

**The Politics of Personification: Anthropomorphism and Agency in Chaucer,
Langland, and Lydgate**

by

Gaelan Gilbert

B.A., Point Loma Nazarene University, 2007

M.A., San Diego State University, 2009

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation attends to the figurative device of personification, or *prosopopoeia*, in the writings of three late-medieval English authors, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, and John Lydgate. Situating my study between three coordinates -- the lineage of rhetorical anthropomorphism stretching back to Quintilian, the medieval political context that drew on figurative personification, and recent theoretical work in political ecology and philosophical sociology (actor-network theory) -- I argue in the introduction that the redistributions of agency from abstract terms to personified figures performed in *prosopopoeia* entail an intrinsic politicization; the personifications of non-humans deployed by Chaucer, Langland, and Lydgate hinge on and exploit the anthropomorphic qualities of speech and embodiment, which late-medieval theories of political representation see as essential prerequisites for political agency. The affinities between literary and legal-political discourses are even thicker; more sophisticated instances of personification refract in fictive narrative the part-whole dynamic between unity and multiplicity that undergirds representative government in its negotiation between delegated sovereignty and deliberative conciliarity, or, put differently, between actors and the networks within which their action becomes intelligibly institutional. *Prosopopoeia* thus emerges in my texts of interest as not only a multifaceted catalyst for democratizing debate about matters of concern to vernacular publics -- from female agency to royal reform -- but also as a moving target for imaginatively theorizing -- and experimenting with the limits of -- the ethical imperatives that govern the proper practice of equitable governance: participation, answerability, reconciliation, common profit. In the discursive culture of late-medieval England, literary *prosopopoeia* animates simulations of non-human polities for heuristic, humanistic purposes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Introduction: <i>Prosopopoeia</i> and Politics.....	1
Chapter 1: The Politics of Nature in Chaucer's <i>Parliament of Fowls</i>	41
Chapter 2: Trying to Live Answerably in the <i>Auctor</i> -Network: Chaucer's <i>House of Fame</i>	80
Chapter 3: Tactical Rhetoric and the Politics of Citation in Chaucer's <i>Tale of Melibee</i>	115
Chapter 4: Assembling the King in Langland's <i>Piers Plowman B-text</i> Prologue-passus IV.....	152
Chapter 5: Royal and Authorial Agents in Lydgate's <i>Triumphal Entry of King Henry VI into London</i> and <i>The Fall of Princes</i>	185
Conclusion: Recapitulation and (Realist) Speculation.....	223
Bibliography.....	229
Appendices.....	243

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the memory of

Laurel Amtower (1965-2010)

whose untimely falling asleep was a loss to all lovers of Chaucer. Her explorations (*via* Bakhtin) into the answerability of writers and readers profoundly shaped my own thinking, and her generosity and enthusiasm were the bridge across which I first ventured into the lush forests of medieval literature.

Memory Eternal!

Introduction: *Prosopopoeia* and Politics

“Where does ‘external nature’ now lie? It is right here: carefully naturalized, that is, socialized right inside the expanding collective. It is time to house it finally in a civil way by building it a definitive dwelling place and offering it not the simple slogan of the early democracies – ‘No taxation without representation!’ [*Quod omnes tangit!*] – but a riskier and more ambitious maxim – ‘No reality without representation!’” Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 127.

“A person’s a person, no matter how small.” Theodore Giesell (Dr. Suess), *Horton Hears a Who*

“For assuredly a speech cannot be made without being made as the speech of some person” (*nam certe sermo fingi non potest ut non personae sermo fingatur*) Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae* IX.ii.32.

William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, a key text in this study, begins with a vision of a “fair feld ful of folk” populated by “alle manere men” (B.prol.19-20). Most of these “men,” however, are allegorical personifications, which we shall provisionally define here as *anthropomorphic characters with the capacity to speak who are named after the non-human entities they represent*.¹ What “represent” may mean in this context will be the focus of my extended investigation into the figurative affinities of political and literary discourses in late-medieval England, each of which perform kinds and degrees of representation, as Latour’s quote in the epigraph above implies. The literary sense of representation, at its most fundamental, usually turns on the distinction between figurative and literal signification. Representations can be mimetic or allegorical. *Piers Plowman* confounds those distinctions. Langland’s personifications populate a common field that “literal” characters also inhabit. In Langland’s poem, such confounding motivates the entire plot; the premise of the search in the first half of *Piers* for Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest turns on the personified exteriority of these non-human agents,

¹ As Elizabeth Fowler notes, especially in literature, “[t]he category of person does not include all human beings, nor does it consist only of human beings.” See Elizabeth Fowler, *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 27.

personifications of moral agencies, entities that exist outside those who search for them. In subtle ways, *prosopopoeia* drives the narrative even while frustrating the expectations of readers and characters alike.

The narrative of *Piers* amounts to a fictive assemblage that explodes ordinary distinctions between figurative and literal, human and non-human, gathering them all under the phenomenological commonality of being anthropomorphic, or “human-shaped.” This enables a certain referential dilation and transference that extends far beyond the poem, to the extent that one of Langland’s personifications would play a significant part in the 1381 Rising. In the letters of John Ball, the isotypical name “Pier Plowman” functioned as an inspirational symbol for the hard-working, Christian, and surprisingly literate agrarian class whom Ball was addressing, suggesting at the very least Ball’s knowledge of Langland’s poem and perhaps his audience’s as well. Yet *Piers* did not remain within the sphere of merely literary symbolic reference. In the entry for 1381, the Cistercian *Dieulacres Abbey Chronicle* lists “Per Plowman” alongside historical individuals such as “Iak Strawe” and “Iohannis B.,” implying his status as among the principal leaders of the 1381 Rising, including John Ball himself.² In this instance, as John Bowers notes, “[t]extual appropriation became so aggressive that a literary figure was transformed into a historical personage.”³ In late-medieval England, the discursive boundary between literature and politics is exceedingly thin; fiction itself was an agent of sociopolitical influence. In this mediated instance of Langland’s poem’s reception, the personification of an agrarian agent, *Piers Plowman*, became a coded figure involved in a

² See M.V. Clarke and V.H. Galbraith, eds., *Chronicle of Dieulacres Abbey, 1381-1403 BJRL* 14 (1930), 164-165.

³ See John Bower, *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 108.

revolutionary event through which the fourteenth century's pressing questions of political representation were raised, to the extent of ultimately being enlisted in support of the subjugated, yet startlingly literate rebels.⁴ Yet this should not be surprising given the versatile capabilities and affordances of the literary device, or so I want to argue.

Five decades later, personification allegory would be taken up by John Lydgate to support a political agenda very different from the 1381 Rising. In Book VI of the *Fall of Princes*, the quasi-authorial persona "Bochas" is startled by the arrival of a personified Fortune, who scolds him for attempting to offer remedies for the disastrous effects of regiminal contingency. Fortune represents, in a compressed anthropomorphic form, the sub-lunar condition of temporal contingency manipulated by her wheel. And yet she stakes her claim in distinctly political terms that beg the question of her representation of contingency by appealing to terms of institutional authority, articulating stable statutes. She first chides him with all the censure of an offended sovereign: "Thou dost folie thi wittis for to plie / ...Bi thi writyng to fynde a remedie, / To interupte in thi last dawes / My statutis [and] my custumable lawes" (149, 152-54). Fortune's specious appeal to her "custumable lawes" belies the fact that her power, as she herself later claims, comes not from a unified, unilateral establishment but from her own disseminated, chaotic haphazardness. She then defies the pretense to "souereynte" that men dare claim against her "fredam" (158): "Whi also shold I nat haue my wille / To shewe my-silf now smothe and aftir trouble?" (173-74). Justifying the phenomenological turbulence of her appearance with reference to the free volition that she rhetorically possesses suggests not only the contradiction in her complaint, but the instability of sovereign power itself.

⁴ Stephen Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

Lydgate had been commissioned to translate Boccaccio's poem, *De casibus virorum illustrium*, circa 1431 by the Lord Protector of England, Humphrey of Gloucester, for propagandistic reasons that are clear enough: the poem indicates the latter's prudence and immunity from the bad political fortune suffered by those in the poem's narratives. His foresight in commissioning this text simultaneously intimates his own awareness of its content, as well as its importance for other rulers who, it is thereby intimated, have not yet read it, but should. Yet in the dialogue between Bochas and Fortune, an anthropomorphic personification of contingency critically engages with the political agency of both authorial intent and human patrons -- two forces that have materially enabled Fortune's emergence in the poem. As will be explored further in chapter five, Fortune's personified embodiment and assertion of sovereign right performs a subtle subversion of the larger patronage context, exposing not only the instability of Humphrey's pretensions to have so easily conquered Fortune but also begging the question of the possibility of overcoming Fortune given the psychological volatility of sovereign power that Humphrey himself claims to bear. Crucially, Lydgate's political message here depends on the possibilities for singular presence and voice afforded by the device of personification. Only animate beings are accorded a will, let alone a sovereign one; as Humphrey knows, shared sovereign power begets conflict. And yet the distinctive threat of Fortune's power comes not in her unilateral singularity but rather in "her" amorphous haphazardness, what Chaucer calls the "unwar strook" (*Boece* II.Pr.2; *Monk's Tale* VII.2764). If we see Fortune as a proxy for Humphrey himself, then we can appreciate how, insofar as it concentrates power into a single agent, the rhetorical force of anthropomorphosis echoes Humphrey's own pretensions to the centralization of royal

power in his own person, over and against the other members of the regency council. Moreover, in the midst of relatively propagandistic verse, Lydgate's personification produces a nuanced critique of Humphrey's project of patronizing political verse. Personification, this time more deliberately than with "Pier Plowman" in the Abbey chronicle, proves to be an apt political apparatus in the rhetorical endeavor.⁵

Langland's and Lydgate's texts may also be exploiting what political historians have long noted: personification has a central place in late-medieval political matters where the representation of diverse constituencies is at stake. As Charles Taylor has recently written, political personification is necessary for popular sovereignty: "[f]or the people to be sovereign, it needs to form an entity and have a personality."⁶ In this dissertation I argue that personification is not just useful to literary and legal writers for making political arguments, but that the rhetorical figure engenders and enables careful scrutiny of a complex field of political relations. There we find distributed many of the actual and anthropomorphic prerequisites for political agency. Ordinarily such figures -- institutions and concepts among them -- did not receive due attention from medievals as phenomena of political import in themselves, but the climate of a regime could make them tactically indispensable as allegorical agents. Specific textual sites in the writings of Chaucer, Langland and Lydgate at which one can discern these cross-pressures -- human and non-human, figurative and literal, political and literary -- constitute the data of this study.

⁵ I follow J. Allan Mitchell in thinking of the use of rhetoric in the writing of poets like Lydgate and Gower (and Chaucer and Langland) as "an activity that seeks to engage audiences as potential respondents rather than [...] voyeurs upon whom no clear responsibility is placed." See Mitchell, "John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture." *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c. 1350-c.1500*. Ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 570.

⁶Judith Butler, Jurgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 43.

The remainder of this introduction is organized into five sections:

- I. Personification (and) Allegory (12-21)
- II. Rhetorical Sources of *Prosopopoeia* (21-27)
- III. Political Personification: Some Late-Medieval Developments (27-28)
- IV. Anthropomorphism, Semiosis, & Actor-Networks (28-44)
- V. Chapter Descriptions (44-46)

I. Personification (and) Allegory

One of the recurrent problems in literary criticism is with the definition of terms, some saying “allegory” where others would want “personification” to be understood, some assuming the conflation of the two. This has led at times to unwarranted expectations being placed on personification allegory, whether these are expectations more proper to allegory as Paul de Man, for example, defines it -- as a master-trope -- or those more aligned with naturalist sensibilities. As a result, the rhetorical dynamics of the anthropomorphic figuration unique to *prosopopoeia* has been either obscured or neglected.

In the last three decades, personification allegory has received important if scattered attention in several scholarly explorations and collections: Stephen Greenblatt’s 1981 edited volume *Allegory and Representation*, Morton Bloomfield’s edited collection of the same year, entitled *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, Carolyn Van Dyke’s *The Fiction of Truth* (1985), Jon Whitman’s *Allegory* (1987), Carr, Clarke, and Nievergelt’s edited collection *On Allegory: Some Medieval Aspects and Approaches* (2008), Brenda

Machosky's edited volume *Thinking Allegory Otherwise* (2010), and the new *Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (2010).⁷ What they share is an attention to allegory considered as a literary device and not as a patristic mode of interpretation (*allegoresis*), on which more soon. Nonetheless, the contributions of many authors to the above collections effectively re-entrench the post-Romantic prejudice that assumes the rhetorical act of allegorical personification is tainted by a certain discursive clumsiness. Personification allegory has accordingly been taken as the most simplistic sort of allegory, receiving considerable abuse from literary critics since Coleridge. Warren Ginsberg, for instance, speaks of "the facile personifications one finds in so many medieval poems," contrasting them with what he calls "living character."⁸ Such attitudes toward personification, while valid to a degree in some contexts, have unfortunately resulted in assumptions about the device's simplicity that grossly underestimate its generative power.

Allegory, etymologically, suggests private or secret discourse; allegory is "other" (*allo-*) than "to speak in public" (*agoreuein*). In classical rhetoric, as Jon Whitman and Anne Astell have respectively emphasized, to speak allegorically is to retreat from open assembly in order to speak about matters too sensitive for the crowd (*demos*). They contend that it is, in this classical context at least, an anti-democratic trope. According to this reading, allegory introduces a fissure within religious or philosophical argument

⁷ See Stephen Greenblatt, ed. *Allegory and Representation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981); Morton Bloomfield, ed. *Allegory, Myth, Symbol* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Carolynn Van Dyke, *The Fiction of Truth: Structures of Meaning in Narrative and Dramatics Allegory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Mary Carr, K.P. Clarke and Marco Nievergelt, eds. *On Allegory: Some Medieval Aspects and Approaches* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008); Brenda Machosky, ed. *Thinking Allegory Otherwise* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, eds. *Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁸ See Warren Ginsberg, *The Cast of Character: The Representation of Personality in Ancient and Medieval Literature* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 78.

through polysemy, adding another figurative “level” to a text, as an exercise in elitist functional ambiguity.⁹ This enables the trope to be deployed for political expedience or intellectual pedantry as a way of stratifying audiences into different sets of readers: those who are able to interpret the allegorical sense and those who are not.¹⁰

The esotericism of ancient allegory is modified in the later Middle Ages when, as a result of developments in early Christian biblical exegesis, Latin poetic literature beginning with Prudentius’ *Psychomachia* would come to use allegorical figuration to make doctrine accessible and entertaining by adding another layer of “literal” semantic content typically narrative in form to a non-literary discourse.¹¹ This use rendered allegory didactic and transparent rather than esoteric, but nonetheless still in need of a measure of hermeneutic effort, a sort of participatory reading practice that would enhance impression and recall of abstract content.¹² This dynamic of an added figurative sense was sometimes achieved *post hoc* through a mode of interpretation (*allegoresis*) that interpretively identified certain characters with specific virtues or ideas (as in the *Ovide Moralisé*). The sort of allegory we are concerned with, however, was inscribed into the texts from the outset, most commonly by naming characters after the virtues or ideas they represent. While the former attached ideas to figurative bodies through interpretation, personification allegory -- what Whitman calls “compositional allegory” --

⁹ Kerby-Fulton describes functional ambiguity, originally Annabel Patterson’s term, as “ambiguous reference and phrasing used deliberately by a writer in self-defense.” In the situation I am describing above, it is figurative mystification rather than self-defense that serves as a motivating factor. See Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 19. See also Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

¹⁰ See Whitman, *Allegory*, especially chapters 1 and 2.

¹¹ On the way that personification allegory concretizes the abstract, see C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

¹² See Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2009).

anthropomorphizes ideas in the composition itself, incarnating them as embodied agents in a narrative, however contrived. The former relies on the hermeneutic agency of the reader, the latter on the rhetorical agency of the author. Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* is an important early example of this sort of compositional allegory in which various personified liberal arts emerge as characters alongside Roman deities such as Mercury and Apollo.

Such compositional or personification allegory was not unknown in classical literature, but it was not commonly referred to as *allegorouein*, or *allegoria*. It was instead called *prosopopoeia*. Examples range from Rumor (*fama*) in Virgil's *Aeneid* to Death (*thanatos*) in Euripides' *Alceste*. As Lewis has argued, however, even such cases as these are more closely aligned with cultic mythology, as with the municipal deity of Rome appearing to Caesar in Lucan's *Pharsalia* or the later Neoplatonic mythopoeia of Capella's *De Nuptiis*. Lewis' phrasing, as often, is felicitous: only with the "twilight of the gods" does the "mid-morning of the personifications" begin to shine.¹³ Prudentius and Boethius are key figures in this change, but the noon-day climax of the great Latin, French, and English personification allegories -- those of Bernard Silvestris, Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, Guillaume Deguilleville, William Langland, John Gower, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Lydgate, et al. -- would begin with the twelfth-century Renaissance and last through John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Neither allegory nor personification is necessarily more semantically rich, for each can, in the framework of an individual text, "contain" the other.¹⁴ In an allegorical

¹³ See Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 52.

