Usk sought an appropriate means of addressing authority; see *Languages* Ch. 1.

rhetoric, an erotic language of power governed by desire, undermines social bonds; and second how Theseus both resists this rhetoric of desire and establishes a rhetoric of kingship that restores tentative balance to the Athenian polity. It is, I think, precisely the fragility of the Athenian order at the close of the tale that critics, like Elizabeth Salter are responding to when they describe the tale as "expressing best not the great orthodoxies of medieval faith, but the stubborn truths of human experience" (*Fourteenth Century* 180) Because of the absence of great orthodoxies of medieval faith, critics suggest that the *Knight's Tale* describes a benighted view of power that lacks grace. Instead of comparing the *Knight's Tale* to a Christian model of kingship (an approach that has its own rewards), I will examine how the absence of a Christian framework allows Chaucer to create a rhetoric of kingship that does not *illicitly* appropriate the workings of Providence.

By tracing out the relationship between royal will and cosmic framework, the *Knight's Tale* explores how cosmology is used rhetorically to justify royal power and as he seeks to "define the nature of royal power" (Staley, *Languages* 75), Chaucer recalibrates the relationship between language and what Anderson calls the "ontological truth" (Anderson 40). Theseus's attempts to define the divine source of his authority demonstrate that majestic descriptions of royal power still had a strong grip on the medieval political imaginary. Indeed, from the "noble theatre" to the first mover speech, Theseus describes kingship in majestic terms. However, I will demonstrate that the king's majestic rhetoric undergoes a dramatic transformation. I will argue that in Book III, through his construction of the "noble theatre," Theseus suggests that his royal will is underwritten by Providence—i.e. he asserts the cosmic warrant of kingship. By the

conclusion of the tale, Theseus's first mover speech implicitly acknowledges that Providence does not guarantee the prerogative or authority of the king; in fact, it may just easily bring about rebellion or the collapse of cities.[38] Recognizing, at the end, that his royal will cannot be grounded in a language of Providence, Theseus reconstitutes his prerogative and the social hierarchy in the face of "transmutacioun," establishing a majestic rhetoric that grounds its authority in the fact that it *creates* a provisional order for a world of "transmutacioun."

Crucially, this narrative study on the rhetoric of kingship also explores the limits of representation and poetic authority. Insofar as Theseus's language comes against the hard limits of political exigency, the *Knight's Tale* shares a common concern with what Anne Middleton called "public poetry." Middleton has suggested one important development of Ricardian poetry was the production of a common voice, a voice that was a "creature of time, place, event and language" (100). I have argued that this voice, in part, arises out of the emergence of a political community (i.e. the *communitas regni*) and the subsequent decline in the belief in a "cosmological dispensation" of royal authority. Although Theseus and the Knight never adopt the "common voice," the majestic perspective adapts to the pressures of the political conditions of royal power. Like Theseus's first mover speech, the sign provides (for the king and his audience) a provisional order, a provisional peace, against the violence of transmutacioun, instead of offering "privileged access to ontological truth." The *Knight's Tale* expressing the

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[38] The *Knight's Tale* which is larded with allusions to *Consolation of Philosophy*, brings Boethius's assertion "that all things happen for a reason" to its logical conclusion that "cherles rebellyng" (I. 2459) and "gret tounes" waning (I.3025) are part of the providential scheme.

"stubborn truths of human experience" is a way of acknowledging how Chaucer distances

languages of power from the cosmic framework.

The conquest of Scythia and the destruction of Thebes, which begins the *Knight's Tale*, inadvertently unleashes the erotic violence at the heart of the *Tale*: that is, the crisis of the tale arises from the captives that Theseus brings back from battle. At Scythia, Theseus seizes Hippolyta and her daughter Emelye and at Thebes Theseus captures Arcite and Palamon. Theseus marries Hippolyta, but the two Theban kinsmen fall in love with Emelye. Love, however, is rarely *only* about love. As Lynn Staley points out, Chaucer, like his Ricardian counterparts, frequently "employed the rhetoric of sexual desire or favor as a way of exploring broader social issues" (*Languages* 55).[39] The love language in the *Knight's Tale* signifies a deeper political violence. Indeed, it often shades into martial language such as when Palamon imagines that Arcite may "assemblen alle the folke of oure kyndrede,/ and *make a werre* so sharp on this citee" and take Emelye as his wife (I. 1286-87). By transposing the hostility caused by war onto the antagonistic love story, Chaucer turns *fin amour* language into a vehicle to show how desire infects the discourse of sovereignty and attenuates the social bonds of kin, country and even sworn brotherhood.[40]

Seeking to contain violence and exhibit his majestic authority, Theseus declares that the matter of Emelye's betrothal will be decided by a judicial tournament in which

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[39] Borrowing from Stephen Jaeger's work Ennobling Love, Staley describes "the language of lovers as "policy made visible," as indicating the honor associated with Ciceronian friendship, which was explicitly elitist and exclusive. The classical language of love was transferred to relations between "members of the medieval nobility, whose claims to superior privilege were linked to their claims of superior morality (55)."

[40] Barbara Nolan discusses how both Boccaccio and Chaucer shift the martial parts of Statius' *Thebaid* into the discourse of love; see Nolan 269-272. Patterson describes the violence between Arcite and Palamon in terms of their "Thebanness" which embodies "an irrationality that Theseus must chasten into civilization" (*Chaucer*, 200). He symbolically tied to cyclical internecine violence to magnate violence. For discussion of the political implications of the sworn brotherhood, see Stretter 501-524.

each of the knights will lead a company of a hundred knights.   Whichever knight wins

the tournament *ostensibly* will marry Emelye. He introduces this decision asserting, "My

wyl is this, for plat conclusion." Although this line does not provide a fleshed out theory

of medieval kingship, audiences alerted by the word "wyl," nonetheless would have

recognized in this formula the king's majestic claim for the authority to act *pro sua*

voluntate.[41] Theseus's majestic will manifests in the construction of the "noble theatre"

where the tournament will take place. The architectural rhetoric of the arena (what I will

call arena-rhetoric) reinforces his regal authority. This would all be rather conventional,

if Theseus's "wyl" did in fact bring about the "plat conclusion," to the cousins' feud.

However, as readers of the *Knight's Tale* are well aware, Theseus' will is subverted

during the tournament. Arcite wins, but he dies before he can marry Emelye.

Cosmological forces cause the death; however, these forces only empty out the elaborate

symbolic systems that ground Theseus's authority. The poem complicates the

relationship between royal prerogative, the rhetoric of kingship and actual conditions of

power.

Scholars have read Theseus as the embodiment of the "self-destructive" energy or

"contradictions" of chivalric practices and values and consequently the failure of his

prerogative has been woven into a critique of the Athenian polity and chivalry. [42]

Patterson explains:

> chivalry's dilemma is anatomized in the figure of Theseus, seen by the Knight as
> providing an alternative to the self-destructive Theban lovers and exemplifying
> the civilizing process. Yet as we have seen, this reading ignores both the threads

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[41] The word "wyl" appears when Theseus changes course and makes a sovereign decision the decision to spare the cousins and build the arena the "Firste Movere" (I.1845) and in parliament at the end (I.2986).

[42] See also Aers 1986 30-32; Patterson's *Chaucer* 203-4; and Wallace 107.

of the legend, plot, and character that link Theseus to Arcite and Palamon and more important, the moral incoherence of the Tale (229).

Throughout the Middle Ages chivalric idealism provided a discourse aimed at civilizing (what Elias called "Verhöflichung," literally, courtizing) the violent tendencies of the warrior class.[43] The Knight continues this civilizing mission. However, according to Patterson, the Knight is blind to chivalry's contradictions. The dark imagery represents the moral failing of Theseus and chivalry as a whole; and consequently, the tale exposes the "moral incoherence" embedded in the civilizing process of chivalry. Many scholars have developed this argument claiming that the *Knight's Tale* imposes a "moral idealism on a deadly profession" (Hanning 540) or that it represents the "epistemological and teleological darkness" in chivalry (Kolve 123). Others, working along psychoanalytical lines, treat Palamon and Arcite as embodiments of the repressed erotic energy within the Thesian polity. Although these claims demonstrate Chaucer's keen awareness of the dangerous ideology of chivalry, they are ultimately conservative readings of the *Knight's Tale* insofar as they focus on the question of ethics—and ignore the way the *Tale* transforms the "way" we evaluate sovereign decisions. The problem, I will argue, is not "the moral incoherence" of Theseus's civilizing mission, but the lack of coercive power necessary to ensure its success.

The Knight does not *anatomize* "chivalry's dilemma . . . in the figure of Theseus," but rather he *narrates* the struggle to resolve the anxieties of Thesian discourse of sovereignty. The Theban cousins and their desire for Emelye pose both an actual and figurative threat to the Athenian polity. While I will discuss how both cousins actually threaten to attack Athens later, it is important to note here, that the cousins equally

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[43] For discussion of courtly language, see Jaeger 210-213 and 265.

represent the martial and erotic violence unleashed by Theseus. The tale depicts the Duke's various attempts resolve this violence through non-violent rhetoric. By focusing on the narrative development of Theseus's rhetoric, I will argue that what Patterson perceives as the tale's "moral incoherence," is actually a rhetorical shift from the idealism of cosmic kingship towards prudential realism. The *Knight's Tale* shows how sovereign discourse must transform to address two new critical questions: what constitutes legitimate authority and what is the relationship between legitimate authority and the actual conditions of power?

By looking at the evolution of the Duke's rhetoric, I demonstrate how the Knight explores Theseus's limits as both king and meaning-maker. First, I contrast the language of Duke with the Thebans when Theseus chances upon them dueling unlawfully in his grove. On a stylistic level, Chaucer renders the tension between Athenian stoic justice and Theban erotic violence as an encounter between *Fürstenspiegel* and *fin amour*, respectively.[44] I will argue that courtly love represents violent antisocial desires that sever the bonds of sworn brothers and blend into the language of private war represents— a language analogous to both tyranny and magnate violence.[45] Second, I contrast Theseus's architectural rhetoric in Book III with the *provisional* rhetoric of the first mover speech. Here, I demonstrate how Theseus's majestic claim to authority collapses and how he develops a new more political rhetoric to recuperate his authority.

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[44] I use the term "*Fürstenspiegel*" in its broadest sense here to mean a text with a particular "interest in kingship's *public* dimension rather than by its Latinity, then one can well see these vernacular writings as the greatest flowering rather than its demise" (Scanlon 138); see also Ferster 1-4.

[45] Barbara Nolan, on the other hand, suggests that Chaucer's deployment of *fin amour* to makes "the young lovers both sympathetic and typical," Barbara Nolan 270. For a comparison of Arcite and Palamon to magnate violence.

After conquering Thebes, Theseus initially sought to contain violence by putting Arcite and Palamon in a prison without ransom. However, both got out. Arcite gained his freedom through the intercession of Theseus's friend. And despite being banished, he returned to Athens. Palamon escaped prison by a stroke of fortune or plan of destiny. Shortly after a chance encounter in a nearby grove, the cousins begin to duel over Emelye. The violence represents the direct threat to Theseus's royal image and the Athenian community posed by elevating singular desire over common profit. It represents the problematic at the heart of the discourse of sovereignty, what Macherey calls the "determinate disorder" for which ideological fictions (i.e. political and majestic rhetoric) provide imaginary resolution by building coalitions capable of securing sovereign authority. The remainder of the *Knight's Tale* can be read as a search for a "rhetoric of kingship" (*the* ideological fiction) that contains hostility and repairs the social bonds undermined by violence.

Chaucer's subtle modifications to the *Teseida* underscore how the illicit duel is a symbolic assault on Theseus's majestic image of kingship. [46] By formalizing aspects of the hunt, Chaucer changed Boccaccio's spontaneous "once in a thousand years" hunting party into a ritualized daily hunt set in King's forests (Grimes 34-6). The scene assumes greater significance insofar as the ritualized hunt symbolically "celebrate[s] and perpetuate[s] aristocratic authority." Arcite and Palamon, then, not only defy Theseus's legal judgment (i.e. banishment and imprisonment respectively), but their trespass on

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[46] Grimes points out that Chaucer excludes the scene from the *Teseida* in which Arcita attempts to stop the duel (349). This exclusion focuses our attention on the stark contrast between Athenian justice and Theban violence.

royal forests and disruption of the ritualized hunt represents "a symbolic act of aggression against the sovereign himself." [47]

Theseus must address this aggression. And his reasoning provides one of the most psychologically nuanced meditations on legitimate authority—a meditation that manifests structurally as a clash between the values of mirror tradition and the conventions of *fin amour*. The cousins' illicit duel causes Theseus to returns to a martial attitude:

> Youre owene mouth, by youre confessioun,
> Hath dampned yow, and I wol it recorde;
> It nedeth noght to pyne yow with the corde.
> Ye shal be deed, by myghty mars the rede! (I.1744-47)

Theseus's invocation of Mars and his initial decision to kill the knights reminds us of the epic hero riding under the Red banner. This initial reaction depicts the potential slavery of sovereign authority to perverse will—central to the political critique of prerogative— the critique central to the *Clerk's Tale*. The aggression of the cousins *almost* produces a like reaction in Theseus; thus the violent eros of *fin amour* threatens to become a majestic wrath. The *Knight's Tale*, like many Ricardian works, shows how *fin amour* and wrath (both products of singular desire) enslaves its devotees and how the enslaved will threatens the state itself. [48]

In the *Knight's Tale*, as in much of Ricardian poetry, *fin amour* and ire are part of a carefully calibrated discourse of tyranny deployed to discuss the legitimacy of

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[47] Chaucer intensifies the political threat of eros by making it part of Palemon's plan to raise an army to take Emelye's hand by force. Whereas Boccaccio associates the forest primarily with Arcita's love laments, Chaucer turns the "boschetto" into the more ritualized space—the King's forests (Grimes 334-6). The hunt, in the *Teseida*, is a more spontaneous "once in a thousand years" event. Teseo delights in hunting and hawking, but it is not an essential part of his character. For Chaucer's Theseus, on the other hand, the hunt is both "al his joye and appetit;" he wakes up each morning "clad, and redy for to ryde/with hunte and horn and houndes hym bisyde" (I.1677-78) (Grimes 349).

[48] See Staley, *Languages* 15-16 and Burnley 30-31. For a lengthier discussion of *fin amour*, see my discussion of the "Tale of Darius and the Three Advisors" in Chapter III.

particular sovereign decisions.[49] It is true that excessive desire and wrath were always

signs of a tyrant and that medieval literature is filled with them—Nero, Antiochus, etc.

What makes the *Knight's Tale* interesting, however, is its subtle application of the

discourse of tyranny. Theseus is not a tyrant. Even if he did execute Arcite and Palamon,

it is unlikely the reader would feel that he was a Ricardian Caligula. Theseus is not a

typical tyrant, but he might be persuaded to act *somewhat* tyrannically. This concept of

"somewhat tyrannically" allows Chaucer to use the discourse of tyranny to make more

finely tuned political analysis.

Theseus, unlike Walter from the *Clerk's Tale*, recognizes and resists this

"perversion of will" and adopts a *Fürstenspiegel*-rhetoric that disrupts his initial martial

response to kill the lovers:

> And eek his herte hadde compassioun
> Of wommen, for they wepen evere in oon,
> And in his gentil herte he thoughte anon,
> And softe unto hymself he seyde, "Fy
> Upon a lord that wol have no mercy,
> But been a leon, bothe in word and dede,
> To hem that been in repentaunce and drede,
> As wel as to a proud despitous man
> That wol mayntene that he first bigan.
> That lord hath litel of discrecioun,
> That in swich cas kan no divisioun
> But weyeth pride and humblesse after oon. (I.1770-81)

Theseus interior monologue could fit into almost any handbook for princes under the

rubric of mansuetude or what the Parson calls "debonairtee" (X.654). Mansuetude steers

a virtuous course between excessive revenge of wrath and a "wommanliche excess of

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[49] Burnley 44-48. By focusing his attention on Duke's "ire" Chaucer engages the discourse of prudence common among Ricardian poets and, as we will see in the discussion of *Melibee*, "ire" in late medieval literature presents the greatest threat to political rhetoric.

mercy" (Rigby, *Wisdom* 64).[50] The intercession of Hippolyta, Emelye and the ladies of

the court allow us to imagine the monologue as a struggle between the excessive

vengeance and "wommanliche" mercy.[51] Once his anger is "aslaked," Theseus

recognizes that his initial reactions (i.e. having twice demanded their death in the name of

Mars) are part of an animal will without discretion or the ability to make "divisioun."

Such a lord, who *could* not reverse his decision, would be more "leon" than man.

Theseus escapes the "cruel ire" that will control the hermeneutic practices of Melibee in

the *Tale of Melibee*.

However, to suggest that the *Knight's Tale* is merely an exemplification of

Fürstenspiegel-prince diminishes its literary complexity.[52]   Unlike traditional mirrors

that show how sovereign virtues induce obedience, the knight psychologizes the mirror.

By forcefully rejecting the *fin amour*-passions that incited Palamon and Arcite to fight

like "as houndes for the boon" (I.1177), Theseus maintains the "free will" of the true

sovereign (i.e. Theseus resists the *leon*-will). The *reasoned* response to the women's

emotional plea does not, as Wallace suggests, have the "the net effect of accentuating the

isolation and self-sufficiency of Theseus," but rather it shows how his decision-making

incorporates and responds to the women.[53] The noble ladies appeal to his affective

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[50] For a full discussion of the virtue of *mansuetude* in *Fürstenspiegel* tradition, see Rigby, *Wisdom* 64-66.

[51] For an important discussion of this scene, see Wallace 116. He argues that Theseus does not respond to the women in a sort of shared decision-making way—the queen is still silenced but he is saved from tyranny—"the net effect is to accentiate the isolation and self-sufficiency of Theseus." The women thus represent the majestic isolation of the king's decision making within his court. This contrasts with the parliament at the end, which suggests a more political setting.

[52] Rigby contrary to most literary critics does in fact suggest that Theseus is the perfect exemplification of the *Fürstenspiegel*-prince in *Wisdom and Chivalry* (Ch. 1).

[53] Wallace 116. Wallace demonstrates how Thesian majestic rhetoric accommodates political anxiety (the desires of the ladies of the court). Wallace's reading of this scene seems like an unnecessary attempt to make Theseus' interior monologue part of his broader thesis that the *Knight's Tale* is an exploration of "the possibilities and limitations of one-man rule within a context of magnate rivalry." I would suggest that the women represent the *curia regis*, those people,

intelligence such that "his herte hadde compassioun/ Of wommen." Their

"wommanliche" compassion draws him away from his initial "ire" and towards the

rational virtue of *mansuetude*: "although that his ire hir gilt accused/ Yet in his *resoun* he

hem bothe excused" (I.1765-66, emphasis mine).[54] The monologue depicts the complex

transition between *ire* and *resoun* as an engagement with the community.

By contrasting this monologue with the various love plaints of Arcite and

Palamon, one realizes the freedom of choice afforded by mirror rhetoric. For example,

when he was first released from the dungeon, Arcite complains "Allas that day that I was

born/Now is my prisoun worse than biforn" (I.1223-24) because he no longer can see

Emelye. Through hyperbolic dedications of the knight to a lady, Chaucer makes *fin*

amour into slave-tyrant metaphor central to political rhetoric in which singular desire (in

this case the desire for Emelye) enslaves its devotees (makes their prison "worse than

biforn") and the enslaved will threatens the state. Ironically, Arcite alludes to the

Consolation of Philosophy to reinforce this idea:

> We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.
> A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,
> But he noot which the righte wey is thider,
> And to a dronke man the wey is slider.
> And certes, in this world so faren we;
> We seken faste after felicitee,
> But we goon wrong ful often, trewely. (I.1261-67)

Arcite unwittingly uses the Boethius metaphor of the "dronke man," from the

Consolation of Philosophy (III.pr2), to describe his paradoxical situation (i.e. that his

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involved in the king's private decision making, who in effect were always part of the will of the king. As such these women contrast to the public situation at the end, when Parliament will make demands of Theseus. One does not need to imagine that Theseus is completely "isolated" in order to suggest that the tale explores the workings of one-man rule.

[54] Equally, his internal abstraction of the lovers allows him empathize with the lovers: "he thoghte wel that every man/ Wol helpe hymself in love, if that he kan" (I.1767-8).

freedom is his prison). The drunk-man thinks he is going home but he discovers that he is going the wrong way; likewise, one would think Arcite's escape from prison would bring him "joye and parfit heele" (I. 1270-1) but it only exiles him from his "wele" (1272). Arcite subordinates Boethius to a *fin amour* value-system and turns Emelye into his sovereign "felicitee." This, of course, breaks with essential idea of Boethius's philosophy and signifies the rot of *fin amour* ideology. That is to say, Lady Philosophy's "dronke man" describes a person (much like Arcite) who mistakes temporal goods for the sovereign good. The allusion to Boethius reminds us of the cosmological structure underwriting the tale, but it also illustrates the danger of illicitly appropriating the language of Providence to exert control over temporal events. Boethian philosophy should free Arcite from the prison of his lust for Emelye (not vice versa).[55]

Arcite and Palamon's value-system blinds them from the sovereign good, binds them to their lust, and eliminates any freedom of choice. Theseus's rejection of *fin amour*-desire and his provisional freedom turn the mirror genre into a meditation on the political limits of authority and, paradoxically the freedom and power generated by those limits.[56] The cornerstone of political rhetoric was that that the 'free' will of the king had the force of law, but that freedom was hedged in with political conditions that constrained the king. As we have seen in Chapter II, the constrained "free will," embodied in coronation oath and Honorian inalienability decretals, is the foundational equivocation

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[55] Chaucer frequently employs *fin amour* value system to depict figures whose will is slavishly directed by external circumstance; see Lynn Staley, *Languages* 45ff. Collette in *Species, Phantasms and Images*, shows how the prison is an actual mental illness "amor heroes" in which "fantasy unchecked by will and separate from reason transforms the image into an obsessive fixation" (34). Kolve argued that Chaucer significantly expands upon the prison/life metaphor; indeed this metaphorical pairing establishes the philosophical problem of the tale (142). As Hanning points out, Arcite and Palamon are "reduced to playthings by the knight" (86); however, he does this so he can separate their tyrannical will from Theseus majestic rhetoric.

[56] See Scanlon 266-69.

necessary to imagine the institutionalized Crown. This political paradigm turns the

mirror into a mode of expressing the same limits of prerogative central to thirteenth-

century reformers—one that develops the relationship of will and authority.

It is no accident then that after the internal monologue, Theseus delivers a speech

that makes the political implications of the erotic violence manifest:

> The god of love, a benedicite!
> How myghty and how greet a lord is he!
> Ayeyns his myght ther gayneth none obstacles.
> He may be cleped a god for his myracles,
> For he kan maken, at his owene gyse,
> Of everich herte as that hym list divyse. (I.1785-1790)

The violence in the grove is described figuratively through a political metaphor and also

described as having actual political consequences. Arcite and Palamon are lieges of the

"God of love," that "greet . . .lord" who can control "everich herte." This power to

control singular desire, as we have seen, threatens not only the individual lovers but also

all of Athens (Leicester 249-51).[57] Continuing the Cupid-Lord conceit, he describes the

situation in overtly political language "hir lord, the God of love, ypayed/ Hir wages and

hir fees for hir servyse" (I.1802-3).[58] However, while they are lieges to a *figurative* "God

of love," they have *broken* real laws: they have started an unauthorized duel, they have

trespassed on royal forest, and they pose a potential military threat to Athens. Perceiving

this military threat, Theseus demands that they swere "that nevere mo ye shal my contree

dere,/ Ne make werre upon me nyght ne day,/ But been my freendes in all that ye may"

(I.1822-24).

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[57] The speeches of Arcite and Palamon alluding to potential violence against Athens displace political considerations onto erotic object such that the Knight, according to Leicester seems "at pains" to demonstrate "the confusion of the relations between love, lordship and the "felaweshipe" of society; see 250-51, quotation from 250.

[58] Theseus's full speech is replete with a quasi-legal register (i.e. "distreyne" (I.1816) and he forgives the "trespas" (I.1818)).

Through personification Theseus can purge himself of his checkered past with Cupid: "A man moot ben a fool, or yong or oold,/ *I woot it by myself* ful yore agon" (I.1812-13; emphasis added). This admission (and the mercy it engenders) allows him to distance his sovereign power from the unauthorized erotic violence in the grove. Thus, Theseus replaces the unauthorized duel (the God of Love's jurisdiction) with a judicial battle that is part of the Athenian state apparatus—a judicial battle to be fought in an arena built on the grounds of the grove itself:

> My wyl is this, for plat conclusioun
> . . . .
> . . . this day fifty wykes, fer ne ner,
> Everich of you shal brynge an hundred knyghtes
> Armed for lystes up at alle rightes,
> Al redy to darreyne hire by bataille. (I.1845; 1850-53)

Through the establishment of the royal lists, Theseus will ostensibly decide who marries Emelye: "Thanne shal I yeve Emelya to wyve/ To whom that fortune yeveth so fair a grace" (I.1860-61). The phrase "my wyl is this" repudiates Theban erotic violence, reminds us of his own personal suppression of his animal will and most importantly makes a legal conquest of Cupid.[59] While this conquest fails for both cosmological and necessary reasons, it is this need to create semiotic systems that constrain erotic violence that authorizes both king and poet.

Theseus replaces this volatile and transgressive erotic *energy* of the grove with the sturdy, looming and enclosed edifice of his own authority: [60]

> I trowe men wolde deme it necligence

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[59] In a theological register the displacement of the violence in the grove with a state sanctioned violence in the arena alludes to a Thomistic model of kingship that arises in order to control to the initial violence in the Garden of Eden. Robert Hanning, for example, hears echoes of Genesis (81).

[60] For the conventional reading of how Theseus's arena establishes a "civilizing resolution" of the animal conflict in the woods, see Kolve 105-112.

> If I foryete to tellen the dispence
> Of Theseus, that gooth so bisily
> To maken up the lystes roially,
> That swich a noble theatre as it was
> I dar wel seyen in this world ther nas.
> The circuit a myle was aboute,
> Walled of stoon, and dyched al withoute.
> Round was the shap, in manere of compas (I.1881-89)

The "noble arena," the subject matter for most of book III, symbolizes Theseus cosmic warrant (what Anderson calls rule by "cosmological dispensation"), displays his magnificence, and connects both to the "civilizing mission" or kingship. The architectural language exerts control over (defines) those elements and people within it. Susan Crane has even called it the "precursor of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon" insofar as the circular lists bring the "lover's willful resistance to Theseus's law under institutional visibility and regulation" (Crane 34).[61]

The size, shape and sturdiness of the arena make it a symbolic representation the cosmic warrant underwriting Thesian majesty. Especially when read recursively in light of the orbits of the Saturn, Mars and Venus, the "round . . . schap" of the theater draws from the philosophical and theological traditions that imagined heaven in terms of perfect circle. The arena represents Theseus's orbit.[62] Chaucer places the theater "on an astrological axis to achieve an image of *theatrum mundi* in order to suggest that the "theater" is a micro-universe" (Clopper 135). Theseus's role in building the theater, then,

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[61] For Kolve, the visibility of the arena contrasts with the woods, which, as a "place of hydynge and lurkkynge," was "potentially perilous, beyond the law, antithetical to human values" (111). However, whereas the "panopticon" works precisely because of the fear of an invisible surveillor, the arena depends upon maximum visibility to stage its own authority. As Johnston notes the Duke's "theatre mundi" creates a public spectacle where "no *outside* view is possible" (emphasis mine) and symbolically establishes a perspective that is "both totalizing and universal" (100-2).