¹⁴ The distinction drawn by Whitman between interpretive allegory (*allegoresis*) and compositional allegory (*prosopopoeia*) turns on the similarly artificial but nonetheless analytically useful distinction between sacred and secular texts. Yet this alignment of interpretive allegory and sacred texts, and

narrative, nonhuman characters can be personified, while those personified nonhumans in turn allegorize human experiences, faculties, ideas, institutions, and so on. Allegorical narratives often house personifications, although they also contain allegorized objects, architecture, and geographical features as well. On the other hand, allegory and personification work together with a special virtue. As Morton Bloomfield, Samuel Levin, and others have argued, the most dynamic instances of personification allegory -- often the premodern ones -- are capable of subtly modulating their representational capacities between the esoteric and the obvious within a single text, addressing multiple publics for several purposes, and oscillating strategically between allegorical and mimetic registers of signification. So what is it that differentiates allegory and personification? Allegory and personification are neither simply convertible nor diametrically opposed. Allegory *per se* happens when two semantic levels -- the literal and figurative -- are mapped directly onto one another, most often as an “extended metaphor” which imbues the primary characters and events of a given narrative, at some level of consistency, with an additional figurative sense. The second, figurative meaning of an allegory may not be immediately apparent, but when it is discovered it is as an intended (political or didactic allegory) or inspired (biblical or typological allegory) sense. The former, closely related to personification, can involve the bestowal of voice and often also imagined embodiment upon a non-human entity that can yet need not be part of a larger allegorical

compositional allegory and secular texts, ultimately implodes as well; while biblical scripture was interpreted according the fourfold hermeneutic (with the first of its spiritual senses often denoted as *allegoria*) secular texts were often read allegorically as well, such as the *Ovide moralisé* or other pagan narratives; certain audacious Italians (Dante and Boccaccio) would even suggest that their own writings be read according to the fourfold method, in some cases doing so themselves! On the other hand, although compositional allegory is only an occasional feature in the biblical Wisdom tradition, personification was used by the twelfth-century Platonists as much more than a mere heuristic; Whitman himself sees Bernardus Silvestris’ *prosopopoeia* of macrocosmic entities in *Cosmographia* as bearing a deep religious authenticity. See Whitman, *Allegory*, 1-13.

narrative.¹⁵ In this sense, while any nonhuman thing can be allegorized without its ontological status being changed (*e.g.*, Langland’s “Tower of Truth”), personification involves the *anthropomorphosis* of non-human entities, whether abstractions, animals, or institutions. Depending on the subject matter, differing kinds and degrees of ontological transformation are involved in becoming fictively humanized.¹⁶

Because an abiding fluidity characterizes the semantic range implicit within each specific instance of *prosopopoeia*, a brief foray through varieties of allegorical personification may assist here. For instance, i) some personifications can be more dramatic or apostrophic, such as when Chaucer’s Fortune disputes with the presumably human interlocutor in *Fortune*. This is what Quintilian would call “impersonation” (*IO* IX.ii.31).¹⁷ A second sort of personification ii) embraces and sometimes even depends on the mimetic effects that accompany the generation of a new character. For instance, a dog has not far to go to become like a human: it need only stand upright, speak intelligibly, and perhaps wear garments.¹⁸ A concept, however, as an abstract immaterial entity, requires additional features for its anthropomorphic concretion in narrative, features that a dog already possesses (*i.e.*, a material body). Sometimes in a poem these features are merely assumed, and the resulting personified concept can seem stiff, but when done well

¹⁵ As Emily Steiner writes, “The whole point of personification allegory is that it literalizes that which is not meant to be taken literally – in a certain way, it works counter to the logic of biblical hermeneutics.” See Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45. It should be noted that Steiner is neglecting the dimension of philosophical realism here, which would render allegory a literalizing of what is meant to be taken literally – that is, the real existence of universals. But on another level the discrete, finite embodiment of a universal in personification allegory would be an *allegorization* of such a real universal, whose existence as a divine idea in the mind of God would of course exceed any and all of its temporal instantiations.

¹⁶ Materialization, reification, humanization, individuation are some of these kinds and degrees of transformation that James Paxson lists in his seminal study. See James Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 42-43.

¹⁷ Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*. (in 2 vols.) Trans. John Selby Watson (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856).

¹⁸ A narrative in which animals are personified has typically been considered as apologue or beast fable; my point is that personification is at work within this generic category, as an aspect of fabulous narrative.

the effect can be dizzyingly powerful. The figurative emergence of non-human characters in narrative would be categorized by Quintilian as an instance of “personation” (*IO* IX.ii.30, 33), equivalent syntactically to the generation of personal agents through the transformation of common or abstract nouns into proper ones. These two types -- let’s call them the apostrophic and the characterological -- imply that personification combines and mediates between unitary allegory and plural mimesis. In some ways, personification can even be seen as closer to a sort of fictional *realism* insofar as, while the allegorical meaning of the text unfolds on its figurative “surface,” the embodied characters populate the literal level of plot and dialogue. Personification is a hybrid rhetorical figure, and authors variously exploit its figurative affordances along the allegorical-mimetic spectrum, devoting varying degrees of attention to the emergence, appearance, and agency of a given anthropomorphism.¹⁹

Alberic of Monte Cassino says in his eleventh-century text, *Flores Rhetorici*, that *prosopopoeia* “is not a technique to be ignored” (*FR* VII.6). Yet while the critical history of allegory has been written and rewritten, less analysis has been devoted to the rhetorical figure that passes under the name of *prosopopoeia*, which, as we have now clarified, has to do specifically with figurative anthropomorphosis. This lacuna is perhaps due to the prevailing critical prejudice against *prosopopoeia*, described by Angus Fletcher and

¹⁹ See James K. Wimsatt’s point on the difference between mimetic “mirrors” and narrative allegories: “Like the representations of painters, literary mirrors show height, breadth, and depth, but they tend to be static, to lack movement in time. With narrative allegories the case is exactly opposite: action, temporal process, is the essence of narrative allegory; it requires movement in time but no particular spatial extension.” See James Wimsatt, *Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 216. As Scanlon puts it, “Personification can mediate between allegory and mimesis because it can interpenetrate both. It can function in a fully allegorical fashion and be fully mimetic at the same time. But this interpenetration is not a compromise between the abstractive propensities and the ‘realism’ of imitation. Personification can be mimetic because of its roots in allegory, not in spite of them.” See Larry Scanlon, “Personification and Penance,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 21 (2007): 24. See also Whitman, *Allegory*, 5-6.

others as an inferior, limited form of figuration in contrast to more modern (but not postmodern), realistic modes of description and characterization. Consider the remarks of one critic who conflates personification and allegory:

When the sense of possibility, or contingency, becomes part of the writer's perceptual set – and it can only do so when it is a fact of social life – then s/he will not, I suggest, find allegory a satisfactory mode of expression. That is because the allegorical character can display no free will, no irrational or inexplicable ambivalence.... The allegorical character may make mistakes, but even mistakes are easily rationalized by reference to the dominating abstract ideology. In the long run the allegorical persona is perfectly predictable, functioning within a narrative frame which is also perfectly predictable.²⁰

In striking contrast, Lavinia Griffiths argues that William Langland's fourteenth-century use of personification allegory in characterizing the Seven Deadly Sins amounts to an instance of "late medieval naturalism."²¹ Griffiths implies that personifications can not only incorporate all the mimetic details used in describing a properly human character, but also serve "more than purely mimetic function": "Because there can be considerable variation in the degree of 'concreteness' or 'abstraction' of each of these, the transformation of the concept or principle into the being in the story can engender a number of different forms."²² What is more, this introduction of an abstract entity as a narrative actor has been seen as not only a rhetorical but also an ontological event.

Griffiths likens the effect of personification to a sort of ontological reclassification:

Figures of speech tend to disturb an existing set of categories and an established order, as they create a new one.... A metaphor which translates an abstract or universal term, the name of a quality, like truth or sin or hunger, into a person, upsets a system of relationships, and makes possible a series of categorical propositions which were not possible before.... One can therefore argue that the personification of abstractions does not involve a substitution or equation of

²⁰ Sheila Delaney, *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990), 57. See also Angus J. Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964).

²¹ See Lavinia Griffiths, *Personification in Piers Plowman* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1985), 50.

²² *Ibid.*

concretion and concept, but rather a change of classification. The general term slides down the branches of the categories to end up under the heading of *species infirma – homo*.²³

Any claim that personification suffers from an intrinsic limitation of narrative agency would thus seem to be exaggerated, at best; in fact, *prosopopoeia* issues new anthropomorphic agencies even as their capacities and appearance often exceed the human through reference to their original non-human qualities. Accordingly, my study will attempt to offer examples that counter the charges by Fletcher, Delaney, and others that personified characters remain bounded by the figurative limits of their identifying concept or non-human object, and therefore cannot help but prove irremediably dull.

Similarly, while much attention has been given to political allegory, the relationship between literary personification and politics in the broadest sense has scarcely been theorized at all.²⁴ An exemplary study of medieval political allegory, such as Ann Astell's *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England* (1999), for instance, interprets several late medieval literary allegories as vehicles for covert political commentary, offering in the process a nuanced survey of medieval rhetoric and topical invention. Yet her concern is primarily the topical allusions made by allegorical texts to contemporary events and figures. While appreciative of her findings, I want to attend to the political vectors inherent to the textual effects of the device of personification, extending and exploring the theoretical significance of producing non-human, anthropomorphic characters in embodied, narrative dialogue. What is produced is

²³ Ibid, 44, 45. See also Benjamin Schnieder and Tatjana von Solodkoff. "In Defense of Fictional Realism." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 59.234 (January 2009): 138-149.

²⁴ One notable exception is the work of Theresa Kelley, who has shown, for example, that political forces utilize "allegorical images because they are visually compelling, even forceful, tools for shaping public opinion that can be blown up or made deceptively small such that their fictitiousness cannot escape notice, however much they refer to real things and events." See Theresa M. Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 92.

something *ecological* – by which I mean more densely and diversely populated and complexly interrelated than topicality usually allows. My investigation will explore what it is about the device of personification in its formal deployment that expands the field of political agency to include what, in a new theoretical idiom, can be called an actor-network oriented to the perennial political issue of the one and the many. My focus on *prosopopoeia* in several texts of interest will coincide with the delineation of an intertextual, rhetorical dimension of political ecology, as discussed more below.

II. Rhetorical Sources of *Prosopopoeia*

Cicero and Quintilian, the seminal sources of rhetorical theory in the Middle Ages, both offer definitions of *prosopopoeia* that involve the fictional attribution of personal agency in ways useful for the representation of humans and non-humans. They prove to be forerunners in assuming a deep connection between legal-political and literary discourses when it comes to anthropomorphic agency. Cicero's treatment of personification is not extensive, even as passages from his speeches were often cited as exemplary instances of the figure. In his *De Oratore* III.liii, Cicero describes *prosopopoeia*, which he translates into Latin as *conformatio*, as the “introduction of fictitious persons” (*personarum ficta inductio*).²⁵ In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, which was ascribed to Cicero in the Middle Ages, “[c]onformatio is the practice of making an absent person present or attributing life to some inanimate object.”²⁶ Not only the making present of an absent person, *conformatio* involves the rhetorical attribution of life, sentient existence, to that which does not otherwise possess it.

²⁵ Quoted in Whitman, *Allegory*, 269.

²⁶ See Charles Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1959), 151.

Quintilian's treatment of *prosopopoeia* is by far the most detailed and significant among premodern rhetoricians. His *Institutiones Oratoriae*, a massive compendium of rhetorical devices, was well known in the Middle Ages.²⁷ John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*, for instance, cites Quintilian's *Institutiones* incessantly, most often from Book I, II, and X. Baldwin thinks that "[i]t is only fair to assume of so careful a scholar [as John] reading the first books and one of the last, and occupied with Quintilian's idea of educational sequence, that he read the whole work" – or at least all that was available.²⁸ The *Institutiones* were written as an encyclopedic glossary for reference in the practice of legal argument. Quintilian foregrounds *prosopopoeia*'s legal roots, tied to the representation of a defendant in Roman court by an *advocatus* (lawyer) who personifies, by speaking in place of, his client.²⁹ He introduces it thus: "[a] figure which is still bolder, and requires, as Cicero thinks, greater force, is the personation of characters, or *prosopopoeia*" (IX.ii.29). Quintilian specifies that in the invention of personifications, the mode of imagined agency precedes and determines the discursive contours spoken by a fictive agent; he explains that the device happens "when we invent persuasions, or reproaches, or complaints, or eulogies, or lamentations, and put them into the mouths of characters likely to utter them" (IX.ii.30). But such characters need not be human, for "[i]n this kind of figure it is allowable even to bring down the gods from

²⁷ It is commonly assumed that no complete copy of the *Institutiones* was available until Poggio's rediscovery in 1417. Nonetheless, scholars have shown that through available portions of the text, Quintilian's rhetorical theory was second only to Cicero in influence during the Middle Ages. See James Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 358-59.

²⁸ See Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1959), 170-171. See also E.R. Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 482.

²⁹ As Quintilian says in Book VI of his *Institutio Oratoria*, "And by such impersonations I mean fictitious speeches supposed to be uttered, such as an advocate puts in the mouth of his client" ('*Prosopopoeiae, id est fictae alienarum personarum orationes, quales litigatorum ore dicit patronus*') (IO VI.i.25).

heaven, and evoke the dead; and cities and states are gifted with voices” (IX.ii.29-31).

Quintilian and later authors would use an excerpt from Cicero’s speech against Catiline as a paradigmatic instance of personification, one that exemplifies the politicized gifting of voice to “cities and states”: “For if my country, which is far dearer to me than my life, if all Italy, if the whole republic, should thus address me, Marcus Cicero, what are you doing?” (*IO* IX.ii.32).³⁰

Quintilian gives a formula for personification whose pattern will recur inasmuch as the definition itself deploys the device: personification happens “when we give voice to things which nature has not given voice” (IX.ii.32). As examples, Quintilian lists several “imaginary beings, as Virgil personifies *Fame* [...] and Ennius *Death* and *Life*, whom he represents in one of his Satires as engaging in combat” (IX.ii.36). Quintilian ranges over several of the figure’s aspects, from what we might call impersonation -- mimicking the speech of other humans (IX.ii.31) -- to personification (giving voice to things which nature has not; IX.ii.32) and even just “personation” (the invention of characters and their speeches; IX.ii.30, 33). These three variants of *prosopopoeia* delineate a range of semiotic diversity. Notably, it requires skill to use the figure well: “great power of eloquence is necessary for such efforts; for what is naturally fictitious and incredible must either make a stronger impression from being beyond the real, or be regarded as nugatory from being unreal” (IX.ii.33). When used well, *prosopopoeia* involves a certain mixture of fantastic amplification and representational, or mimetic realism: “Did [Cicero] not...express the very image of every one to whom he was giving voice, so that they seems to speak beyond themselves, indeed, but still as themselves?” (*IO* III.viii.50).

³⁰ From Cicero’s *In Catilinam* I.27.

Quintilian's discussion of personification also draws on parallels between rhetorical declamation and poetic narrative; he admits that "*prosopopoeia* sometimes assumes the appearance of narration, whence oblique speeches are found among the historians" (IX.ii.37). And later in the *Institutiones*, Quintilian refers to *prosopopoeia* in literary narratives as a model or tactic for improving argument at law:

There is great regard paid to character among the tragic and comic poets, for they introduce a variety of persons accurately distinguished. Similar discrimination used to be observed by those who wrote speeches for others, and it is observed by declaimers, for we do not always declaim as pleaders of a cause, but very frequently as parties concerned in it. 39. But even in the causes in which we plead as advocates, the same difference should be carefully observed, for we often take upon ourselves the character of others and speak, as it were, with other persons' mouths. (IO XI.i.38-9)³¹

In this passage, Quintilian elaborates on the affinity between the rhetorical practice of legal advocacy and literary characterization in tragic and comic narrative. The rhetorical skills necessary in the narrative representation of character and voice are the same needed for successful legal pleading. The validity of this alignment of rhetorical figuration in literary and legal discourse is important for my analyses of literary texts below, a parallel that in several texts is made explicit insofar as the setting of the narrative is a courtroom, as in *Parliament of Fowls*, *House of Fame*, and the early parts of *Piers Plowman*. And in the ancient courts those requiring representation included women and children, who were not, under Roman law, capable of holding full citizenship:

Not only, indeed, are there as many various points to be observed in *prosopopoeia* as in the cause itself, but even more, as in them we assume the characters of

³¹ Quintilian goes on: "The same care is to be taken with respect to those for whom we plead, for in speaking for different characters, we must often adopt different styles, according to whether our client is of high or low station, popular or unpopular, noting, at the same time, the difference in their principles of action and in their past lives" (IO XI.i.42).

children, women, nations, and even of voiceless objects. In regard to all of them, propriety must be observed. (*IO XI.i.42*)³²

The grouping of women and children among other, non-human entities, beyond demonstrating the patriarchy of Roman culture, suggests the ontological diversity capable of being figured by *prosopopoeia*. Such diversity is rendered intelligible by an inquiry into political context, for women and children may be abject in Roman society but they are at the same time elevated by personification when it benefits them in legal representation.

Treatments of personification appear in many medieval rhetorical treatises with both interesting variation and remarkable consistency, echoing and adapting the close relationship between law, politics, and rhetorical figuration that we have explored in Cicero and Quintilian. See Appendix 1 for a survey of these definitions; notably, Quintilian and other writers -- including Priscian, Isidore of Seville, Alberic of Montecassino, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf -- use the figure of personification in defining it. When discussing the use of personification for representing non-humans, each writer distributes the anthropomorphic capacity of bestowing or withholding voice to the personification of *Natura*. The rhetor-poet emerges as one who is capable of transgressing the prerogative of Nature and unnaturally distributing the capacity of speech to entities that are thereby classifiable as newly invented, fictive persons, what Cicero and later thinkers call *personae fictae*. Recalling the etymology of *prosopopoeia* as connoting the making (*poeisis*) of persons (*prosopon*), a continuum of agency in

³² In his work on personification, James Paxson notes that “the sense of Quintilian’s sentence assimilates women, children, and ‘voiceless things’ into one ontic category – a category apart from that of adult males who can be represented in a fictional text according to other means of characterization (*ethopeia* or *adlocutio*). Roman legal theory, in fact, designated any being – corporate or individual – that was not a ‘sane, adult, and natural person,’ as part of a category in need of ‘curatorial’ representation (Kantorowicz 374). Thus, children, mad persons, and cities required figurational processing in order to enjoy legal voice or social presence.” See Paxson, *Poetics of Personification*, 49.

bestowing vocally defined personhood can thus be discerned. At the head is Nature, who distributes speech to humans and does not distribute speech to nonhumans. But in *prosopopoeia*, human poets can extend speech, given by Nature, to nonhumans: Nature → humans/poets → nonhumans.

The presence of the personification of *natura* in many classical and medieval definitions of *prosopopoeia* has a political significance. The political status of non-humans such as animals, rivers or even concepts in the Middle Ages is ambiguous.³³ While some medieval writers consider non-human animals to be utterly apolitical, others suggest that non-human communities provide an ideal model for the human *polis*.³⁴ At what point the boundary of the human (or non-human) intersects with that of the political thus remains ambivalently productive, and in *prosopopoeia* this corresponds with the point of intersection between figurative and literal, as we shall explore in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. The second political aspect evident in the rhetorical definition of personification can be seen in the example from Cicero cited by almost all other rhetoricians in which it is a regional polity that is anthropomorphized, a republic whose imagined speech incites Cicero to his moral duty of denouncing Catiline.³⁵ The pathos

³³ By the adjective "political" I mean to imply all that which regards public matters of concern relating to governance and association, as well as more "economic" issues such as resource distribution.

³⁴ The premise here, constituting an important strand of medieval thought stemming from Aristotle and Cicero, is that human politics is natural, for humans are "political animals" or, in Aquinas' phrase, *animale politicum*. Nederman and Forhan call this the legacy of "political naturalism." In descriptions of non-human collectives, the device of personification plays an important role for manifesting the humanly comparable contours of, for example, a beehive. See Cary J. Nederman and Kate Langdon Forhan, eds., *Medieval Political Theory -- A Reader: The Quest for the Body Politic* (London: Routledge, 1993), 3. On what he calls the "Naturalness of Society and the State," see also Gaines Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State, 1100-1322* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 494-561.

³⁵ See Appendix I for later citations of Cicero. Interestingly, in *Confessio Amantis* VII, John Gower refers to Cicero's speech against Catiline as a properly political use of rhetoric in its supposed avoidance of flowery embellishment, *unlike* Caesar's defense of Catiline. It is plausible that Gower, whose own poem deploys personification as a framing fiction, being familiar with personification in legal rhetoric, would have seen it as a prudent figure in public poetry. See J. Allan Mitchell, *John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, 572; and John Gower, *Confessio Amantis* VII.1595-1628.

involved in such an imagined encounter, a quality of direct address, plays a key part in the rhetorical maintenance of good governance, as Lucan, for instance would take up in Book I of *Pharsalia* when Rome addresses Julius Caesar. This and the example from Cicero's speech against Catiline are early examples of personification's legal-political utility. In the late Middle Ages, as it happens, figurative personification was put to sophisticated use in law and politics.

III. Political Personification: Some Late-Medieval Developments

Personification is arguably *the* prevalent fiction in later medieval European law and politics. From the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries especially, the climate of political theory is thick with persons not all of whom are people: corporate ones and fictive ones, royal and representative ones, legal and natural ones. Medieval literary scholarship has begun to acknowledge the importance of this legal-political climate for vernacular poetry.³⁶ In a specifically English context, Bracton formalized the use of fictive persons in English law with his importation from Roman law of the tripartite distinction of legal entities into *res*, *personae*, or *actiones*.³⁷ Bracton's further meditations on the practicalities of litigation in court also evidence the utility of personification in a context perfectly analogous to the rhetorical *prosopopoeia* of Quintilian we have surveyed above. This utility was not lost on authors such as Chaucer, Gower, and Langland, who simulated scenes of legal advocacy in their writing.³⁸

³⁶ For example, see Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio Amantis* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2014).

³⁷ See Bracton, *Bracton de Legibus et Consuetudinis Angliae*. Ed. G. E. Woodbine. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), II.29.

³⁸ See Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 22-28.

Surveying some of the more prevalent examples of rhetorical person-making in late-medieval law and politics will help to further envision the historical-discursive context for this project. Given the lack of space in this introduction, however, such a survey appears in Appendix 2 where I survey legal fiction of corporate personality, and its generation of fictive linguistic agents. I also attend to writings surrounding two English institutions of political representation undergoing intense development in the later Middle Ages: parliament and constitutional monarchy. I indicate how specific concepts used for theorizing conciliar assembly and royal sovereignty partially derive from the legal fiction of corporate personality, such that anthropomorphic figuration plays a vital role in the definition of late medieval English representative governance.

Now we can turn to the theoretical approaches informing this dissertation.

IV. Anthropomorphism, Semiosis, and Actor-Networks

While medieval thinkers had their own vantages on anthropomorphism and political agency, recent scholarship, drawing on sources as wide ranging as Whitehead's cosmology and phenomenological considerations of materiality and affect, have blazed new trails in theorizing how we can think of agency in nonhumans.³⁹ An emerging school of thought known as political ecology, which combines political philosophy, social theory, and science studies, describes the agency of nonhuman entities in ways that encourage their consideration in political affairs.⁴⁰ Beyond a specific concern with

³⁹ For a medieval discussion of agency, see Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis* (New York: Columbia University, 2001), II.viii. Importantly, Marsilius acknowledges the limitations of human agency, and that, "of human acts arising from knowledge and desire, some arise without any control by the mind" (II.viii.2).

⁴⁰ For instance, Jane Bennett suggests that political ecology aims to offer "a style of political analysis that can better account for the contributions of nonhuman actants." See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), x.

influencing policy and protecting the “natural” environment, recent developments in political ecology spearheaded by Bruno Latour draw from various disciplines in an attempt to dismantle the conceptual binaries endemic to modern epistemology: nature and culture, facts and values, subject and object. Treating these divisions as fallacies emerging from the scientific and industrial revolutions, Latour hopes to re-enchant public discourse with questions of nonhuman agency in order to “bring the sciences into democracy,” and rethink “the composition of the common world.”⁴¹

Understandably, many political ecologists reject anthropomorphic language as a supposedly reductive mode that is assumed to perpetuate *anthropocentrism*. However, a select group of thinkers have suggested an alternative approach. Ian Bogost, for example, has noted that anthropomorphic language, such as personification, implicitly acknowledges and respects the limits of human thought and expression as necessarily “human-shaped.” To pretend otherwise would be to neglect the finitude of human knowing, as well as the positive explanatory power of anthropomorphism.⁴² Similarly, Brian Rotman has contended that the textual technology of alphabetic writing, with all of its syntactic and figurative affordances, has been a key factor in shaping reflection on the human person in the West. In Rotman’s words,

As the medium in which the legal, bureaucratic, historical, religious, literary, and social business of the West has been conducted, the alphabet’s textualization of thought, affect, and metaphysical systems and its shaping of psychic interiority have been so pervasive and all-encompassing as to be invisible. The very concept of ‘a person’ has been determined by the apparatus of alphabetic writing, communicating, presenting, theorizing, and framing it.⁴³

⁴¹ See Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁴² See Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

⁴³ See Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 94.

Rotman's insight suggests that personification is not only cognitively unavoidable, but that language itself tends toward -- and in turn defines -- the anthropomorphic.⁴⁴

While to some extent intrinsic to human linguistic communication, anthropomorphism can facilitate the acknowledgement of non-human agency as well. Jane Bennett admits that "an anthropomorphic element in perception can uncover a whole world of resonances and resemblances."⁴⁵ In this regard, says Latour: "we need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism -- the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature -- to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world."⁴⁶ Anthropomorphism can contribute powerfully to more complex models of human and nonhuman community. Yet it is important to emphasize that political ecology does not seek to strip humans of agency, nor does it suggest that the agency of nonhumans is more determinative than that of humans. As Bennett says, "to acknowledge human materialities as participants in a political ecology is not to claim that everything is always a participant, or that all participants are alike. Persons, worms, leaves, bacteria, metals, and hurricanes have different types and degrees of power, just as different persons have

⁴⁴ Samuel Levin points out that the majority of verbs in any language relate to specifically human activity. In his words, "The real reason that personification tends to predominate, it seems to me, is that even in his creative freedom man...[has] a limited and skewed number of predicates at this disposal (this condition, of course, derives from the fact that it was man who developed language, not animals or plants)." See Samuel Levin, "Allegorical Language" *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*. Ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 26.

⁴⁵ See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 98-99. She says further: "Anthropomorphizing, the interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics, is clearly a part of the story, but it is less clear how fatal it is....In revealing similarities across categorical divides and lighting up structural parallels between material forms in 'nature' and those in 'culture,' anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphisms" (Ibid).

⁴⁶ Bruno Latour, "An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto," *New Literary History* 41.3 (2010), 483. See also Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xvi. Bennett echoes Latour's point in saying that "the figure of an intrinsically inanimate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption" (x).

different types and degrees of power, different worms have different types and degrees of power, and so on.”⁴⁷

Latour’s pioneering work in actor-network theory helped reinvent political ecology as an academic field. Latour’s thought, as it happens, affords concepts that are particularly amenable for use in literary analysis. As he suggests, “[t]he redistribution of agencies is the right purview of literature studies.”⁴⁸ This is partly because Latour’s thinking about nonhuman agency has literary-theoretical origins and a long history of literary-critical application. A central term in Latour’s thought, “actant,” is derived from the work of narratologist A. J. Greimas, whose structuralist analyses of textual meaning differentiate between syntactic actants (grammatical functions) and semantic or thematic actors (narrative functions).⁴⁹ As Latour describes it,

Actant is a term from semiotics covering both humans and nonhumans; an actor is any entity that modifies another entity in a trial; of actors it can only be said that they act; their competence is deduced from their performances; the action, in turn, is always recorded in the course of a trial and by an experimental protocol, elementary or not.⁵⁰

Applying Latour’s terms, we can say that while the abstract nonhuman things or concepts that are personified can be seen as actants, personifications themselves amount to semiotic actors, interactive with other diegetic actors as catalyzed through the “trial” of a given plot.⁵¹ Unlike human characters, however, who are relatively confined to

⁴⁷ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 108.

⁴⁸ See Bruno Latour, “On actor-network theory: A few clarifications,” *Soziale Welt* 47.4 (1996): 378.

⁴⁹ Algirdas Julien Greimas, “Actants, Actors, and Figures,” *On Meaning: Selected Writing in Semiotic Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 106 and 114.

⁵⁰ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 237.

⁵¹ Given his grounding in literary theory, it comes as no surprise that Latour contends that the question of non-human agency is one “which humanists and literary studies are actually better equipped than most social sciences to deal with, thanks to their attention to the complex semiosis of human and nonhuman fictional characters.” See Latour, “Compositionist Manifesto,” 489, n. 25. Similarly, Elizabeth Fowler contends that “all discursive practices, including the sciences, use some of the resources of fiction and

predictable parameters of believable agency, personifications have a wider scope of development, even if their fictitious psychic interiority generally remains less manifest.⁵² And when actants and actors (non-persons and persons, the latter both human and nonhuman) interact in narrative, there are always what Latour would call redistributions of agency. Latour uses the noun “actor-network” to capture the inherent dynamism of agency within and around any particular agent, as always embedded in and recirculated through particular, open-ended networks. Bennett’s definition of an “ecology” merges neatly with what Latour means by actor-network, for she considers something “an ecology in the sense that it is an interconnected series of parts, but it is not a fixed order of parts, for the order is always being reworked in accordance with a certain ‘freedom of choice’ exercised by its actants.”⁵³ I will be primarily utilizing the term actor-network, rather than ecology, given the latter’s evocation of specifically material entities, whereas most of the personifications we will be investigating are figurations of either concepts, psychological faculties, or moral qualities.⁵⁴

personification to shape their own representations of the person. This is why formal literary analysis is a powerful tool for understanding the process of figuration when it occurs in any disciplinary context.” See Fowler, *Literary Character*, 29. And yet Latour’s conceptual distinction between actants and actors does not provide a seamless heuristic garment for my approach of *prosopopoeia*; even his term “actor-network,” which will be explained below, while it will assist in my delineation of a certain topical remainder “within” allegorical personifications, is not ultimately flexible enough for the sorts of figuration that *prosopopoeia* will engender. This much is to be expected; if a theory seems to resolve or explain away all quandaries in a given case or type of situation, the probability of an overarching inaccuracy or obscuring factor so large that it remains unnoticed, is all the higher. But certain terms from Latour will prove remarkably agile catalysts for articulating the sorts of figurative operations that personification performs in its “phase transitions” from non-human to human, and back again.

⁵² Latour clarifies that shift from semiotics to political ecology is enabled by Actor-Network Theory, or ANT (about which more below): “Building on the semiotic turn, ANT first brackets out society and nature to consider only meaning-productions; then, breaking with the limits of semiotics without losing its toolbox, it grants activity to the semiotic actors turning them into new ontological hybrids, world making entities.” See Bruno Latour, “On actor-network theory: A few clarifications,” 378.

⁵³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 97.

⁵⁴ In chapter one, however, which focuses on Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*, we will be exploring the personification of animals, specifically birds, and the notion of a political ecology will therefore be helpful.

But the political adjective I do not intend to abandon. As my explorations below will suggest, there is an affinity between the dialectic of singular and manifold agency in the figure of an actor-network and the negotiations of sovereign and conciliar representation in late-medieval politics. The specific personifications to which attention will be given below function as sites within which this mereological affinity becomes apparent, cohered within anthropomorphic contours. For the redistributions of agency in our literary texts of interest may not always seem to be of immediate political importance, but if the political can be defined as both the art of the possible and the partition of the sensible, then every imagined redistribution of agency is precisely political.⁵⁵ Every sovereign is a sovereign only in the “network” of conciliarity; every actor is an actor only in the “council” of its network. Likewise, every council is effective in the unity of its consensus, every constituency in the singularity of its delegated representative. Personification imagines actors who are also networks, and councils (multiplicities) that -- in their representative capacities (in both literary and political senses) -- are also sovereign agents. And it does so with nonhumans, which, as we will reiterate at various junctures, is in itself essentially political, insofar as “the political act consists in the exclamatory interjection of affective bodies as they enter a preexisting public, or, rather, as they reveal that they have been there all along as an unaccounted-for

⁵⁵ For politics as the “art of the possible,” see Otto Van Bismarck, Interview (11 August 1867) with Friedrich Meyer von Waldeck of the *St. Petersburgische Zeitung*; reprinted in *Fürst Bismarck: neue Tischgespräche und Interviews*, Vol. 1, p. 248. For politics as the “partition of the sensible,” see Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics” *Theory and Event* 5.3 (2001). Available here: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jacques-ranciere/articles/ten-thesis-on-politics/> In this regard, Fowler articulates the fraught series of cross-pressures that emerge in varying measure in every text we explore below: “Individualism suggests that endowing as many biological organisms as possible with the gift of independent humanity is just, but it is not always sufficient or desirable to recognize as persons all the individuals who need to be protected by the sphere of rights and immunities that humanity should confer. Daily life, both private and public, is full of such dilemmas. Power and stewardship must be gained, conferred, limited, transferred; trade and collaboration must be encouraged and made just; participation in the polity as well as protected retreat and dissent must be fully possible; independence and responsibility must be equally full.” See Fowler, *Literary Character*, 28.

part.”⁵⁶ Personification enables this “exclamatory interjection of affective bodies” inasmuch as it concretizes and bestows speech upon conceptual, psychological, or institutional entities in such a way that they enter and recalibrate the narrative field. What is more, as our texts of interest speculate about the political agency of various individuals and institutions -- parliaments, aristocrats, judges, housewives, peasants, kings, authors, not to mention the nonhuman entities that surround, compose, and orient them (virtues, mental faculties, speech-acts, concepts, etc.) -- they pay close attention to how specific characters facilitate the redistribution or repartition of power in a given field or ecology. This, in turn, impacts the reader’s capacity to reimagine the public milieu thus portrayed. As Bennett says of Ranciere’s political theory, “a political act not only disrupts, it disrupts in such a way as to change radically what people can ‘see.’”⁵⁷

So how do personifications perform the so-called redistribution of agency? I will explore the connection between personification and actor-network theory from three vantage points, each connected to a particular scale at or on which the figure of *prosopopoeia* performs its semiotic work.