[62] For Boethius "the form of divine substance is such that it does not spread out into outside things or take up into itself anything from them." As Parmenides says of it, 'like the mass of a sphere well-rounded in all ways' it rotates the moving sphere of the universe while remaining itself unmoved" (III.12.p). For lengthy discussion of the circle in relation to cosmological definitions of kingship, see Rigby, *Wisdom* 237-8. See also Patterson (216-222) for an explanation of switching between Gods and astrology.

mirrors depictions of God as a "master craftsman" or "choice architect of the universe."[63]

The civilizing rhetoric of the arena aligns with a majestic image of sovereignty that draws

the conventional equation between the prince of the entire cosmos and Duke Theseus's

position within the realm.

The building of the arena plays an important role in understanding its ideological

purpose. In the *Teseida*, Teseo decides to have the judicial duel in a pre-standing theater.

Chaucer, on the other hand, turns the theater into the exemplification of *Fürstenspiegel*-

virtue of magnificence by emphasizing Theseus's role in its construction (I.1881-1913).

The knight tells us that it would be "necligence" to forget the "dispence/of Theseus."

Occasionally ascribed to pride or corrupted chivalric values, the Knight's praise of

Theseus's "dispence" aligns perfectly with magnificence found in mirrors for princes,

such as Roger Dymock's *Liber Contra XII Errores et Hereses Lollardorum:*

> it is fitting for a king to have sumptuous and beautiful buildings, excellent meals
> and ornate clothing, since it was because of these things that the wisdom of
> Solomon received great praise (295).[64]

Dymock's handbook, which was in fact a gift dedicated to Richard II, explains that

"sumptuous buildings," "excellent meals," and "ornate clothing" all *stabilize* kingship by

turning Solomon's wisdom (an abstract virtue) into a concrete object of praise; the

concrete object in turn enthralls the subject, that is goads them to praise that virtue. Regal

construction was the primary expression of magnificence—a virtue Giles, through

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[63] As Rigby notes, drawing from similar in Plato's *Timaeus*, medieval theologians often represented God as an architect or "master craftsman." Alain de Lille, for example refers to God as the "the choice architect of the universe", "the golden constructor of a golden construction, the skilled artisan of an amazing work of art" (*Plaint* 144).

[64] Translation by Rigby, *Wisdom* (51). For the complete contemporary description of magnificence, see Roger Dymmok 292-97. Nigel Saul argues that Roger Dymmok's *Liber contra XII errores et hereses Lollardorum* provides a "defense of the luxurious style of dress at the court" (356).

fanciful etymology, links to "magna faciens" (Giles I.ii.19).[65] Such demonstrations of

majesty were so important that Malcolm Vale argues, "it was *incumbent* on later

medieval rulers to indulge in the maximum degree of display which their resources and

income would allow" (169).[66] Magnificence is a kind of imperious exhortation that

creates and reproduces the lines of cooperation necessary to maintain sovereignty.[67]

"The public choreography of royal status and splendour, through courtly and civic

ceremonial," as Stephen Rigby explains, "both manifest[s] and in turn, reinforced [his]

real power." The ceremonial reinforces the hierarchy in two ways: first it perpetuates a

symbolic representation of the majestic hierarchy; and second, it forces the spectator to

encounter the "stark realities of social and economic power," (Rigby, *Wisdom* 51) or in

other words his powerlessness to change this order.

Shown the extent of their powerlessness, the rhetoric of the "noble theatre"

encourages the spectator to accept a cosmological definition of their inferiority through

which the spectator justifies his own submission to majestic authority. Thus,

magnificence might be understood as the virtue in which majestic rhetoric coordinates

actual royal power with majestic hierarchies, or as Giles puts it:

> "For he is heed of the regne and therby he hath the *liknese of God that is heed and prince of alle*, it is most semelich that he bere hymsilf as *magnificus* shulde in makyng holy temples and ordinaunce and arraye of seruice and worship of God" (I.ii.20-24)

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[65] Unless otherwise stated, references to *De regimine* are from a John Trevisa's Middle English translation, *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa's Middle English Translation of the De Regimine Principum of Aegidius Romanus*. Eds. Fowler, David C., *et al.*.

[66] See also Rigby Wisdom 249-51; and Saul, "Vocabulary" 861

[67] For a discussion of the use of symbols (even "magical" symbols similar to those of the coronation oath) as an inducement to action, see K. Burke, *Rhetoric* 41-42.

The noble theater attempts to replace violence through a powerful display of regal *magnificence* that translates Theseus's "social and economic power" into a cosmological view of the universe in which Theseus is head of the kingdom as God is *"prince of alle."* The flurry of activity that opens Book IV demonstrates the power of arena rhetoric: we are immediately surrounded by the work of the goldsmiths and armorers and we hear the harnessing noises coming from the local hostelries, people are playing pipes, waving sticks like swords and betting on the contestants (I.2483-2522). While these descriptions of the crowd are more chaotic than the architectonic language of the "noble theatre," they demonstrate how the tournament controls the economic and social atmosphere. All the movements of the crowd point to the majestic center. The Knight shows the degree to which the arena exerts a form of social control. The architectural elements of the theater—the circuit where the battle is fought, the oratories and the seating—project a model of sovereignty that depicts the Duke's civilizing mission in terms of spiritual and social hierarchy.

The mile-wide circuit performs one of the most crucial ideological functions of majestic rhetoric: it ties the legal judgment by battle (i.e. the chivalric tournament) to the civilizing mission of the regal state. The "circuit" heavily regulated by Theseus's terms ostensibly constrains erotic, internecine, blind political violence in what, metaphorically, might be called the orbit of Theseus. The judicial battle replaces epic violence with an arena in which Theseus "wilneth no destruccion of blood" (I.2564). Unlike in Statius and Boccaccio, the only death occurs when Arcite falls off his horse. Thus, the *Knight's Tale* demonstrates the "maturation process" of Theseus as he turns from epic warrior to king

presiding over non-fatal tournament (Laskaya 66). [68] The ethical work of the arena is only matched by its ideological work; the restraint of Theban violence justifies Thesian authority. The battle, removed from Cupid's jurisdiction, does not take place in the temple of Mars or Venus but rather in a space governed by Theseus authority.

Chaucer's description of the paintings in the oratories illustrates the *constructed*-ness of Thesian authority. That is, the oratories in Boccaccio are not painted. Instead, the *Teseida* represents the prayers of Arcite, Palamon and Emelye journeying through Olympian landscapes in search of their proper deity. Chaucer turns these journeys into allegorical paintings representing primarily the dark forces of lust, war and perhaps most peculiarly chastity. Theseus's arena, thus, like language becomes an attempt to restrain "ever-threatening forces of chaos" (Muscatine 190). By changing Boccaccio's Olympian landscapes into paintings patronized by the duke, Chaucer emphasizes that Theseus *projects* the idea that the arena mirrors and is authorized by the "micro-universe."

Among the architectural features of the arena, the oratories of Venus, Mars and Diana have received the most critical attention. Johnston arguing that the theatre does not provide "privileged opportunities for remaining invisible" mentions in passing that the temples are an exception, as they alone "remain impenetrable to the Athenian commonality" (Johnston 101). Because of this "impenetrable" secrecy, many scholars suggest that these temples, which depict only the "images of disorder," point to "the repressed knowledge of military chivalry's darker, more malevolent valence" (Patterson,

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[68] Anne Laskaya argues that Chaucer "purposefully shapes the maturation process for" Theseus (66). Leicester describes this maturation process in terms of genre in which "the initial move from epic to romance in the poem" acts as an "assertion of a more refined and more socialized drive to order" (257).

Chaucer 226).[69] Patterson, for example, connects the "malevolent valence" to Theseus

and the Knight's own failure to recognize the violent energies in chivalry itself. Even if

we accept that these paintings have a "malevolent valence," we must remember that

Theseus commissioned these paintings. As such, the paintings also represent Theseus's

recognition of the kind of erotic violence that the "noble theater" contains and

suppresses. These intimate spaces are associated with the prayers of Arcite and Palamon

and as such represent violence. Most importantly, the oratories, not unlike the oratories

dedicated to saints in Cathedrals, are part of a larger construction dedicated to the

worship of the highest authority. The oratories are part of a larger orbit, a larger temple

to Theseus, or Jove, or perhaps better yet Theseus as Jove—the cosmological warrant of

the state.

The amphitheater's tiered-seating contrasts sharply with the "images of disorder"

painted on the oratory walls by providing a *shared* vision of an Athenian hierarchy that

mirrors the cosmic order.   One of the most crucial elements of the amphitheater,

according to Andrew Johnston, is that it affords equal visibility to all the spectators. The

elimination of the "visual hierarchies" produces a perspective that "is shared by all and

simultaneously encompasses all" (101). However, when he suggests that the arena

"effaces social differences" (101), he misses the point about what exactly is being

staged—viz. Theseus's magnificence and the majestic hierarchy. The elimination of

"visual hierarchies" is the naturalization (not the elimination) of social hierarchies.

Through a magnificent display of power that excludes individual perspectives, Theseus

produces a shared vision (an ideology) that naturalizes those "ideas that help to legitimate

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[69] The D.W. Robertson camp that reads all medieval literature in terms of a "fully coherent and hierarchical world view" quite naturally read the *Knight's Tale* as an allegory for spiritual failing (166); see also Collette 49.

a dominant political power" (Eagleton, *Ideology* 1-2). In his description of the procession

and seating arrangement at the theater, Chaucer emphasizes the hierarchical organization

of Athenian society through a description of the audience:

> Ful lik a lord this noble duc gan ryde,
> Thise two Thebans upon either syde,
> And after rood the queene and Emelye,
> And after that another compaignye
> Of oon and oother, *after hir degree*
> . . . .
> Whan set was Theseus *ful riche and hye*,
> Ypolita the queene, and Emelye,
> And othere ladys *in degree* aboute.
> Unto the seetes preesseth al the route. (I.2569-73; 2577-80; emphasis mine)

The theater, arranged so that the companies and noble ladies each sit "in degree" with

Thesian majesty "riche and hye" at the center, recalls the earlier description of "Duc

Theseus" in Book 4: "at a wyndowe set,/ Arrayed right as he were a god in trone"

(I.2527-8). Theseus is the focal point of the arena like the statue in each of the oratories.

Likewise, the static descriptions of Lygurge and Emetrius (III.2129-89) appear as

paintings on Jove's walls whose animal characteristics are tamed (like their own animals)

by a gold and jeweled encrusted magnificence. In the battle scene, Chaucer focuses on

two rather unknown figures and, instead of thinking about the vicious effects of Venus or

Mars, we see the magnificence and stability of warrior kings—figures that bear the

magnificence of Theseus "in trone."

Theseus produces a microcosm that "mirrors" the cosmic framework. The

architectural metaphor provides a perfect image of imperial power as a reflection of (and

thus sanctioned by) the stable majestic hierarchies. The "noble theatre" in its

conspicuous rigidity mirrors the whole tale, which Patterson describes as a tableau, a

frieze, a set of static images, a pageant; at its most dynamic a procession" (Patterson

209). By removing time from the narrative, the ecphrastic description of the arena imitates the atemporal order that purportedly sanctions Thesian order. In short, Theseus's architecture enacts majestic rhetoric.

However, much like Theseus's prisons could not contain Theban violence, the "noble theatre" cannot bring about his "will." While Chaucer begins book three with the magnificent construction of the arena, he concludes it with an almost comic counsel of the Gods that undercuts its rhetorical façade. The sudden appearance of the parliament of the Gods at the end of Book III is particularly jarring because it diminishes the scale of the noble arena and shows the failure of its symbolic language. After Palamon, Emelye, and Arcite offer prayers to the Gods, Chaucer concludes with a counsel in which Venus and Mars fight over whether Palamon or Arcite would prevail. Coming after the lengthy description of the theater, the counsel of the gods, quite literally telescopes the "noble theatre" with it mile long circuit within "cours" of Saturn that "hath so wyde for to turn" (I.2454) that it "hath moore power than woot any man" (I.2455). Instead of representations of venereal and martial power of the oratories contained by the edifice of the arena, we see the orbits of Venus and Mars contained within the widest orbit of Saturn.

Setting the claims of the "noble arena" against the authority of Saturn made visible the embarrassment of authority: it made visible the mechanisms that 'naturalized' the majestic hierarchy and created the Athenian subject. Saturn's resolution to Mars and Venus's competing desires brings about formally ordered, but ethically bankrupt solution. Chaucer drives a wedge between *Fürstenspiegel*-rhetoric and the actual conditions of power. Theseus attempts to resolve the violence peacefully, but his attempt to a just and

peaceful solution fits uncomfortably with the result; that is, the result emphasizes

Theseus's own lack of authority. Theseus's arena fails in part because it attempts to

usurp the authority of Providence—he imagines that he controls the orbit of the arena.

Some have seen this as a failing of pagan prince, I would suggest that it shows the failure

of majestic rhetoric employed by Christian princes, particularly Richard II; or put another

way Chaucer's poem shows that majestic images of kingship are infected with a pagan

element.

While Theseus still imagines these events as part of a higher "necessity," he must,

like all people experience them and manage them as part of "unexpected and

unforeseen."[70] After all the magnificent arrangements, from the construction of the

theater to the feasting of foreign kings, Arcite, the victor of the lists, does not win the

hand of Emelye, but dies instead. Theseus's majestic rhetoric may legitimize and

mobilize his *ethical* authority, but it cannot assure the efficacy of his "wyl." Royal will

and prerogative is thus divorced from the cosmic framework. Despite its majestic

intentions (aligning Theseus with the Prime Mover), the voice of sovereign and poet, in

the *Knight's Tale*, must increasingly address the political aims of "worldly felicity and

peaceful, harmonious communal existence" (95).[71]

The anxiety in the discourse of sovereignty manifests in the histrionic mourning

over Arcite; after all, Arcite has done nothing for the Athenians themselves. They are

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[70] Boethius describes the difference between chance and Providence "whenever something is done for some purpose, and for certain reasons something other than what was intended happens, it is called chance" (117)

[71] Similarly, Marshall Leicester describes the *Knight's Tale* as disenchanted. In Middleton's terms this "disenchantment" as a transformation occurring within the narrative perspective "The "I" of public poetry presents himself as, like his audience, a layman of good will, one worker among others, with a talent to be used for the common good. It is his task to find the common voice and to speak for all, but to claim no privileged position, no special revelation from God or the muses, no transcendent status for the result, and little in the way of special gifts beyond a good ear" (Middleton 99).

mourning the loss of the great victor of the arena and as such are mourning the loss of arena-rhetoric itself. In light of this loss, Theseus must recuperate the legitimacy of both his authority and that of the Athenian social order—a recuperation that emphatically calls for the end of mourning.[72] Instead of employing his characteristic language of "architecture and procession," Theseus delivers a speech that emphasizes mutability and contingency. The first mover speech recuperates sovereign authority by making kingship and social order part of a rhetoric of resistance, a rhetoric that pushes back on "transmutacioun" signified by Arcite's death.

Nonetheless, the process of recuperation exacts its price. Muscatine has given this recuperative speech its most noble spin: "when the earthly designs suddenly crumble, true nobility is faith in the ultimate order of all things" (190). Equally, David Aers, reading the speech in a Marxist light, is not wrong to claim that the speech combines the "rhetorical elaboration of the banal observation that all things must die" with "plund[ed] bits" of *Consolation of Philosophy* to "persuade us that whatever is, is right" (1986: 59-60). Although they have very different opinions about what Chaucer "wants to say," Muscatine and Aers both focus on the moral justification for order—the ideological fiction through which one creates order.

Instead of analyzing the disparity between arena- and first mover-rhetoric in terms of ethics, I focus on the disparity between the language of kingship and the actual conditions of royal authority. While performing the ideological function of creating a new fiction of power, Theseus' speech reveals the internal fissures within ideology and

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[72] Fradenburg describes the "end of mourning" as "a figure for the unanimity of community and assent, that is, both concurrence and submission" (180).   For a full discussion of the role of mourning and community, see *Sacrifice* 179-182.

makes evident limits of power.[73] The first mover speech critiques the structural

limitations of majestic rhetoric. However, these limitations do not necessarily constitute

what some critics see as the dark underbelly of chivalry. The speech points to a problem

that is ethically neutral: the *inability* (not the unwillingness) of majestic rhetoric to

contain erotic desires (magnate violence) that fray the bonds of *communitas regni*.

In the final scene of the *Knight's Tale*, the erotic energy of the Theban cousins

becomes explicitly political when Theseus, at the behest of parliament, attempts to

channel it into a marriage in order to create alliances with certain countries and to "have

of Thebans obeissaunce" (I.2974). The inclusion of parliament draws a stark contrast

with the grove-scene. In the grove—a place of majestic sanctuary—Theseus bends his

will to the entreaties of the "ladyes in the compaignye;" in the final scene, Theseus "will"

works in and at the request of Parliament. The poem thus narrates a shift from the

majestic power contained in the private realm of the grove to a public political forum.[74]

Likewise, the pivot from arena-rhetoric to the "first movere" stages a movement away

from majesty towards a more political rhetoric—a movement away from the confident

and transcendent subject position of the arena towards a more "limited but also more

realistic and serviceable agent" (Leicester 370). Theseus's will becomes an instrument of

parliament. Parliament decides "upon certein pointz and caas" for which this noble

Theseus anon/Leet senden after genti Palamon" (2975-76).

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[73] For a lengthier discussion on how narrative exposes the "internal distance" of ideology, see Introduction. For further theoretical discussion of this idea, see Althusser 222-23; Pieters 205; and Macherey 155.

[74] The "ladyes" (i.e. the wife, step-daughter, and their women attendants) would all be members of Theseus' immediate household; as such they have the power to entreat—a private power that does not threaten regal majesty. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu provides a similar description of feminine power as always "unofficial or even clandestine or occult" (41).

Insofar as it makes use of the king/god analogy, the first mover speech cannot be considered an example of political rhetoric *par excellence*. Nonetheless, it highlights the same structural rift in sovereignty that produces political rhetoric that accommodates and revises Thesian cosmology. The First Mover, who makes "the faire cheyne of love," offers both an analogue and ethical justification for Theseus's renewed authority deserves to be quoted at length:

> "The Firste Moevere of the cause above,
> Whan he first made the faire cheyne of love,
> Greet was th' effect, and heigh was his entente.
> Wel wiste he why, and what thereof he mente;
> For with that faire cheyne of love he bond
> The fyr, the eyr, the water, and the lond
> In certeyn boundes, that they may nat flee.
> That same Prince and that Moevere," quod he,
> "Hath stablissed in this wrecched world adoun
> Certeyne dayes and duracioun
> To al that is engendred in this place,
> Over the whiche day they may nat pace,
> Al mowe they yet tho dayes wel abregge.
> Ther nedeth noght noon auctoritee t' allegge,
> For it is preeved by experience,
> But that me list declaren my sentence. (I.2987-3002)

For critics, like V.A. Kolve, Theseus's first mover speech seems spurious because his reasons simply do not support his claim—how does the existence of elements and mutability prove the existence of the prime mover? Theseus, himself, seemingly acknowledges the absence of deductive reasoning through his own abrupt assertion of "experience" over "auctoritee." These scholars describe the speech as exemplifying reason confounded rather than triumphant, as pragmatic not philosophic. This, however, ignores how medieval science recognized that the four elements, like the humors of the body, were contained (i.e. the fairly experiential truth that fire cannot exist under water). Indeed, Gower's description of "Physique" at the beginning of Book VII provides a fairly

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detailed explanation of this containment that is mercifully summed up by Theseus "faire cheyne of love." The crucial difference between Theseus's *cheyne* and medieval Christian science/theology is that, in medieval tradition, Aquinas's first mover creates the universe *ex nihilo* while Theseus's, more like the creator of the Ovidian universe, orders pre-existing elements by fixing them in "certeyn boundes."[75]

This Ovidian cosmology allows Chaucer to engage in a political discussion without "talking about souls," a strategic move that parallels Gower's authorial decision to tell a story that "does not strecche up to the hevene" (I.1). The Knight makes a similar gesture after the death of Arcite:

> His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,
> As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.
> Therefore I stynte; I nam no divinistre;
> O soules fynde I nat in this registre (I. 2809-2812)

It is important to note that Chaucer's decision to not speak of Arcite's soul, deviating from Boccaccio's description of the ascension of Arcite's soul through the spheres, emphasizes how his practical narrative/translation technique (i.e. refusing to tell what he never saw) is connected to his refusal to play the role of *divinistre*, his refusal to transgress the boundaries of divine knowledge. While the first mover speech lacks the Christian consolation, its cosmology is not unchristian. Like the refusal to speak as a *divinistre*, the *Knight's Tale*, in ways similar to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century theologians, created a theological explanation for separation of political and theological discourse—what I have called political theology. The pagan universe allows the knight

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[75] To say this is Ovidian is not to suggest that this is pagan. This same model was used at different points in Boethius (*Consolatio* II.viii.m; III.xii.p; IV.vi.p;) and Alain de Lille (*Anticlaudianus* I.53-54) to describe the creation of the universe and can fit within Christian thought. The Knight, as many critics have noted, is limited in that he does not imagine a Christian creator.

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to deploy a political register to describe this ordering of creation. For example, the
elements, which seem to have their own agency, need to be constrained so "that they may
nat flee." Theseus, who binds erotic violence with the "faire cheyne" of marriage,
appropriates the authority of the first mover.

Unlike "noble theatre," however, the authority articulated in the first mover
speech is less an attempt to *reflect* a divine order than to *regulate* temporal disorder.
Royal power resists entropy and is justified by the chaos it seeks to restrain. The speech
replaces magnificence with politics. Theseus's argument for a new political order is
rooted in an uncharacteristically pessimistic view of the cyclical nature of the "wrecched
world." He stresses the natural limitations of people in the face of mutability and death.
After seventeen lines describing how trees, rocks, rivers, towns, kings and pages all
"wexeth" or "deye." Theseus concludes:

> What maketh this but Juppiter, the kyng,
> That is prince and cause of alle thyng,
> Convertynge al unto his propre welle
> From which it is dirryved, sooth to telle?
> And heer-agayns no creature on lyve,
> Of no degree, availleth for to stryve.
> Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,
> To maken vertu of necessitee,
> And take it weel that we may nat eschue,
> And namely that to us alle is due.
> And whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye,
> And rebel is to hym that al may gye (I.3035-46)

Theseus's description of the inevitability of death is not only part of a general
philosophical program justifying his authority, but more important it addresses the
specific death of Arcite—a death that threatens his own sovereign authority.   The danger
of Arcite's death explains Theseus's inordinate grief: upon the death of Arcite, the Knight
tells us that "no man myghte gladen Theseus" except Egeus who "knew this worldes

transmutacioun" (I.2839 emphasis mine). Arcite's death, unlike those on the Theban or

Scythian fields, was not part of war waged by Theseus. Arcite was not *supposed* to die.

In fact, Theseus had decreed that no one in the royal lists was to die. As such Arcite's

death lacked significance to Theseus. Arcite's empty death is part of the "entropic drift"

that undercuts Theseus's worldview—for all his battles, he did not fully apprehend "this

worldes *transmutacioun.*" The death exposes the allegorical illusion of Thesian majesty;

as Gordon Teskey shows, allegory always tentatively projects an illusion of order onto a

field of chaos:

> The rift that slashes through the center of the field of allegorical expression,
> opening into chaos, cannot be shown for what it is except by the poets, who have
> the courage, at brief moments to do so. These are the poets . . . who draw back
> the veil of an optimistic metaphysical illusion to reveal the truth of its origin and
> the certainty of its undoing. (1996: 30-31)

The death of Arcite, as all the grief attests, is a moment that "slashes" the "optimistic

metaphysical illusion" of the arena and exposes the "chaos." The death of Arcite has no

meaning in the arena—it is the saturnine fury at the heart of a projected allegorical order.

The first mover speech redescribes Arcite's death in new cosmological terms: his life had

reached "dayes and duracioun" and in cosmic (and rather euphemistic) language Juppiter

has *converted* him "unto his propre welle." The reintegration of his life and death into a

universe of meaning is central to the reconstruction of a model of sovereignty situated in

mortal time.

Theseus's speech reveals the degree to which the discourse of sovereignty

depends upon giving particular narrative significance to the life of his subjects. Just like

his grief was only closed off by Egeus's explanation of the world of transmutacioun,

Theseus must find a new register that gives meaning to the lives of his subjects in order

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to end their mourning. The death of Arcite signals the end of the cosmological warrant manifested in the arena and it inaugurates the search for a new discourse of sovereignty that might, in Anderson's terms, give a "certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss and servitude)"

Since the 1980s many critics have treated the first mover speech as a power play. For instance, David Aers suggests the speech is a cynical deployment of religious rhetoric that:

> shows how theological language can serve those in power. It enables them to present thoroughly limited class and nationalistic self-interests as universal ones dictated by a transcendental being to whom they have special, indeed monopolistic access. Wonderful to say, this being never critiques the basic activities or views of the ruling class. (Aers 1986: 30)

Aers points out how the Prime Mover essentially reproduces arena-rhetoric to establish "limited class and nationalistic self-interests as universal." Those who focus on the authoritarian side of the Thesian *regime* focus on how making "vertu of necessitee" reproduces the social order. As such, the first mover speech can be read as just another use of religion to sustain his spurious authority. Theseus speech certainly reproduces the same social order that begins the tale: his observation that no one regardless of "degree" can strive against mutability and death, only leads him to conclude that to strive against this order is madness and political rebellion. His belief in a social hierarchy, however, does not make him into a "Machiavellian caricature."[76] Echoing Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, David Aers describes Theseus's justification for hierarchy as a simple assertion

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[76] For discussion of Theseus as a "Renaissance machiavel," see Neuse 252; Sherman 105; and Guidry 162.

that "whatever is, is right" (30).[77] Aers's bald and shocking précis masks the social context of Chaucer's readership and all the socio-political processes that naturalize and anchor the discourse of sovereignty. As we have seen in Chapter II, the reasons for hierarchy are not purely mythical, but rest on the fact that "what is" provided stability against lawlessness, civil war, and rebellion, those anti-social energies ascribed to Saturn's orbit.

Thus, while these cynical accounts of the speech rightfully point out its attempt to reproduce a certain social order, they also tend to flatten out the narrative of the *Knight's Tale* and ignore an important question: What is the difference between the rhetoric of the "noble theatre" and the first mover speech? They ignore Theseus's own learning curve— his journey from epic conqueror to parliamentary king. They ignore the narrative thrust of the tale as a whole. By focusing on the ends, both Muscatine's "noble designs" and Aers' "what is, is right" elide the difference between Theseus's arena rhetoric and his recuperated authority. This recuperation transforms the sign-system inherent in the discourse of kingship. Instead of presenting himself "as he were a god in trone" (I.2529), Theseus repeatedly makes use of leveling rhetoric to emphasize the weakness of political power: "grete tounes se we wane and wende" (I.3025) or again "in youthe or elle age—/He moot be deed, the kyng as shal a page" (I.3029-30).

Theseus's recognition that he is not only a king but also a subject is a crucial element of the mirror for princes genre. Usually this recognition that makes the traditional mirror focus on the ethical instruction of the king. The *Knight's Tale* actually

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[77] Aers appropriation of Alexander Pope points to one of the underlying tensions the *Knight's Tale* investigates: namely, the attempt to use cosmic framework to justify political power. Just because a medieval Christian accepts that all things happen according to divine plan does not mean that a Christian ruler can use this plan to justify their own authority because he, like all his subjects, does not have understand this plan.

shows the relationship between regal power and submission to the effects of fate. Like the marriage of Palamon and Emelye, the king's office creates a temporary order out of necessity. Larry [Scanlon, speaking about Gower's Lycurgus has argued that the sovereign "achieves his power from the gap between the monarchy and the divinity he simulates" (289). The king's *subjectedness* to the Prime Mover models the relationship of the Athenian to Theseus. However, by illustrating the mechanisms of majestic authority (i.e. showing that majestic rhetoric is a response to the embarrassment of authority), the political world assumes increased significance. Although this language does not threaten the actual hierarchy, it does change the source of their authority. Unlike the arena—the enclosed edifice of his own authority—the first mover depicts the king as *responsive to* the conditions of "necessitee." To "maken vertu" requires negotiation with the forces of "necessitee" whether that is a Peasants's Revolt or a Merciless Parliament.

The arena-rhetoric that made a magnificent pageant of the "stark realities of social and economic power," is gone. His speech no longer assumes Jove-like power to contain the deified or planetary forces of Venus, Mars and Diana but rather recognizes that the Prime Mover's "ordinaunce" is such that "speces of thynges . . . shullen enduren by successiouns" (I. 3013-14). The *Knight's Tale* does not anatomize a static majestic rhetoric, but narratively depicts its collapse beneath the weight of contingency. Rather than displaying Jovian plenitude, the new authority in the first mover is *responsive* to "this worldes transmutacioun." The Knight describes the shift from cosmology to contingency. In *Melibee*, Chaucer provides a more detailed depiction of this political "responsiveness."

In *Sacrifice Your Love*, Louise Fradenburg explains the transformation of necessity into virtue in psychoanalytical terms as a transformation of "finitude into creative power" (164-5). Theseus exerts a kind of control over the uncontrollable forces of contingency by representing those forces. His description of mutability (despite or even because of its conventionality) is hardly what Aers calls the "banal observation that all things must die." That is, the reason that mutability trope is so often repeated is because the representation of one's "finitude," what Fradenburg calls the "beautiful signifier," allows the speaker some semblance of control. The signifier gets its meaning not from an external order, but through its resistance to entropic drift. Unlike the arena-rhetoric that masks the embarrassment of authority behind an excessive display of earthly power, the prime mover speech emphasizes this embarrassment and turns it into creative power by including them in subjection to a higher necessity.

In the absence of cosmological claims of the arena, the "creative power" power of the beautiful signifier provides psychological foundation of political power. Rhetorically, the speech offers a new model of sovereignty that no longer confidently reflects the majestic hierarchy, but rather imagines hierarchy and royal power as a resistance to the forces of chaos. While this does not alter—in Theseus's mind—the actual social order it changes the nature and claims of kingship. Unlike arena-rhetoric in which Theseus's power is based on a cosmological order, the first mover speech imagines Theseus's sovereignty as an act—resisting saturnine disorder. In J.L. Austin's terminology—the discourse of sovereignty changes from constative statements to performatives. Since mutability and death are the primary conditions of the world, we must accept our

condition (rather than "stryve" against it) in order to continuously project order onto the chaos.

The "parfit joye . . . lasting evermo" that concludes the tale offers a panoply of optimistic and pessimistic *readings*. The idea of joining "two sorwes" into "o parfit joye" satisfies the generic expectations of romance in which the suffering of mutability, what Bakhtin calls "romance time" is closed off by the biographical marriage. However, as many critics point out, given the conditions of the marriage proposal itself, which is actually embedded in a eulogy, such a conclusion seems wildly optimistic and even spurious.[78] Reminded that all things "moot deye," we recognize that Palamon and Emelye will, like all things "corrumpable," be converted to the their "propre well" (I.3037) (i.e. "deeth is an ende of every worldly soore" (I.2849)). The "joye" will be short lived. Read another way, the "joye" is not strictly Palamon and Emelye's but the "joye" of "successioun" (I.3014) that resists the endless cycle of death. The marriage represents the "joye" that will continue the cycle of creation instituted by the Prime Mover. Pessimistic critics will counter argue that the whole Prime Mover system is likely to collapse much like his arena rhetoric did. What is crucial about all the potential readings of the tale is the ordering impulse embodied by Theseus. Each *reading* of social order— accepted as conclusive (much like Theseus's confident belief in his "plat conclusion")— collapses because saturnine chaos cannot be enclosed. While many critics end on this despairing note, it is essential to recognize that the *Knight's Tale* does not solely seek a

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[78] Kolve and Aers both suggest the materialism of Theseus's speech fails to offer a real "philosophical resolution" (Kolve 148) or "metaphysical order" (Aers, *Chaucer* 189). The speech asserts divine authority but focuses on decay. Thus, as Collette argues "no one who has read or listened to the tale, especially to Theseus's speech, can expect that the joy – or anything else – will last for long, much less "evermo" (57-58).

truth to close off meaning, but suggests an interpretive strategy that *responds* to the new conditions.

Theseus's first mover speech exemplifies a greater truth still: namely that reading, meaning making and translation all respond to the conditions through which sovereignty is maintained. The tale does not offer *a* meaning, but rather embodies a political sociolinguistic order, "a semiotics of power," that challenges majestic allegories that sustain the cosmic framework. The story heals the tear in the "metaphysical illusion" by replacing an order with an ordering process embodied by Theseus. While this ordering process maintains many of the same hierarchical assumptions, it accepts the limitations inherent in the "beautiful signifier" central to political rhetoric. At the end, the speech recognizes and provisionally contains the forces of entropy, it acquires its meaning through the forces it resists.

This translates Theseus voice from the confident transcendent voice found in the arena to the anxiety ridden "common voice" of the first mover speech. Reading the first mover speech as part of a lengthy commentary on chivalry, scholars suggest the philosophical flaws of the speech or its dark imagery point to the failures of the Knight's ideology. The *Knight's Tale*, as Galloway puts it, "de-authorizes" and reauthorizes "authority" in a different form—changed in order to create space for Chaucer's own fictional voice. What I have tried to demonstrate is that this *de-authorization of authority* is part of the emerging political rhetoric that developed new lines of cooperation outside the cosmic framework through which power was recognized and coalitions established. Unlike the sturdy, atemporal *imperative* rhetoric of the theater, the first mover speech is strategic and performative; Theseus reconstructs his authority. The

movement from the noble arena to the first mover speech reflects a transformation in

kingship, one in which a "coherent system of purely logical relationships" suddenly

becomes strategic and visibly *hortatory*.[79] As a result, this new "fictional voice" does not

share the cosmic confidence of Theseus's arena, or even his Prime Mover, but rather it

anchors its authority in the broader Thesian imperative to create order in the face of

historical circumstance—'meaning' as a 'response to.' In Middleton's terms we see the

transformation from the transcendent narrator to the common voice. The Knight replaces

a depiction of Theseus as "god in trone" in front of a majestic spectacle with an image of

Theseus in Parliament arranging a political marriage. Galloway's argument that this *de-

authorization* creates space for his fiction aligns with my broader idea that the emergence

of political rhetoric required narrative that consistently negotiates the conditions of its

power. It establishes an author/ruler who must *continuously* turn "sorwe" into "joye." In

our discussion of the *Clerk's Tale*, we will see how the collapse of the transcendent voice

(arena-rhetoric) and the rise of a common voice manifest in a political perspective (and

thus a political identity) of the reader.

Reading the Clerk's Tale as A Critique of Majesty

　　　The Clerk tells a tale in which a Marquis demands absolute obedience from his

wife and then tests this obedience by pretending to murder her children and marry a new

woman. The tale, to put it bluntly, is provocative; and it was equally provocative in the

fourteenth century. In the marginal comments to his 1384 copy of the *Decameron*,

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[79] Bourdieu's distinction between official kin and practical kin provides a useful paradigm. He describes official symbolic descriptions of kinship "serve the function of ordering the social world and of legitimating that order" (34). It is a language, like majestic rhetoric, that reproduces a given order. Moreover, he shows how this official system often brushes against the "utilization of connections [kinship]"(34). For full distinction between official and practical uses of kinship, see 35-38.

Francesco Amaretto Manelli imagines Griselda violently responding to the Marquis'

offer of reconciliation "Go piss on your hand Gualtieri, who'll give me back twelve

years? The gallows?" (qtd. in Green, "Why the Marquis" 49). Manelli's response alerts

us to the potential energy of the Griselda legend. While one should not make too much

of one marginal comment, I think it equally naive to dismiss it. Boccaccio, Petrarch and

Chaucer, each in his own way, anticipate and address an adverse reaction from his

audience. Boccaccio distances himself from the Griselda legend by relating it through a

fictional narrator, who concerned that his story will be ill received opens with a withering

critique of the Marquis:

> I want to tell you of a marquis, whose actions, even though things turned out well
> for him in the end, were remarkable not so much for their munificence as for their
> senseless brutality. Nor do I advise anyone to follow his example, for it was a
> great pity that the fellow should have drawn any profit from his conduct (784).[80]

Dioneo's introduction to the Griselda story emphasizes the "senseless brutality" rather

than the exemplary status of Griselda and calls attention to the fact that the "virtue" is not

rewarded.

Petrarch who translated the tale into Latin in a letter of *Seniles* removed the

fictional narrator and focuses the reader's attention on the exemplary conduct of Griselda.

In *Seniles XVII, 4* however, he gives an account of two responses to the legend. A

Paduan friend who was overcome "by sudden weeping" who "confessed he could not

proceed" and another friend from Verona who,

> read it all without stopping anywhere, nor did his brow darken or his voice break .
> . . in the end he said, "I too would have wept, for the touching subject and the
> words fit for the subject prompted weeping . . . but I believed and still do that the
> whole thing was made up. For if it were true, what woman anywhere, whether

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[80] All citations from the *Decameron* are from G.H. McWilliams translation, 2nd ed. (London: New York: Penguin, 1995).

Roman or of any nation whatever will match this Griselda? Where, I ask is such great conjugal love, equal fidelity, such signal patience and constancy? (669-670)[81]

Petrarch focuses the tale on the exemplary power of Griselda and even provides an imagined riposte to the Veronese friend "there have been many . . . for whom things that seem impossible to the multitude are simple." Petrarch wants to transform the "weeping" that Walter's cruelty causes into a model of spiritual constancy.

It seems likely that Chaucer never read Boccaccio's account. Nonetheless, by inserting it into the *Canterbury Tales*, he restored the ironic distance of the original. Chaucer exploits this distance even more than Boccaccio by foregrounding the narrator's response to the tale. Unlike Dioneo, the Clerk repeatedly interrupts with his own opinions "I saye that yvele it sit" (IV.460) or "O nedelees was she tempted" (IV.621). This running commentary shapes the reader's response to the Petrarchan material and renders the reader's reception of the tale conspicuous. For Petrarch, Griseldan constancy confines and spiritualizes the tale's potential energy (i.e. the potential violent reactions to the Marquis's cruelty) in a way that fosters the "sphere" of individual moral self while submitting to the "conventions and compulsions" of public life.[82] The two responses in *Seniles XVII, 4* reinforce this reading.

In my discussion of the *Clerk's Tale*, I will look at how Chaucer's Clerk fosters a political response to Petrarch's Griselda. However, there is one important caveat: my

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[81] Translation of *Seniles* VII, 4 669-670 *Letters of Old Age* (*Rerum senilium libri I-XVIII*). Trans. Bernardo, Aldo S, and Levin, Saul.

[82] Developing Charles Trinkhaus's discussion of Petrarch's separation of the private and public sphere Warren Ginsberg describes the role his Griselda legend played: "The palms he [Petrarch] craves, however, are fundamentally civic virtues, yet like spiritual attainments, they must be gained through an intensely private inner battle to determine the constitution of the self. Only the man who had made himself estimable in solitude, shut off from the public, will be able to win the public's esteem . . . Throughout his life Petrarch sought a means that could accommodate the contesting impulses of this "double consciousness." The Griselda represents his maturest attempt to reconcile the demands of personal will and communal duty" (255).

discussion should not be read as a response to Petrarchan humanism, but rather as a response to subjectivity and majestic model of authority the tale seemingly invokes. In its acceptance of absolute submission of the political self to the sovereign, the Griselda legend could be read as an exemplum of majestic obedience. The reader response staged by the Tale establishes a metacritical frame aligned with political rhetoric that is absent from Petrarch. This frame encourages a reading born out of resistance to the Griseldan subjectivity the tale engenders. The act of reading is tied to the development of the political perspective.

What makes Chaucer's handling of the Griselda legend so compelling is that— unlike Petrarch's Griselda—the spiritual moral cannot contain the 'physical' revulsion caused by the narrative events—it is, in a sense, a broken exemplum. Usually, an exemplum is a short narrative that illustrates a point—the moral. The narrative should interest the reader without drawing their attention away from the spiritual moral. Chaucer rips the moral and narrative apart—at once enjoining the reader to give obedience to God and simultaneously delivering a withering critique of majestic rhetoric. The audience's reaction, then, can be understood formally as a tension between the narrative events of the exemplum and the moral those events are meant to illustrate. On the narrative level, we have a disturbing tale about a Marquis who marries a peasant only after she agrees to never confront, question or even frown at any of the Marquis' future commands. After the marriage, Walter, in order to test his wife's constancy in the extreme, pretends to kill her children and then divorce her.

Like Petrarch, the Clerk tries to dismiss these narrative events of the story by telling wives not to follow her example:

> This storie is seyd nat for that wyves sholde
> Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
> For it were inportable, though they wolde (IV. 1142-44)

Acknowledging that Griselda's humility is "inportable," the Clerk attempts to transform

the tale into an exhortation for Christians:

> sith a womman was so pacient
> Unto a mortal man, wel moore us oghte
> Receyven al in gree that God us sent. (IV. 1149-51)

However the Clerk's moral does not satisfy. One is left asking with Manelli's Griselda:

"who'll give me back twelve years?" Ultimately, Walter's cruelty has such a presence

that Chaucer's Clerk—like Petrarch and Dioneo— feels compelled to remind us that he

doesn't believe "wyves sholde/ Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee" (IV.1142-3). The Clerk

tries to turn the reader's attention away from the temporal world established by narrative

events (turn away from inter-personal relationships) and focus instead on a transcendent

relationship between the Christian and God. However, the narrative and the interpersonal

relationships have their revenge.

    The tension between the pat Christian moral and violent reactions to the tale

continues to inform modern readings of the *Clerk's Tale*.[83] Charles Muscatine, with a

hint of censure, suggests that Chaucer's "superfluity of . . . pathos" (193) comes

dangerously close to overwhelming the Petrarchan force of the tale. [84] Similarly

Elizabeth Salter identified a powerful "discrepancy between austere allegory and realistic

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[83] For a lengthier discussion of anxiety caused between moralizing the tale and responding to Walter on a more personal level, see Sprung 345-369, particularly 345-346; Green, "Why the Marquis" 48-50; and Cherniss 235-37.

[84] Muscatine describes the Clerks tale as "trembl[ing] on the edge of sentimentality" (193) which he postulates may be "a mark of the time." Muscatine's "mark of the time," seems as though he is dismissing a particular taste, a taste that does fit with his own more Petrarchan palate. However, this phrase, "mark of the time," may in fact be more significant than that. I suspect the kind of "sentimentality" and "pathos" added by Chaucer to Petrarch's tale is a product of a new political orientation, an orientation that focuses on human joy and suffering.

pathos" in the *Clerk's Tale* (62). Although she has been criticized for reading the tale as allegory, Salter accurately emphasizes the anxiety caused by the failure of transcendent meaning to either displace (or even mitigate) the "real pathos" of the narrative.[85] More recently, Michael Cherniss has argued that the *Clerk's Tale* does not resolve "the surface tension between it [the marital theme] and the spiritual moral," that it has a "double theme" (Cherniss 242). He claims there is deep anxiety or "awkwardness" between reading Griselda's constancy to a mortal husband as allegory/ exemplum of a Job-like obedience to God, and the "righteous anger" at the misery "inflicted capriciously by a *human* hand."

The Clerk not only tells an exemplum of spiritual constancy but also a narrative of marriage and politics; that is, the marriage narrative creates a fictive space for "the theme of sovereignty to be worked out" (Muscatine 194). The Clerk describes Walter and Griselda as husband and wife, but he also emphasizes Walter as sovereign and Griselda as his subject. Indeed, this 'political' relationship, a microcosm of the king's relationship with his subjects, defines and subordinates the mutual obligations of the conjugal bond. For Muscatine, the political moral reinforces, rather than upsets the spiritual moral— Griselda represents the perfect subject and perhaps, as some critics suggest, a rarefied resistance rhetoric.[86] This Petrarchan interpretation of the *Clerk's Tale* undercuts the anxiety of the tale—an anxiety that Chaucer amplified. The "surface tension" between

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[85] For example, Charlotte Morse argues that the allegorizers (Salter, Muscatine etc.) "shift[ed] attention away from the narrative itself and onto an abstracted pattern of divine-human relationship" (52). While allegory reduces the tale, the *desire* to use some interpretive method to render the tale acceptable is not only part of "presentist" reading of obedience, but very much an anxiety recognized within the tale itself. The allegorizers may find arrive at a false conclusion, nonetheless, the problem they adumbrate and try to resolve is very real.

[86] Muscatine argues that Griselda never gives into Walter and through "vertuous suffraunce" forces him to capitulate. Griseldan constancy, thus, represents the efficacy of political quietism in the face of tyranny.

marital theme and spiritual moral, a tension developed by the Merchant and the Franklin, encourages the reader to challenge the rhetoric that constrains Griselda. On one level, Chaucer's narrative conflates the spiritual moral and the political narrative; on another it registers the anxiety caused by this conflation. And it is precisely this conflation at the heart of majestic rhetoric: that is, the subject ought to treat the sovereign as the "vice-regent of God on earth," or "semi-deus" because the earthly hierarchy mirrors the heavenly hierarchy. By conflating *and* generating friction between the narrative and its moral, Chaucer forces the reader to disambiguate and revise the relationship between spiritual and political rhetoric.

In order to understand the tale's critique of politics, we must first examine it intentionally exacerbates the conflict between "austere" spiritual moral and the story's "pathos" and then explain how it situates this conflict within a political context. As scholars since J. Severs have pointed out, Chaucer's additions to the Petrarchan source amplify the tale's emotional realism, which I have shown rises out of political realism.[87] Petrarch exalts Griselda's exemplary constancy rather than critiquing the political relationship between Griselda and the Marquis.[88] Petrarch's Griselda, according to David Wallace is "classicized, mythologized, and moralized as a timeless exemplum of obedience to God" (Wallace 282). As a result, the marriage, which has little political valence, primarily establishes a pretext for the cruelties Walter inflicts upon Griselda. It proves Griselda constancy rather than Walter's tyranny. This spiritualized portrayal of

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[87] For a full description of the emotional realism in the *Clerk's Tale,* see Severs 233-245.

[88] According to Wallace, Petrarch imagines evaluating a potential bride as "a kind of masculine *inventio* which, in gazing at or through the female body, may lay bare the essential qualities beneath. The female mind is valued, but only for its willingness to cast off any "ornatus elegantism" it brings with it, laying bare the essential "pietatem" that may be subjected to masculine molding" (274). Chaucer's Clerk encourages the reader to recognize and critique the Petrarchan subtext.

Griselda as a "timeless exemplum" of Christian constancy, Amy Goodwin argues,

depends upon the "imperfect analogy between Griselda' obedience to Walter and the

Christian's to God (62).[89] The spiritual exemplum overwrites the political narrative.

Petrarch maintains this implied, albeit "imperfect analogy" by downplaying the

psychological violence of Valterius' tyrannical acts. For example, in the denouement,

where Valterius returns Griselda's children, the suffering caused by the Marquis seems

to, in Wallace's words, "vanish into thin air" (292):

> His words produced almost unbearable joy and frantic devotion: Griselda rushes
> with the happiest tears to embrace her children, wearies them with kisses, and
> bedews them with maternal tears. (128-129) [90]

When the Marquis restores Griselda's children, his words, produce "unbearable joy and

frantic devotion." Petrarch avoids adding psychological complexity here for the sake of

the moral. By focusing intently on Griseldan constancy, the cruelty of relationship

becomes almost evanescent. He transforms the reader's moral outrage into "moral

approbation" of Griselda's transcendent constancy and thus, elevating the spiritual, he

effectively cordons off, or at least forcefully downplays, the political readings of the

tale.[91] The focus on Griselda's virtue mystifies the relationship between sovereign and

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[89] The attempt to understand Griselda as a Job-figure has led to all kinds of ways of trying to understand Walter as a God-figure. Most often, this has assumed the shape of accepting that the anagological relationship is "imperfect" and that the tale focuses on Griselda's piety rather than Walter's imperfection. According to David Wallace, "the implied analogy between Walter and God can be taken seriously in Petrarch's text because Walter's tyrannical proclivities are played down" (Wallace 282) Robert Stepsis argues that the Clerk developed theological theories of "Oxenford" to represent Walter as the *potentia absoluta* of God—a power that renders reasonable explanation of God's will out-of-bounds (129-146).

[90] All citations and translation from Petrarch's Griselda Legend are from *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*. Ed. Correale, Robert M.

[91] For Muscatine, the "inner inspiration" of *Clerk's Tale* "is Petrarchan." He locates this Petrarchanism in "The poem's theme is in Job v, 17: 'Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth. His is pure chastening, pure correction. Walter's lack of motivation is an advantage in presenting this theme. Griselda's trial is a trial because there is no reason for it. The life of the tale, simplified down to extremity, makes show of the nature of *bare* virtue itself' (194 emphasis mine). I am suggesting that the Petrarchan tale of "bare virtue" is a subtext. It is not difficult to hear Petrarch

subject. Petrarch imagines Griseldan constancy as interior virtue divorced from (and thus resistant to) the public sphere.[92]

The Clerk's Griselda is no less exemplary. Chaucer, however, amplifies the imperfections of the analogy between Griselda' obedience to Walter and the Christian's to God in a way that "restores Griselde to the movement of history" (Wallace 283). Recognizing the frustration with reading Griselda as part of an "austere" allegory or exemplum, Chaucer amplified the political tensions within the narrative, which Petrarch had tried to erase. Griselda's subjugation allows Chaucer to examine the effects of majestic rhetoric. For example, in his translation, the *return* of the children (an unproblematically joyous moment within the conventions of exemplum) ironically paints such an abhorrent picture of Walter and Griselda's marriage that rivals (and for some readers) replaces Griselda's exemplary constancy as the object of analysis.[93] In his translation of this scene, Chaucer turns Petrarch's three lines of prose into 34 lines of poetry in which Griselda repeatedly weeps and swoons.[94] More importantly, he gives voice to something that has been suppressed throughout the text, Griselda's emotional response:

> "O tendre, o deere, o yonge children myne!

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in the *Clerk's Tale*, but Chaucer's Clerk is not presenting that voice in its most flattering light. Petrarch's bare virtue, by moments of added pathos, is being exposed as violence.

[92] Comparing Petrarch's humanism to Harry Bailley's concept of fiction, Warren Ginsberg argues that both engage "history by deflecting the consequences of its demand for public commitment" (2002: 263). While I agree that both texts avoid any call for "public engagement," it is my intention to show that their attitude towards the role of the political in the fashioning of the self, and thus the awareness of the political as part of the subjects' identity, are very different.

[93] Charlotte Morse suggests that many modern readers have been so deeply disturbed by the violence of the tale that they cannot accept Griselda's exemplary constancy. Indeed, she argues this leads to literary "presentism" in which interpretations of the tale are unduly shaped by modern concerns (51-52).

[94] It is precisely this amplification that leads Muscatine to identify "the superfluity of Chaucer's pathos over Petrarch's" (193) as the defining characteristic of Chaucer's translation of his Petrarchan source material.

> Youre woful mooder wende stedfastly
> That crueel houndes or som foul vermyne
> Had eten yow; but God of his mercy
> And your benyngne fader tendrely
> Hath doon yow kept" — and in that same stounde
> Al sodeynly she swapte adoune to grounde. (IV. 1093-99)

The passage depicts the impossible and traumatic contradictions that Griseldan subjectivity had to manage throughout the tale. First, we see Griselda's intense motherly love in the interjections "o tendre, o deere, o yonge," which suggest an emotion that she cannot apprehend, in Petrarch's words an "unbearable" emotion. As he translates her unbearable joy into dialogue, Chaucer adds psychological dimensions to Griselda.

Griselda's renarrates the *Clerk's Tale* from a new, or rather adjusted perspective—one that allows Griselda to claim her own suffering. In the previous instances where Walter tests Griselda, Chaucer depicts her as "noght ameved" (498). We do not see the "woful mooder." For example, when Walter has pretended to order the death of her daughter Griselda responded:

> . . . Lord, al lyth in your plesaunce.
> My child and I, with hertely obeisaunce,
> Been youres al, and ye mowe save or spille
> Youre owene thyng; werketh after youre wille.   (501-504)

Griselda's suffering is supplanted by Walter's "pleasaunce." In a tale that emphasizes Walter's anxiety regarding his will(an anxiety that drives him to exact outrageous oaths from his subjects and to test his wife in "merveillous" manner), Griselda's submission to Walter (i.e. "werketh after youre will") demonstrates the *potentially* chilling effect of the royal prerogative on the subject's interiority. Indeed, Griselda's acceptance that Walter may "save or spille" echoes Arphages from Gower's "Tale of the Three Advisors" who describes the absoluteness of the prerogative as the power to "save or spille."

When her children are returned, Griselda unwittingly emphasizes the emptiness of

Walter's 'kindness.' Immediately, after her joyful interjections, Chaucer introduces a

powerful possessive pronoun "o yonge children myne." This possessive exclamation

punctures—even if momentarily—a tale in which Griselda repeatedly replaces *her* grief

with the Marquis's *pleasaunce*. Having been kept down throughout the tale, her love and

grief flood into these thirty-four lines. Of course, one must not imagine that *Griselda*

escapes the majestic rhetoric of kingship; after all, she cannot express her grief without

repeatedly acknowledging the just authority of her husband. Her agency is largely

predicated on Walter's 'kindness.' However, in a poem that represses any kind of agency

(such that Muscatine called said it had an astringent aesthetic that could only be

appreciated by connoisseurs), the possessive "myne," invites *readers* to imagine Walter

as excluded from the scene. The speech, largely absent from Petrarch's text, encourages

a critical reading of Walter's "gift" and the majestic paradigm that gift represents.

In Chaucer, the "unbearable joy" gives way to a remembering her prior woe and

at the moment of resolution Chaucer vividly recalls the cruelty of the Marquis. In this

retelling, Griselda reconstructs her anguish—an emotion that had been suppressed in the

initial description of the events. Griselda does not just say that she was sad, but rather

explains that she continuously ("stedfastly") imagined that hounds and "foul vermyne"

ate her children. No matter how much we attempt to read this as a tale of Griselda's

spiritual constancy, this memory of her grief (though without a single accusation)

condemns Walter. After reminding the reader of Walter's cruelty, Griselda thanks "God

of his mercy" and the children's "benyngne fader" who had "kept" them. Griselda's

gratitude toward God and the Marquis anticipates the moral but also highlights the

anxiety: Walter was a "benyngne fader" because he did not do the cruel thing to the children that he said he would—Walter's kindness is an empty gift.