Scale 1: Personification as Figure, or Actor-Network

The first scale pertains to the figurative or semiotic dynamic “within” a single personification, namely, the correspondent relationship between allegorical singularity on the one hand, and mimetic multiplicity on the other. With, that is, the distinguishing of the unified actor -- in which agency is located as efficient -- or the disseminated network -- through which agency is redistributed. This distinction pertains both to the extent to which a personification’s diegetic actions accord with its allegorical identity as

⁵⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 105.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 106-107.

counterbalanced with the realistic accretions of affect and interiority available to anthropomorphic figuration, and also to the obverse capacity for a personification to disseminate or disperse its singular status as an actor into a network of multiple human subcharacters or more obviously nonhuman actants, such as animals, or words, or events. In other words, personification introduces non-human actors which encode complex configurations of unity and multiplicity, two concepts at the heart of a theory of social analysis founded by Latour. Actor-network theory (ANT) interprets both individual organisms and social organizations as constituted by nonlinear relations at multiple scales, pluralizing what it means to speak of agency. Ultimately, agency is minimally locatable in “every entity that makes or promotes a difference in another entity or in a network.”⁵⁸ Regarding shifts in scale, ANT simultaneously conceives collectives as singularities and singularities as collectives, networks as actors and actors as networks.⁵⁹

So how is a personification like an actor-network? Some scholars have noted the presence of a metonymic (or isotypical, or isomorphic) aspect in personification that is relevant here.⁶⁰ Consider the personification of Wrong in *Piers Plowman*. After his dramatic and bloodied entrance into “parlement” in IV.47-60, the figure of Peace presents a “bille” against Wrong. The allegorical meaning of an injured Peace litigating against the personification of Wrong, who “was a wikked luft and wroghte muche sorwe” (IV.62) seems apparent, but what is notable for our purposes is that Wrong functions as

⁵⁸ Edwin Sayes, “Actor-Network Theory and methodology: Just what does it mean to say that nonhumans have agency?” *Social Studies of Science* 44.1 (2014): 141. In *Chaucer’s Agents*, Carolyn Van Dyke likewise notes that “[a]gency is by definition efficacious – action presumes an *agens* – and it need not be human, social, or even animate.” See Carolyn Van Dyke, *Chaucer’s Agents: Cause and Representation in Chaucerian Narrative* (Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 17.

⁵⁹ In other words, it treats each singularity as a part of a larger network, and each singular actor within a larger collective as, on a “deeper” scale, a network composed of “deeper” parts.

⁶⁰ *Isotype*: “representative of a greater number of entities ontologically identical to himself.” See Paxson, *Poetics of Personification*, 46. Also, see Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, on how “anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphisms” (98).

both a singular agent on the literal level as well as a categorical nexus “within” which any number of human agents and actions can be referentially assembled. A phenomenological reading of *Piers*, for instance, would emphasize the extent to which the actions of the character named Wrong are narratively indistinguishable from and identical with the aggregate actions of the historical individuals to whom Langland intends to refer, and who are therefore both outside and “inside” the fictional narrative, as what William of Ockham would call Wrong’s integrant parts. Holding together an emphasis on the representation of personal freedom that is inherent to *prosopopoeia* even while insisting on the device’s capacity for portraying specifically impersonal or distributed agency opens up a different approach to analyzing rhetorical figuration in medieval narrative. By exploring how personifications are like actor-networks (and hence traceable in their many referential parts and allegorical relations) even while attending to their mimetic uniqueness in simulating personhood with its deliberative intentionality (free agency, inflected speech, etc.), this study proposes a unique vantage on the medieval texts it explores.

Scale 2: Occasions for Personification

The second scale pertains to setting and plot, and the intradiegetic rationale for the interactions between various personifications, including how they envision their own purposes and limits. In our texts of interest, this scale will often be legal and/or conciliar, grounded in scenes of complaint or defense in trial, deliberative talk, or some combination of the two.

In enabling a singular fictive agent to stand for and speak on behalf of a non-vocal nonhuman or a conceptual collective (a part for a whole, an actor for a network), allegorical personification can be interpreted according to the paradigm of legal representation in which *prosopopoeia*, as we have seen, first emerged. It should be no surprise, in other words, that such dynamic personifications as Medea or Wrong emerge in court, and many of our texts of interest will have quasi-legal trials as their definitive diegetic setting. Quintilian had defined personification primarily as a rhetorical resource in pleading on behalf of one's client in court. In it, he says, "we...take upon ourselves the character of others and speak, as it were, with other persons' mouths" (*IO* XI.i.39). This includes even nonhumans, which demands that "we assume the characters of children, women, nations, and even of voiceless objects" (*IO* XI.i.42). In the texts we will explore, voice likewise gets extended to nonhumans. The underlying purpose here needs to be distinguished. Political ecologists have recognized the importance of legal representation in defending the agency of nonhumans, even going so far as to extend the legal fiction of personality to rivers, forests, etc., which thereby are granted certain rights.⁶¹ In the texts we will be examining, the purpose is different; the goal is undoubtedly to attain a deeper understanding of *the human*, but as nonetheless partially constituted by relations with nonhumans. This is no reason to ascribe an unthinking anthropocentrism to these texts; for what is actually happening, with the help of *prosopopoeia*, is equally as radical, even if ineluctable. In continuously posing the question of the human, these texts do so *in light of and through reference to the non-human*, whether the animal, the conceptual or even the divine.

⁶¹ See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 8-10.

Latour once again crystallizes the issue nicely here. Not only speaking of actors as definable through their effects “in the course of a trial,” he also introduces the notion of “spokesperson,” which “designat[es] the whole gamut of intermediaries between someone who speaks and someone else who speaks in that person’s place.”⁶² Importantly, Latour finds the term helpful to “show the profound kinship between representatives of humans (in the political sense) and representatives of nonhumans (in the epistemological sense).”⁶³ For Latour, the kinship -- or even “family resemblance” -- suggested between two types of representation is equivalent to the functions of law and science; the former represents humans, the latter non-humans. In both cases, humans constitute the intended audience, and for varying purposes. The kinship between modes for representing humans and nonhumans – and therefore the utility of anthropomorphic language as a catalyst for diversifying political theory -- is reflected further if we juxtapose a statement from Quintilian with one from Latour. Quintilian marvels that Cicero’s speeches in court on behalf of his clients “express the very image of every one to whom he was giving voice, so that they seem to speak beyond themselves, indeed, but still as themselves” (*IO* III.viii.50). On the other hand, Latour insists that, when it comes to representing *nonhumans* literarily, “the spokesperson is precisely the one who does not permit an assured answer to the question, ‘Who is speaking?’”⁶⁴ In other words, the anthropomorphic representation of non-humans in literary personification is a much riskier business, epistemologically, than legal representation – except insofar as the latter, too, deals with non-humans. Thinking of personifications as spokespersons for

⁶² Ibid, 64. Also, with reference to Deguileville’s *Pelegrinage* and the writings of Bracton, Emily Steiner traces the role of documents as legally fictive “spokespersons.” See Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, 17-45.

⁶³ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 237 and 250.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 250.

allegorized nonhumans does not foreclose the scope of agency to the singular narrative agent, or advocate. In a courtroom, the defendant or plaintiff surrenders his or her case to the skills of the rhetor. In literary narratives, the multiple, non-human entities that a given personification represents can exert their own particular affordances in a way that delimits and refracts the anthropomorphic figuration, even while such refraction presupposes prior figurative compression into a unitary, human-like form that can emerge in the diegetic field.

Scale 3: Effects -- Dispersonification and Defamiliarization

The third scale pertains to the post-textual effect on the reader, and the rhetorical impact of “imaginatively entering” and becoming sensitized to nonhuman (and ethical human) agency. This scale is important in the chapter analyses below, but it will not receive the same direct attention. I will describe it here as an intended effect of the figurative operations that we will be exploring, since we can only speculate about the possible impact that concentrated figurative sites -- rather than whole texts -- such as we shall be exploring actually had on real readers.

As we saw in Scale 2, when seen from the vantage of the nonhumans they represent, personifications are spokespersons. Seen from the vantage of the human authors and readers who deploy and receive them, personifications are what Latour calls “speech prostheses.” As Latour explains, “speech prostheses...allow nonhumans to participate in the discussions of humans, when humans become perplexed about the participation of new entities in collective life.”⁶⁵ The emphasis here is on how certain

⁶⁵ Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 67. Latour is cognizant of the literary resonances of his argument, referring implicitly to personification and the possible “impression that [his readers] are being pulled into a fable

linguistic forms can adapt human perception through their sensitizing effects and explanatory power. Bennett makes the leap toward specifying *prosopopoeia* as just one such linguistic form when she admits that “[a] touch of anthropomorphism... can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations.”⁶⁶ And Charles Baldwin, referring to the rhetorical “exercises generally known as *prosopopoeiae*,” follows Cicero and Quintilian in explaining that the “idea [behind the exercises] was an imaginative entering into the character, the emotional as well as intellectual habit, of the person for whom one was speaking (*fictae alienarum personarum orationes*, VI.i.25).”⁶⁷ When the one for whom one is speaking is not naturally a person, personification -- as a means for granting personal status -- can be, if not a way of imaginatively entering into the experience of nonhumans (though Bogost and Levin would each go this far, if for different reasons), at least a catalyst or prosthesis for attempting to articulate the contours of agencies beyond human understanding even while remaining implicated within human experience.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s exploration of what they call “ontological metaphors” elaborates on the function of personification as a creator and adaptor of perceptual habits. Personification

allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities....But personification is not a single unified general process. Each personification differs in terms of the

where animals, viruses, stars, and magic wands are going to start chattering away like magpies or princesses.”

⁶⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 99.

⁶⁷ Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic*, 71.

aspects of people that are picked out. . . . It not only gives us a way of thinking about [the personified] but also a way of acting toward it.⁶⁸

For this reason *prosopopoeia* is properly deemed a *rhetorical* device, given the purpose of rhetoric toward persuading audiences to modify beliefs and behavior accordingly, especially in legal contexts. Samuel Levin elaborates on the complex figuration involved for such modification. He coins the term “dispersonification,” which has both normal and radical variants, to refer less to an effect in the nonhuman being personified than upon the experience of the viewer or reader. As Levin explains,

[i]n the standard case dispersonification leads to an interpretation in which the predicate is understood to mean a state, attribute, or activity that is compatible with the meaning of the noun or noun phrase with which it is paired; this interpretation, therefore, will be accordant with our mundane conceptions of the objects named by those nouns. Since for rocks to glisten and be multicolored is part of our everyday experience, we will interpret ‘The rock was merry’ (on the dispersonification mode) in some such fashion. Under radical dispersonification, on the other hand, we try to construe the predicate such that its *normal* meaning, ‘full of gaiety or high spirits,’ is attributed to the rock. Although we speak in this case also of construal, the construal is not semantic. Rather, the words of the sentence are taken literally; so taken, however, they instigate a construal, or transformation, of our conceptual habits. We try to conceive what it would be like for a rock to be merry.⁶⁹

Personification thus pulls real weight for enabling the development of mental habits amenable to the goals of political ecology: “[t]o regard a rock as animate is to conceive of a possibility for which our ordinary experience provides no warrant. If approached in this way, therefore, personification would represent a conceptual move beyond the bounds of our experience.”⁷⁰ If the rhetorical effect of narrative *prosopopoeia* can attain to such traction in post-textual perception and behavior, literally enabling the production of new,

⁶⁸ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 33-34.

⁶⁹ Levin, “Allegorical Language,” 31.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 34. As Levin later reiterates, “Under radical dispersonification ‘merry’ is to be construed to mean what merriment would mean in a world experience by rocks” (35).

defamiliarized experiences with non-humans – and thereby adapting however subtly what it means to be human both individually and collectively in political societies facing the realities of material scarcity -- then anthropomorphic figuration has not only a dynamic past, but, it can be hoped, a thriving future.

With this theoretical background in place, I hope to explore how medieval poetic narratives qualify and interrogate the interdependence of human political agency upon non-human agents precisely through the anthropomorphic figuration of non-humans.⁷¹ I will not be arguing that medieval authors envisioned statecraft as an ontologically diverse endeavor that demanded the participatory inclusion of bacteria, bovines, and buildings – although in some ways the quasi-neoplatonic, hierarchical cosmology of premodern Christianity facilitated such a perspective. Nor will I be arguing that human and nonhuman agency are qualitatively identical. Rather, I will suggest that personification enabled literary authors to refract contemporary political concerns surrounding nascent institutions of representation, in sovereign and conciliar forms, through the introduction of walking, talking nonhuman entities into domains of dialogue and social interaction, at once in order to disclose the complexity of the issues even while rendering them available to wider readerships in entertaining, vernacular verse. As noted above in Scale 2, medieval writers deploy personification out of a “conative concern for *human* survival

⁷¹ See Latour, “Compositionist Manifesto,” 481. Significantly, Latour locates the origin of the problem of animism (*aka* nonhuman agency) in the exit from the Middle Ages: “One of the principal causes of the scorn poured by the Moderns on the sixteenth century is that those poor archaic folks, who had the misfortune of living on the wrong side of the ‘epistemological break,’ believed in a world *animated* by all sorts of entities and forces instead of believing, like any rational person, in an *inanimate* matter producing its effects only through the power of its causes. It is this conceit that lies at the root of all the critiques of environmentalists as being too “anthropocentric” because they dare to ‘attribute’ values, price, agency, purpose, to what cannot have and should not have any intrinsic value” (481).

and happiness.”⁷² Nonetheless, the range and diversity of nonhuman actants figured in our texts of interest also effect a secondary delimitation of the scope of human agency. Rather than justify exaggerated portraits of primitive anthropocentrism in the Middle Ages, as Huizinga and others have done, the anthropomorphic figuration performed in the medieval examples of *prosopopoeia* I will be examining does something very different. In extending human attributes to nonhuman entities, the figurative device of personification functions as a heuristic for speculating about the place and role of human agency in particular communities, each of which is refocused so that the ontologically diverse parties of which human agents are always already constituted come more directly into view (and voice), albeit as temporary assemblages or analytical catalysts for imaginative theorization leading to conjoint action.⁷³ In asking the question of the meaning of *the human* and its proper political, social, ethical, and religious becoming, medieval authors deploy personification to suggest that any viable answer must acknowledge the agency of non-humans, whether antagonistic, benevolent, or morally neutral, whether institutional, divine, or conceptual. The complex political aesthetic of figurative actor-networks through which such agencies are vividly depicted in my texts of interest depends, at every turn, upon the affordances, limitations, and quirks of rhetorical personification.⁷⁴

⁷² Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, x.

⁷³ Along similar lines, Elizabeth Fowler has explained how she sees “...figuration as a species of philosophical thought experiment. This is not only a literary experience but a political one. In the experiment of deliberation, we consider what seems good from the position of each social person, always in conjunction with justice as it is exemplified by an entire system of social life....all fiction puts us in the position of evaluating the social persons that fashion its characters. By means of character, fiction tests the forms, both ethical and political, of social life.” See Fowler, *Literary Character*, 31.

⁷⁴ The opening phrase of this sentence is meant as a modification to what Emily Steiner calls the “medieval political aesthetic.” See Emily Steiner, “*Piers Plowman*, Diversity, and the Medieval Political Aesthetic” *Representations* 91.1 (Summer 2005): 1-25.

V. Chapter Descriptions

I am proposing to examine a cross-section or core-sample of the intersection of personification and politics in a small group of vernacular literary texts. My focus is on selected texts by three authors: Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, and John Lydgate. Excluding Gower, these constitute a sort of triumvirate of medieval English poetry from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries. In the first three chapters I focus on Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, *House of Fame*, and *Tale of Melibee*. The last two chapters focus on Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and selections from John Lydgate's writings that were commissioned by royal, municipal or corporate entities, such as the *Triumphal Entry of Henry VI into London* and the *Fall of Princes*. In the first three chapters, I reveal the political dimension of what is commonly treated as a semiotic device; in the last two, I show that that device deepens or complicates texts commonly treated as political discourse.

The first chapter will address the latter parts of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* and its inquiry into "the politics of nature." Bringing Nature herself to preside over the most conventional of institutions – parliament – has various effects. Chaucer's so-called animalization of the post-1381 English parliament not only comically literalizes the naturalization of politics in earlier writers, but also satirizes the noble milieu of deliberative debate for the common good with reference to a wholly sexualized end. Does reproduction ultimately drive human statecraft? And what extra affinities between animal instinct and human reason complicate the allegory? In Chaucer's *House of Fame* the question of ethical answerability emerges in full force, specifically with regard to authorial agency. As I will argue in chapter two, Chaucer deploys personification to

investigate the parameters of a text's impact and its creator's merit (or blame) as a result. At the same time, the poem recuperates figures who have suffered due to a text's negative effects, suggesting that the never ending opportunity for revision amounts to a rival "afterlife" to Fame's fickle – and frightening -- judgments. *The House of Fame* shows in political terms – Fame's tyranny and discursive democracy (as mob rule) -- both the pomp and the parody of the literary enterprise. The third chapter will explore Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*. Stillwell long ago thought that Melibee may be a *speculum principum* for Richard II; the allegorical personification at work in Melibee adds a further dimension insofar as Prudence, whose singular presence oscillates between deferential yet strong-minded housewife and personified scholastic pedagogue, not only teaches a hermeneutic of self-*allegoresis* to her bellicose husband, thereby de-literalizing (or allegorizing) him, but invokes an apparatus of cited texts, constitutive of her own narrative agency, in order to promote non-violence. Prudence thereby indicates the tactical role of womanly virtue in taking the burden of political reconciliation, even at the risk of domestic violence, upon herself.

My fourth chapter will explore William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. The resistance of one personified mental faculty – Conscience – to marriage with the complex personification of Mede, who singularizes a network of economic practices, occurs within a narrative plagued by venal corruption endemic to legal administrative procedure in late fourteenth century London. The question of the scope of royal agency is trotted forth in the context of other agencies: psychological, administrative, sexual. Lydgate's *Triumphal Entry of Henry VI into London* introduces not quite a nonhuman, but rather a prehuman into the mix: a ten-year-old child. That child is the future king of England, but

an elaborate pedagogical choreography renders the pre-sovereign passive, positioning him in a spectacle where (as a legal minor) he is not even the political equal to his enthroned effigy, let alone to the pageant of allegorical personifications whose combined efforts will prepare him to attain proper rule. A final focus on the interlocution of Bochas and Fortune in *Fall of Princes* VI will both explore the philosophical dialectic of freedom and necessity within the personal agency of Fortune and extend the question of overcoming Fortune beyond rulers to writers. Does poetic rhetoric -- and hence *prosopopoeia* itself -- have any political agency? In my conclusion, after offering a recapitulation of my treatment of the worlds that each of the above texts dares to render, I will extend Lydgate's affirmative answer to this above question and offer a speculative comment on the ontological and epistemological aspects of rhetorical personification.