The blending of love, suffering and gratitude is unbearable, which is registered by Griselda's violent collapse—"she swapte adoune to grounde." We might register this as just another amplification of Petrarch's "unbearable joy;" however, Chaucer makes sure we recognize that she collapses "al sodeynly" and "in that same stounde" as she praises Walter and conjoins his benignity with God's mercy. By amplifying Griselda's suffering and hence the realistic pathos of the tale, the imperfect Griselda-Walter/Christian-God analogy collapses. Conjugal and political violence remain unresolved. Consequently, the reader is likely to condemn Walter and, more broadly, the majestic rhetoric signified by marriage demands that occlude the subject-wife's proper political agency. Griselda's words emphasize the psychological *effects* of power, the psychological trauma caused by majestic *relationship* between husband and wife—between Marquis and his subject.

Walter's decision to end his testing ("this is ynogh"), simply does not balance out Griselda's 34-line emotional response when reunited with her children, children she thought were dead. Not even the Clerk-narrator seems willing to accept this exemplary reading of the tale. Although the Clerk says the tale should be thought of in spiritual terms, his envoy actually "draws attention back to the ostensibly abandoned marital theme, renewing the surface tension between it and the spiritual moral" (Cherniss 242).[95] After finishing his tale of "ernestful matere," the Clerk sings a sarcastic song for the love of the Wife of Bath. In his song he playfully enjoins the noble wives to "lat noon

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[95] What follows develops Cherniss' argument that the envoy demonstrates the Clerk's own fascination with the secular theme of the exemplum. Muscatine made a similar observation about the thematic conflict between the spiritual moral and the realistic envoy; however, he dismisses the envoy as part of the dramatic frame that has no effect on the "inner inspiration" announced by the Clerk at the close of his tale in the moral (192).

humylitee youre tonge naille" (1184) and to fire the arrows of their "crabbed eloquence" (1203) against their *mortal* husbands. If the envoy is read as a sarcastic reversal of Griselda, then clearly the Clerk is still thinking about the secular relationship between Griselda and Walter—not just the spiritual one between Christians and God. I would add that the envoy accentuates the fact that the reader ought to think of the Griselda-Walter relationship in terms of the discourse of sovereignty. The Clerk's suggestion that the noble wives can strengthen the "commun profit" by following Echo, who "holdeth no silence" (IV.1189-1194) seems out of place even as a joke.[96] Unlike Petrarch's Paduan and Veronese readers that ensure that we read Griselda in terms of her "signal patience and constancy," Chaucer, by contrasting Griselda to these "archewyves" of the common profit, directs the reader back to marriage as a political representation of the subject-sovereign relationship.

Insofar as we imagine Clerk's Tale as a political (in its broadest sense) allegory, Chaucer's emphasis on the literal level of Walter's cruelty disrupts the allegorical "modus significandi."[97] It is this fracture between, or rather fracturing of, the ideal and the literal that I have described as political realism. In terms of political allegory, the *Clerk's Tale* encourages the reader to imagine Griselda as the ideal obedient subject. Obedience was the theocratic cornerstone of majestic rhetoric encapsulated in Augustine: "obedience is both the origin and perfection of all justice in all people and rational

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[96] The overly talkative wife was a common comic figure of medieval literature. However, the use of this comic figure to represent the common profit seems to be Chaucer's invention.

[97] Ricardian Poetry 82 "the prevailing 'modus significandi' in Ricardian narrative is not allegorical but literal. Andrzej Wicher suggests more specifically that the prevailing mode of signification in Chaucer is allegory that is "disconcerted."

animals" (qtd. in Ullmann, *Individual* 32).[98] Richard II's chancellor, Michael de la Pole

expounds upon this majestic obedience in his 1383 address to parliament, stressing,

"obedience to the king was the foundation of all peace and quiet in the realm" (qtd. in

Saul, *Richard II* 386). De la Pole's address exemplifies how Richard II fostered majestic

rhetoric that would "raise himself above, and to distance himself from his subject" in

order to "strengthen his claims to his subjects' obedience" (Saul, Kingship 49). This

oppressive political obedience hangs over the tale. Chaucer makes us think of Griselda's

marriage in relation to obedience and subjection from the moment that Walter approaches

her:

> And doun upon hir knes she gan to falle,
> And with sad contenance she kneleth stille,
> Til she had herd what was the lordes will.   (IV. 292-94)

Her "sad contenance" which will become the object of Walter's testing was already seen

as bound to her "lordes wille." Before we even get to the proposal, the relationship

between Walter and Griselda is one of kneeling subject to standing lord.[99] We will get

another image of kneeling Griselda when she returns to Walter's house as his servant:

"on hir knees hire sette,/And reverently . . . him grette" (951-2). As J. B. Severs points

out, these depictions of the kneeling Griselda increase the political valence by

emphasizing her "humble obedience to the will of *her lord* and husband" (235—emphasis

mine).

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[98] The Latin is: "[obedientia] est in hominibus et in omni rationali creatura omnis iustitiae origo atque perfectio." This common Augustinian construction of obedience and justice echoes throughout the Middle Ages.

[99] Severs points out that Chaucer frequently inserts a number of "gesture[s] of subjection" that were not in the original text (235). As a result, the *Clerk's Tale* emphasizes the majestic authority of Walter. This was perhaps shaped by the image of kingship projected by Richard II. The image of the kneeling subject played an important role in Richard's vision of kingship (or at least how it was perceived by chroniclers). The *Eulogium* chronicler states that "it became the king's practice to sit throned in state from dinner till vespers observed by all his courtiers who were expected to end the knee whenever his gaze fell on them" (qtd. in Saul, "Kingship" 40).

Walter's majestic authority necessitates the erasure of the *political* model of

kingship that Aristotle (and the Scholastic school he deeply influenced) signified by

married love. Aristotle described kingship in terms of "economic" relationships (i.e. in

terms of relationships within a household): the paternal relationship represented regal

kingship, conjugal represented political kingship and master/slave despotic. [100] The

conjugal relationship, which is most important for our purposes, provides an analogy for

political kingship in which the ruler is bound to charters, contract and customary law,

much like a husband bound to certain "condiciouns and covenantes" (Giles 2.1.13-15) of

marriage.[101] Aristotle's political tropes inform our reading Walter's rewriting of the

marriage covenant and his oppression of his wife. In short, it is the political potential of

marriage that threatens Walter.

Chaucer may or may not have been consciously using Aristotelian metaphors for

kingship; nonetheless, the economic language of kingship was so pervasive in the

fourteenth century that Aristotelian political ideas informed Ricardian marriage-

sovereignty metaphors. In fourteenth century one found this paradigm in sermons on

"the mutuality of conjugal love," political treatises and vernacular books on household

management. [102] The ubiquity of the marriage-sovereignty trope helps explain why

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[100] Economic refers to the relationships between different members within a household. As Lynn Staley points out, economics, alongside ethics and politics, was crucial to medieval understanding of government. Nicole Oresme, a French political theorist patronized by Charles V produced one book for each field (ethics, economics and politics) and described them as such: "ethics is about the mastery of the self, the *Economics*, about managing family, and the *Politics*, about establishing the science of managing groups or governing cities" (Staley, *Languages* 89).

[101] "Fo[r] the housebond shulde be above the wif and rewle here by politik rewelyng, for he schuld rewle here certeyn as by the lawe of wedlok and matrimoyne and by condiciouns and covenantes" (Giles 2.1.13-15). Giles of Rome had considerable influence over the political thought in the court of Richard II. For more on the conjugal model in Giles, see Rigby 297-98. Blythe points out that Aquinas popularized the Aristotelian analogy.

[102] On the prevalence of discussing *trouthe* and mutuality in terms of marriage, see Emma Lipton Chapter 1. For the pervasiveness of marriage as a political construct in French literature, see Lynn Staley, *Languages* 88-91. She cites its influence on English literature arguing that Gower's *Traité pour ensampler les amantz marietz* "collapses the fiction of

Chaucer's marriage sequence seem so deeply invested in the language of governance—

i.e. "sovereignty," "obeissaunce," "trouthe," "lordship" and "servage." Coming right on

the heels of the *Clerk's Tale*, for example, the Merchant, similar to the Marquis, describes

marriage in terms of constraint and freedom, but unlike Walter he privileges the "yok" as

"blissful:"[103]

> They [Bachelors] lyve but as a bryd or as a beest,
> In libertee and under noon arreest,
> Ther as a wedded man in his estaat
> Lyveth a lif blisful and ordinaat
> Under this yok of mariage ybounde. (IV. 1281-85)

If we see the Merchant's Tale as picking up on threads of the *Clerk's Tale*, then he seems

to be accusing the unmarried Walter of a kind of bestial liberty. More importantly, it

praises the conjugal model of sovereignty in which the covenants and conditions of

wedlock bind both the sovereign and subject in "a lif . . . ordinaat." Chaucer's Franklin,

on the other hand emphasizes the freedom within mutuality of "sacramental marriage:"

> That freendes everych oother moot obeye,
> If they wol longe holden compaignye.
> Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
> When maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
> Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon! (V.762-6)

The Franklin addresses the dangers of majestic obedience in the attempt to "holden

compaignye" which points outward to *compaignye* of pilgrims that signified political

authority itself (Wallace 2). Marriage becomes a way of analyzing "liberty," "maistrye"

obedience within the different models of sovereignty.

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love into a praise of marriage, which is allied with the greater harmony of the created world and the communal harmony that emerges from the lawful containment of base desire" (347). Similarly James Simpson has argued that Ricardian praise of marriage is a move from obsessive amatory love to politics (282-284).

[103] Of course, the marriage in the *Merchant's Tale* resembles blissful ignorance more than a blissful "yok." However, this does not contradict what the Merchant says of marriage at the beginning of the tale. The marriage problems in the *Merchant's Tale* result from the January blindly reproducing the tyrannical crimes of Walter.

Unlike the Franklin's sanguine depiction of marriage as freedom within the mutual obligations of matrimony, Griselda, as wife and subject to the Marquis, raises the specter of a constrained political model authority (a menacing version of the Merchant's "lif . . . ordinaat") that threatens Walter. This anxiety manifests in the Clerk's censure of Walter at the beginning ("I blame hym thus" (IV.78)), in Walter's own depiction of marriage as *servage* (IV.147) and most viscerally, through the oaths that Walter demands and the tests that he devises. In his introduction of Walter, the Clerk reprimands the young Marquis for spending too much time thinking of his "lust present" (IV.80), a lust represented by his love of "hunting and hauking." Walter mistakenly reads this "lust present" as "liberte" and it is this inability to distinguish "lust" and liberty that grounds the political reading of the *Clerk's Tale*. Walter's marriage-anxiety is really a concern with the extent of royal *voluntas*—the power-over that defines the royal prerogative.[104]

The Marquis' jealous protection of his will recalls Henry III reply to the demands of his barons: "the servant is not above his lord nor the disciple above his master . . . and I should not be your king, but a mere slave, if I were to bow in this way to your will"(Matthew of Paris II.266); or Richard's more violent response to lords and commons upon their call for the dismissal of his Chancellor that "he would not dismiss so much as a kitchen scullion from office at their request" (qtd. in Saul, *Richard II* 167).[105] For both Henry III and Richard II, any limitation upon royal power amounted to a form of slavery

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[104] Michael Raby among other critics shows how the "prenuptial demands" secure Walter's "liberte" and in fact make Griselda into the new object of Walter's hunt (239). I argue that the "liberte" that the king worries over is the potential of "mutual obligations" most clearly linked to the king's ability to control his household.

[105] This scene provides just one of the many anecdotal examples suggesting that Richard sought to enhance the prestige of kingship and create a more continental model based on principles of "benign absolutism" that had gained popularity in France, see Staley, *Languages* 28-30.

or bondage. Indeed, anything that implied that royal power derived from (and thus, was limited by) the *communitas regni* threatened the Angevin theory of kingship.[106] The *iura regis*, or royal prerogative, was regarded as part of the king's legal inheritance—and the diminishment or loss of *iura regis* through a lack of heirs was an anxiety at the heart of majestic rhetoric. When the people of the realm approach the Marquis, they wisely (if deferentially) exploit Walter's desire to maintain his prerogative. They convince him to accept the yoke of marriage by pointing out that if he does not marry then his "lyne" would "slake," and he would lose his "heritage" to a "straunge successour."[107]

As a result, the Marquis, seeing their "trewe entente" (IV.149) to ensure his line, enters into a pact with his people, a pact that might be described as a *political* arrangement: "Wherefore of my free wyl I wol assente/ To wedde me, as soone as evere I may" (IV.150-1). The language here reflects the political concessions to be found in Magna Carta or the Provisions of Oxford. However, he only agrees to this political pact, because of his need to maintain his authority and he makes clear that he perceives marriage as a threat:[108]

> I me rejoysed of my liberte,
> That seelde tyme is founde in mariage;
> Ther I was free, I moot been in servage. (IV. 145-47)

Chaucer added the juxtaposition of "free" with "servage" and rhymed marriage ominously with *servage*. While one line may seem like a minor adjustment, these

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[106] For more on the Angevin theory of kingship, see Holt 27ff.

[107] In the "Folly of Rehoboam" the young counselors to the king used a similar strategy when they warned Rehoboam showing mercy to his people would diminish his "riht." *CA* VII 4081ff.

[108] Carol Heffernan explains that this provides "a clue to the tyranny of his rule, for political theorists frequently accused tyrants of pursuing personal delight instead of the common good" (333).   See also Raby 237-39 and Rooney 95.

additions have an epigrammatic quality that allows Chaucer to reshape Petrarch's text in important ways. The hyperbolic representation of marriage as slavery demonstrates how Walter, because of his proprietary sense of will (or warped sense of liberty), perceives any kind of mutual obligation as a challenge to his free status (i.e. free as both having liberty and his "fre" or noble status).[109]

This *marriage/servage* anxiety should not be confused with Harry Bailley's comic frustration with his termagant-wife who comes home and "rampeth in [his] face" (VII.1904) nor the Merchant's wife, who can "overmacche" the "feende" (IV.1219-20). Chaucer uses the character of Walter to explore the psychological dimensions of majestic authority—namely its overweening concern to protect *dignitas regi*. Thus, even Walter's political pact is driven by a deep anxiety over his "heritage" rather than any legitimate concern for the community that petitioned him. The king's sole interest in his "lust present," an extreme and perverse form of the *voluntas regi* turns into the fear of *servage*. He fears the mutual obligations that marriage entails and the system of power that it represents. His demands demonstrate a concern not with the loss of power to-do (i.e. go "hauking") but rather the power-over (his *ability* to command without resistance). This fear drives him to demand that the people let him choose his own wife and "neither grucche, ne stryve" against his choice (170), an absolute acceptance meant to repay his lost "libertee."

Moreover, he requires Griselda to swear a prenuptial vow in which she subjects herself unconditionally to his will:

I seye this: be ye redy with good herte

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[109] Lynn Staley has also argued that the Uprising of 1381 shaped this language. The Marquis' anxiety, here, seemingly taps into the threat to boundaries between lordship/servage caused by the 1381 Uprising (Staley 70ff.).

To al my lust, and that I frely may,
As me best thynketh, do you laughe or smerte,
And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day?
And eek whan I sey 'ye,' ne say nat 'nay,'
Neither by word ne frownyng contenance?
Swere this, and heere I swere oure alliance. (IV. 351-57)

We are expected to recognize the political ramifications of this passage. As David Aers

suggests, Chaucer analyzes "political questions concerning sovereignty and

responsibility" (*Chaucer* 172) through the relationship between Walter and Griselda.

Although this passage specifically focuses on the married couple, Griselda can be read

more broadly to represent the Marquis' subjects. Walter's prenuptial demands, then, point

to the way in which all the "characters are bound to each other irrefrangibly by political

and spiritual dominion" (Muscatine 195).[110]   Most obviously, Walter's prenuptial

demand that, Griselda never "grucche" his will whether he makes her laugh or smart

echoes the oath that Walter demands of his people: "agayn my choys shul neither grucche

ne stryve" (IV.170). Reading the tale in this light, Walter's demands and subsequent

violence represent the suppression (and pre-silencing) of political rhetoric. Walter's pact

with the people and Griselda resembles the kind of authority wielded in a political

kingship; however, it is a pact in which the people surrender their agency. Walter does

not control just the actions of the people but their ability to speak or even frown. The

expectations of obedience and patience in the relationship between the Marquis and

Griselda can be seen as a study *in parvo* of the subject-sovereign relationship.

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[110] Griselda's acceptance of the Marquis' marriage proposal mirrors several sovereign-subject interactions and relationships throughout the Clerks tale—the depiction of the Marquis' subjects in the opening stanzas, the promise made by the people to the Marquis, Janicula's promise to the Marquis, and finally the duty owed by sergeant to the marquis.

The passage parodies the terms of the marriage covenant in which the husband declares: "I N. take thee N. to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward for better or worse . . . and therto I plight thee my *trouth*."[111] Although the conjugal relationship was not equal (putatively because of the man's superior reason), it did establish contractual obligations pertaining to both the husband and the wife, both plight their "trouthe."[112] Walter's oath deliberately assumes none of the typical contractual obligations of the husband. Instead of saying that he will support her in good times and bad, Walter's imperious demands (that he can make her laugh or smart as he thinks best) anticipate the fact that he will cause many of her "worse" times. Additionally, the passage empties out the authority of the marriage oath. Unlike the conjugal (political) rhetoric of the Franklin's Arveragus who pledges freely that he will "take no maistrie/Agayn hir wyl" (V.747-8), Walter's majestic rhetoric gives in such a way that it strips away the agency of the beneficiary. Both parties "swere" oaths; however, Walter's "alliance" is meaningless because his "lust" subsumes Griselda's agency. Walter's majestic rhetoric represses a marriage "trouthe plyght" and reduces his subject-wife to one "wondrynge upon his word, quakynge for drede" (IV. 358).

Alongside exploring how majestic rhetoric shapes the political selfhood, Chaucer uses conventions of the tyrant to represent the "weakness in power" of majestic rhetoric. In the *Clerk's Tale*, the majestic relationship between sovereign and subject decays into cruel tyranny that binds both subject and sovereign. While Walter's hunting and hawking

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[111] I have normalized the text: "I N. take the N. to my weddyd wyf to have and to holde fro this day wafort bettur for wurs . . . and ther to I plycht the my trouth" (*Sarum Missal* 146).

[112] Emma Lipton has showed various places where the marriage contract was used to demonstrate mutual obligations. She shows how Chaucer himself discusses this model of marriage in the *Franklin's Tale* in political terms (Ch. 1). Aquinas, Lucas de Penne, and Giles of Rome advanced this view of marriage in their economic models kingship (Blythe 66).

show his tyrannical potential, this potential is a far cry from those cruelties that dominate the latter half of the poem. The threat of political power drives this transformation. The problem begins when Walter's subjects request his marriage, a request that poses a double threat to his sovereignty: if Walter gets married he must presumably capitulate to both his subjects and accept the "*yoke* of marriage." This threat instills in Walter a need to probe the depth of his authority through testing his Griselda. The connection between testing Griselda and Walter's desire to experience the fullness of his authority evokes a political paradigm derived from Augustine's spiritual psychology of sin.[113]

The political psychology of the *Clerk's Tale*, like Augustine's theory of sin, stems from the idea of freedom and false freedom. Augustine, throughout his works, frequently describes sin as an attempt to demonstrate one's own liberty by imitating divine authority. In the *Confessions*, for example, he likens the sinner to a "prisoner . . . who does without punishment what is not permitted" to make an "assertion of possessing a dim resemblance to omnipotence" (32). Sin is the attempt to assert a God like omnipotence. Early political theorists, like John of Salisbury, had already turned to this doctrine of false liberty to distinguish the prince from the tyrant, describing the tyrant as one who "ignorant of his own proper knowledge and obligatory yoke of subjection" foolishly seeking to imitate the authority of God "affects a sort of *fictitious liberty* so that he can live without fear and do with impunity that which he wills" (163, emphasis mine). Nonetheless, for John of Salisbury and many philosophical minds of the twelfth-century

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[113] Augustine's psychology of sin where a person's reason is enslaved by a perverse will is fairly commonplace in the Middle Ages. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux describes sin as perverse will in his sermons "For my will rules my members, denying the law of God (Rom 7:23). And since the law of the Lord is the law of my mind, it is written, that "the law of God is in his heart" (Ps. 36:31), my very will is seen to be against me; and this is the greatest iniquity. (Sermon 82.10). What I am interested in is how this metaphor became part of political rhetoric in the thirteenth century. In this rhetoric we are not discussing about the relationship between the individual and God, but rather the individual and the community.

Renaissance, Augustinian notion of "false liberty" was still aimed at promoting regal self-restraint. The king's responsibility was directly to God. The king's failure to act morally may harm his kingdom, but the community itself plays a limited role in John's political imagination.[114]

In the thirteenth century, the *communitas regni* became increasingly important for ways people thought about sovereignty, and this made the political subject more visible. Alongside many of Chaucer's tales, the *Clerk's Tale* gives more psychological depth to the rigid prince/tyrant discourse and renders political subjects and their subjectivity visible. For example, in the *Clerk's Tale*, the attempt to assert omnipotence is depicted in more political terms as violence directed at the community of the realm rather than toward God. We see a political model of kingship actively pushing back on majestic notions of hierarchy. In Chaucer's telling of the Griselda legend, Walter does not offer a *Job*-like "pure correction" (Muscatine 194). He is too motivated. Walter's testing arises out of fear that marriage will curb his "lust" and "liberte." The tale's political register goads us to read Walter and his pacts with the people and Griselda in political terms.

The Marquis's demand for abject obedience is part of the agreement between the king and his subjects (the people, Griselda). However, unlike Lycurgus's political pact with the people of Athens (a pact that restricts both kings and the people), Walter's pact thoroughly undermines Griselda's agency; as such it resembles the "pact" at the center of Ulpian's Roman conception of sovereignty in which "the *imperium* of the Emperor had absorbed the original *imperium populi Romani*" (Hinsley 42). The pact between Walter and Griselda shows how majestic and political rhetoric are entangled. These "pacts" are

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[114] John of Salisbury lacks "any clear distinction . . . between the moral and the political; abuse of public power is conceived simply in terms of a breach of morality" (Dickinson 325).

structured like political agreements, but like the coronation charters of Henry I and II they are more about securing regal privilege than concession to the community. Read in this light, Walter represents a complex intersection of political covenant with majestic rhetoric underwritten by Roman conceptions of sovereignty and claims divine authority.

While the agreement assumes a political form, the tale makes clear, through the utter subjection of Griselda, the majestic foundation of authority—an authority that diminishes the *significance* of the subject and the community of the realm. In this model of kingship, the relationship between king and subject king as Vicar of Christ was considered a "corporation sole," an authority beyond all human jurisdictions. Although no theologian would suggest that a person treat a mortal like God, the relationship between king and subject often approximates this relationship and the exact boundaries are less than clear. The imitation of the divine order was a crucial aspect of majestic rhetoric and, as many scholars point out, the idea that kingship, was a "reflection of a heavenly hierarchy" remained "widely accepted in the fourteenth century and beyond" (Strohm, "Form" 20).[115]

Encouraging a more political reading of the Griselda material, the Clerk's Tale challenges the pact between king and subject—the *ground* of sovereign authority. Through the outrageous terms of his covenant with Griselda and his cruel testing of his wife, Chaucer activates the conventional prince-tyrant discourse. However, Walter, unlike Gower's Cyrus or Rehoboam, is not a *static* representation of a tyrant. Chaucer dramatizes Walter's collapse from a Marquis "ful of honour and of curteisye" (IV.74)

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[115] It is important to recognize the dominance of majestic rhetoric, but England also had a strong tradition of political kingship, what Pocock has referred to as the ancient constitution (*Ancient Constitution* 46-55). Nigel Saul makes an important clarification, saying that Richard II strove for absolutist regime that was destined to fail in England, but that this model was alive and flourishing on the continent ("The Kingship" 37).

into a monstrous tyrant, a collapse driven by his anxiety to protect his prerogative. It is easy to see how this may present a circumspect admonition to Richard II, but what about to the Chaucer's broader audience? I will argue that the tale, by focusing on a violent relationship between the subject and king, encourages the reader to rethink the majestic rhetoric wrapped up in the political pact, or better yet, to rethink the pact itself. The act of interpretation is itself part of an emergent political consciousness.

Walter's need for power and his testing of this power allows Chaucer to transform Petrarch's spiritual exemplum of Griseldan constancy into an anatomization of political power—a tale that violently undercuts the theocratic foundation of majestic power. Like Augustine's "prisoner," the Marquis, through his extreme testing of Griselda's obedience, seeks to imitate divine omnipotence and falls into a state of sin. Walter tests his wife's sadness (i.e. "constancy") by telling his wife that he must take away her daughter, presumably in order to kill her. Walter's tempting of Griselda, aping the testing of Job or Abraham, seeks an obedience that is quite clearly owed to God. This has led many critics to read the tale as an allegory or exemplum in which Walter is an "imperfect analogy for God" (Goodwin 62) as a representation of the obedience a monk owes to the abbot (McCall), or even that it represents the fourteenth-century concept of God's *absoluta potentia* (Stepsis). These analogies intentionally force the reader to think about the Marquis as owed God-like obedience or even as a typological representation of God. Walter, to some degree, is a stand-in for God. By blurring (or perhaps simply deploying an already blurred) theocratic and political language of sovereignty, the Clerk's

alignment of Griselda with common profit and his demonization of Walter, renders the

tension between the political and spiritual almost unbearable.[116]

The Clerk constructs a psychological critique of majestic authority in his

description of Walter's desire to test of Griselda:

> The markys in his herte longeth so
> To tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe,
> That he ne myghte out of his herte throwe
> This merveillous desir his wyf t'assaye;
> Nedelees, God woot, he thoghte hir for t'affraye.
> He hadde assayed hire ynogh bifore,
> And foond hire evere good; what needed it
> Hire for to tempte, and alwey moore and moore,
> Though some men preise it for a subtil wit?
> But as for me, I seye that yvele it sit
> To assaye a wyf whan that it is no nede,
> And putten hire in angwyssh and in drede. (IV 451-62)

Petrarch (again erasing the political content of the tale) tells us that Walter was "seized

with desire as wondrous as laudable." Petrarch, himself, rather majestically, asserts the

legitimacy (laudability) of Walter's desire, so the reader can focus on Griselda's virtuous

suffering. The Clerk translates Petrarch's "laudable," as some "men *preise* it [Walter's

testing] for a subtil wit" but then he derides the testing as "yvel." The nature of this

"yvel" is captured perfectly in Chaucer's translation of "wondrous" as "merveillous."

The word "merveillous" denotes miraculous, supernatural and monstrous. Walter's desire

is merveillous because it seeks to reproduce heavenly authority ("reflect the heavenly

hierarchy") within a human context. Simultaneously, Walter's attempt to seize false

freedom from the mutual obligations imposed by marriage (and by extension community)

is "merveillous" because it is monstrous.