Chapter 1: The Politics of Nature in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*

Barbara Newman claims that Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* "opened up the momentous question of [Nature's] relation to Culture."⁷⁵ This chapter will extend Newman's insight by demonstrating how Chaucer's exploration of this momentous question in *Parliament* turns on his deft deployment of the rhetorical device of *prosopopoeia* within the fictive representation of a specific conciliar political milieu: parliament. With their related representational affordances, both the device of personification and the parliamentary institution enable Chaucer to investigate and adapt the tension between nature and culture. Put more complexly, at the heart of Chaucer's *Parliament*, the fraught worlds of sexuality and politics fantastically intersect in the imagined mouths of non-human agents that function as speculative spokespersons who theorize the politics of nature in terms recognizable to Chaucer's civic audience.⁷⁶ Russell Peck has helpfully delineated three primary ways in which *Parliament* can be interpreted politically:

The centrality of politics as a topos of the *Parlement of Foules* may be argued from three different approaches: 1) a historical approach which perceives the occasional nature of the poem, whereby historical persons of the courts of Europe are seen lurking behind the Valentine's Day debate in Dame Nature's garden; 2) a philosophical approach, which links the discussion of common profit in the Scipio section and the social conflicts within the natural domain with the neo-Aristotelian and Ciceronian discourse on the well-run state; and 3) a psychological approach, stemming from the *Roman de la Rose*, which views love in conflict with reason as a progressively sophisticated political

⁷⁵ Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 111.

⁷⁶ Reading *Parliament* from this vantage assumes its affinities with John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, which likewise explores the fraught relationship of the natural and political with literary sophistication and, more so in Gower's case, direct moral imperative. For an exemplary study of themes common to both *Parliament* and *Confessio*, see Hugh White, *Nature, Sex and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

gesture. The different approaches yield disparate results which testify to the complexity of Chaucer's well-crafted poem.⁷⁷

This chapter attempts to connect the second and third ways through attention to the poem's deployment of semiotic anthropomorphism. I hope to demonstrate in a new way the felicitously phrased point that "Chaucer's writing can evoke contemporary forces challenging the authority of dominant institutions and governing classes even as it disarms, displaces, and effaces them in an extraordinarily complex range of strategies."⁷⁸ This range of strategies in Chaucer's *Parliament* hinges on the poem's multiple deployments of personification.

Scipio Africanus' appearance to the narrator of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* early in the poem has rightly led many critics, assuming the oneiric categories given in Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, to identify the dream in which Scipio appears as both oracular and prophetic. A dream is oracular when some wise ancestor returns from the grave with advice, and it is prophetic when that advice pertains to future events that eventually come true. It is helpful to focus on the dream-related details of the early portions of Chaucer's *Parliament* not only because the narrator-dreamer himself reflects on the possible causes of his dream (ll. 99-108), but also because the dream-vision form afforded Chaucer important rhetorical advantages for speculative thought within literary composition. Peter Brown's succinct list is the most helpful enumeration of the rhetorical advantages of the dream-vision form, which, to begin,

⁷⁷ See Russell Peck, "Love, Politics, and Plot in the 'Parlement of Foules,'" *The Chaucer Review* 24.4 (Spring 1990): 290.

⁷⁸ David Aers, "Vox Populi and the literature of 1381," *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*. Ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 445.

intrigues and engages the interest of an audience by appealing to a common experience and by inviting its members to become analysts and interpreters. It allows for the introduction of disparate and apparently incongruous material. It encourages and facilitates the use of memorable images. It permits the author to disavow responsibility for what follows. It invokes an authoritative and impressive tradition of visionary literature. It provides a way of dealing with a wide variety of subjects: divine prophecy; erotic adventure; political or philosophical speculation; apocalyptic vision. It offers a point of entry into a representational mode (sometimes allegorical) which is less restrictive than, say, the conventions of realist narrative.⁷⁹

Brown's last point in particular gestures toward the open-ended, experimental quality of Chaucer's figurative poetics, and one representational mode central to the two dream-visions on which this and the following chapter will focus is the device of *prosopopoeia*. Indeed, practically all the characters in the *Parliament of Fowls* can be understood as examples of *prosopopoeia*, whether allegorical or animal. And there is a real garden variety. James Paxson's delineation of the differences between the variants of personification as they operate within the various sections of *Parliament of Fowls* admirably categorizes types of *prosopopoeia* based on the capacity for speech that a given character possesses. Paxson suggests a continuum of linguistic agency from the speechless abstractions in Venus' Garden to the garrulous birds in Nature's parliament, ultimately arguing that the poem "experiments with the limits of figural and literary character invention by distributing characters among a discrete structure of diegetic levels (and images of containment), and by investing these characters with varying powers of language."⁸⁰ Paxson's focus on the different features and faculties of varying "prosopopoetic characters" sets a precedent for exploring the device of

⁷⁹ Peter Brown, "On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions," *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25.

⁸⁰ James Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90.

personification in what is arguably Chaucer's most polished dream vision. As noted above, this chapter's attention to personification in *Parliament* will build on Paxson's study by connecting anthropomorphic figuration with one of the poem's central thematic concerns: the relationship between specific institutionalizations of politics and sexuality, both of which refract natural and cultural aspects. Through its multiple uses of *prosopopoeia*, Chaucer's *Parliament* composes a speculative political ecology of great sophistication in which the interaction of anthropomorphic non-humans facilitates the exploration of social and sexual love in late-medieval English society.

Scipio and the Temple of Venus: Common Profit and/or Courtly Love

Echoing the final book of Cicero's *De re publica*, the narrator-dreamer of *Parliament of Fowls* is visited in his bed by Scipio the Elder. Not incidentally, one variant of *prosopopoeia* described by Quintilian applies well to Chaucer's Scipio, who can be seen as an instance of the device in which the speech of a dead or absent figure is poetically mimicked.⁸¹ While Chaucer's Scipio appears at a considerable historical remove from his forebear in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Chaucer's narrator-dreamer recounts the theme of his reading material to be "commune profyt" (47, 75) in keeping with Scipio's concern in the earlier parts of *De re publica*. But while both Chaucer's and Cicero's Scipio articulate a concern for politics, there is a key difference between them. Macrobius in his commentary on the *Somnium* and to an extent even Cicero himself both take a traditional

⁸¹ See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* VI.i.25. In Book IX, Quintilian notes that "in this kind of figure it is allowable even to bring down the gods from heaven, and evoke the dead" (IX.ii.31).

Platonic stance in denigrating the carnal pleasures of this world. Chaucer's Scipio, on the other hand, leads the forlorn narrator *into* the Garden of Love.⁸² Chaucer thus complicates the venerable politico-literary heritage of Cicero's *De re publica* in which human sexuality plays only a negative, minimal part, and suggests the possibility of a more fruitful relationship between human sexuality and political virtue. Dangers await, however; the careful delineation of positive, common profit-oriented modes and models of love and governance from self-interested ones abides as a deep thematic anxiety in the poem.⁸³ At the beginning of *Parliament*, Chaucer's secondary translation of the figure of Scipio, by the fourteenth century a veritable proxy for civic virtue, helps inaugurate and define the poem's juxtaposition of political and sexual concerns.

Once inside Venus' Garden, the narrator-dreamer encounters personified representations of psychological qualities and behaviors associated, through implicit allusion to the *Romance of the Rose*, with the baser impulses of courtly sexuality:

Tho was I war of Plesaunce anon-ryght,
 And of Aray, and Lust, and Curteysie,
 And of the Craft that can and hath the myght
 To don by force a wyght to don folye –
 Disfigurat was she, I nyl nat lye;
 And by hymself, under an ok, I gesse,
 Saw I Delyt, that stod with Gentilesse.

I saw Beute withouten any atyr,
 And Youthe, ful of game and jolyte;

⁸² As Russell Peck notes, Chaucer "plays down ascetic issues in Cicero and Macrobius to heighten political emphasis." See Peck, "Love, Politics, and Plot," 291.

⁸³ As Cowgill puts it, in *Parliament* "Chaucer's unifying theme – and the key to the poem's dichotomous allegory – [is] a contrast between the ordered state wisely governed according to natural law and the chaos of a state whose leadership is selfish and irresponsible." See Bruce Kent Cowgill, "The 'Parlement of Foules' and the Body Politic," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 74.3 (July 1975): 315.

Foolhardynesse, Flaterye, and Desyr,
Messagerye, and Meede, and other thre -
(218-28)

With regard to their measure of linguistic agency, the allegorical tableau of abstractions differs markedly from the *prosopopoeia* of Scipio.⁸⁴ We instead move towards the eroticized garden party of the *Romance of the Rose*. In accord with critical denigrations of the device, the narrative action of these personified characters remains limited to what strictly fits with their conceptual identity: Beauty is attractive, Youth is jolly, etc. There are no semantic surprises here beneath the idyllic shadows, excepting perhaps Cupid's belligerent aspect (211-17), which may give the reader pause. The Temple of Venus dilates and grounds the hint of violence involved in Cupid's brief *effictio*. The non-human agents of Venus's temple, dwelling in a place where flames and painful sighs issue forth from the slaves of a personified Jealousy (246-52), come to stand for the courtly type of human sexual relationship that results in groveling submission. The central figure here is Priapus, who stands "in sovereyn place" (254), with phallic "sceptre in honde" (257), while presumably impotent or at least unrequited men frantically crown him with flowery garlands. Priapus's power before his fawning subjects intimates darkly how the tyrannical ascendancy of sexual prowess encourages the passive subject-positions endemic to the practices of courtly love, for both males and females. While women may receive rhetorical laudation as sovereign over their lovers, male and female courtly lovers are enthralled to the elaborate dictates of convention in communicating the fiery impulses of desire, although it is primarily

⁸⁴ These personifications exemplify another type of *prosopopoeia* described by Quintilian, one defined as the basic invention of narrative characters (*IO IX.ii.30, 33*), in this case lacking the power of speech.

men who are supposed to suffer this enthrallment.⁸⁵ The political dangers of extra-marital sexuality are depicted on the walls of Venus' temple (285-94), with the downfall of past statesmen and monarchs suggesting that Venus' regime extends over not only the infantilized Theban princes, Palamon and Arcite (278-279), but the span of political history (280-294).

The narrative's movement of progression thus far amount to two sets of redistributions, first from the narrator's initial and naïve sexuality (8-14) to the alluring possibility of politics in Scipio's oblique representation of common profit; the second is from the idyllic façade of courtly sexuality in the Garden to its stark and violent reality of suffering inside the Temple. The latter scene discloses that the politics proper to courtly love is absolute monarchy, which in its tyrannical aspect proves as antithetical to common profit, as evident in the slavish submission endemic to the practice and idiom of courtly love. If Scipio's pushing of the narrator into the Garden thus permits the initial positing of an important connection between the political ideal of common profit and human sexuality, then Venus' temple poses a challenge to the positive viability of this connection, threatening to replace common profit with self-interested adherence to individual impulse, which for premodern thought precisely defines the character of the tyrant, here personified in the violent or dictatorial figures of Cupid, Priapus, and Venus.

So must sexuality and politics remain separate, one in the private realm and the other in the public? Is the prioritization of singular profit above common profit symptomatic of human sexuality as such, or can Chaucer's Scipio point us toward

⁸⁵ See Slavoj Žižek, "Courtly Love; or, Woman as Thing," in *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (London: Verso, 2005), 89-112.

alternative models for combining sexual love and public order? In order to further unfold the speculative inquiry, the third phase of *Parliament* differentiates between two related but antagonistic quasi-institutional forms proper to both sexuality and politics, respectively. For sexuality, this includes one form we have already seen, and will yet see more of -- courtly love -- and another we have not seen anything of yet, but shall -- procreative marriage. For politics, we have also seen the first of two institutional forms at issue in *Parliament* -- what I will simply call sovereignty -- but not yet the second form, which I will label conciliar multitude.⁸⁶ Through the personifications in the Temple of Venus, we have seen the close connection that Chaucer posits between the former term in each pair -- courtly love and sovereignty. It is not until he enters Nature's assembly that the narrator-dreamer encounters examples of the latter term in each pair: marriage and conciliar multitude.⁸⁷ And yet the possibility of a chiasmic structure that relates marriage to sovereignty remains as well. It is through his deft navigation between these four institutions, aided in key ways through the device of personification, that Chaucer investigates the charged and amorphous question of the relationship between nature and culture.

After exiting the Temple of Venus, the dreamer-narrator finds himself within a topical allegory on marriage set in the dialogic framework of the English political form of conciliar multitude *par excellence*: an instituted parliament. This parliament, in Chaucer's poem populated entirely by birds, is presided over by the

⁸⁶ Robinson's suggestion that Chaucer may have been inspired to write *Parliament of Fowls* by reading a single line in *De planctu* describing Nature's "aray" or garment, on which 'the animals hold a parliament' (*animalium celebratur concilium*), suggests that the topic of "conciliarity" is at the inspirational origin of *Parliament*. See F.N. Robinson, *Works of Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1957), 794.

⁸⁷ Marriage was defined throughout the Middle Ages as consummated by and constituted in sexual union leading to biological reproduction. See John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 19-26.

figure of Nature. Nature and the council of garrulous birds exemplify two variations on a third type of *prosopopoeia*. Deriving from the Old French *parler*, parliament was preeminently a place for speaking. Hence, unlike the personations in the Garden of Love who were given singular bodily form but no voice, the birds already are possessed of a material body, and hence are anthropomorphized primarily through the bestowal of voice, enabling speech. Yet their narrative agency, like the personifications in the Garden, is at times limited according to the symbolic qualities attributed to their various fixed species – more on which below. Nature, on the other hand, exemplifies a full “personification,” a non-human immaterial entity given humanized form and voice along with a malleable narrative agency. In Quintilian’s reflexive definition, Nature exemplifies “when we give a voice to things which nature has not” (*IO* IX.ii.32). Quintilian’s personification of nature as the withholder – and also distributor -- of speech anticipates nicely the role of Nature in *Parliament*. As the presiding figure at the assembly, Nature can designate which party should speak and in what order as they deliberate toward marital culmination. Her authority may suggest the need for some form of sovereignty in at least attaining if not maintaining marriage. She can also prohibit certain figures from speaking, as she sees fit. Nature functions for Chaucer and Quintilian and a host of other rhetoricians -- and political players -- as the dispenser of that most political of human capacities: linguistic agency.⁸⁸ Paradoxically, far from playing an opposing role, Nature hosts and promotes Culture.

⁸⁸ For more on language use as the definitively political capacity of humans, see Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, III.i.4. See *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa’s Middle English Translation of the De Regimine Principum of Aegidius Romanus*. Ed. David C. Fowler, Charles F. Briggs,

Naturpolitik in *Giles of Rome, Cicero, and John of Salisbury*

For a host of classical and medieval thinkers, the capacity for language is the prerequisite for political agency. We will turn now to earlier accounts of political origin and linguistic agency and the influential precedents for “conciliar multitude” that they provide, situating the personified parliament in *Parliament* in a particular intertextual network of influential precedents. Personifying nature, Aristotle says that because of language man is a *politikon zoon*: “why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech.”⁸⁹ Aquinas echoes the Philosopher in his commentary on the *Politics*, calling man *animal civile* or, elsewhere, *animal politicum et sociale*.⁹⁰ Continuing the tradition, in the fourteenth-century, John Trevisa translates Giles of Rome’s Thomist use of *animal civile* into Middle English as *politik and cyvel beest*. In arguing how language facilitates what we could call man’s “political nature,” Giles *via* Trevisa cites Aristotle in treating the human capacity for speech as categorically different from communication between non-human animals:

It is ipreve by speche that man is kyndelich a companable beest, for by speche we haven techynge and loore. And heere we may preve by speche that man is kyndelich politik and cyvel beest, for the voice of man that is speche tokeneth other wise than vois of othere beestes. Therfore the philosofer, primo Poleticorum, seith that in othere bestes here kynde is so isette so that the voyse is so to hem tokne of likynge and displesyng so that by the voyse thei knowen plesynge and displesynge, for by the voyce it is iknowe whether he be plesed other greved. For the hound berketh other wyse whanne he is

and Paul G. Remley (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 293; and, Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, VI.337-427.

⁸⁹ See Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1253a.

⁹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Political Writings*. Ed. A.P.D. Entreves (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), xv.

iplesed thanne whanne he is igreved, and by his berkyng other houndes known whether he is iplesed other igreved. But here over man hath speche by the whiche it is distinctlich iknowe what is good and what is evel, what is rightful and what is wrong.⁹¹

According to Giles, humans communicate in such a way that moral knowledge becomes available to them in terms beyond those merely expressing pleasure: “man hath speche by the whiche it is distinctlich iknowe what is good and what is evel, what is rightful and what is wrong.” Giles contends that the presence of moral knowledge that is “distinctlich” -- that is, apparent and public -- is a precondition for politics, enabling communicable visions of justice so essential for a healthy polity. But such moral knowledge can only become public and mutual by being shared linguistically. If we read these words from Giles of Rome in light of Quintilian’s definition of personification, an important connection emerges: if language use is the enabling condition for political agency as Giles says it is, and if as Quintilian says *prosopopoeia* distributes the capacity for language to those to whom Nature has denied it, *then personification itself is inherently political in its generation of new talking agents who can therefore participate in fictive models of public interlocution and community formation grounded in “distinct” moral knowledge.*

Cicero, who imported the Aristotelian *politikon zoon* into a Roman legal-political context, describes the contours of a community in *De re publica* in relevant terms:

the commonwealth is the concern of a people, but a people is not any group of men assembled in any way, but an assemblage of some size associated with one another through agreement on law and community of interest. The

⁹¹ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum* III.i.4. See Trevisa, *The Governance of Kings and Princes*, 293-294.

first cause of its assembly is not so much weakness as a kind of natural herding together of men: this species is not isolated or prone to wandering alone, but it is so created that not even in an abundance of everything do men wish to live a solitary existence.⁹²

While Giles had insisted on “the linguistic difference,” Cicero notes that political community does not derive from self-interest based on physical weakness, but rather can be traced to the biological constitution of the human “species,” which is “not prone to wandering alone.” The republic’s defining quality -- that its members are “associated with one another through agreement on law and community of interest” -- implicitly depends on the use of language for expression of interest and agreement. But Cicero does not stress the importance of language to the same extent as Giles; rather, terms such as “a kind of natural herding” (*naturalis...quasi congregatio*) allude to an instinctual activity upon which the associational form of human political assembly is based. Cicero not only contends that man is naturally political, as Giles had. Beyond this, he posits a certain *commonality* shared with non-humans -- the desire and tendency to gather with others, as a “species” (*genus*) -- as the precondition of the republic. While Giles of Rome designates linguistic agency as the unique enabling faculty for the human art of politics, Cicero founds human politics upon its similarities with rather than differences from non-human “natural” communities. In this way Cicero can be said to “naturalize” human politics, rendering it intelligible through reference to its originary imitation of animal behavior, drafting what might be called a *naturpolitik*.

⁹² Cicero, *On the Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), I.39a. See also A.J. Carlyle, *Medieval Political Theory in the West, Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, Ltd., 1970), 14-15.

John Salisbury's *Policraticus* takes this even further, closing to a greater extent the linguistic gap between humans and hounds posited by Giles. While Cicero applies to humans a predicate literally appropriate for non-humans ("herding") and thus momentarily "dispersonifies" or "animalizes" human agents in order to relate politics to its primitive origins, John of Salisbury, on the other hand, refers to a classical anthropomorphosis of a non-human, insect community into a fictional commonwealth with deliberate republican contours, which he in turn proffers as an exemplary model for human association and governance.⁹³ John contends that civil life should not only acknowledge its "natural" tendency toward community, but also that it should *imitate* non-human nature in political organization. He cites at great length a passage from Virgil's *Georgics* (4.3) on the "tiny commonwealth" of bees as a laudable model of political economy:

Now you must marvel at the spectacle of a tiny commonwealth (of bees)...
 They alone possess children in common, and share as partners
 the dwellings of their city, and lead a life
 under the law's majesty....
 For some are diligent to gather food
 And by fixed covenants labour in the field....
 To some it falls by lot
 to keep guard at the gates: in turn they watch
 for showers and cloudy skies, or take their loads
 from incomers, or rank themselves to drive
 the drones, that lazy herd, far from the hive....
 Therefore although a narrow span of life,
 awaits the bees themselves (for it stretches never

⁹³ In Book VI of *Policraticus*, John points out that both Cicero and Plato insist "that the civil life should imitate nature, which we have very often identified as the best guide to living. Otherwise, life is duly called not merely uncivil, but rather bestial and brute. Indeed, these creatures devoid of reason are themselves afforded instruction about what it is that nature decrees." See John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*. Ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), VI.21. As Quintilian had done, Salisbury grammatically personifies nature as a personal agent, not as a giver of voice but as the instructor of creatures devoid of reason and, as in Chaucer's *Parliament*, the issuer of decrees. The implication is that Nature's "instruction," i.e. instinct, compensates for the lack of reason, which is the prerequisite for the deliberation and freedom necessary for political debate.

beyond seven summers), yet the race abides
 immortal, and the fortune of the house
 stands firm through many years, while to the third
 and fourth generation sires on sires are numbered.
 Moreover neither Egypt nor great Lydia,
 Nor Parthia's tribes, nor Median Hyaspes
 Pay to their king such reverence....
 He is guardian of their labours;
 it is him they revere; their multitudes
 throng close around him in a murmurous swarm;
 and often on their shoulders do they lift him,
 or shield him with their bodies from the fray,
 and rush through wounds to seek a glorious death.⁹⁴

The notion that civil life should imitate nature takes Cicero's description of the commonwealth to its logical conclusion. But there is also a change in the direction of rhetorical figuration, a shift of tenor and vehicle, human and non-human figures. If Cicero had naturalized human political association as a sort of "herding" intrinsic to human nature, then John of Salisbury inverts the figuration by characterizing non-human communities in anthropomorphic terms, speaking of "a king and tiny citizens, / ...courts and waxen palaces" and thus *politicizing nature*. And yet, in addition to the possible irony here and earlier in the claim that only in accord with nature will human societies avoid being "bestial," there are moments when the bee kingdom clearly seems a less attractive ideal.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, John's note that Plutarch used this passage from Virgil to instruct emperor Trajan, despite its inaccuracy, suggests that John himself may intend the apian community at the very least as an inspiring model for human civic emulation, even if not an actual

⁹⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VI.21.

⁹⁵ In later portions of the passage, for instance, upon the perishing of the "king" (*Georgics* 4.3.209), the drones "they break their fealty, / and themselves plunder their store of honey, and destroy / their trellised combs" (4.3.211-13). The following characterization of the popular "multitudes" as "a murmurous swarm" does not have a positive ring to it. In Plato's *Republic*, as Virgil likely knew, an apian allegory is deployed to portray both the tyrant and the gullible and corrupt plebian class.

blueprint for helping Thomas Becket, the dedicatee of *Policraticus*, enforce what John calls “public utility,” or common profit.

In any case, the figurative naturalization of republican politics performed through urging the human emulation of bees entails an important advantage; namely, the rhetorical likening of a specific regime to benign analogues of non-human community. The regime structure that John endorses is implicitly styled as equally a part of the natural order:

Skim through the authorities on the republic, think over the histories of republics; nowhere is civil life presented to you more accurately and more elegantly. And cities would without doubt be happy if they prescribed this form of living for themselves.⁹⁶

Latent but unacknowledged by John is the fact that any naturalization of human politics through exemplary reference to non-human community implies an *a priori* politicization of nature. Virgil’s bees, in other words, have already themselves been described in human terms, personified according to the customs of the republican *polis* as John nostalgically understands it. (Virgil’s bees even have shoulders on which to carry aloft their victorious ruler!) Something like a rhetorical principle thus emerges: every naturalization of politics presupposes a prior politicization of nature.⁹⁷ Every appeal to exemplary non-humans is always already couched within an *a priori* anthropomorphism.

⁹⁶ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VI.21.

⁹⁷ Antony Black succinctly traces the history from here: “The concept of the state as a product of human nature and social skill was reinforced after c. 1260 by ideas taken from Aristotle’s *Politics*, especially I.1-2....The impact of all this on political thought was indirect. It meant that the character of the state and of human social and political relationships could be understood in a naturalistic way, through analysis of human nature, needs and desires. And such things could be known systematically because all nature – God’s work – made coherent sense....Political science had become part of the human being’s creative exploration of the world.” See Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20-21.

This much at least and more can also be said about Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*. Relevant to passages from Cicero and others above, Peck notes that in *Parliament* "Chaucer has dramatized the formation of political states as a response to erotic compulsions."⁹⁸ In exploring the intersection of nature and cultural/political institutions, Chaucer's poem takes the extra step of disclosing some of the problems inherent to rhetorical politicizing or naturalizing. Such problems are locatable at the limits of representation, in related literary and political senses of that important term. As we have seen, personification as a form of literary representation pertains to the distribution of linguistic agency, but by this very token, according to Giles of Rome's understanding of language as originary to politics, it also reintroduces non-human agents as capable of nothing less than politics, albeit fictionally. Despite possessing the capacity for speech in narrative, however, a personified non-human may still be represented as functioning according to instincts rather than freedom. Thus the question of the agency of a personified animal emerges: is portraying the fictive use of language as guided by non-human instinct rather than freedom sufficient for offering an analogy with human politics? Or must a sufficient measure of free will be assumed to accompany the very capacity to speak? These are the most pressing issues related to the imaginative theorization of political community and process in Chaucer's *Parliament*.

Political Nature: Freedom and Instinct

⁹⁸ Peck, "Love, Politics and Plot," 301.

The personified interactions of Nature and the birds in the parliament throw into relief the philosophical tension between biological necessity and freedom, nature and culture. And the primordial personification at the dawn of politics, in whom this tension between freedom and biological necessity also inheres, is Nature, “whom” Aristotle had, after all, personified in *Politics* 1253a. Chaucer’s text consciously abides in what Economou calls “the Nature tradition.”⁹⁹ In accord with a political-theological thread in this tradition that treats Nature as *vicaria Dei*, Chaucer has Nature call herself “vicaire of the almyghty Lorde” (379).¹⁰⁰ Deliberately extending the sense of the term vicar through reference to the contemporary institutions of monarchical sovereignty and parliament, *Parliament* proceeds to adapt its literary forebears in the Nature tradition by introducing elements from late medieval political culture. Chaucer personifies Nature as an indeed a divine vicar, but one who engages in courtly disputes not with other macrocosmic entities, as in Bernard Silvestris’ *Cosmographia*, but with the raucous animals that in Alan’s *De planctu* show up on Nature’s garment, themselves now able to speak as well. The relationship between Nature and her avian subjects is

⁹⁹ While Economou identifies several other versions of personified Nature throughout the classical and high Middle Ages, including *pronuba* (matron of honor), *plangens* (the complaining one), and *procreatrix* (midwife), it is primarily as *vicaria Dei* that Chaucer’s Nature operates, as Chaucer himself refers to her as “vicaire.” See George Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 28-52.

¹⁰⁰ See also Chaucer’s *Physician’s Tale*, ll. 19-23. The personification of Nature in the definition of personification also suggests, of course, the importance of nature at the threshold of humanity and non-humanity. It is Nature who in Alan of Lille’s *Anticlaudianus* initiates the project of forming the perfect human; it is Nature who in the same author’s *De Planctu Naturae* lauds the obedience of non-human creatures to her law while complaining of man’s free disobedience. In *Parliament of Fowls*, at the threshold between the Temple of Venus and the avian parliament, Chaucer imports this thematic premise of Alan’s Latin poem – i.e. the tension between natural necessity and freedom, biological instinct and choice – by alluding directly to *De Planctu*’s complaining Nature: “And right as Aleyn in the Pleynt of Kinde / Devyseth Nature of aray and face, / In swich aray men might hir there finde” (316-18). For *De Planctu Naturae* and *Anticlaudianus*, see Alan of Lille, *Literary Works*. Ed. and Trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library*.

complex, however, since Nature in one sense is the compressed emanation of animal instinct even while manifesting free volition as sovereign empress. At times, the singular figure of Nature portrays absolute freedom, while the birds fluctuate wildly between idiosyncratic anthropomorphism and determinate taxonomic types. At other moments, however, especially near the poem's end, the birds seem to resist the determinations of natural order, in part due to their participation in the cultural institutions of sexuality and politics.

With regard to Nature's agency, consider the overlaying of political terminology in the following stanza, in which she opens the avian parliament:

'Ye knowe wel how, Seynt Valentynes day,
By my statut and thorgh my governaunce,
Ye come for to cheese – and fle youre wey –
Your makes, as I prike yow with plesaunce;
But natheles my ryghtful ordenaunce
May I nat lete for al this world to wyne,
That he that most is worthy shal begynne.'
(386-92)

Nature unflinchingly asserts her sovereignty. Even within this passage, however, Nature's power seems riven; line 391 betrays that she cannot contravene her own ordinance, while two lines earlier her role as *vicaria Dei* is complicated by the fact that her influence appears less as a dictate from above than as a locally distributed agency *within* the birds themselves. In other words, even while Nature vocally issues a "statut," she simultaneously operates latently *as* the instinct of each individual creature: "as I prike yow with plesaunce" (389). Earlier she was described amorphously as the one that "hot, cold, hevy, lyght, moyst, and dreye / Hath knyght by evne noumbres of acord" (380-81). This splitting of agency also emerges within the particular creatures themselves. While subject to natural

impulses (i.e. Nature's "prike"), the birds are given the freedom "to cheese" (388). Is Nature's sovereignty as empress and divine vicar thereby attenuated, rendered conditional on the particular individuating difference of each avian species and its symbolic inclinations (ll. 330-70)? To ask such a question is to imagine a false contrast, however, because the special "enclynyng" of each creature can also be understood as the particular instantiation of Nature's larger order. Yet even as a reification of their "enclynyng," the poem continually resists stripping Nature of not only free volition but sovereign power, at times over and against the birds.

Chaucer's deployment of personification thus aptly figures the philosophical problem of multiple causality. With God as the invisible primary cause invoked in line 379, personified Nature functions as a discrete secondary cause, the vicar of divine agency, and the birds as tertiary causes. The scale of agency in the microcosm of *Parliament of Fowls* can thus be rendered as God → Nature → birds.¹⁰¹ Yet this continuum still allows room for a certain measure of autonomy on the part of those lowest on the scale, the birds. Thus Nature's agency operates not just vertically with relation to God, but also horizontally through each creaturely individual – a sort of vicarious causality, in Harman's sense.¹⁰² Nature functions as an actor-network, and Chaucer can redistribute agency by alternating his emphasis on Nature's singularity or her diffused multiplicity, as poetic occasion demands.

Through Chaucer's tinkering with the capacities of figurative anthropomorphism as

¹⁰¹ In related legal-political terms, both Nature and the birds are simultaneously principal and delegated agents, free and yet subject to the sovereignty of a higher influence. Nature is a delegated agent with regard to God but a principal agent with regard to the birds; the birds are principal agents in seeking their own mates (albeit with influence from Nature) and, later, delegated agents in speaking on behalf of their respective subspecies in the parliament.

¹⁰² The phrase "vicarious causation" is taken from the work of Graham Harman. See Graham Harman, "Vicarious Causation," *Collapse II*. Ed. R. Mackay (Oxford: Urbanomic, 2007), 171-205.

a means for bestowing narrative agency on non-humans, both conceptual and animal, the philosophical theme of agency -- specifically formulated here as the resolution of the problem of freedom and necessity -- receives speculative treatment. The versatility of *prosopopoeia* enables Chaucer to imaginatively theorize the coexistence of embedded causalities and hence co-implicate the relationship of free will and instinct in the figure of Nature and the anthropomorphic birds.

The Politics of Nature

“But to the poynt” (372), as the narrator of the poem puts it. Comparable to the texts of Giles, Cicero, and John of Salisbury, Chaucer’s *Parliament* seems also to have a “politics of nature,” enacted not through reference to an idyllic model of non-human community, but rather through the satirizing of human politics and courtly convention premised upon the affinities between non-human and human behavior. The proceedings of the parliament itself refract the dichotomy of human freedom and animal instinct beyond Nature through the lens of ritual sexual pairing. For while the dreamer-narrator hopes *Parliament* will be a poem about love, it is actually a beast allegory about the institutionalization of politics and sex. As noted above, late-medieval humans institutionalized sexual love through two different sociocultural conventions: marriage and courtly love, the former defined primarily with reference to procreation and the latter to its extramarital, essentially non-procreative aims. The sexual pairing that the avian parliament has been convened to accomplish is therefore at once an indirect exploration of whether and how the

procreative institution of marriage, with all its political potential, can incorporate sexuality into a broader vision of common profit. Can Nature reclaim sexual love from the erotic tyranny of self-interest represented by Venus and Priapus? It is conceivable, albeit uncertain. Nature's successful orchestration of the annual mating ceremony would amount to securing one further year of natural community, or what Giles of Rome calls "kyndeliche comynte" (*DRP* III.I.IV), as the precondition for voluntary political community grounded in the basic social units of reproductive pairs and offspring. One of the abiding ambiguities here, however, is that, as an allegory for the betrothal negotiations of various royal suitors with Anne of Bohemia, the avian pairing that is likened in most detail to the human institution of marriage, that of the eagles, is also the one most thoroughly saturated by the conventions of courtly love, on which more below. Importantly, given the medieval understanding that it is sexual consummation more than institutional acknowledgment that ratifies marriage, the pairing of the lower fowls more definitively allegorizes human marriage as a common form ultimately unconcerned with and even hostile to, even if occasionally influenced by the idiom of, courtly convention.

These preliminary remarks retrace the intersections of Nature and culture through the two human institutions of sexuality -- courtly love and marriage -- in light of our foray into questions of linguistic and political agency. The poem's sophisticated avian personifications, specifically the subtle vestiges to animal instinct beneath the anthropomorphic surface, hinder the ideological payoff of rhetorical politicization of nature by suggesting that fixed species divisions actually

disallow conciliar progress. In the process, Chaucer adapts the nuances of *prosopopoeia* for satirizing the similarities -- and differences -- of human and non-human community, indirectly interrogating both the nature of politics and the political rhetoric of naturalization on which his allegory depends.¹⁰³

Once the parliament properly begins, Chaucer's personification of non-human animals politicizes nature primarily by exploiting linguistic markers of social status. For instance, after convening the assembly, Nature invites the most "worthy" eagles to begin. The nuances of their vocal interactions define their anthropomorphism; in their diction and syntax alone one can glean the flourishes of aristocratic pretense.¹⁰⁴ Satirizing chivalric long-windedness (with obvious influence from forebears in the *demande d'amour* genre), the speeches evince Chaucer's developing penchant for impersonating idiomatic register, a staple of antique *prosopopoeia*. By reiterating in courtly vernacular the privileged if impotent sighs of the supplicants in Venus' temple, the eagles' complaints also suggest a certain effeminate quality connected with singular profit. Faintly echoing the "men" (257) who had pleaded with Priapus in his "sovereyn place" (254), the eagle that Benson interprets as an allegorization of Richard II addresses the formel as "my sovereign lady." He places the prerogative of the intended female at an unapproachable height¹⁰⁵:

¹⁰³ For more on the institutional framework as a factor in shifting from amatory to civic registers, Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 129.