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[116] Carol Heffernan discusses how Griselda and Walter represent a tension between the common profit and tyranny respectively (333-36).

The "merveillous desir"—ultimately a desire to protect the royal prerogative (*voluntas regi*)—arises out of an intensification of the "lust present" that characterizes Walter in the hunting scene at the beginning of the tale. Now, however, Walter has a new quarry—Griselda, or to be more specific, Griselda's interiority. The testing is "merveillous" because it serves no purpose; it is, as the Clerk repeatedly emphasizes, "nedelees." The end is not the knowledge of her "sadnesse," but rather it is the testing itself. That is, he tries to squeeze out of his subject-wife's "sadnesse" a sense of his own omnipotence. This needlessness reminds us again of Augustine's prisoner attempting to imitate the freedom of God. The freedom is absolute (literally separated from) precisely because it is not contingent on any other entity. The Marquis "wins" his "freedom" more through violence directed at the common profit (i.e. against Griselda and the marriage pact) than God directly. Thus through a marriage tale, the Clerk subtly rewrites the Augustinian idea of sin (i.e. the imitation of divine freedom) into political terms as the attempt to transgress and rewrite political constraint. Through the "nedelees" tempting of wife and subject, the Marquis fashions *voluntas regi* as a freedom from all political strictures of the *communitas regni* (as imagined by the thirteenth-century ideal of political kingship)—strictures represented by the mutual obligations of marriage.

The *Clerk's Tale* demonstrates how majestic rhetoric, which reflects "the heavenly hierarchy," decays into an "yvel" parody of God's order. The Clerk's description of the Marquis' "merveillous desir" collapses into a register of compulsion: "his herte longeth," "he ne myghte out of his herte throwe" and always he sought to test her "moore and moore." The "moore and moore" suggests how needless evil is driven by an acquisitory desire that can find no rest—each "moore" drives Walter to seek

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another. The crucial point here is that when a king attempts to mirror God, he seeks more

and more because he cannot mirror God's plenitude; repetition represents an attempt to

mimic the eternal. Chaucer shows the hardening of Walter's desires. In the passage

describing his "merveillous desir," Walter is unable to "throwe" temptation from his

heart. Finally, however, the Clerk depicts the Marquis as completely enslaved by his

own will:

> But ther been folk of swich condicion
> That whan they have a certein purpos take,
> They kan nat stynte of hire entencion,
> But, right as they were bounden to that stake,
> They wol nat of that firste purpos slake. (IV.701-5)

Chaucer turns Petrarch's Valterius into a pointed attack on majestic rhetoric in which the

will of the sovereign actually binds the sovereign. Petrarch reduces Valterius' crime and

punishment by likening him to those "people, having begun a course of action will not

desist" but rather "press on further, clinging to their plan" (Petrarch 122). Although

Chaucer uses similar syntax, his figurative depiction of Walter as "bounden to that stake"

of his own will introduces a rhetoric of political psychology absent from Petrarch's text.

Walter does not merely "cling" to a plan, but rather he is bound to a stake, either like a

heretic awaiting execution or like a bear tied to post as part of a hunting trap (both of

which would have rather interesting implications for the Clerk's Marquis). More

interestingly, he holds tight the reins on his "firste purpos." In other words, Walter

fearing the loss of his authority is bound by his "entencion" to repeatedly test the strength

of his will. If one leans on Chaucer's figurative depiction, it is possible to see an

invocation of original sin with Walter bound to a tree holding tight to his first sin.

Ricardian political narratives, particularly Chaucer's, frequently depict the psychology of power as interwoven with the social order by showing the complex mechanisms through which the will to power becomes its own prison—what Levinas would (in our time) call the "weakness of power." By testing the obedience of his subjects, Walter tests the royal prerogative or that absolute freedom of the king to act *pro sua voluntate*. The Marquis thinks that his testing of Griselda demonstrates his freedom (his power over his subject), however the reader is aware that the Marquis is "bounden to the stake." Through his use of the political paradigm derived from the Augustinian model of sin, Chaucer's reimagination of Walter shares a rhetorical space with the political reconstruction of kingship in the thirteenth century. The prisoner-king is the critical trope of political rhetoric of the Common Enterprise as one is "in truth a king," and "he is truly free *if he rule rightly* himself and the kingdom" (*Song of Lewes* 106-7). This trope is powerful because it allows the opposition to redefine the traditional concept of royal will that resides at the center of monarchy. It suggests that when a king acts with no concern for the common utility, then the king is a *prisoner* of desire—thus, the will of the king is enslaved. The prisoner-king trope allowed reformers to imagine royal power as limitless *only* in its sufficiency. The king could act *pro sua voluntate* in order to protect the common profit. When it exceeds the utility of *communitas regni*, then it is no longer the will of the king but an enslaved will. Indeed, it was this principle that allowed reformers to install conciliar governments that seized control of sovereign power and claim simultaneously that they did so to protect the king's will. Although Chaucer does not go this far, his complex psychological development of Petrarch's Valterius, a

psychological development fundamental to thirteenth-century resistance rhetoric, demonstrates Chaucer's political orientation.

Chaucer turns the Griselda tale into the perfect vehicle to critique majestic rhetoric insofar as the awkwardness between the spiritual moral and the realistic narrative mirrors the problem in discourse of sovereignty itself—namely the awkwardness of forging a symbolic connection between the obedience owed to God and that owed "unto mortal man." Griselda, as such, shows the obedience due unto God and the obedience that should *not* be given to mortal man. While her patience towards her husband and lord may offer a template for Christian patience towards God, the opposite is not true.

More importantly, in Chaucer's hands, the Griselda-legend exposes the cruelty of majestic rhetoric. Walter silences his wife, his subject and the potential political voice she represents. Aside from directly and repeatedly critiquing the kind of power exerted by Walter as "yvel" and "nedelees," the *Clerk's Tale* challenges cosmic framework and interpretive strategies that support majestic authority (i.e. strategies that compare of derive royal authority from divine authority). That is, once we bracket the spiritual moral of the tale, the *Clerk's Tale* on a literal level depicts and rejects the absolute obedience owed to a *mortal* lord in theocratic models of kingship. The poem's political force derives from the fact that it reveals that majestic rhetoric (the literal level of the tale) does not mirror but rather parodies the cosmic framework; as a result the poem severs the allegorical and exemplary Griseldan obedience from the discourse of sovereignty. Instead of training the reader in Griseldan obedience, Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale* trains the reader to critique Walter's demands. It fosters, on an individual level, the development of political rhetoric. In the *Knight's Tale*, we examined the change of narrative

perspective—from arena- to first-mover rhetoric; in the *Clerk's Tale* we have seen the development of the citizen subject; now we will investigate how Chaucer, in the *Tale of Melibee*, trains his reader in a political hermeneutic.

Teaching Lord Melibee: Towards a Political Hermeneutic

It is not accidental that the *Tale of Melibee* is often reduced to a tale with a straightforward political or spiritual message. The narrative action of the tale takes place in roughly 25 lines and the 'dialogue,' which feels more like a *florilegium*, extols the virtue of royal mercy commonly advocated by courtiers. The poem is a fairly accurate translation *Livre de Melibée et de Dame Prudence* by Renaud de Rouen, which was itself a truncated translation of *Liber consolationis et consilii* by Albertanus of Brescia responding attack on the rights of Lombard communes by Frederick II.[117] Chaucer's tale begins with a brief description of an attack on Melibee's house and family. As was common for affronted nobility in the Middle Ages, Melibee called together a "greet congregacion" (VII.1003) to deliberate upon the appropriate course of action.[118] However, when he "shewed his cas" (VII.1008) his "manere of . . . speche" (VII.1009) made his predetermined desire for revenge apparent. Recognizing this vengeful inclination, the larger part of this council drowns out any calls for peace with "Werre! Werre!" (VII.1036). *The Tale of Melibee*, not unlike the *Knight's Tale*, addresses the imminent threat of extra-judicial private war between lords, all too common feudal

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[117] For more on Albertanus of Brescia, see Witt 448-450.

[118] According to Kennedy manors frequently got "together with their families and affines they had to decide how to retaliate, whether violently legally of through an accord" (168).

Europe, and like the *Knight's Tale*, the poem searches out a rhetoric that can restore community.[119]

Once the council affirms Melibee's initial desire for revenge, the tale shifts to a debate between him and his wife on how to respond to this attack. Melibee seems intent on private war, while, Prudence, befitting her name, advocates a non-violent solution. By casting the debate between two characters with allegorically charged names, 'Prudence' and 'Melibee' (i.e. honey-drinker), the moral didacticism of the tale can seem overbearing.

The debate addresses conventional issues of sovereignty associated with the mirror for princes' tradition. Prudence defends her own counsel-giving authority (VII.1069-1110), discusses the proper selection of councilors (1115-1198), explains how to make a decision based on counsel (1199-1231), analyzes and criticizes the large council (1241-1385), and eventually advocates that Melibee opt for magnanimous reconciliation with his enemies (1674-1679). After war is averted through a peace accord the *Tale of Melibee* concludes with a conventional (albeit uncomfortable) comparison between the Lord Melibee's mercy and the mercy of God who is "so free and so merciable" (VII.18886).

Scholars, who read *Melibee* as a mirror, argue that it broadly advocates princely patience, and many of these examine how this virtue intersects with contemporary issues.[120] Since the political message of the tale is conventional and transparent, they

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[119] While outright war was often repressed, a kind of poaching violence between neighboring landlords was common, see Kennedy 145-46.

[120] "Broadly the ethical and social problem the *Melibee* treats is how to diffuse the violence of a powerful man, allegorically by fostering self-governance within Melibee's wounded mind, and more naturalistically by reconciling Melibee with his enemies" (Taylor 299). See also Lynn Staley Johnson "Inverse;" and Ferster 89-90.

turn from literature to history and argue over the particular circumstances of the tale—i.e. for whom and for what circumstances did this advice apply in Chaucer's world. Likewise, the poem has often been treated as nothing more than "schematic anthology of moral commonplaces" for the medieval reader. Indeed the tale has garnered a rather unfortunate reputation among some rather influential Chaucerians: Trevor Whittock called the tale "an enormous bore and the bane of commentators;" for C. David Benson it is a "clear, dull, lengthy and somewhat suffocating work" lacking in both "irony and stylistic virtuosity" (Benson, *Chaucer's* 39) and Derek Pearsall dismisses it as "a peg on which to hang a vast quantity of moral discourses" (Pearsall, *The Canterbury* 286). Some critics—struck by this perceived dullness—even suggest the tale satirizes itself by playing a long "prank on the courtly audience" (Gardner 291). Edward Foster has even claimed that the tale, which he describes as "a lump in our oatmeal" (399), was written with the expectation that no one would read it! E. Talbot Donaldson usefully *mis*-characterizes the problem by arguing that "the story . . . was . . . a very popular one in the Middle Ages when readers did not entirely distinguish between pleasure in literature and pleasure in being edified" (Donaldson 937).

Perhaps I just like lumpy oatmeal, but I think Donaldson, who aligns *edification* with the face-value meaning of Prudence's proverbs, disregards the complex way that the tale *edifies* through shaping the reader's perspective: that is, he ignores the way *Melibee creates* the political reader. The pleasure of being edified in the *Melibee* is in its "social aesthetic."[121] The critical tendency has been either to accept that Prudence's political advice amounts to, what Richard Firth Green sees as, a bunch of "general and

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[121] For fuller discussion of this term, see Taylor 298-322.

unexceptionable statements" (Green, *Poets* 164) or to upbraid critics, like Green, by arguing that these kind of discussions "eschew interpretation—assuming that a tale so explicitly didactic must carry its meaning on its face"[122] (Patterson 107). The defenders of *Melibee*, as Patterson suggests, focus on the didactic meaning of the poem and its importance to the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. I agree with Donald Howard's assertion that the Tale is a "major structural unit in the *Canterbury Tales*" that exemplifies Chaucer's own political views and Green's position insofar as the political paradigm advanced by the story is conventional and unexceptional (Howard 309-15). However, I would suggest that this claim of the tale's conventional sentence does not close off interpretation but rather it offers a critical point of departure.

What is often lost in such moral schematics—and even in much of what Patterson calls "interpretive" scholarship—is that *Melibee* is a highly rhetorical piece primarily concerned with the art of persuasion.[123] Both the council of Melibee and Prudence shape their ideas to meet the listener's emotional state. Prudence clearly recognizes the importance of kairos (καιροσ), waiting for the opportune moment to apply persuasive argument. Before talking to Melibee, she recalls "he is a fool that destourbeth the mooder to wepen in the deeth of hire child til she have wept hir fille . . . and thanne shal man

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[122] This is similar to Burnley's assessment: "there is no trace of ambiguity in Chaucer's attitude to the Tale" *Chaucer's language and the Philosophical Tradition* (45).

[123] The council's call for "werre," for example, seems only to reproduce (as Prudence will argue) the "cruel ire, redy to doon vengeaunce" indicated by the "manere" of Melibee's speech. Even Melibee's name suggests that the only way of addressing him through honeyed speech that he will drink up. Chaucer points to ambivalent potential of honeyed speech. Melibee alluding to Solomon describes Prudence's words as "honycombes, for they yeven swetnesse to the soule and hoolsomnesse to the body" (VII.1113). Later, when Prudence accusing Melibee of failing to understand his own guilt says that he has "ydronke so muchel hony of sweete temporeel richesses, and delices and honours of this world" that he has forgotten "Jhesu Crist" (VII. 1501-2)

doon diligence with amyable wordes" (VII.977-8).[124] Like Theseus, who waits for an

appropriate end of Athenian mourning and then rhetorically projects his own serious

deliberation in his delivery, Prudence recognize that "amyable wordes" can only take

hold after mourning is complete.[125] Prudence's concern for the right moment prepares

the reader for a poem that not only provides a reasoned argument against vengeance, but

a persuasive one. David Wallace has called the *Melibee* a rhetorical handbook for go-

betweens or a means of feminine intercession to alleviate masculine violence—a text that

prepares the reader to engage a threatening sovereign power.

 I will argue that Chaucer's *Melibee* does not (primarily) address Richard II, nor

provide a handbook for addressing people like Richard II, but rather imagines the reader

as the go-between—as the ultimate liaison between sign and signified. Reading

strategies are directly entwined with civic concerns of violence and peace, Melibee and

Prudence respectively. As such, the tale does not so much address Melibee (or his real

world analogue), but rather it trains the reader to reject Melibee's rigid world-view and to

adopt a prudential hermeneutics.

 This shapes the way we discuss the genre of the *Melibee*. Since the tale consists

of a progression of seemingly self-evident quotations from ancient and biblical

authorities, it is often characterized as a *florilegium* (and *Fürstenspiegel*) written for a

child king. While *Fürstenspiegel* and *florilegium* provide a useful critical terminology

for analyzing *Melibee*, both can also render the tale's most salient features invisible. The

Melibee, like Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis*, deviates from most mirrors by making

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[124] The quotation is also interesting because Prudence imagines changing gender roles, a point discussed at length by Stephen Yeager, "Chaucer's" 312-3.

[125] Theseus waits until the "al stynted is the moornyng and the teres" (I.2968) before summoning a parliament calling for the marriage of Palamon and Arcite.

the sovereign a character within the story and focusing on that character's missteps;

Moreover, *Melibee* develops the audience's civic consciousness by emphasizing the

practical conditions of authority that are often excluded, or at least muted, in the

Fürstenspiegel-tradition. Likewise, while it shares many of the characteristics of the

florilegium genre, the narrative carefully shapes the *reader's* interpretive experience.

Rita Copeland's analysis of rhetorical invention and medieval hermeneutics

demonstrates that the significance of *Melibee* lies not in Prudence's "unexceptionable

statements" about kingship but rather in the interpretive strategies that she promotes. In

Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages, Copeland describes

vernacular translation as a means of appropriating cultural authority and inserting one's

own voice into a larger argument. Copeland argues that "for Chaucer and Gower as

translators, the governing framework of vernacular hermeneutics is a product of a strong

vernacular tradition in which translation develops as a powerful form of exegetical

action" or as she argues more succinctly about Dante's *Convivio:* "the public office of

rhetoric . . . takes the form of exegesis" (183). What is crucial is that vernacular poetry

not only translates ancient texts but it also shapes the hermeneutic strategies of the reader.

The vernacular poetry of Chaucer, similar to Dante, "inscribes the vernacular with the

kind of social responsibility that rhetoric can carry" (181) Rhetorical invention is an

exegetical or hermeneutical performance of an ancient text.

The *Tale of Melibee* does not fit the criteria for her study because it is not a

substitution for an ancient text and thereby cannot appropriate the authority of either

classical or theological texts. Nonetheless, the *Tale* demonstrates the self-conscious

process through which "exegetical activity" becomes "rhetorical invention."[126] Prudence collocates citations from ancient authorities and interprets them for her husband in an effort to persuade him not to take vengeance on his enemies. She substitutes her own exegetical performance for the original meaning of the classical quotes.[127] In short, the tale stages the kind of hermeneutic performance described by Copeland that

> extends or transfers rhetorical control to readers by locating the real power of ethical inquiry in the act of interpretation or reading and by offering his own exegetical performance as a kind of program for his reader (183).

Melibee presents the reader with two competing hermeneutical approaches, by staging a debate between Melibee's reading, which seems to be a transparent and utterly justifiable response to an attack on his family and Prudence's sophisticated attempt to secure communal peace through reconciliation. Both characters though deeply involved in the narrative events also, through their responses to the crime, figuratively act as readers of those events.[128] The tale encourages this reading by reducing the central action, the attack on Melibee's family into two short paragraphs and then providing an extensive debate through which these events are interpreted, including a kind of *mise en abyme*, in which Prudence applies a tropological exegesis of the crime that attempts to rewrite the meaning

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[126] Copeland is interested in how translation uses rhetoric to "transfer academic institutional power" or to "assert the priority of vernacularity itself" 179-180.

[127] For example she skillfully revises Solomon's misogynist attitude (VII.1076-79) toward women in such a way that the passage seems to hold no real meaning at all—except that Solomon did not know the right women.

[128] Stephen Yeager, along similar lines, argues that *Melibee* addresses reading and hermeneutical practices particularly "the relationship between the literary mode of moralizing allegory and contingent reading practices" (308-09). I am suggesting that *Melibee* justifies "contingent reading practices" rather than moral absolutes that threaten the peace.

of the events from within. The majority of the tale is an exegesis of the truncated narrative action.[129]

The investigation of Chaucerian prudence must begin with two of the most significant changes that Chaucer made to Renaud's text: first Chaucer increases the allegorical potential of the text by naming Melibee's daughter Sophie, a name which in the Greek (σοφια) means wisdom; and second, although Prudence promises to restore Melibee's daughter, this restoration (unlike his source texts) is conspicuously absent. In short, Melibee's 'Wisdom' is mortally wounded (VII.971-72) and Prudence never actually restores her/it. The mortal wounding of Wisdom, and her conspicuous absence even at the end of the tale allows Chaucer to stage a hermeneutic performance that creates civic language of prudence tied to the actual conditions of power rather than Aristotelian-Thomistic wisdom that transcends the particular.[130] The reader must make due with Prudence's knowledge in lieu of Wisdom's (i.e. Sophia). The shift in paradigm is made more conspicuous because Chaucer names her immediately. As Kathleen Kennedy notes this mimics the legal form. The combination of the allegorical absence, this legal motif suggests an important paradigm shift (Kennedy 168).

Before we discuss the particular rhetorical strategies that Prudence uses to convince Melibee, we must first understand the source of her authority within the larger context of prudence/wisdom relationship in both classical and Christian tradition. Since

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[129] There are several narrative events such as the gathering on manorial court, Prudence's intercession with the enemies, and the eventual reconciliation scene. However, the narrative action of these scenes is buried beneath a dialogue that does not advance the narrative action but deepens the ethical and political reasoning.

[130] Aristotle contrasts wisdom and "Political Science, or Prudence" in *Nicomachean Ethics* arguing that wisdom is "a knowledge of the most exalted objects" and prudence deals with one's "own particular welfare" (NE VI.vii.3). For full discussion of the distinction, see VI.vi in its entirety. For Aquinas's discussion of wisdom as the ability grasp the fundamental truths rather than particularities, see *ST* IIa.IIae. 45.1 and *ST* Iia.Iiae.47.4, respectively.

an exhaustive study of prudence exceeds the scope of this work, I will limit my discussion primarily to three "well-known" sources that provide some context for the wisdom/ prudence distinction—Aristotle, Cicero and Aquinas. The addition and notable absence of "Sophie" invokes classical descriptions of prudence, most notably Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *De Officiis,* that set about defining prudence *in contrast to* wisdom, in contrast to Sophia (i.e. σοφια). Chaucer develops Prudence in the absence of Wisdom allowing him to focus on the practical nature of Prudence.

Wisdom and prudence, for Aristotle, focus on different ends—universal principles (speculative thinking) and actions (practical thinking), respectively (*NE*.VI.ii.3). After describing wisdom as "both Scientific Knowledge and Intuitive Intelligence as regards the things of the most exalted nature" (*NE*.VI.vii.5), Aristotle emphasizes the difference between wisdom and prudence:

> it is absurd to think that Political Science or Prudence is the loftiest kind of knowledge [Wisdom] inasmuch as man is not the highest thing in the world . . . those called prudent "can discern its own particular welfare; hence even some of the lower animals are said to be prudent. (*NE*.VI.vii.3)

That is, wisdom, which discerns first principles through intuitive intelligence and expands on these principles through deductive and inductive reasoning of scientific knowlege, studies those principles that "cannot vary," the "exalted object" that "exists of necessity" (*NE*.VI.iii2). The object of prudence and political science, which Aristotle closely associates with prudence, is one's "particular welfare." Prudence guides ones response to contingent event, the ultimate particular thing, which cannot be apprehended by scientific knowledge (*NE* VI. viii.9):

> "Prudence, on the other hand is concerned with the affairs of men [rather than exalted], and with things that can be the object of deliberation [rather than intuitive first principles]. For we say that to deliberate well is the most

characteristic function of the prudent man but no one deliberates about things that cannot vary nor yet about variable things that are not a means to some end, and that end a good attainable by action; and a good deliberator in general is a man who can arrive by calculation at the best of the good attainable by man. (*NE*.VI.vii.6)

Since prudence considers only those matters that "*can be* the object of deliberation," and since that "no one deliberates about things that cannot vary nor yet about variable things that are not a means to some end," Aristotle limits the object of deliberation to matters of contingency. One relies on prudence, then, to weigh the practical options in order to secure "the best of the goods attainable by man." Where wisdom might seek the universal justifications of sovereignty, prudence—ever responsive to the realities of power—seeks the best model of sovereignty "attainable by man." By emphasizing the cosmological justifications of power, majestic rhetoric tends to occlude the practical application of prudence. As Harriss has argued, the cosmic framework stood in the way of developing a significant Aristotelian model of political science. The absence of Wisdom sidelines (without demoting) universal justifications and allows the tale to focus on the prudential applications central to the development of political perspective in Ricardian narrative.

With Aristotle in mind, if not in front of him, Cicero makes a similar, though more compact distinction between "what the Greeks called σοφια and φρονησισ." Cicero, who was intent on making philosophy the servant of the state, conflates the two terms by asserting (rather spuriously) that *wisdom* is *primarily* concerned with "the relations of man to man" and "safeguarding of human interests" (Cicero, *De Off*.

I.XLIII.153).[131] In practical terms, Cicero elevates phronesis (prudence) to a form of practical wisdom equal to (if not above) Aristotelian σοφια. The importance of Cicero's analysis for the later Middle Ages is that it provided an authoritative source that aligns one of the cardinal virtues (indeed the primary cardinal virtue according to Aquinas) squarely with human interests. Cicero's *summum bonum* is the health of the polity. The exegetical performance of Prudence carefully opposes the kind of majestic rhetoric adopted by both Richard and the Appellants and instead develops a prudential rhetoric aligned with thirteenth-century political constitutionalism—a rhetoric that, as J.D. Burnley demonstrates at length, had taken root in the imaginative literature of the Ricardian period. Gower's handling of Practique in Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis*, the concept of prudence in the Ricardian period expanded beyond simple opposition to "ire" and "folhaste" and began to encompass a whole system of political science containing fields as diverse as ethics, law, government, economics and commerce.[132] In the tale, Prudence displaces Melibee's majestic view of the universe "by offering [her] own exegetical performance" of classical prudence focused on a practical view of the common profit. Because of his focus on the "relations of man with man," Cicero's 'new man' republican rhetoric fit remarkably well with the political constitutionalism of the

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[131] As his translator, William Morris, points out, Cicero, at this point in his argument, introduces a "curious fallacy" by introducing a fourth premise to his argument concerning wisdom that "the 'bonds of union between gods and men and the relations of man to man' are derived from wisdom. This allows Cicero to "sidetrack wisdom" and make it reliant upon social instinct (Morris 156-57n.a). David Aers suggests that the use of Cicero actually "de-Christianized" *Melibee* (76). I would suggest that what David Aers calls a "de-Christianized" discourse is merely the rejection of the cosmic framework that does not take the peace of the community of into account—Prudence introduces a new Christian political paradigm.

[132] Burnley 50-55 discusses the development of a rhetoric of prudentia in the fourteenth century. "Prudence" as Burnley explains "is the faculty of assessing and understanding all the circumstances and consequences of any projected action, both deciding on its desirability and planning its execution" (51). Burnley argues that Gower's "practique" that encompasses "Etique, Iconomique, and Policie" shows a development of prudence that becomes more explicit in the schema of Reginald Pecock's work 50 years later in which ethics

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by providing the discursive space in which political science—crucial to political constitutionalism—became meaningful.

Nonetheless, Chaucer must situate his classical models of prudence within a larger "sacramentally organized universe," a universe organized around the wisdom of revealed truth (Aers 75-7).[133] While Christian thinkers had clearly absorbed the classical distinction between prudence and wisdom, they tended to focus on ethical questions that deemphasized political conditions of power. Aquinas provides an explicitly theological account of prudence and wisdom by arguing that when it comes to human affairs the prudent man is called wise, inasmuch as he directs his acts to a fitting end:

> Wisdom is prudence to a man (Prov.10: 23). Therefore he who considers absolutely the highest cause of the whole universe, namely God, is most of all called wise. Hence wisdom is said to be the knowledge of divine things, as Augustine says (*De Trin.* xii, 14)."(*ST* I. Q1.A6)

By saying the prudent man "is called wised," Aquinas recognizes both the similarity and difference between wisdom and prudence. He maintains the classical model of prudence insofar as it operates as the hinge between universal principle and particular situation that enables an agent to "grasp what is pertinent and to assess what ought to be done in complex circumstances" (Hibbs 98); however, for Aquinas, wisdom is synonymous with revealed truths of scripture. That is, prudence "looks" like wisdom to philosophers such as Cicero who did not have access to the divine knowledge of things. As a result, prudence can only be perfect insofar as it aligns with universal principle of revealed wisdom. Aers points to St. Thomas Aquinas's careful distinction between *prudentia spiritus* and *prudentia carnis*, reminding us that "prudence" can be used to evil ends—as in Aquinas's example of the "patient robber." By cordoning off Sophia and creating in

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[133] See also Patricia 127-8, for a discussion of Prudence's "secular pragmatism."