¹⁰⁴ As Strohm surmises, "That the eagles, most worthy of nature's creations, embody an aristocratic stance toward love seems apparent from contextual references to their degree, supported by medieval works of natural science and heraldry." See Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 127.

¹⁰⁵ See Larry D. Benson, "The Occasion of the *Parliament of Fowls*," *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*. Ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel. (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982). While I agree with Benson's reading, I have not chosen to expand on the topical political context of Richard's impending marriage to Anne of Bohemia

Besykyngge hire of merci and of grace,
 As she that is my lady sovereyne,
 Or let me deye present in this place.
 For certes, longe may I nat lyve in payne,
 For in myn herte is korven every veyne.
 (421-25)

Here is the affected masochism of which Žižek speaks in his well-known essay, the male eagle rhetorically if not physically groveling at the formel's feet.¹⁰⁶ After Nature cryptically reassures the blushing formel (447-48), the following two eagles contribute equally contrived and melodramatic addresses. The dreamer-narrator's over-positive assessment (484-86) may be an ironic *occupatio*, for it turns out that the eagles' complaints have lasted no less than the entire day: "And from the morwe gan this speche laste / Tyl downward went the sonne wonder faste" (489-90). The echoed imagery of a sunset connects the bed of Venus in ll. 260-66 and the eagles' extended speeches. In focusing on their own merits and taking no consideration for the other fowls, the raptors evince an aristocratic indifference in their pursuit of individual profit. This pursuit never abandons an emotive, chivalric idiom in favor of emphasizing the political benefits of a good marital alliance. Such would be far too indelicate, and hence the intensity of the speeches remains bound up with the affectively impacted personhood of each raptor. Seen from a wider vantage, while the biopolitical reality of royal marriage will require the generation of an heir, any reference to the procreative role of marriage in the eagles' complaints remains far below the narrative surface, neglected out of social propriety in favor of fashionable

because I want to call attention to the political dynamic of the poetic figuration internal to the logic and world of the poem. See also Peck's comment that "although there is every likelihood that some specific historical occasion hovers beyond the text of the poem, an allegorical approach tied to specific individuals remains speculative and incidental to the main thrust of the dream vision." See Peck, "Love, Politics and Plot," 291.

¹⁰⁶ Žižek, "Courtly Love," 89-112.

courtly tropes. The conciliar institutional proceeding has been co-opted by the idiomatic register of Venus's regime, so hostile to constructive politics.

Understandably, the common fowls are becoming impatient. Determined to halt the courtly complaints, their interruption is so raucous, both in decibel level and social impropriety, that the forest itself seems to splinter:

The noyse of foules for to ben delyvered
So loude rong, 'Have don, and lat us wende!'
That wel wende I the wode hadde al to-shyvered.
'Com of!' they criede, 'allas, ye wol us shende!
Whan shal youre cursede pletynge have an ende?
How shulde a juge eyther party leve
For ye or nay withouten any preve?'
(491-497)

A legal dimension can be discerned in the final question posed by the lower fowls to the eagles: how to adjudicate between the suitors without valid proof (of love)? The tension between aristocratic sexuality and the impatient pragmatism of populist politics comes into stark relief here. Typically, the lower fowls' expression of discontent with the impracticality of courtly convention is read as the overreaching of sexual impulse from the lewd populace. Following Giancarlo's highlighting of the scene's use of terms from parliamentary procedure, however, I want to suggest that the interruption has more political significance.¹⁰⁷

David Aers illuminates this political significance of the lower fowls' outburst from the vantage of the 1381 English Rising, contending that Chaucer parodies the

¹⁰⁷ See Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Nick Havely likewise notes that "as the debate unfolds and intensifies, other terms – *delyvered*, *pledyng*, *juge*, *remedye*, *assented*, *presente*, *accepteth* – evoke legal and parliamentary procedure." See Havely, "Nature's Yerde and Ward: Authority and Choice in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*," *Medieval Poetics and Social Practice*. Ed. Seeta Chaganti (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 115.

lower class (fowls).¹⁰⁸ Aers argues that the birds' descent from Middle English into onomatopoetic animal sounds (ll. 498-500) is Chaucer's negative satire of the Commons attempting to appropriate political agency for itself over against the aristocracy, whose patronage Chaucer enjoyed.¹⁰⁹ I think, however, that while from one vantage such a reading is justified, the following lines also suggest the bureaucratic shrewdness of the lower fowls, even if the slow narrator misses it. For despite their demotic, carnivalesque idiom, the lower fowls achieve a conciliar reorientation of the poem away from self-interested courtly antics toward the positive concern with common profit¹¹⁰:

The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also
 So cryede, 'Kek, kek! kokkow! quek, quek!' hye,
 That thourgh myne eres the noyse wente tho.
 The goos seyde, 'Al this nys not worth a flye!
 But I can shape hereof a remedie,
 And I wol seye my verdit fayre and swythe
 For water-foul, whoso be wroth or blythe!'

'And I for worm-foul,' seyde the fol kokkow,
 'For I wol of myn owene autorite,
 For comune spede, take on the charge now,
 For to delyvere us is gret charite.'

(498-509)

The shift is quick, from impatient, nonsensical animal sounds to a pushy appeal for representative delegation. In offering to speak on behalf of their species group, the goose and cuckoo have taken a bold step, even if not for the noblest of motives.

¹⁰⁸ Cowgill also considers the 1381 Rising as a significant contextual background for *Parliament*, contending that "...the revolt loomed large in Chaucer's mind as the immediate historical context of the *Parlement*." See Cowgill, "The 'Parlement of Foules,'" 332.

¹⁰⁹ As Aers puts it, "The upper-class 'speche' is disrupted by what the poet classifies as 'noyse', a distinction that the author of *Vox Clamantis* would certainly have recognized with some pleasure." See Aers, "*Vox Populi* and the literature of 1381," 447.

¹¹⁰ For Marion Turner, this interruption is "reminiscent of Bakhtin's description of carnivalesque language parodying formal discourses." See Marion Turner, "The Carnivalesque," *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*. Ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 392.

Their intervention leads to Nature's reordering of procedure; while the initial *modus tenendi* had been predicated merely on species difference with no specific protocol for delegation, now Nature calls for the election of representatives from each species group (ll. 519-25). Ironically, of course, Nature has simply reiterated what the birds themselves suggested. Is this another instance of multiple agency within the continuum of causality, God → Nature → birds? It seems not, for here the decision of the individual animals *precedes* Nature's counsel: birds → Nature. It is as if Nature struggles to catch up with the agency of her non-human subjects, to the extent of taking credit when it is actually due to them. The personified birds thus operate from a position beyond natural instinct, even with a measure of deliberate intention, despite the continuing cacophony. In the above passage their personification can be seen unfolding in compressed form, as they change from inarticulate animals into first-person interlocutors with a political agenda. Put more generally, the poem subtly cloaks an "ascending" foundation narrative of representative government in the guise of "descending" sovereign jurisdiction, styling the self-motivated, 'bottom-up' invention of parliamentary delegation as Nature's 'top-down' official decision. This theoretical point finds a rhetorical parallel inasmuch as the chivalric plaint of the eagles, a more negative example of top-down governance than Nature's, finds its counter in the interpellatory plaint of the lower fowls, "plaint" taken in the specific sense of an appeal from the Commons to the natural person of the royal sovereign.¹¹¹ This sovereign is Nature,

¹¹¹ As delineated by Steven Justice with regard to the 1381 rebels' appeals to Richard II. See Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 60-63.

who ratifies the idea of delegation and, perhaps as a satire on presumptuous monarchy, passes off the idea as her own.

I devote particular attention to this recalibration of parliamentary *modus tenendi* because it functions as a critical site in which the vocal capacity of personifications facilitates the bestowal of political significance upon the sexual agency of the multitude in opposition to the self-interested narcissism of courtly love and its aristocratic indifference to common profit. The interruption of the lower fowls suggests that demotic, marital sexuality need not be opposed to republican politics. The electoral procedure of representation inaugurated in lines 526-32, by enabling advocacy for procreation for natural community, in the same gesture allegorically affirms the political significance of non-courtly sexuality. The political ecology imagined through anthropomorphism thus takes a positive step toward a proper biopolitics of the common that festively departs from the socially disruptive violence of courtly love, evoked in Venus's temple by Cupid's dangerous arrows (211-17), the tragic death of historical lovers (288-94), and here by aristocratic pugnacity (540). The latter, in fact, provokes the *tercelet* to voice the poem's conciliar *credo*: "Oure is the voys that han the charge in honde, / And to the juges dom ye moten stonde" (545-46). This affirmation reinforces the importance of conciliar apparatuses for giving a voice to the marginalized and keeping the excesses of the ruling class within bounds.

Yet the reconfiguration of institutional procedure inspired by the lower fowls is not an attempt to naturalize parliamentary representation. Unlike Cicero's "herding" humans at the dawn of politics and John of Salisbury's apian

commonwealth, this parliament of fowls reflexively nods to the gaps in its own figurative rhetoric as a way of signaling hazards connected with political and literary representation. In other words, while with Salisbury's bees the naturalization of republican politics depended on the prior politicization of nature as a republic, so the deep reciprocity of Nature and culture, necessity and freedom, also conceals several fault-lines at the heart of Chaucer's avian assembly, fault-lines the poem tactically reveals. It is thus that Chaucer aims to elucidate and at least tenuously address sensitivities at the heart of representative government.

In short, the delegates do not agree among themselves. The input of the goose and cuckoo suffers derision from the aristocratic raptors for its divergence from gentility. When a contribution from the lower fowls does accord with courtly love, as in the turtledove's recommendation of patient chastity, dissent arises from the lower ranks, such that no real progress occurs. Even the tercelet's speech reinstates the privilege of noble bloodline that undergirds the aristocratic monopoly on violence. His conciliar assertion was, after all, an assertion. The avian parliament is plagued by internal disagreement. Why? The answer has to do less with animal instinct than with another biopolitical factor, and one in which the limits of personification are deliberately embraced; namely, the basis of the organization of the parliament upon species distinctions (323-328). Earlier, mirroring the order of speaking in the Roman senate, Nature gave first choice to the raptors, as most "worthi" (392):

‘The tersel egle, as that ye knowe wel,
The foul royal, above yow in degre,
The wyse and worthi, secre, trewe as stel,
Which I have formed, as ye may wel se,

In every part as it best liketh me -
It nedeth not his shap yow to devyse -
He shal first cheese and speken in his gyse.'
(393-404)

It is not just that Nature's prerogative as *procreatrix* determines the raptors' own prerogative in order of speech. It is also that royalty is conflated with the best formed and favored by Nature. The idea that political noblesse depends on biological factors is the sustaining myth of dynastic regimes. Relatedly, the basis of the aristocratic derision for the lower fowls also has to do with species difference, as seen preeminently in the sparrowhawk's prejudice against waterfowl -- "Lo, here a parfit resoun of a goos!" (568) -- and the merlin's disdain for the cuckoo (610-16). Given the stratified taxonomy of natural species, disagreement among the fowls is ineluctable, and this parliamentary debate by definition cannot attain a satisfactory resolution. Admittedly, describing the institutional organization of the avian parliament has afforded Chaucer an occasion for exploring the degrees of agency and kinds of attendant agents, human and nonhuman. Yet the differences between the classes of birds are themselves not subject to discussion; as a result, neither are the reasons for the differences in their positions, founded in the personality types associated through *prosopopoeia* with those species differences (330-64). The species difference of personified animals disallows their capacity for successful political dialogue, which presumably would be achieved only through total anthropomorphosis.¹¹² These birds may be able to talk, but the instincts

¹¹² This is not to say that Chaucer has not achieved a lively synthesis of human and nonhuman qualities. Jill Mann has expressed what most readers sense in Chaucer's artistic mastery of character invention and elaboration: "There is here a merging of the human and the animal that makes it appropriate to speak of their 'connaturality.'" See Jill Mann, *From Aesop to Reynard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 198-199.

associated with phenotypes -- analogically concomitant with the prejudice of social classes -- trump the rational freedom implied by the capacity to speak.

The kinds and degrees of difference among the birds are presented as both biological *and* social. This hybridizing of animal and cultural categories has considerable ramifications for the poem's prosopopoetic "naturalization" of human parliamentary politics. Inasmuch as the biological divisions of avian kinds allegorize the social estates according to which the historical institution of Parliament was itself organized, the poem figures the latter to be or at least be capable of becoming as immovable and fixed as ornithology. According to medieval thought, of course, there was divine sanction for social hierarchy and privilege. But the naturalization of sociopolitical rank involved in affirming as much conceals the *a priori* politicization involved in the appeal to natural categories as a way to legitimate the sociopolitical status quo, as we have seen. Such appeals need not have been entirely insidious, whether from John Gower or Vincent de Beauvais; nonetheless, the specious grounding of social distinctions in unverifiable differences "of nature" results in a political vision that can be exploited to justify the powerlessness of the powerless. Herein lies the critical acuity of Chaucer's use of personification, for in satirizing the political stalemate occasioned by prejudices grounded in species differences, the justness and political efficacy of the social estates system that the portrayal allegorizes is itself implicitly questioned. This is truly estates satire, accomplished through what Samuel Levin calls "radical dispersonification," a figurative effect of personification in which the literal attributes of allegorical non-humans (in this case the species differences among

birds) reverberate critically against the human parallels they figure. In other words, we are shown in this case what is wrong with human politics when we are made to notice negative parallels with animal attributes or behavior.

As a result, the rhetorical proffering of non-human communities for human emulation, as in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, comes off seeming far more risky and problematic. Is the conflict stemming from the purportedly natural divisions underlying social estates as politically counterproductive for common profit as the conflict between members of different avian species to the furtherance of successful mating in *Parliament*? Possibly, and the avian parliament should therefore not be read to exemplify Chaucer's simple assent to social division, even if he can have fun at the expense of both gentry and Commons, learned and lewd, all the while affirming the goodness of social difference (thankfully we don't all speak like aristocrats!). The poem exposes the inefficacy of conciliar governance when the latter's institutional organization is premised on naturalized or "ontologized" social categories that permit the perpetuation of default inequities. As it turns out, the stance of *Parliament* to the uprising of 1381 may be less hostile than otherwise thought.

Admittedly, this is quite a lot to see in some talking birds. But the poem's sensitive navigation of figurative emphases -- from institutionalized sexuality to political procedure, and back again; from aristocratic to populist idiom, and back again -- traces multiple rhetorical trajectories that exemplify Aers' point in this chapter's first paragraph on Chaucer's apt embedding of political comment within formal complexity. Throughout the poem, such comment has been mitigated by

another kind of political agency, one typically in tension with conciliar representation and which we only briefly discussed above with regard to the convening of the parliament: sovereignty. Given the poem's historical context, this mitigating element should come as less of a surprise, since it was the prerogative of the monarch in late-medieval England that convened parliaments, albeit primarily in order to receive approval for royal fiscal policies. Kathryn Lynch sees the heart of the poem as an investigation into volition, elevated to a philosophical topic of reflection by late-medieval voluntarism, and its potential excessive sovereignty – an idea Chaucer will return to in *House of Fame*.¹¹³ So, as the sovereign convener of this all but failed parliament, now it is Nature's turn to interrupt: “‘Now pes,’ quod Nature, ‘I comaunde heer! / For I have herd al youre opynyoun, / And in effect yit be we nevere the neer’” (617-19). In late-medieval legal theory, the king was required to seek popular approval through the consent of parliamentary delegates according to the conciliar principle that “what touches all” (*quod omnes tangit*) must be approved by all. This same principle, that what “touches” (*tangit*) or pertains to a given constituency must be approved by the same, renders Nature's interruption of the squabbling birds more intelligible insofar as she utilizes her sovereignty to equip another figure with the prerogative to decide the matter. Lest we forget, the political assembly, from the eagles to the cuckoo, has been talking for its entirety thus far about a single, solitary agent, or perhaps we should rather say patient: the formel.

¹¹³ See Kathryn Lynch, “The *Parliament of Fowls* and Late Medieval Naturalism, Part I” *The Chaucer Review* 25.1 (1990): 1-16; and Kathryn Lynch, “The *Parliament of Fowls* and Late Medieval Naturalism, Part II” *The Chaucer Review* 25.2 (1990), 85-95.