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Melibee a reader as obstinate as the Pharaoh of Exodus, the *Tale of Melibee* comes up with a way of talking about political prudence without either dissolving it into, or completely severing it from, a Christian model of revealed wisdom. Chaucer does not elevate political rhetoric above spiritual idealism, but rather develops a prudential rhetoric precisely because of the intransigence of Melibee. Prudence's more secular instruction depends upon what Aquinas would call "imperfect prudence" rather than the vitiated form—*prudentia carnis*.

Much of the scholarship concerning the *Tale of Melibee* asks: what kind of prudence does Prudence espouse? By adjusting their emphasis between classical and Christian handlings of the cardinal virtue, critics have argued that the tale is a spiritual allegory, a Ciceronian *Fürstenspiegel* aimed at the common profit, or a text mired in the "empirical calculations" of singular advantage. Because of Melibee's obstinate reading practice, Prudence frequently oscillates between these modes of persuasion. I will demonstrate how Prudence's instruction establishes a unified political rhetoric in which these three persuasive approaches overlap at the same moment that they disintegrate due to Melibee's bad reading practice. The *Melibee* views the same "ultimate end" diffracted as though through a kaleidoscope. I begin with an analysis of the spiritual foundation of Prudence's argument and then show how she defends reconciliation in terms of Melibee's singular advantage and common profit. It is critical to remember that Prudence's arguments (unlike those we might expect Sophia to make) never achieve a kind of dialectical synthesis into a "single auctoritee" (Kempton 168). Thus, while I arrange the argument tentatively into a discussion of the spiritual, singular and the common profit (in

that order), I have tried equally hard to show that these persuasive modes can never be neatly separated.

The tension between *prudentia spiritus* and a pragmatic *prudentia carnis* has become a crux (and source of some critical play) to the tale.[134] For example, Aers argues that Prudence deliberately "sidelines anything distinctly Christian, choosing a thoroughly secular pragmatism in which "Tullius" and "Salomon" provide the key guidelines" (Aers 76). I would argue that it is not Prudence that "sidelines" Christian models of the virtue, but the tale itself in which Melibee's explicit rejection of Prudence's Christian reasoning forces her to make her case in more pragmatic terms. This allows Chaucer to both elevate the Christian model of prudence while displacing its language of moral absolutes with a political rhetoric. Prudence's Christian argument occurs in one of the more peculiar moments in her discourse in which she briefly abandons her *florilegium*-style to deliver an allegorical sermon:

> Thy name is Melibee; this is to seyn, 'a man that drynketh hony.'/ Thou hast ydronke so muchel hony of sweete temporeel richesses, and delices and honours of this world/ that thou art dronken and hast forgeten Jhesu Crist thy creatour
> . . . .
> Thou hast doon synne agayn oure Lord Crist,/ for certes, the three enemys of mankynde—that is to seyn, the flesh, the feend, and the world—/thou hast suffred hem entre in to thyn herte wilfully by the wyndowes of thy body,/and hast nat defended thyself suffisantly agayns hire assautes and hire temptaciouns, so that they han wounded thy soule in fyve places/
> . . . .
> And in the same manere oure Lord Crist hath woold and suffred that thy three enemys been entred into thyn house by the wyndowes/ and han ywounded thy doghter in the forseyde manere. (VII.1410-3; 1418-21; 1425-6)

Prudence's allegory should be understood as a sermon aimed at both explaining God's justice and shaping Melibee's future conduct. Using a strategy common in sermons,

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[134] Lee Patterson argues that the *Tale of Melibee* becomes "mired in a world of relentlessly prudential imperatives"(*Temporal* 119); see also Aers "Whose Counsel."

Prudence interprets the crime at the beginning of the story tropologically—so that the

narrative can be read as a series of spiritual metaphors.   She explains that Christ allowed

Melibee's "three enemys" into his house "in the same manere" that Melibee's allowed

Flesh, Fiend and the World into his soul. This suggests that, instead of seeking

vengeance, Melibee should protect his spiritual home against spiritual enemies—a

spiritual discourse that runs deep within the Christian tradition. Aers's suggestion, then,

that *Prudence "*sidelines anything distinctly Christian" (76) ignores how her sermon

shows how Melibee's suffering was "ful of [God's] justice" (1407).

Prudence's spiritual rhetoric aims at changing Melibee's hermeneutic strategy.

Her sermon reinterprets the opening paragraphs and, by transforming Melibee from

victim into perpetrator, deflects the potential of vendetta caused by wounded honor.

Since Melibee had "suffred" the three enemies to enter into his "herte" and not protected

himself against their "assautes" and "temptaciouns," his house was attacked. Prudence

aptly shows that Melibee's desire for private war arises from his failure to fight against

the traditional enemies of Christian life—the real threat of war is upstaged by the

conventional allegory of the soul's war found throughout Christian literature. The

comparison thus establishes the traditional *Fürstenspiegel* hinge between ethical behavior

and the temporal world. Melibee's spiritual failings turn into social violence. By making

Melibee the primary cause, the tropological interpretation turns a narrative of revenge

into one based on a self-improvement and Prudence's rhetorical performance attempts to

dislodge the inflexible honor-hermeneutics that drives Melibee to violence. Nonetheless

we should not confuse Prudence's spiritual argument with the argument of revealed

Wisdom, precisely because she makes clear that the entire sermon is based on "presumpciouns and conjectynges" (1407).

Dame Prudence's sermon provides, for an instant, a sacred view of the events of the *Tale of Melibee*; however, Lord Melibee refuses to accept her world-view. Aers only briefly alludes to this sermon, choosing instead to focus on Melibee's intransigent reaction:

> at first [Melibee] seems persuaded by Prudence's counsels about the 'perils and the yveles that myghten falle' (VII.1427-32) if he pursues revenge, but he argues that in general violence is legitimate and necessary. ("Whose Virtues" 76)[135]

For Aers, Melibee's intransigence signals *Prudence's* failure. However this reading ignores the fact that Prudence and the tale are also the reader's instructor and what Melibee's response really shows is that he is a bad reader. Melibee has completely misunderstood her moral sentence; Prudence's sermon does not explain the "perils" of revenge, but rather argues that Melibee's sin is the primary cause of the crime.

Melibee's failed reading is what we might call a "teachable moment" for the reader, as it illustrates the danger of readings that "enclined to [our] owene desir" (1282). His intransigent hermeneutic of majesty is dangerously bound up with ideas of honor and shame—ideas that play similar role in both the *Knight's* and *Clerk's Tale*.[136] The simple division of the world into good and evil at the center of majestic romance reproduces a system where private war frays the bonds of the *communitas regni*. Unlike Prudence, Melibee reads events of his story in light of this rigid hermeneutic code and thus can only

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[135] Aers does not make clear distinctions between Prudence, Melibee and the voice of the text as a whole.

[136] In the *Knight's Tale*, Theseus almost allows his anger to govern him when he chances upon Palamon and Arcite's unlawful duel in the grove. Ire, often seen as the antithesis of prudence, threatens to "enslave" Theseus, to reduce his will to that of a "leon." Similarly, in the *Clerk's Tale*, Walter, afraid that he is conceding power through marriage, makes all these 'merveillous' demands upon his wife. However, instead of proving the Marquis's freedom these demands only demonstrate that he is "ybounden to the stake."

understand good and evil through violence and this mode of interpretation leads to his failure to understand her instruction. After listening to Prudence's sermon, Melibee reasserts his own interpretive lens: "by the vengeance-takynge been the wikked men dissevered fro the goode men" and the wicked restrain themselves "whan they seen the punissynge and chastisynge of the trespassours" (VII.1431-2). His rigid world "dissevers" good and evil without taking into account the social conditions of evil itself—social conditions that would imply his own culpability. This hermeneutic reinforces the personal shame involved in being a victim leading him to argue that Fortune "shal helpe me my shame for to venge" (VII.1446). The failure to punish the wicked (i.e. a failure to extract revenge) will redound on his own honor, allow his enemies to continue to abuse him and lead to the disintegration of the cosmological division between good and evil in the world.

Melibee's response to the Prudence's spiritual allegory anticipates what Lee Patterson has called the "devastating moment" (118). The "devastating moment" is the moment at the end of the tale, when Melibee, after all of Prudence's conciliatory rhetoric, decides upon a merciless punishment: "I thynke and purpose me fully/ to desherite hem of al that evere they han and for to putte hem in exil for evere" (1834-35). This "aporetic moment" at the end of the tale, according to Patterson, "subverts the pedagogical program that the *Melibee* simultaneously espouses and enacts" and makes brutally apparent that "Prudence's teaching has been largely useless" (Patterson 118). While the "aporetic moment" subverts the "pedagogical program" between Melibee and Prudence, the real pedagogical program has always been between Prudence and the reader: Melibee is in fact a pedagogical prop that allows Prudence to provide alternative modes of

persuasion aimed at political reconciliation—alternative modes of persuasion which align (are coordinate) with a Christian paradigm of prudence.

Melibee's role as intransigent interpreter (or bad reader) allows the text to become a vehicle to explore a more secular model of prudence responsive to the actual power structure of the state: it integrates political science and narrative in ways that the cosmic framework tends to thwart. When she recognizes that her instruction cannot bring about Melibee's spiritual salvation because he cannot grasp the spiritual concept of *caritas*, then she yields to the possibility that "over-muchel suffraunce is nat good" (VII. 1466), and pivots to a more brutal political pragmatism:

> "lat us now putte that ye have leve to venge yow./ I seye ye been nat of myght and power as now to venge yow,/for if ye wole maken comparisoun unto the myght of youre adversaries, ye shul fynde in manye thynges that I have shewed yow er this that hire condicion is bettre than youres./ And therfore seye I that it is good as now that ye suffre and be pacient" (VII.1477-80).

Crucially, Prudence never concedes that Melibee has the *right* to "venge." She will only suppose or "putte" that he has "leve" in order to engage Melibee on his own terms and develop a practical argument that demonstrates that even if he possesses this hypothetical authority, he lacks the "myght and power" to execute it.[137] Having hypothetically accepted his right to vengeance, she reminds him of "thynges that I have shewed yow er this:" namely that his "enemys been thre, and they han manie children, brethren, cosyns and oother ny kynrede" (VII.1372). In short, Melibee cannot win. Prudence pivots from the spiritual argument to the Aristotelian focus on seeking what is "attainable" (NE VI.vi). Instead of a moral allegory focused on Melibee's desire for "sweete temporeel

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[137] As Prudence noted earlier, Melibee might be "riche" but he "han no child but a doghter,/ ne . . . brethren, ne cosyns germayns, ne noon other neigh kyndrede" (VII.1365-67). After his rejection of her spiritual advice, Prudence, invoking Solomon, reminds Melibee of this power differential arguing that it is "a woodnesse a man to stryve with a strenger or a moore myghty man than he is hymself" (VII.1480).

richesses, and delices, and honours of this world" (VII.1410) she *must* argue that he does not have the manpower to achieve his ends, that one should not trust fortune, that he lacks jurisdiction, that his wealth will not avail him, that war is too unpredictable to justify. That said, even as she pivots towards a more practical argument, she frequently reminds Melibee (and the reader) that the practical is embedded in a spiritual Wisdom (cf. VII.1495).

By addressing Melibee's singular advantage in practical terms, Prudence's rhetoric embraces the aspirations and anxieties of the broader political community: it addresses not only lords and kings but also merchants, guildmasters, and London oligarchs that have the economic capital for political power without the air of nobility. The clearest example of this comes in Prudence's discussion of "gaderynge of richesses" (VII.1575) that has often been read as a strange "digression" (Howard 313). What makes this discussion *seem* like a "digression" is that it appears to depart from Prudence's "ultimate end" (i.e. the reconciliation of Melibee with his enemies). However, this assumes a narrow view of the stakes: Prudence may have been a victim of Melibee's enemies, but she does not want to be a victim of his vengeance.

This peculiar turn allows Prudence to create a Ciceronian hermeneutic in which the desire for singular advantage turns into civic rhetoric. She thus concedes that "richesses been goode to hem that han wel ygeten hem and wel konne usen hem" (VII.1553). Indeed, Prudence repeatedly stresses the importance of *using* riches well (VII.1553, 1575). The proper use of wealth, in Prudence's terms seems to be anything that builds one's political authority: through wealth a woman may choose a husband "of a thousand men" and that a rich man "shalt fynde a greet nombre of felawes and freendes"

(VII.1558). Chaucer carefully steers away from a Franciscan demonization of wealth—

indeed some have even argued that Chaucer anticipates the Protestant work ethic.[138]

Wealth properly used strengthens one's social network. Indeed, at this moment, when

Prudence's rhetoric seems most mired in "empirical calculations," it also fits nicely

within Christian *Fürstenspiegel* virtue of largesse.[139] In fact, like *Fürstenspiegel*

handlings of largesse, Prudence discusses the importance of not appearing *chynche*.

However, Prudence approaches "largesse" primarily as a means of securing Melibee's

singular advantage—largesse becomes part of a resistance rhetoric, a means of fighting

back.

However, Melibee's security in his own wealth threatens to culminate in social

violence. And although he may be "riche and myghty," Prudence points out that "the

dedes of batailles been aventurouse and nothyng certeyne" (VII.1668) as the "litel

compaignye" (VII.1660) of Maccabees were able to overcome "gretter nombre"

(VII.1658). The social violence threatened by Melibee endangers base of his political

power. The crucial point to Prudence's discussion is the danger of increasing one's

"owene profit to the harm of another man" (VII.1586). All of Prudence's arguments,

whether against idleness, "chynchness," or over-expenditure, focus on how to gain wealth

to increase one's own "name" without harming others: "For Seint Jame seith . . . by

concord and pees the smale richesses wexen grete,/ and by debaat and discord the grete

richesses fallen doun" (VII.1676-77). The translation of this passage, actually authored

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[138] For example,Sadlek argues that Dame Prudence describes "how riches can be gained and used. In this section labor is strongly linked to production and reward and not as in the person still present it simply is an antidote idleness" (212).

[139] For example: "he that yevith his good in tyme of nede to suche as haue nede thereto, and principally to suche as haue deservid it, suche a kyng is large to him silf and to his sugetis bothe, and his rewme shalle stonde in gret prosperite" (*Secreta* 7-8).

by Seneca, usurps the meaning of the passage by changing the phrase "great things" into "richesses." This usurpation, whether intentional or not, reveals the mechanism through which the *Melibee* blends the singular and common good.   Indeed, the spiritual attribution may even suggest that we should take the word "richesses" to mean something more like the sacred penny given to the workers of the vineyard (Matt.20). As this mistranslation shows, it is crucial to recognize that Prudence's spiritual and pragmatic rhetoric share a common secular end: namely the reconciliation between Melibee and his enemies that will bring about an end to the violence that threatens communal bonds. Melibee must learn to interpret his singular advantage in terms of those "greater things," namely the common profit. Thus, the *Melibee* offers a proto-Hobbesian view that "all actions are to be esteemed good or evil by their causes and usefulness in reference to the commonwealth" (Hobbes 58). The singular must be read "in reference to the commonwealth."

In *Chaucerian Polity*, David Wallace reduces this kind of argumentation to a purely practical handbook for subjects to deal with magnate violence in which her arguments remain entirely utilitarian—a "diverse" collection of rhetorical tactics aimed at dealing with a violent lord. This focuses on Prudence's arguments rather than her perspective (i.e. the "exegetical performance" offered as a "kind of [interpretive] program" for the reader). Prudence attempts to teach Melibee "to read" the crime within a political context in order to dissuade him from "vengeance-takynge." For the reader, the initial crime becomes a forum for competing reading practices of Melibee and Prudence. The *Melibee* develops the readers' relationship with the political community, a relationship embedded in the reading process itself. By training the reader to view

textuality and narrative events as they concern the both singular advantage and the polity, the *Melibee* displaces the transcendent perspective of Sophia and develops a unified civic consciousness—a socio-political way of reading events, in which prudential interpretation is not the search for an absolute truth statement but rather a constitutive social practice aimed at strengthening the political bonds of community.

Thus far, I have suggested that Prudence turned sharply from a spiritual to a pragmatic argument in an effort to stop private war. The pivot, more importantly, was a prudential response to Melibee's failure to interpret properly. However, her "secular pragmatism" is not pure power politics; it is a politics shaped by a Ciceronian hermeneutic in which expediency and the *summum bonum* of the *communitas regni* turn out to be the same thing.[140] Perhaps the clearest example of this social reading practice is Prudence's examination of the advice given Melibee's "greet congregacion" (VII.1004). At this point, departing from the *florilegium*-model where the wisdom of the citation *seemingly* stands on its own, Prudence's instruction assumes the shape of scholastic *magister-discipulus* debate in which a teacher, by carefully correcting a student's faulty reading, arrives at the right meaning of the text. In the *Melibee* this scholastic exercise is embedded within social practice. The manorial counsel is the text and similar to the practical syllogism, the *meaning* of the text is replaced with a "reasonable" *course of action* addressing the particulars of a volatile political situation.

The physicians' advice ironically poses the biggest risk to the health of the polity. After the surgeons deliver a high-minded argument that:

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[140] Ad Putter argues that medieval scholars like William of Conches suggest the ethical ideal of "honestas" ultimately blends into the political expedience (153-55). The idea that ethical had practical effects (i.e. political effects) can also be found in the Decretals which Chaucer cited: "by cause that the Book of Decrees seith, 'Seelden, or with greet peyne, been causes ybrought to good ende whanne they been baddely bigonne" (VII.1404)

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"Whan twey men han everich wounded oother, oon same surgien heeleth hem bothe;/ wherefore unto our arte it is nat pertinent to norice werre" (VII.1013-1014),

Chaucer tells us that the physicians answered:

"in the *same* wise . . . *save* that they seyden a fewe wordes moore:/that right as maladies be cured be hir contraries, right so shul men warrishe werre be vengeaunce" (VII.1016-17)

Alongside the addition of the medical doctrine of contraries, the physicians also provide a social interpretation of this doctrine "right so shul men warrishe werre be vengeaunce" in order to make clear how they apply this medical proverb to questions of justice and vengeance. Chaucer humorously draws a comparison between two healing professions by suggesting that the physicians answered in "in the same wise" as the surgeons with just a few words more, when, in fact those "few words" turn the their advice into the opposite of the surgeons.[141] Before we get to Prudence's advice, Chaucer points to the role interpretation plays in the maintenance and disruption of the social fabric.

The *Tale of Melibee* draws a critical distinction between social and anti-social modes of interpretation—Prudence and Melibee respectively. Prudence must establish a critical vantage point that allows Melibee a perspective outside of the rigid interpretive limits of his "cruel ire" (VII.1509). Melibee, like Walter, does not interpret signs, but rather the signs control him. Prudence, on the other hand, when analyzing the advice of his counselors, lauds the surgeons' advice that "aperteneth to doon to every wight honour and profit, and no wight for to anoye" (VII.1269). The surgeons' advice situates abstract questions of vengeance and justice in the pragmatic realm of their actual wounds caused to those people through the effects of war. Their advice mirrors Prudence's hermeneutic

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[141] For an alternative reading, see Ferster who suggests this humorous turn highlights Prudence's own wresting of the quotation, 95-6.

program of maintaining political unity—a program in which "meaning" depends upon its effects on the "profit" of "every wight." Through Prudence, interpretation becomes a social activity. In fact, Prudence explicitly connects the political forum and exegetical practices when she refers to the physicians' advice as a *text*: "touchynge the proposicioun" (VII.1276) of the physicians "that in maladies that oon contrarie is warisshed by another contrarie—/I wolde fayn knowe hou ye understonde thilke *text*"(1277-78). By transforming the "greet congregacion" into a text that can be glossed, Prudence quite literally turns the civic space into a readerly space.[142]

Unlike Prudence, who reinforces the surgeons' advice to "do no damage," Melibee's interpretive strategies are antisocial, as they never take into account those lives that will be lost. In the *Knight's Tale*, we have already seen how ire threatens to separate the king from the community by reducing his decision-making abilities to his animalistic will (a will more worthy of a "leon" than a prince) (I.1775). When Prudence asks Melibee to interpret the physicians' proverb, Melibee paraphrases their interpretation saying that "right as they han doon me a contrarie, right so sholde I doon hem another" (VII.1280). The medical meaning of this line suggests that an ailment should be cured by its opposite—such as using fire to reduce chills. However, Melibee, like the physicians themselves, ignoring the medical context, misreads the word "contrarie" as a "hostile act." Thus, Melibee reads violence into the discourse of healing—one hostile act must be paid by another. Prudence rejects Melibee's violent misprision turning it into an accusation of his own perverse inclinations: "Lo, lo . . . how lightly is every man enclined

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[142] Prudence treating the physicians' declaration as a text that can be appropriated to her own ends explains the "real" meaning of physicians' argument (Walling 166-67). Similarly, Prudence's allegorical reading of the crime committed against Melibee allows her to transform violence against Melibee into Melibee's moral failing.

to his owene desir and to his owene pleasaunce" (VII.1283).   Indeed, Prudence's claim

that Melibee's reading is shaped by his desire makes even more sense when we

remember that the physicians' advice, itself, was shaped by the "cruel ire" apparent in

Melibee's own "manere of speche" (VII.1009). Melibee's countenance evokes the

physicians misreading of their own discourse, and thus his "ire" creates a closed

hermeneutic circuit around his "owene desir."

Melibee's interpretive model depends upon misreading of a medical quote—a

misreading that turns healing into injury—and this misreading leads to social violence.

Prudence arguing that he has misread the physicians' proverb explains that:

> wikkednesse is nat contrarie to wikkednesse, ne vengeance to vengeaunce . . . but
> they been semblable./ And therefore o vengeaunce is nat warissed by another
> vengeaunce. . . But certes, the wordes of the phisiciens sholde been understonden
> in this wise . . . certes wikkednesse shal be warrisshed by goodnese, discord by
> accord, werre by pees, and so forth of othere thynges (VII.1284-86).

Amanda Walling argues that Prudence's reading (which she claims is counter-intuitive)

reveals the instability of meaning in the glossatorial tradition "in which the tools of

interpretation at times threaten to overwhelm the authorities they purport to serve" (167).

While Prudence "overwhelm[s]" the physicians interpretation and replaces their sentence

with her own, her hermeneutic program is not unstable. Prudence interprets the

physicians' words—like she does with all her biblical and classical citations—in order to

create "accord," "pees," and "goodnesse"—in short to strengthen the community.

Prudence (offering a "contrarie" to the physicians own violent wresting of the citation)

returns the quotation to it proper medical context, and in doing so shifts the physicians'

violent advice back into surgeons' healing rhetoric and, in terms of the community,

Prudence's rhetoric heals the wounded body politic turning "discord" into "accord."

Because of Melibee's bad reading practices, Prudence addresses the threat of

private war from many angles by showing that it is legally unjustifiable, socially

destructive and individually unachievable. This multi-layered approach has led to the

critique of Prudence as a pasta-chef courtier throwing everything against the wall in order

to see what sticks: her willingness to "say anything" underlies the pejorative accounts of

her "utilitarian" rhetoric as "mired in prudential saying" or nothing but a collection of

"empirical calculations" (Patterson 118) Daniel Kempton suggests Prudence's "say

anything" approach leads to a kind of logical incoherence:

> Contrary to our expectations, the diverse voices of "auctors" are not brought into
> accord among themselves, or into harmony with the single voice of "auctoritee,"
> through exegesis on the part of Prudence . . . there is no synthesis of doctrine
> through the operations of dialectic. (Kempton 268)

Admittedly, as her pivot from spiritual to the brutally pragmatic reveals, Prudence's

rhetoric (aimed at convincing a particular person) does not dialectically resolve all the

"diverse voices of [her] auctors" into a universal principle or a "single auctoritee."

However, she does synthesize each of her "diverse voices" in one "ultimate particular

end" namely the reconciliation of Melibee with his enemies. The logical incoherence of

Prudence's "diverse voices" resides in Melibee, the bad reader, who does not detect that

the "voices" of salvation, common profit and even individual desire are, in fact fully

integrated. The conspicuous absence of Melibee's Sophia (σοφια) leads to the dis-

integration of these "auctoritees."

The lack of a "single voice of auctoritee" is not a flaw in Prudence, nor does it

show her lack of a "sacramental view of the universe" (Aers 76). Instead, the dis-

integration of "auctoritee" is precisely the point of the tale for two important reasons.

First, as Prudence herself acknowledges, any "conseil that is affermed so strongly that it

may nat be chaunged for no condicioun that may bityde . . . is wikked" (VII.1231).

Prudence thus associates Melibee's rigid interpretive strategies with social violence. It is

precisely this hermeneutical inflexibility that makes Patterson's "devastating moment"

(118) not so much a single instance of misprision but a structural principle of the tale as a

whole. Second, the absence of Sophia (i.e. a dialectically determined universal principle)

allows *Melibee* to be a vehicle for exploring a crisis of sovereignty from political angles

and thus take into account all of the aspects of power within the Ricardian polity. Thus,

having divorced the *Melibee* from the potential spiritual resolution, Chaucer can safely

turn back to a study of Cicero's practical wisdom aimed at maintaining the bonds of

community. Like Gower's development of prudential rhetoric in Book VII of the

Confessio Amantis, Chaucer's prudence opens up for narrative examination the actual

conditions of power. The "pleasure of reading" and "the pleasure of being edified"

resolve into the kaleidoscope that is the *Melibee*. Ultimately, Chaucer's narrative

embodies and molds the emergent political perspective crucial to Ricardian poetics.

Chaucer and the Political Aesthetic

Popularizing the critical idea of "Ricardian poetry" in a book of the same title,

J.A. Burrow suggests that something new was happening in English poetry toward the

end of the fourteenth century. For Burrow, Ricardian poetry had a "robustness" and

"gusto" (52) that, in the fourteenth century, was unique to England:

> The Ricardian poets were able to produce authentic narrative poetry in an age no
> longer favourable to it. Unlike predecessors such as the author of *Kynge
> Alisaunder*, they had the knack of selecting bits of the mass of old approved
> storyes just those episodes they could convincingly turn to their own literary
> purposes. (57)

What I have argued is this "knack" is not just chance skill, but part of the cultural milieu. As I demonstrated inthe nobility were aware of (and enamored by) the majestic ideas of kingship and lordship on the continent, but these ideas were impractical in England, which was accustomed to an increasingly political kingship embodied in Magna Carta, the Provisions of Oxford, and the Barons' Gravamina in the Mise d'Amiens.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer finds "episodes" that fit, or could be made to fit into a political description of the sovereignty. Anne Middleton has likewise argued that the literary transformation captured in Burrow's "Ricardian poetry" reflects a stylistic turn toward the "ideal of communal responsibility" (96). In this chapter, I have shown focused on how political rhetoric embedded in the literary project—as "public poetry" or the poetics of disenchantment—is rooted in and structurally entangled with majestic rhetoric. The "authenticity" of Ricardian narrative derives from a "literary purpose" shaped by *the act of creating* a perspective capable of speaking to/for a political community which "for all intents and purposes formed under Henry III" (Dunbabin 482), a perspective that found new validity under the senility of Edward III and the minority of Richard II.

Discussions of Chaucer's political thought are complicated due to the absence of nearly any explicit topical references, a complication compounded by the shifting political attitudes of his narrators within the *Canterbury Tales*. His political statements must then be drawn out tales, which are themselves "old approved storyes" that would hardly have been considered revolutionary. Moreover, his handling of these conventional stories has none of the political allegory that we see in works like *Absalom and Achitophel*, or even the limited degree of political allusion in the *Faerie Queene*. As a

result, some critics like Judith Ferster look for political commentary "camouflaged" by the profound "dullness" of the well-worn maxims of the *Fürstenspiegel*-tradition, while other suggest that Chaucer is deliberately cagey. [143] This complication, though often overstated, is not irrelevant. Although there was considerable political violence in Ricardian England, although Chaucer was a member of parliament and a justice of the peace, and although he had close ties with Ricardian and Lancastrian factions, his poetry is vague when describing policy or machinations of governance; indeed, at first glance, Chaucer's poetry does, as Ferster suggest, seem to fit the political sensibility of the *Fürstenspiegel*-genre that treated governance simply as a matter of ethical self-regulation: an ethical king created peace and stability in the realm and conversely political crises were caused by moral failure. [144] A literary idea where narrative outcomes depend upon moral actions divorced from circumstance is neatly captured in the fifteenth-century *The Life of St. George*:

> so ought your lyfe/ be clennest from offence,
> and shyne in vertue/ above youre subiectes all.
> A vycyous prynce/ is as a plage mortall
> And foule example/ to all his comonte. (*St. George* 1305-8)

As such, it is understandable that a historian such as G.L. Harriss would characterize the "literary model of governance" as one in which "there was no awareness of a science of politics, of where power was located, whence it was derived, how it was apportioned, through whom it was channeled" (Harriss 12-13). Since the existence of a "*political community*" takes shape in the thirteenth century, it would be reasonable that we would

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[143] Ferster explicitly asks: "why would these works be s hard to connect to their social and political contexts?" For Ferster, the answer lies in authorial circumspection that buried political commentary beneath conventional wisdom literature. The literary critic (really a historian) must show how these maxims seem to articulate particular political positions.

[144] For a useful summary of the "Literary Model of Governance", see G.L. Harriss pages 6-13.

begin to detect the emergence of this community in the "literary model" of Ricardian poets.

It is because a definitive language of politics did not exist in English, that I have located the *political* more in the historical development of a political perspective than in some "camouflaged" intervention in topical factional politics. What should be clear by now is that insofar as we might imagine political ideas as relating to a particular policy or mechanism of governance, there is very little Chaucer's *oeuvre*—even in the most didactic works like *Melibee*—that allows us to fit him comfortably into a traditional history of political ideas with Giles of Rome or John of Salisbury. Chaucer's poetry does not represent the political content of the Provisions of Oxford or Mise d'Amiens; and the attempts to explain Chaucer's poetry as a response to political events (from the Uprising to the Merciless Parliament) has always led to statements made on ambivalent and selective evidence. The Provisions and the Mise are political responses to the anxieties of sovereignty; Ricardian poetry registers these anxieties through narrative invention. Chaucer's political realism, based on prudential reason, challenged the cosmology of majesty and shaped and was shaped by a nascent 'secular' science that rivals, rather than nests into, the cosmic framework. Chaucer frequently narrates the fraying of those "fundamental cultural conceptions . . . whose axiomatic grip on the men's minds" had repressed the political model of sovereignty (Anderson 40).

Of course, Ricardian poetry continues to make the conventional allusions to the king's divine authority characteristic of majestic rhetoric. However in the *Canterbury Tales*, we see the development of a political perspective that forces us to reevaluate these conventional statements—a perspective far more responsive and dependent upon the

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needs of the *communitas regni*. Although *communitas*-rhetoric was always *notionally* present in the "literary model of governance," it did not significantly contribute to the "science of politics." In Chaucer and Gower, this political rhetoric expanded to meet the needs of a developing administrative ethos and a fledgling political community. The primary feature of this rhetoric was its acknowledgement of and responsiveness to the needs of the community. In short, Ricardian poetry begins to imagine sovereignty more in terms of a social rather than a cosmic order. This social order develops, tensely, alongside royal *superioritas* that thrived on the continent, particularly in the court of Edward the Black in Aquitaine where Richard II and many of his courtiers were groomed (Dunbabin 490).

In this chapter, I have provided a more nuanced account of the "literary model of governance;" a model that demonstrates how Ricardian poetry, beginning to respond to the actual conditions of power, tended to diminish the significance of the cosmic framework. In particular we have seen how Ricardian literature, reacting to new pressures within the discourse of sovereignty expands prudential rhetoric, acknowledges the condition of power, and demystifies the cosmic kingship. What I have been calling the 'political realism' of Chaucer does not depend solely—or even primarily—on the contingent forces of history, but rather the way these forces *begin* to shape narrative of architecture of Chaucer and Gower. The *Knight's Tale*, for example, *begins* to imagine kingship and hierarchy as a resistance to the chaotic forces of history rather than a reflection of a cosmic order; the *Clerk's Tale* cultivates the political perspective of the citizen-subject, qua reader, who can and should critique royal *superioritas*. And, most

obviously, the *Tale of Melibee* fleshes out a prudential rhetoric based on the actual conditions of power.

I have demonstrated that Chaucer's ability to select and turn "bits of the old approved storyes" to his own "literary purpose" was in fact part of a broader rhetorical shift occurring within the discourse of sovereignty. To this end, I have made use of Pierre Macherey's description of literature as a "caricature of ideology." For him, the literary text "imitates everyday language which is the language of ideology" and by "mingling the real uses of language in an endless confrontation, it concludes by revealing their truth." The truth is the "gaps of ideology" (what Bakhtin would characterize as the necessary incompleteness of the monologism of ideology") that give ideology its "contours" and allow you access to it "from within." As Chaucer imagines the political power far more responsive to the broader political community (working within political ideology), he produces a narrative that exposes the gap between cosmology and political realism at the same time (or perhaps because) he tries to bridge this gap.

In an effort to bring the *emerging* function of political rhetoric into relief, let me conclude with a comparison between Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* and Chaucer's *Melibee* between literary production in the twelfth and fourteenth century respectively. Alain, writing for, and as part of, a "very small courtly elite" (Simpson 292) had "unbounded confidence in the young king's [Phillip II's] power, given that he sees the world wholly from the point of view of its ruler" (Simpson 296). Chaucer's aesthetic arises from the ethos of the civil servant of the Crown. The portrayal of prudence—a virtue that became the cornerstone of political rhetoric in the fourteenth century—by the

two authors is illuminating. Alain de Lille describes Phronesis (Greek for Prudence)

"entering God's realm:"

> The brightness dazzled her eyes and the impact of the strange objects benumbed
> her mind. Faced with them her vision failed and her mind within was darkened.
> Thus, drowsiness overcame the alert mind of Phronesis and false sleep weighed it
> down . . . When the queen could not by any means eradicate the harmful stupor
> and restore full powers of mind, she brought with prayers her own sister to come
> to Phronesis's aid, drive out the numbness completely, bring back her power of
> mind and force it to return. This sister, dwelling in the realms of the powers
> above, examines the depths of heaven and, to the exclusion of all else, clings to
> the innermost recesses of God. [145] (Book VI; p. 166)

Chaucer describes Prudence giving advice to a man who not only lacks access to divine

wisdom:

> For al be it so that ye be myghty and riche, certes ye ne been but allone,/ for certes
> ye ne han no child but a doghter,/ ne ye ne han brethren, ne cosyns germayns, no
> noo oother neigh kyndrede,/ wherefore that youre enemys for drede sholde stinte
> to plede with yow or to destroye your persone./ Ye knowen also that your
> richesses mooten been dispended in diverse parties,/ and whan that every wight
> hath his part, they ne wollen taken but litel reward to venge thy deeth (VII.1366-
> 71).

These passages capture what I have depicted as a shift from majestic rhetoric of the

"small courtly elite" loyal to the person of the king and political rhetoric of the civil

servant loyal to Crown. More importantly, these passages allow us to see how these

conditions of literary production map onto the mode of literary expression, in this case

allegory: that is, we can see how majestic rhetoric conveniently maps onto the tenor and

vehicle of the allegory.

The two texts create disparate portrayals of the *function* of Prudence, what might

be seen as the tenor of the allegorical figure Phronesis/Prudence. In *Anticlaudianus,*

Phronesis is part of a metaphysical discourse on the universe and man's role in it. She is

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[145] Translation from Sheridan, James J. *Anticlaudianus; or The Good and Perfect Man*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of
Mediaeval Studies, 1973.

part of a hierarchy of knowledge that bridges man to the "realm of god" with the aid of Theology and Faith (the two sisters who aid her in the passage above). Alain's allegory depends upon the connection forged between nature and the cosmos in Prudence's ascension to heaven. Her pleas bring about the creation of the perfect man, who not surprisingly—according to most literary critics—is a thinly veiled allusion to King Phillip II of France. The vertical motion of the poem's action (i.e. Prudence's ascension and Faith's descent to rescue Prudence) produces the earthly hierarchy—through the creation of the perfect man who will defeat the forces of Allecto. Aside from invoking its importance to the perfect man, Alain only hints at the function of phronesis in practical worldly affairs. We have a rhetoric as perfectly sculpted as Theseus's "noble theatre," indeed a rhetoric similarly aimed at the containment of chaos (i.e. Allecto). However, unlike Chaucer, Alain confidently suggests that the moral virtue of his hero provides the coercive force necessary to overcome the historical forces of chaos.

Unlike Alain's cosmic validation of Philip II, and the *Fürstenspiegel*-model of sovereign power, Chaucer, in the *Tale of Melibee* exposes the nuts and bolts of earthly power. Prudence reminds Melibee that one can only maintain sovereignty through developing a powerful network of alliance. Whether Melibee has a right to vengeance or not, the reality is that he lacks the affinity (brethren, cosyns germayns, or kyndrede neigh) to assert his will against his three foes. Likewise, she carefully analyzes the relationship between money and power, identifying one of the problems facing merchant oligarchs namely that economic power still did not guarantee the coercive force to protect one's interests or secure one's will. While these three foes allegorically represent Flesh, World and Satan, Prudence's advice will blur their allegorical function. The tension

between allegorical and political realism (also a feature of the *Clerk's Tale*) allows Chaucer to anatomize the nature of sovereign authority.

More importantly, we see how the poet's allegorical vehicle encourages a particular hermeneutics. In Alain's cosmological allegory, we see that Phronesis is the 'natural' faculty of man most capable of ascending to heaven. Riding the chariot fashioned by the Seven Liberal Arts she has arrived at God's realm. At this point, Alain makes the reader aware of the limits of this earthly faculty. She is blinded and faints at the sight of things that the earthly mind cannot grasp. The only thing that can drive out the "numbness" and "bring back her power of mind" is Faith. Alain's point is clear: Prudence can begin to bridge the gulf between heaven and earth, but to "examine the depths of heaven" she must submit to faith. This submission is not just the tenor; it models the interpretive scheme necessary to read the *Anticlaudianus*. The vertical motion of the poem's action—Prudence's ascension and Faith's rescue of Prudence—creates a model of knowledge that mimics the neo-Platonic celestial hierarchy of pseudo-Dionysius in which God's light (knowledge) descends through a hierarchy of angels becoming increasingly occluded at each tier. The occluded quality makes the light suitable to the eyes of those among the lower echelon of the hierarchy. Thus, when Phronesis oversteps her bounds (i.e. transgresses the hierarchy), she is blinded by light. For Alain de Lille knowledge (and the "Good and Perfect Man") depends upon the proper ordering of one's internal faculties, here the submission of practical wisdom to faith. Like majestic rhetoric, the celestial hierarchy anchors the meaning, authority and limits of Alain's vehicle—his allegory depends upon what might be called the cosmic vehicle.

In the *Tale of Melibee*, Prudence represents the faculty to bring about the best possible result to worldly affairs; and as such the allegorical representation of Prudence (the vehicle) is articulated more in relation to a social, rather than cosmic, frame. Pointing to the need for strong affinities and the relative weakness of wealth (by itself), Chaucer's Prudence represents effective relationships between members of nobility. As the center shifts from the "Good and Perfect" king toward community, prudential rhetoric (synonymous with political rhetoric) arises out of the practical effect of the action. As allegory becomes more analytical, the vehicle, Prudence as wife and advisor, cannot be separated from the specific conditions that she engages; she resists taxonomic descriptions and seemingly steps out of the allegory.

Obviously, a single comparative exercise is not enough to make definitive claims about either the twelfth or fourteenth century; nonetheless it is suggestive of a link between narrative architecture and the organization of sovereign power. I have tried to demonstrate that the difference between Alain and Chaucer is embedded in Chaucer's text: the failure of Theseus's arena or the critique of Walter stand over and against the "semiotics of power" represented in *Anticlaudianus*. The conceptual shift in narrative is intimately wound up in the development of the institutional body of the Crown that reoriented the relationship between subject and sovereign and made the *communitas regni* the foundation of sovereign power. In a sense, what I am arguing is that the distance between Chaucer and Alain's account of Prudence is the thirteenth century.

This brief comparison to Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* illuminates those "gaps of ideology" that Chaucer's poetry renders visible—those places where the fiction cannot mask the "determinate disorder" that shapes it. The embarrassment of authority is

repeatedly thematized and never resolved in the *Canterbury Tales*. The "gaps of ideology" are not just linguistic. Macherey's descriptions of "literary production" assume, but hardly analyze, the real way that the text constitutes and is constituted by textual coalitions. In other words, the gap between cosmic kingship and *communitas*-rhetoric manifests in actual struggle between two visions of power: one (Alain's) controlled by elite barons surrounding a king, the other (Chaucer's) by expanded coalition that consists of the upper echelon of society (gentry, esquires, merchants).

The political rhetoric of this latter group can be characterized as the administrative ethos of the gentleman bureaucrat, a rhetoric born out of the articulation of the nobility and this 'gentleman' class amidst the 'constitutional' conflicts of the thirteenth century. The *Fürstenspiegel*-rhetoric associated the health of the realm with the ethics of the king and the obedience of his subjects: "the king is imagined as the very epicentre of health in the natural and political realms" (Simpson 277). This majestic cosmology was still alive in both England and on the continent, and central to Richard II's own regal aspirations. The poetry of Chaucer points toward a shift from "personal king" and the kind of elite coalition it embodied, toward the sacred obligation of the king to the common profit (often referred to as "high minded secularism"), an obligation at the heart of a new political theology that began to separate king and Crown. More importantly, for Chaucer this new emphasis involved the creation of a new subjectivity, one capable of imagining, like Ralph de Neville, that one might act against the decision of the king in order to protect the Crown. Chaucer, of course, did not have to see himself as a "constitutionalist" to write as he did. He did not have to think he was writing a new for the gentleman-bureaucrat. I prefer to think of Chaucer being aware of the relationship

between power and language, and I think there is good evidence for this awareness; however, even if he was not explicitly reworking the language of sovereignty, Chaucer was, nonetheless, deeply shaped by the emergent political rhetoric. This new emphasis involved the creation of a new subjectivity and political perspective—the invention of a "robust" Ricardian narrative that addressed the pressures of time, cosmology and language central to the *political* identity of an emerging commonwealth.

CHAPTER V

A RETROSPECTIVE: THE COMMUNITY OF THE REALM AND THE AESTHETIC

OF NATION

The central contention of this study has been that the political innovation of the

thirteenth century, described as a "great turning point in medieval political thought"

(Canning 341) and the genesis of a "conscious political opposition" (Chrimes 70), bred

an anxiety in the discourse of sovereignty and that this anxiety manifests in Ricardian

poetry. Indeed it was this anxiety that generated, to some extent, the characteristic

"robustness" and "gusto" of Ricardian narrative.[1] In short, the literary aesthetic of the

fourteenth century addresses the political transformations of the thirteenth. This has been

examined obliquely by those who have read Ricardian poetry in light of topical events—

usually as informed by either the factional politics of the Merciless Parliament or the

Uprising of 1381.[2] Examining the quarrel between magnates and Richard II, these

studies naturally touch upon the political anxiety unleashed by the thirteenth century.

These same studies, however, tend to read Chaucer and Gower as adherents of particular

factions and thus turn their poetry into politics. By imagining these poets as the inheritors

of thirteenth-century political innovation, I demonstrate how Ricardian poets create a

civic mentality for an emergent community.

There is already a large body of scholarship investigating how the *Confessio*

Amantis and the *Canterbury Tales* participate in creating the aesthetic of an "emergent

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[1] Burrow described Ricardian narrative poetry as having a "robustness" and "gusto" (52) that, in the fourteenth century, was unique to England.

[2] For example, Lynn Arner shows how Gower and Chaucer's poetry contains the violent energy of the 1381 uprising; Kurt Olsson and Judith Ferster read Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis* in light of the Merciless Parliament; Lynn Staley, in "Inverse Counsel," focuses on the relation between *Melibee* and factional politics during the reign of Richard II.

English community" (Knapp 156). The tendency has been to either examine how fourteenth-century social conditions induced Chaucer or Gower to *create* their *own* imagined community or alternatively, to examine how these poets fit in with the general theories of nation, particularly "the imagined community" of Benedict Anderson. These approaches underestimate the *particular* political history of the English community. For example, Anderson argued that the birth of nation could only happen after "three fundamental cultural conceptions, [i.e. a sacred privileged language, cosmic warrant of the royal prerogative, and the devaluation of causal history] . . . had lost their axiomatic grip" on the pre-national mind (Anderson 40). I have tried to show that these cultural conceptions were already under assault in the political imaginary of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. While print capitalism (as Anderson supposed) may have ushered in the final collapse of these "cultural conceptions," the imagined construct of the *communitas regni* and the political rhetoric of Ricardian poets were already loosening the "axiomatic grip" of these ideas.

The "community" central to the political imagination of Chaucer and Gower had already changed from a "vague untechnical colloquialism" to a legitimate source of authority over the course of two centuries. By focusing less on *imagined* communities and more on *imagining* community, I have used Anderson's theory as an heuristic to describe the *historical* emergence of the political imaginary in the thirteenth century. The *communitas regni* that emerged from the Second Barons' War, established new lines of cooperation aimed at reshaping laws, the administrative machine, and ultimately the definition of sovereignty. The political imaginary born out of this new source of authority was both dependent on and struggling to free itself from those "cultural

conceptions" that reproduced a majestic arrangement of power. In the thirteenth century,

an emergent political rhetoric established new descriptions of legitimacy that created

lines of cooperation between magnates and vavasours. Ricardian poetry arises out of this

rhetorical situation. The political aesthetic of Chaucer and Gower, as such, is both held

by and prying free of these epistemic limits on the prenational discourse of sovereignty.

The narrative architecture of their works cannot be separated from the political

anxiety that the "emergent English community" no longer fits comfortably into older

narrative paradigms. It was this discomfiture that inspired Gower and Chaucer to develop

a literary style that Charles Muscatine identified as fourteenth-century "realism."

However, for Muscatine, realism (amongst English poets at least) was found primarily in

the works of Chaucer and Langland.[3] Imagining realism on a spectrum, I have argued

that Gower's desublimation of the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition participates in a broader

literary movement towards *political* realism. I have expanded Muscatine's description of

Ricardian "realism" in order to show how new ways of imagining kings and communities

in the thirteenth century led to new ways of imagining time and space in the fourteenth

century.

I have made very few direct comparisons between the two poets who are the

subject of this work. While Chaucer and Gower are dramatically different, while

Chaucer can be considered an "anomaly" just by the sheer number of voices and genres

that he blends together in the *Canterbury Tales*, the purpose of my work has been to

show how both poets are working within and shaping a *common* English political

tradition. Imagining Chaucer as an unprecedented "anomaly" has led to a number of

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[3] Muscatine had a very narrow application of the term realism suggesting that, among English poets, Chaucer was an anomaly and "only Langland is comparable to him in realism" (244).

crucial investigations on the source of Chaucer's *innovation*. What I have added to this conversation is how Chaucer and Gower adapt their source material to create an aesthetic uniquely fitted to the anxieties of the English political tradition—how they recreate the voice of classics, the Bible, or Italian humanists within an English political space.

Gower revises the *Fürstenspiegel* from a genre reproducing majestic assumptions about cosmology and kingship into a genre capable of expressing new institutional relationships between king and community. Refusing to stretch his hand toward heaven (*CA* I.1), Gower can describe the political universe without recourse to the cosmic framework, which, consequently, makes political "causal history" possible. He does not write an allegorical narrative that effortlessly blends authority and ethics, but instead makes the secular legal idea of *trouthe* into the centerpiece of sovereign legitimacy. In his first tale of Book 7, Gower makes this clear by substituting the pagan myth ("Tale of Alceste") about the bond of marriage for a description of truth as God. This legal *trouthe* becomes overtly political in Gower's "Tale of Lycurgus" in which the sovereign is represented as bound to the community of the realm through its laws. While the ethical message is still undeniably there (good guys are rewarded and bad guys punished), the political and contingent world assumes center stage and morality plays out through political mechanisms. The ethical outcome allows Gower to explore the political mechanisms. By diminishing the importance of the cosmic framework and bringing contingent reality into the spotlight, Gower's poetry deploys a kind of political realism absent from the romance and *Fürstenspiegel* traditions.

Gower's emphasis on political mechanisms creates a new narrative perspective, but his ethics always anchor that perspective. The validity of the perspective itself is

never questioned. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer rarely (if ever) provides this kind of secure perspective. Instead, we repeatedly encounter the collapse of those "official" perspectives that "serve the function of ordering the social world and of legitimating that order" (Bourdieu 34). Indeed, in the opening tale the Knight narrates the collapse of majesty and the rise of a contingent political order. Chaucer's frequent narration of this collapse informs Muscatine's apocalyptic description of Chaucer as "holding together and seeing in relationship to each other of the wide range of values . . . which had once made up the richness and poise of medieval civilization, and were now already making for its break-up" (247). The "holding together" represents a political authority no longer grounded securely in the cosmic framework; and the break-up was not so much in the future Renaissance, but in the development of an emergent political community.

For Chaucer, the problem of sovereign authority redounds on his literary authority; instead of anchoring authority, he repeatedly depicts the moment of crisis—a moment where the secure transcendental order falls, leaving behind a frail contingent order. The tales focus on the relationship between hermeneutics and politics at these moments of crisis. They examine how to read when the *official* grammar vanishes. While people have, I believe rightly, suggested that Chaucer is a bit cagey about his specific political views, his repeated depiction of the fall of a stable sign system aligns with a political view of the universe based on prudential rhetoric. To suggest that Chaucer's writing is deeply influenced by political rhetoric is not to associate him with royalist or Appellant factions, but rather to acknowledge that Chaucer understood the political character inherent in the practice of reading.

Ricardian poets invented (i.e. uncovered, created) a vernacular authority at a moment of crisis; they invented a political aesthetic rising out of and elevating the emergent English community. Much like Theseus, the reader can no longer trust the text to be anchored by a cosmic authority, and the secular word (of the political world) at best resists Saturnine forces. One can, like the Parson, speak of absolute ethical truths; however, these truths as Lady Philosophy herself admits, cannot be used to create a stable government in the hurly-burly of the political world in which most of Chaucer's characters live. Broadly, I have suggested that Ricardian poetry makes more sense if we understand it as part of the creative project of the English community—a project that would reshape politics, literature, historiography and countless other fields as it came into being. Specifically, I have shown how Chaucer's and Gower's poetry shapes and is shaped by their relationship to a uniquely English tradition of sovereignty.

I would like to conclude by looking ahead to the sixteenth century, where the English community, once a site of conflict, became, under the banner of "nation," a source of cultural capital and authority. The critical conversation around nation, as Andrew Escobedo points out, is complicated by the fact that "scholars of modernity" believe that "national consciousness" hardly existed at all in the sixteenth century, while medieval scholars tend to think that nationalism in the sixteenth century was old news (Escobedo 10-11).[4] Instead of engaging in these terminological quarrels, I focus on a particular difference between medieval and Renaissance depictions of community—a difference between a community that limited regal authority and one that gave the

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[4] I tend to agree with McEachern that national consciousness began to take shape in medieval England and "to assume that, because early modern England was a monarchy, its ideologies of order were inimical to expressions of social unity is as naive as to assume that the reigning democratic myth of twenieth century America . . . guarantees either social equality or unanimity" (McEachern 19).

monarch access to nearly unlimited cultural capital to control her subjects—an aesthetic of the community of the realm and aesthetic of nation respectively.

Introducing *The Faerie Queene* allows me to emphasize the role of cosmology and historical time in the political imaginary and to highlight the differences and continuities between late medieval idea of *communitas regni* and Early Modern nationalism. By marking the distance between Spenserian and Ricardian poetry, we can recognize the unique way in which medieval poets understood the political community. By concluding with Spenser, I hope to examine this relationship in two directions at once—to see how Chaucer and Gower inform our modern sensibility and how the medieval political imaginary was a unique response to particular conditions.

Spenser's Aesthetic of Nation

Reading Spenser side-by-side with Chaucer, one is tempted to agree with Muscatine's assertion that Spenser "emulates him [Chaucer] only faintly" (245). This is largely true because Spenser drew heavily on the Italian epic romance tradition of Ariosto and Tasso, which was laden with the kind of chivalric romance critiqued by Chaucer and Gower. However, what Spenser would have encountered in Chaucer, and perhaps Gower, is the presence of a vernacular authority and hermeneutics carved out of cosmic framework.

Edmund Spenser's epic romance, published in two installments in 1590 (Books I-III) and 1596 (Books IV-VI), registers the continuation of political upheaval that began "in the period that joins the fifteenth and sixteenth century" described by Michel Foucault in *Dits et Ecrits* as the

explosive moment which brought into being Protestantism, the formation of the great nations, the constitution of authoritative monarchies . . . all of this led to a sort of rearrangement of the way in which people were governed, both in terms of their individual relationships and in terms of their social and political conduct. (qtd. in Pieters 60)

In England, this "rearrangement of the way in which people were governed" assumed its most violent expression during the reign of Henry VIII. Henry strengthened the idea of the king's divine authority by separating the Church of England from the Catholic Church with the declaration of supremacy (1534) and subsequently dissolving English monasteries (in 1536 and 1539). As a result, the king's court became the center of spiritual and temporal power.

At its core, this "explosive moment" shaped and was shaped by the question at the center of my argument: "what authorized the power of the sovereignty?" I cannot, in the space of this conclusion, begin to describe the historical change in political authority ushered in by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, but I do hope to uncover how the "constitution of authoritative monarchies," which required the validation of the active political life itself, shaped Spenserian romance. Spenser's "historicall fiction" participates in a larger historiographical movement providing increasingly secular accounts of history aimed at validating the Tudor dynasty.[5] Indeed two of Spenser's most fanciful and powerful inventions, Gloriana's court and her city of Cleopolis, elevate sovereign authority by investing subjects (knights/gentlemen) with *historical* purpose. Through this, we see an aesthetic that pivots from the cosmic history of the Church towards a historiography through which "Christian states gradually reappropriated the control of collective memory by favoring the birth of a historical narrative centered on the princes'

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[5] For a discussion of changing attitudes towards history as part of a larger discourse of nation, see Escobedo 5-15.

governments and military deeds" (Burguière 249). In telling the stories of "prince's governments and military deeds," Spenser invests secular history with a significance represented by the cult of fame and establishes the sovereign as the head of economy of fame.

However, historical narrative still had to push back on the tendency to diminish political time, which had been central to majestic models of authority in the past. The political imaginary was still strongly influenced by a historical Augustinianism in which "the condition of all men living in the Sixth Age, whose historical life hears meaning resolutely unavailable to them and for whom the translations of secular history articulate a meaningless pattern of ceaseless rise and fall" (Patterson 97).[6] The cosmological diminishment of "historical life" and "secular history" lessens the importance of the active life and the political present. Many theologians, historians, and poets in the Early Modern period implicitly challenged this model; however, the *need* to challenge it showed its continued presence. The anxiety over the "meaning" of one's "historical life" takes a particularly Protestant shape in Richard Hooker's *Learned Discourse of the Justification of Faith*, when, expounding upon the inability of man to achieve his own salvation, he asserts, "the best things we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned. How then can we do anything meritorious and worthy to be rewarded?" (4). While Hooker ultimately affirms the importance of the active life, the anxiety regarding the significance of "historical life" and "secular history" still haunts sixteenth century thought and, as we

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[6] In Chapter II, I argue that this development of historiography is connected to the new political alliances forming in the thirteenth century, which elevates the political coalition building rhetoric above the majestic rhetoric aimed at consolidation and reproduction of the power structure.

will see, the production of secular history faced many of the challenges it did at the close of the fourteenth century.

Registering the increased strength of the political community, Ricardian poets began to give literary voice to an emergent political time and it is this emergent political time that informs Spenser's aesthetic of nation.[7] This aesthetic arises out of and responds to a similar dynamic that informs political realism of Ricardian literature—namely, the validation of the political imaginary through the attenuation of the political and cosmic framework. We saw how Gower expanded the idea of *trouthe* from a feudal obligation to a broader and innate obligation to the law of the land, the ancient constitution that bound monarch and subject alike. Spenser retains the expansiveness of this *trouthe* (an expansiveness necessary to create an "imagined community"), but he does not imagine a community that restrains the prerogative. He focuses on the aspirational rather than legal authority of the community. This aspirational force is represented by the romance quest, which is linked directly to the earthly court of Gloriana. Redcrosse begins as a young man "falling before the Queen of Faeries" and seeking "a boone . . . that hee might haue atchieuement of any adventure, which during that feaste should happen" ("Letter to Raleigh" 717).

The court of Gloriana and the romance genre itself becomes a vehicle to explore the aspirational authority of a nation, a fictive space to address concerns of legitimacy and allegiance. In his tale on Holiness, Spenser obsesses over questions of political allegiance; indeed, at one point, Redcrosse's insidious allegiance to the enchantress Duessa (a symbol of the false authority of the Catholic Church) threatens to sidetrack the

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[7] I use the term "aesthetic of nation" because the word "nation," "nationalism" and "nation-ness" are "cultural artefacts of a particular kind" and must be understood as having "come into historical being" (Anderson 13).

entire quest. In a country where the queen claimed to be the head of the Church of

England, it is not surprising that holiness cannot be disassociated from politics. Spenser

initially describes the central quest of Book I as motivated by a political obligation and a

desire for glory:

> Vpon a great aduenture he was bond,
> That greatest Gloriana to him gaue,
> That greatest Glorious Queene of Faery lond,
> To winne him worshippe, and her grace to haue
> Which of all earthly thinges he most did craue;
> And euer as he rode his hart did earne,
> To proue his puissance in battell braue
> Vpon his foe, and his new force to learn;
> Vpon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne. (*FQ* I.i.3.1-9)

The description of Redcrosse's allegiance to the "greatest Glorious Queene" seems like

standard romance fare: he is bound to the queen by vow, he craves her grace above "all

earthly thinges," and he hopes to prove his courage "in battell braue." However, in line

five, Spenser, by emphasizing the earthly nature of the allegiance between Redcrosse and

Gloriana, highlights a critical anxiety of Book One—namely a recognition that the bond

between queen and knight was part of an economy of "earthly thinges."

Crucially, Spenser acknowledges the intersection of political authority and

cosmology that shapes Book One. Redcrosse's "great adventure" is defined by the need

to validate this fame-economy by justifying virtuous earthly glory (Gr. *kleos*), and the

romance genre itself. Spenser explicitly addresses the significance of "historical life" and

"secular history" in cantos IX and X. Redcrosse's encounters with Despair (Canto IX)

and his vision of New Jerusalem (Canto X) force him, in different ways, to reevaluate the

glory of "puissance in battell" and the significance of Gloriana's Cleopolis. By analyzing

these scenes, I will briefly point to some ways that *The Faerie Queene* manifests and

exalts the vernacular authority carved out by Ricardian poets in order to elevate the significance of nation and its history.

Using a chivalric register replete with "great aduenture[s]," "puissance in battell braue," and boons distributed by Gloriana, Spenser imagines the active life as a quest for "earthly immortality through fame" (Rathborne 17). Carol Kaske even suggests that Spenser's "high ranking of fame among Christian values was unparalleled in Renaissance literature" (134). Admittedly Spenser celebrates chivalric fame in *The Faerie Queene*; however, in order to understand the political work that the cult of fame performs, we must recognize how he radically distinguishes the knightly virtues of romance from the workings of salvation. Spenser can only reintroduce the "cult of fame" because he has acknowledged its insignificance in relation to the City of God, New Jerusalem. The chivalric obligation to Gloriana's Cleopolis (read the quest for virtuous fame) plays an important role in Fairyland precisely because it gives the knight the purpose and direction needed to face the insignificance of their "historical life." In Canto IX, Despair challenges the value of Redcrosse's chivalric career:

> All those great battels, which thou boasts to win,
> Through strife, and blood-shed and auengement,
> Now praysd, hereafter deare thou shalt repent:
> For life must life, and blood must blood repay. (*FQ*.I.ix.43.3-6)

Despair's redescription of the hero quest as a sin-narrative inappropriately undervalues life as pure vanity. This life-denying attitude toward the world contradicts the Protestant belief, as expounded by Hooker, that "the first degree of goodness is that general perfection which all things do seek, in desiring the continuance of their being" (119).

Redcrosse, confronted by this depiction of "all [his] great battels" as moments that he will "deare…repent," almost succumbs to Despair: "At laste resolv'd to worke his

finall smart,/ He lifted up his hand, that backe againe did start" (FQ I.ix.51.8-9). He is

only saved by the sudden intervention of Una:

> Out of his hand she snatcht the cursed knife,
> And threw it to the ground, enraged rife
> . . . .
> Is this the battaille, which thou vauntst to fight
>   With that fire-mouthed Dragon, horrible and bright. (FQ.I.ix.52.4-5; 8-9)

Daniel Moss argues that this scene allegorically represents "fallen man's utter incapacity

to secure his own salvation" (74) because Redcrosse is saved by an external agent.

However, after Una saves Redcrosse, she immediately reminds him of his sworn duty to

fight the dragon that plagues her parent's homeland. While stanza 52 emphasizes the

inability of man to "secure his own salvation," it also re-establishes the hero quest as the

driving force of the narrative: "Is this the battaille, which thou vauntst to fight." By

bringing salvation and the hero quest into close quarters, Spenser emphasizes both the

insufficiency of the hero quest and its *necessity* in a fallen world. Redcrosse's

commitments to Una and Gloriana provide an alternative narrative that allows Redcrosse

to continue living—indeed *requires* him to continue living. Gloriana's Cleopolis

becomes the providential ordering principle of political time through which the quest for

virtuous fame is fundamental to the desire for the "continuance of being." The life-

affirming obligation to court of Gloriana, which saves Redcrosse from despair, is the

foundation of Spenser's aesthetic of nation.

In Canto X, Spenser explicitly carves out the providential role of the nation and

political time by demonstrating the role of earthly fame against the more exalted context

of heavenly salvation. The conflict between these two perspectives is depicted spatially.

When Contemplation, a hermit, shows Redcrosse the divine city of New Jerusalem, the

knight inappropriately compares it to the earthly city of Cleopolis in order to understand

the perfection of the divine city. Spenser uses these two cities in order to identify and

disentangle the virtues of the religious sphere from the secular sphere. This

disentanglement, however, does not free the knight from earthly concerns, but rather

dramatizes the difficulty of living a life that is both holy and active. Nonetheless, it is

Contemplation that orders the knight to return to the active sphere: "ne maist thou yitt/

Forgoe that royal maides bequeathed care" (*FQ* I.x.63.6-7). Like Una in the Cave of

Despair, Contemplation reminds Redcrosse of his sworne quest—his "maides bequeathed

care." Contemplation acknowledges the importance of the active life represented by the

romance quest.

The two cities represent competing visions of authority. His depiction of New

Jerusalem, however, so far exceeds the virtues of the earthly city that it threatens to

eclipse the value of human life altogether. In fact, after seeing New Jerusalem,

Redcrosse begs Contemplation, "O let me not . . . then turne againe/ Backe to the world,

whose ioyes so fruitlesse are" (FQ. I.x.63.1-2). Unlike Despair, Contemplation provides

Redcrosse with a vision of the ultimate joy. Ironically, however, Redcrosse's impulse to

leave the earthly world of Cleopolis parallels his suicidal urge in the Cave of Despair.

The glimpse of the salvation narrative, of the eternal time outside of the romance,

transforms the "maides bequeathed care" into fruitless joys of life. The implication is

clear—the struggles of life, contrasted with the importance of salvation, are meaningless.

Spenser acknowledges this threat, but through the comparison of the two cities, separates

the two spheres and lends dignity to "historical life" within the fallen context.

Spenser's idealistic depiction of New Jerusalem naturally tempts Redcrosse and

the reader to see the fallen world through a gloomy lens. After tempting the reader to adopt this gloomy perspective of the earthly city, *The Faerie Queene*, through the character of Contemplation, upbraids both Redcrosse and the reader for assuming this erroneous perspective. Contemplation then identifies the appropriate attitude towards each city; however, before I can identify the appropriate attitude, it is important to examine each city on its own terms.

After an abbreviated physical description of New Jerusalem's "wals and towres…builded high and strong/Of perle and precious stone," Spenser focuses our attention towards the inhabitants who:

> …descend
> From highest heuen, in gladsome companee,
> And with great ioy into that Citty wend,
> As commonly as frend does with his frend" (*FQ* I.x.56.2-5)

Spenser's description of the angels revises a biblical account of Jacob's ladder. Instead of describing the angels as merely "ascending and descending on it" (Gen 28:12), Spenser depicts them moving in "gladsome companee…as frend does with his frend." This slight adjustment emphasizes the importance of friendship and equality over hierarchy in an *ideal* world. When juxtaposed against the narrative of knights competing for external honors, the "Citty" built on ideal friendship renders the sanctity of the honor code problematic.

Moreover, Spenser describes God's governance in maternal terms, where all the inhabitants or "Saints" are "More dear vnto their God, then younglings to their dam" (*FQ* I.x.57.9). [8] Because of this unconditional love the ruler performs the greatest service for

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[8] Of course, through this God/mother metaphor, Spenser also makes a not-so-subtle connection between God and Elizabeth, who had frequently made use of maternal language to express her unconditional love of her subjects. This

the citizens by purging them "from sinful guilt/ With pretious blood, which cruelly was spilt" (*FQ* I.x.57.4-5). The description contrasts with the "blood-shed and auengement" that defines the romance quest; the heavenly city highlights the shortcomings of Cleopolis—the city where reformation often requires the "sword."[9]

Against this vision of friendship, unconditional love, and equality amongst the saints of New Jerusalem, the description of Cleopolis, for all its glory, appears "mired" in earthly 'virtue'. However, if we read the description of New Jerusalem as a critique of Cleopolis, we have failed to understand Spenser's strategic use of the incommensurability of the two cities. Spenser dramatizes this possible misreading. Redcrosse attempts to grasp this vision of the unfallen world through the unhappy comparison of New Jerusalem to the most exalted earthly city, Cleopolis: "For this great Citty that does far surpass,/ And this bright Angels towre quite dims that towre of glas" (*FQ* I.x.58.8-9). The attenuation of the political world and the cosmic framework, Cleopolis and New Jerusalem respectively, serves a purpose similar to what we have seen in both Chaucer and Gower. However, in *The Faerie Queene*, the incommensurability between the two cities does not create insignificance, but rather calls into being a new political hermeneutic that allows the knight to navigate the fallen world. Spenser effectively brackets off the eternal city and focuses on how to live in the temporal world, a world where hierarchy and glory are necessary precisely because Cleopolis is *not* New Jerusalem.

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allows Spenser to both separate Cleopolis from New Jerusalem and draw them closer together simultaneously.

[9] As Greenblatt argues, "Spenser's knights live in the profound conviction that there is a moral task set for themselves by the virtue of the power of Gloriana" (179). The "virtuous violence" of Spenser's knights fits his political attitude towards reforming Ireland "even by the sword" (View of the Present State of Modern Ireland). For an extended discussion of Spenser's advocacy virtuous violence and Ireland, see Greenblatt 184-88.

Spenser explicitly thematizes the importance of earthly glory and the role of the state when Contemplation, himself, immediately qualifies Redcrosse's interpretation:

> Most trew, then said, the holy aged man;
> Yet is Cleopolis for earthly frame,
> The fairest peece, that eie beholden can" (*FQ* I.x.59.1-3)

Contemplation warns Redcrosse that the contemplative life does not allow one to escape the "great battells" of the active life—those battles explicitly connected with service to queen. Hamilton glosses the phrase "for earthly frame" as "considered as an earthly structure," presumably to suggest that the two cities are being compared structurally. Yet in the sixteenth century the word "frame" alternatively means "Advantage, benefit, profit" or "an established order or system esp. government" (OED). In this sense, Contemplation acknowledges, simultaneously, that Cleopolis provides the greatest, "fairest" benefit and is itself the "fairest" order of governance in an earthly context (i.e. "that eie beholden can").

This "fairest" system of governance, however, relies upon a dubious ideal, namely that of "fame." In his portrayal of the earthly city of Cleopolis (literally City of fame), Spenser restores an overtly chivalric and hierarchical register. When Contemplation describes Cleopolis, the language of the romance genre floods back into the text, and the words "noble," "couett," "fame," "soueraigne," "glory" and "guerdon" appear over the course of the 68-word description. Contemplation makes us distinctly aware that Cleopolis is governed by a code of honor and just deserts where it

> well beseemes all knights of noble name,
> That couett in th'immortall booke of fame
> To be eternized, that same to haunt,
> And doen their seruice to that soueraigne Dame (FQ I.x.59. 4-7)

Instead of New Jerusalem's "glad companee," Cleopolis is populated by "knights of noble name" that "couett" eternal fame; and, instead of the unconditional and sacrificial love of the mother-God, the "soueraigne Dame" demands "seruice" from her citizens. The knights are driven because they "couett in th'immortall booke of fame/To be eternized." The word "couett" is suggestive of the darker possibilities of the fame economy. Indeed, Spenser uses the word "covet" three times to describe the nature of allegorical figures of the Seven Deadly Sins in Canto IV.

The chivalric register of Despair, the incommensurability of New Jerusalem and Cleopolis and words like "couett" and "fame" show Spenser's awareness of the fragility of earthly order; and with a simple shift in emphasis, this language describes the antitype of Cleopolis, the House of Pride in which there sat:

> A mayden Queene, that shone as Titans ray,
> In glistring gold, and perelesse pretious stone;
> Yet her bright blazing beautie did assay
> To dim the brightnesse of her glorious throne
> As enuying her selfe, that too exceeding shone. (I.iv.8.5-8)

In the court of Lucifera, a language of pride and envy replace the language of fame. The descriptions of Lucifera's blazing beautie that she uses to project her authority point to her illegitimacy. She is a parody of authority whose majestic gestures turn into puns. The comparison to the "Titans ray," which most obviously alludes to the sun, is also suggestive of "the proud, rebellious offspring of the earth, a symbol of pride" (Hamilton 64n.). Likewise the word "perelesse," or peerless, also emphasizes that Lucifera does not possess the heavenly pearl, salvation. Thus, her "peerlessness" is both pearl-less and perilous. The majestic language asserting her authority makes visible the absence of this authority. Most significantly, Lucifera, envying the throne, attempts to dim its brightness

with her own "blazing beautie." As a result, the queen and the throne (i.e. the symbol of the sovereign's office) are torn asunder. The House of Pride makes the embarrassment of authority visible.

Spenser both renders this embarrassment visible and, somewhat magisterially, ignores it. Just as Spenser affirms Lucifera's evil by putting her at the head of a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, he unequivocally asserts Gloriana's justice and legitimacy. Indeed, the illegitimacy of Lucifera's proud authority necessitates and justifies the authority Gloriana. The justification of Gloriana's court, much like the rhetoric of *Fürstenspiegel*, depends upon the tautology behind presumptive reasoning—where the goodness of her authority "can be inferred from the fact of its preservation" (Pocock 15). As such, Spenser's grand allegory dedicated to Elizabeth I fits in with what might be called majestic rhetoric. Spenser confronts the embarrassment of authority with "possibility of achieving a just, coherent, stable identity anchored in the ardent worship of power" (Greenblatt 179). While I think the word "worship," ineptly conflates New Jerusalem and Cleopolis, Stephen Greenblatt, I think rightly argues that the English nation symbolized by the court of Gloriana allows for the creation of a "stable identity" *within* political time. Majesty creates an economy of fame (i.e. the book of fame in Cleopolis). Thus Spenser collapses the distance between majesty and political potential of the community of the realm. The attenuation of political and majestic rhetoric central to Ricardian aesthetic is absorbed into a majestic rhetoric that confers added significance onto historical life and secular history: a majestic language of nation justifies the violence of Redcrosse as an obligation to Cleopolis.

It is through romance quest and the cult of fame that Spenser adds a new majestic dimension to political time. Kaske argues that Redcrosse's "contract with the Faerie Queene…must itself symbolize that problematic hold which Cleopolis has on him; at any rate it is not particularly associated with charity, only with fame" (138). In Kaske's terms, the "problematic hold" of Cleopolis represents Redcrosse's moral deficiencies. It is not accidental that Spenser scholars, like Kaske, repeatedly uncover a "subversive Spenser" in the *Faerie Queene*. The poem confidently asserts the "conviction" in "a moral task" grounded by "virtue of the power of Gloriana," but by situating majestic authority *within* political time, Spenser stridently acknowledges the anxiety of authority. While I find Greenblatt's argument that Spenser justifies "the power of Gloriana" more convincing that Kaske's suggestion that Spenser critiques the "problematic hold" of fame, I think both arguments unnecessarily flatten the *Faerie Queene*. The poem, I would argue, narrates the ideological struggle to make "the power of Gloriana" have virtuous meaning at a moment when "the cult of fame" would be marked with suspicion.

Redcrosse must fight against Error, and Orgoglio (pride) and Sans Foy (faithlessness), but the most complex threat is from the possibility that "the power of Gloriana" has no cosmological warrant. The possibility that work of Cleopolis is without value. Contemplation acknowledges that New Jerusalem "does far surpas" Cleopolis, but simultaneously advises the knight to return to the earthly world:

> …when thou famous victory hast wonne,
> And high emongst all knights hast hong thy shield,
> Thenceforth the suitt of earthly conquest shonne,
> And wash thy hands from guilt of bloody field (I.x.60.5-8)

Redcrosse Knight must win the highest honours before he *can* shun "earthly conquest." Crucially, "earthly conquest" (i.e. virtuous violence) represents both an obligation and a

guilt that he must "wash" away. The "bloody field" is the site of "guilt" and "famous

victory;" it is guilt and necessity. Since the knight is bound to the earth both by vows and

more importantly by his earthly body, he must still live within the fame framework of

Cleopolis. In order to ensure the good governance of his actions, he must serve the

"soueraigne Dame." In this way, New Jerusalem and Cleopolis cannot be read as

traditional foils, but represent different ways of living that are dependent upon separate

ontological foundations. Since New Jerusalem stands outside both our world and our

nature, we are thrown back upon the works of history, on the productions of Cleopolis to

discover models for righteous action.

Reading the Communitas Regni from Spenser's Faeryland

Clearly a short exploration of Book One of the *Faerie Queene* cannot begin to

account for the complex idea of nation (or even Spenser's aesthetic of nation); however,

looking towards this discourse allows me to contextualize the literary transformations

arising from the development of the political consciousness in the thirteenth century.

While the idea of the *communitas regni* is obsolete, we are still engaged in conversations

around nation and nationalism; thus, our understanding of political imaginary of Chaucer

and Gower is almost inevitably shaped by these modern ideas. Instead of summarizing

my argument, I hope that my brief foray into Spenser's aesthetic of nation provides a lens

through which we can see more clearly the familiar and alien in the poetry of Gower and

Chaucer.

By comparing Gower and Chaucer with Spenser, we see how the Ricardian

political imaginary, which produced and embodied the *communitas regni*, engendered

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and differed from the aesthetic of nation. While each of these poets registered the relationship between historical narrative and the political power, in Spenser alone do we see the process through which Tudor poets "reappropriated the control of collective memory" (Burguière 249) in the interests of the state. There is no more obvious symbol for this "reappropriation" than Cleopolis and the court of Gloriana. This city offers knights the opportunity to strive for earthly fame and have their names inscribed "in th'immortall booke of fame" by doing "their seruice to that soueraign Dame." History, and more importantly, the opportunity to meaningfully participate in this history becomes a source of cultural capital.

However, historical time was the imaginative labor of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—an imaginative labor cutting across discourse of politics, law, theology, poetry and many other discursive fields that I could not cover in the span of this book. The poets and political innovations are part of a struggle to bring about a language capable of transforming "a vague untechnical colloquialism" into "a clearly defined and precise constitutional term (Treharne *Simon* 223), a language that gave authority and thus meaningful existence to the community of the realm. Quentin Skinner suggests that "the clearest sign that a society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept is . . . that a new vocabulary comes to be generated, in terms of which the concept is then articulated and discussed" (x). The language surrounding Cleopolis demonstrates that "self-conscious" understanding of that new vocabulary. Chaucer and Gower, on the other hand, represent a poetic of disentanglement, a poetic that labors to wrest the political imaginary from a discourse dominated by majestic rhetoric.

Both the *Confessio Amantis* and the *Canterbury Tales* (in their own ways) participate in the disentanglement of political hermeneutics, causal time, and meaningful sense of the "common profit" from the cosmic framework. Just as the Common Enterprise increased the conventional force of the *communitas regni*, "The Tale of the Three Advisors," "Lycurgus," and "The Folly of Rehoboam" displaced cosmic narratives and put community at the center of the literary project. Through this displacement, Gower creates a new *Fürstenspiegel* that emphasizes political obligations, reshapes traditional values of kingship, revises the discourse of sovereignty and creates a historical space for "science of politics" (Simpson 273). Similarly, Chaucer not only displaces the cosmic framework, but he also thematizes the conflict between majestic and political order, which was a product of the late thirteenth century. The political perspective (a provisional perspective, at best) arises from the rejection of majestic rhetoric—a rejection of arena-rhetoric in the *Knight's Tale*, of Walter in the *Clerk's Tale*, and of Melibean intransigence in *Melibee*.

Spenser's construction of Gloriana's Cleopolis adapts and responds to those aspects of the political imaginary (i.e. hermeneutics, narrative architecture and sign theory) necessary for the "birth of a historical narrative" (Burguière 249). Like Gower, Spenser does not overstretch the earthly limits of Gloriana's court, "the fairest peece *that earthly eie* beholden can" (emphasis mine). The ontological foundation of the state requires an explicit acknowledgement of its distance from New Jerusalem. Moreover, the overall structure of Spenser's compilation of books, with each book dedicated to specific virtues of a *gentleman*, resembles Gower's *Confessio Amantis* both in its confessional division and its focus on increasingly *secular* political virtues. However, Spenser, unlike

Chaucer or Gower, produces a new majestic rhetoric that asserts the unlimited socio-political authority of the queen. Despite the distance between Cleopolis and New Jerusalem, the court of Gloriana has historical import and is the source of cultural capital. The virtues of Spenser's gentleman, unlike Gower's education of Amans, center on *winning* fame not limiting authority. In an aesthetic struggle over language and modes of meaning, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* draws the earthly community and its ancient constitutionalism back under the yoke of majesty.

By placing Ricardian poetry in dialogue with Spenserian nationalism, I have tried to demonstrate how the political imaginary of Chaucer and Gower, grounded in the conceptual idea of the *communitas regni*, focuses on limits of authority. The difference is clearly illustrated in Lord Melibee, who recognizing his own weakness, attempts to create cultural capital out of these limits. The *Tale of Melibee* concludes with Melibee's magnanimous Christ-like gesture of forgiveness of his three enemies:

> Al be it so that of youre pride and heigh presumpcioun and folie, and of youre necligence and unkonnynge,/ ye have mysborn yow and trespassed unto me. Yet for as muche as I see and biholde youre grete humylitee/ and that ye been sory and repentant of youre giltes,/ it constreyneth me to doon yow grace and mercy./ Wherefore I receyve yow to my grace/ and foyeve yow outrely alle the offenses, injuries, and wronges that ye have doon agayn me and myne,/ to this effect and to this ende, that God of his endelees mercy/ wole at the tyme of oure diynge foryeven us oure giltes. (VII. 1876-84)

The conclusion encourages the reader to compare Melibee's forgiveness of his enemies, with the "endelees mercy" of God. However, as Lee Patterson has shown, the mercy of *Melibee* stems from a pragmatic realization that he does not have the power to actually bring about the vengeance he desired. Patterson has called this the "devastating moment" (118) because he reads it as the failure of Prudence and the *Fürstenspiegel* genre. What I have suggested is this pragmatic realization is the painful birth of the political

consciousness. While the political world is still part of the cosmic framework (insofar as nothing escapes Providence), neither Melibee nor Prudence, for that matter, have access to the certitudes of the cosmic framework.

Despite the differences between the individual tales of the Canterbury-bound pilgrims, and despite the even larger gap between the those tales and the exempla of Genius in the *Confessio Amantis*, the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* often speak to the same anxiety of sovereignty reverberating from thirteenth-century political innovation. They imagine an authority "holding together" sovereign authority in the face of the collapse of majestic model of sovereignty (a collapse of the Angevin '*vis et voluntas*' worldview that Richard tried to resurrect at the end of the fourteenth century); they foster an emerging political imaginary for an emerging community of the realm. Political authority is constructed out of Amans recognition that *fin amour* love is impossible; it is constructed out Theseus's realization that his "noble theatre" lacks real authority. That is, by foreclosing access to the language of Providence as a justification for the royal will, Ricardian poetry shaped a provisional mode of meaning that fostered the "communal and historical bond" (Middleton 97) which was vital to the common profit.[10]

The reader frequently encounters the apparent gulf between cosmic and secular authority, between eternal time and a world *seemingly* governed by mutability; they encounter the political as a space governed by the inaccessible laws of Providence. It is not a denial of God's role in history, as much as the recognition of man's inability to understand that role. It is no accident that a sense of resignation pervades their tales—a

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[10] Middleton describes the creation of an emotion common love that was focused not on private relationships, but rather on social relationships and as such it "was turned toward public expression" (96).

resignation to the unknown. Whether we look at the more heroic acceptance of limitations (i.e. Griselda or Alceste) or the more dejected acceptance of limits (i.e. Theseus, Melibee and Amans), a sense of resignation in the face of a cosmic order "making for its break-up" (Muscatine 247) haunts the Ricardian political imaginary. And yet, it is precisely this voice that, holding together a provisional order and speaking against the collapse, eloquently captures how the struggle to create meaning is the struggle to create community.

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