For she eventually becomes an agent. At the beginning of the assembly, after inviting the first eagle to begin his plaint, Nature had hastily interrupted herself and placed a binding stipulation upon the entire parliament, including herself. That stipulation turns on the free female acceptance of male choice:

‘But natheles, in this condicioun
Mot be the choys of everich that is heere,
That she agre to his eleccioun,
Whoso he be that shulde be hire feere.
This is oure usage alwey, fro yer to yeere;’
(407-11)

Over and above the organizational priority granted to the aristocratic raptors, Nature bestows procedural priority to gender, to all the females, marked by the “she” and “hir” in lines 409 and 410. This is precisely the condition that Nature now recalls after the impasse of the parliament:

‘But finally, this is my conclusioun,
That she hireself shal han hir eleccioun
Of whom hire lest; whoso be wroth or blythe,
Hym that she cheest, he shal hire han as swithe.’
(620-23)

In encouraging the formel to select the mate “on whom hire herte is set,” Nature not only inflects the same courtly idiom the eagles and tercelet had earlier employed, but also urges the choice to align with her preference as *procreatrix* (631-37). It seems that Nature may not be capable of imagining that the formel may not want a mate at all, at least not the royal tercel. Rather than openly appeal to her earlier statement at ll. 407-411, as would make most sense procedurally within a legal framework that values precedent, Nature presents her statute as a spontaneous decision, precisely as she had done earlier in reiterating the birds’ self-chosen conciliar procedure, as if she had conceived it. Through the device of

personification Chaucer figures Nature's authority not as a necessary influence but as "her" personal preference: "as it best lyketh me." Like a good sovereign, then, Nature makes an exception to the rule, granting what she calls a "favour" (626) to the formel. At the same time, in passing along prerogative for having the final word, Nature eagerly emphasizes her own power in doing so (624-30), as one who dispenses favors upon whomever she prefers (a far cry from Nature as vicarious force of ll. 380-81). And yet, even while Nature's vicarious causality renders any particular individual non-human choice a potential expression of Nature's own latent *taxis*, the formel responds with a curveball. After securing Nature's assent to grant her "first bone" through the deployment of the Proppian folktale plot device of the secured request, she begins:

‘Almyghty queen, unto this yer be don,
I axe respit for to avise me,
And after that to have my choys al fre.
This al and som that I wol speke and seye;
Ye gete no more, although ye do me deye!’
(647-51)

One can almost hear Patrick Henry in her plea: "Give me liberty, or give me death!" The formel requests a deferral of the parliamentary court in order to take counsel only with herself, and even after that she requires personal sovereignty: "my choys al fre" (649). Yet this is not the same sovereignty as that of tyrannical Priapus or even courtly pretense. The one place in the poem where Chaucer seems to give a measure of unambiguously positive sovereignty -- and happily this is not that surprising for Chaucer -- is in the passage where a female stands in the relative position of vulnerability. The formel's request amounts to what Havelly, evoking speech-act theory, calls a "non-performative," a non-action that is nonetheless

deeply agential.¹¹⁴ It indeed performs much, leading the avian allegorization of human politics to an ambivalent if bold consummation.¹¹⁵

All of the problems we have explored above -- multiple causality, natural and voluntary community, procreative marriage and courtly love, representative and sovereign governance -- are compressed in the formel's request of Nature and its consequences. In maintaining the conventional prerogative of the desired female above her suitors, the formel's deferral -- made in the context of a parliament -- renders unrequited love into a political force. This has two immediate consequences. First, it makes the three male eagles wait for at least an entire year before even the possibility of a decision is once again taken up, effectively halting any royal betrothal that may be allegorized here. More critical than the parody of the trio's love complaints, therefore, the formel's deployment of courtly convention also catalyzes female non-sexual agency against Girardian male rivalry.¹¹⁶ And the personified formel achieves this by means of a parliamentary procedure that we have already seen the lower fowls employ in their earlier appeal to Nature against the long-winded eagles, namely, the vernacular "plaint." Hence while the birds' species differences (as an allegorization of naturalized social estates) effected the destabilizing of conciliar governance through protracted disagreement, it is the form of parliamentary appeal from particular marginalized voices -- the

¹¹⁴ See Nick Havely, "Nature's *Yerde* and Ward," 122.

¹¹⁵ While Hugh White sees the formel's free decision to defer as potentially symbolic of specifically human agency over and against mere "animal sexual desire" (242), such a reading does not account for the complex dynamic of instinct and freedom with regard to all the non-humans personified in the poem, as explored above. See White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 242-243.

¹¹⁶ See Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

interpellative, not chivalric, plaint -- that now enables the assembly's successful conclusion.

For on all counts it has been a success; the formel gets what she wants, and the lower fowls get what they want, all selecting their mates. This amounts not only to the thematic affirmation of common, procreative sexuality, but also, in a reversal of the earlier show of aristocratic indifference to common profit, to an expression of the indifference of common profit to aristocratic satisfaction. Indirectly subverting the natural hierarchy that began with the raptors as most "worthi," here it is the three greatest of the raptors who depart unsatisfied, ironically vindicating the earlier frustration of the fowls who now immediately strike up in song celebrating the procreative summer night ahead. The common profit facilitated by popular marriage and its "soft" political regulation of procreative sexuality -- what White calls "inseminative orthodoxy" -- outflanks the rhetorical self-subjection and pugnacity of courtly love.¹¹⁷ The poem's use of *prosopopoeia* thus seems to commit it to political conclusions, even while -- or because? -- the aristocrats leave empty-handed. Yet this includes the formel, for her freedom still remains *opposed* to the natural order which would see *all* the birds with mates at the end of the day. But the figurative device permits an important distinction; even if departing without a mate, the formel does not go against the personification Nature's order, recalling her earlier "condicioun" (407) that the female must assent to the male who makes her the object of his "eleccioun" (409). The poem positively affirms a political warrant for the indefinite deferral of political alliances forged through aristocratic marriage, implying that common profit does not depend entirely on such alliances.

¹¹⁷ See White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, 91.

By figuring the distributed or vicarious agency of Nature in a sovereign individual agent, Chaucer's poem describes a political ecology in which the instinct *and* individual freedom of each and every creature are always already *both* implicated in every act. This suggests the reality of a single, common world, not two distinct and incommensurable realms, human and non-human, culture and nature(s), which might just constitute Chaucer's Latourian answer to the question posed by Barbara Newman. Relying throughout on the affinities between non-humans and humans in natural community as manifest through figurative anthropomorphosis and using *prosopopoeia* to figure a presiding Nature who cedes sovereignty to a single non-human female creature, Chaucer's poem proposes that conciliar politics, even in the event of its own structural failure, can bestow procedural sovereignty onto otherwise marginalized voices, in this case that of the female agent-object of male desire, and thereby tactically defer the aristocratic pretenses of courtly love in favor of the festal affirmation of procreative marriage, and all right under the purview of Richard II – who will also have to wait until next year.¹¹⁸

Conclusion: Voluntarily Natural

The complementary notions of natural and voluntary community can assist in conceiving the connection between sexuality and politics that the *Parliament* has explored. On the one hand, political assembly depends upon the necessary propagation of the species that ensures a community will endure through time. At

¹¹⁸ That Chaucer can be so tongue-in-cheek in allegorizing Richard II as the tercel eagle suggests what a marked change the English monarch underwent in his two-decade reign.

the same time, because kin relations constitute the most basic social bonds, for common profit to prevail a certain regulation of sexuality must be achieved through such cultural mechanisms as incest taboos, monogamy, and inheritance law. The institution of marriage plays a particularly important role in this regard, formalizing local and international alliances and embedding procreation in political economy through the privilege bestowed on primogenital succession. In these ways natural and voluntary community can be seen to coalesce, such that it is not improper to speak of medieval biopolitics when examining or, in Chaucer's case, figuring cultural sites such as marriage in which sexuality and politics intersect. Courtly love represents a relevant if anomalous development of the same intersection, politically dangerous in its emphasis on affective sexual relation without procreation and regardless of the socially disruptive ramifications.¹¹⁹ As we have seen above, in *Parliament* the individualistic eroticism entailed by courtly love is depicted as the fantasy of not common but individual profit, ending in subjection and self-interest; if its proponents, whether persons or personifications, cannot speak but only sigh, then political assembly, as enabled by vocal dialogue, remains unfeasible. As the attempt to conceive sexuality -- otherwise the means for producing natural community -- upon purely voluntary terms, without reference to biological processes, courtly love may ultimately pit sex against the difficult materiality of good governance and association.

In the course of its tactical deployments of personification allegory, the third section of *Parliament of Fowls* suggests that courtly love has fundamentally anti-

¹¹⁹ For instance, consider the simultaneous constitution and disruption of the Arthurian court through the political and sexual aspects of courtly love; Lancelot is both the perfect knight and the cuckold of the king.

political effects because it delays spousal association and reproductive legitimacy as proper to the fundamental political unit of the family, but also, by provoking violence between rival aristocratic males, it upsets the larger public community of the body politic with the latter's emphasis on common profit. Nonetheless, while Chaucer initially casts sovereignty as the negative political form associated in Priapus and the royal eagle with the singular profit of courtly love, an abiding paradox emerges in the necessary role of Nature's sovereignty -- fraught throughout with the tensions of vicariousness -- for convening, sustaining, and concluding an attempted conciliar multitude in which relative equity can be attained and "political conflict [can be] subsumed in collective agency."¹²⁰ The temporary, tentative sovereignty of the marginalized voice of the formel, moreover, suggests that the procedural mobility of prerogative, distributed by Nature as an actor-network of rational instinct, best enables the proper combination of royal and conciliar political agency. Chaucer's deployments of personification in *Parliament* explore and facilitate the better envisioning of common equity and representational delegation within human polities.

In the next chapter we will explore how Chaucer draws on the capacities of personification to explore how representational delegation can maintain the integrity of authorial and textual agency in the face of a sovereign figure of absolute contingency, a far more fearsome presider than Nature: Fame.

¹²⁰ Carolyn Van Dyke, *Chaucer's Agents: Cause and Representation in Chaucerian Narrative* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 60.

Chapter 2: Trying to Live Answerably in the *Auctor*-Network: Chaucer's *House of Fame*

Extending our study of the ways that personification distributes agency across a range of entities as an imaginative mode of social-critical heuristics, in this chapter I will argue that Chaucer's *House of Fame* draws on the device to gauge the dynamics of authorial answerability.¹²¹ To what degree are authors and readers responsible -- both ethically and eschatologically -- for their linguistic actions and reactions?¹²² Mikhail Bakhtin's answer is that "[a]rt and life are not one, but they must become united in myself -- in the unity of my answerability."¹²³ From Dido and Aeneas in Book I to the canonized poets and personified "wights" in Book III -- where does "linguistic agency" begin and end within the tripartite rhetorical network of author, textual utterance, and reader? I will explore the deployment of the figurative device of *prosopopoeia* in Chaucer's treatment of this quandary. I will argue that Chaucer uses the figurative personification of non-humans, engaging in what Nicolette Zeeman calls "imaginative theory," to sketch an eschatological ecology in which overlapping authorial and readerly

¹²¹ Laurel Amtower, Alastair Minnis, and others have found Bakhtin's theoretical concepts to be helpful in interpreting *House of Fame*. None, to my knowledge, have specifically discussed answerability, however. Amtower focuses on Bakhtin's distinction between primary and secondary genres, while Minnis traces the presence of *heteroglossia* in Chaucer's poem. See Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 129; and A.J. Minnis, *The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 222-23.

¹²² In posing the question in this way, I aim to qualify Lisa Kiser's reading of *House of Fame*, which tries to keep literature and life separate. For example: "*The House of Fame* has little to do with life or the judgments on it that will be rendered at doomsday; rather, the poem refers only to artistic representations of life, to visual and verbal constructions of reality, not to reality itself" (Kiser, "Eschatological Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," 111). How such a distinction could be maintained, such that no artistic or visual representation of reality was held to have anything to do with "reality itself" seems methodologically troubling. It is only near the end of the article that she seems to admit of the possibility that Chaucer is in fact concerned with eschatology. See p. 115, and 118-19. See Lisa Kiser, "Eschatological Poetics in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 49.2 (June 1988), 99-119.

¹²³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, eds. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 2.

agencies are called to account in a climactic juridical court-scene that aligns literary and legal forms of representation.¹²⁴

At the experimental zenith of his literary career, Chaucer deploys *prosopopoeia* as a narrative catalyst for distributing agency and responsibility beyond and around the human, and on into the afterlife.¹²⁵ Chaucer does not exempt himself from this exploration; even the persona Geoffrey is a sort of *prosopopoeia* in which Chaucer, like a good ethnographer and ethicist, embeds his authorial voice in order more reflexively to evaluate the implications of presuming to speak, or write, at all.¹²⁶ In the process of its experimentation, the poem crafts what I would like to call an *auctor*-network, a complex assemblage of personified “semiotic actors” and their imagined afterlives.¹²⁷

The term “*auctor*-network” is my premodern adaptation of Bruno Latour’s term, from which actor-network theory, or ANT, gets its name. This method of sociological analysis attends to the variable relations of part and whole, such that a whole can be simultaneously conceived as constituted of parts and each part, including the theorist him- or herself, as a whole unto itself composed of “smaller” parts. Every actor is *in* a network, and also is *itself* a network. The conceptualization of a network with regard to

¹²⁴ See Nicolette Zeeman, “Imaginative Theory,” *Middle English*. Ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 222-240.

¹²⁵ In his authoritative survey of Chaucer’s shorter poems, Minnis discusses Chaucer’s adroit use of various rhetorical devices – *exclamatio*, *descriptio*, *amplificatio*, *repetitio*, *interrogatio*, *circuito*, *apostrophe* – but not, glaring in its absence, *prosopopoeia*. See Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 161-251. Van Dyke’s *Chaucer’s Agents*, however, is an excellent exception that proves the rule; see her treatment of Fame’s allegorical agency in chapter 2 of *Chaucer’s Agents: Cause and Representation in Chaucerian Narrative* (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005).

¹²⁶ Intriguingly, in his article on the rhetorical aspect of Chaucer’s poetics, Robert O. Payne describes this authorial self-personification in terms that directly evoke the political theory of the King’s two bodies, in which the King is held to have a public or fictional body and a natural, physical one. As Payne says, the poet “must create himself in the language of his work in order that the invented, artificial speaker can survive the mortal, natural one.” See Robert O. Payne, “Chaucer’s Realization of Himself as a Rhetor,” *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*. Ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 283.

¹²⁷ See Bruno Latour, “On actor-network theory: A few clarifications,” *Soziale Welt* 47.4 (1996): 378.

mereological scale is useful according to Latour primarily for tracking the degrees, kinds, and especially redistributions of *agency*.¹²⁸ The notion of a network, in other words, “is of use whenever action is to be redistributed” from one actor to another. My neologism “*auctor-network*” dilates the reference to Latour’s ANT by invoking the medieval legal meaning of the Latin term *auctor*, which denotes not only the author of a revered text, but “the person responsible,” that is, the agent in a legal case.¹²⁹ As I have argued above, agency, legal and otherwise, is precisely what is at issue in medieval political instances of rhetorical personification. In being given a measure of personhood, fictive agents are capable of being assigned ethical and political responsibility. Only an agent, whose power is yoked with a degree of personal freedom, can be deemed answerable. Personification facilitates the emergence of a network of answerability that includes but exceeds individual humans.¹³⁰

This network functions in such a way that non-humans are ascribed anthropomorphic qualities -- embodiment, volition, speech -- and hence brought not only into political existence proper (recall Giles of Rome’s point that speech is an indicator of the naturalness of politics), but also into a narrative’s dialogic engagement with specific matters of public concern. In chapter one we explored how Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls* takes up personification as it addresses questions of nature and culture, sexuality

¹²⁸ In Latour’s words, “network is the concept that helps you redistribute and reallocate action.” See Bruno Latour, “Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist,” *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 800.

¹²⁹ See Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 247.

¹³⁰ Chaucer’s *House of Fame* can thus be said to exemplify what Nicolette Zeeman has called “imaginative theory,” including both various subtle challenges to “the teachings of the schools” (225) – especially teleological materialism with the Eagle and divine voluntarism with Lady Fame – as well as playfully engaging with the topic of answerability. The following point from Zeeman is applicable for *House of Fame*: “Later fourteenth-century English writers such as Chaucer and Langland signal in a variety of ways their distance and disengagement from the traditional intellectual formulations and teaching methods endorsed by the schools: ethics, philosophy, and spiritual teaching look very different in the new forms of vernacular literature.” See Zeeman, “Imaginative Theory,” 225.

and politics. In *House of Fame*, literary texts, oral “tydings,” long dead semi-historical figures, the concept of fame, and the narrator-persona Geoffrey himself are implicated in the poem’s distributions of anthropomorphic agency for the purpose of imaginatively theorizing answerability. Mikhail Bakhtin defines answerability simply as the unity of art and life, whether for writer or reader, artist or viewer. Again: “[a]rt and life are not one, but they must become united in myself -- in the unity of my answerability.”¹³¹ Far from a justification for biographical criticism, answerability posits an ethical relation between writer and reader that is supplemental to unilateral authorial intentionality, counterbalancing an emphasis on the authorial dispossession of textual meaning with the distanced yet appropriative act of readerly interpretation.¹³² For Bakhtin, in fact, answerability is directly related to the existentially responsible reception that manifests the moral freedom of personal agents: “I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life.”¹³³ To shirk answerability is to follow the easy route, “for it is certainly easier to create without answering for life, and easier to live without any consideration for art.”¹³⁴ Chaucer’s eschatological poem explicates the attempt of reckoning life with art, ethics with rhetoric, and explores the extended repercussions.

While Bakhtin’s concept reflexively applies to the experience of reading, *House of Fame* explores answerability in the fertile context of eschatological parody. The setting

¹³¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, eds. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 2.

¹³² Paul Ricoeur’s term *distanciation* stresses both the distance from author to reader in time and intended/received meaning. See Paul Ricoeur, *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*. Ed. Mario Valdes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). One can already hear echoes here of *HF* ll. 1878-82.

¹³³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

of Book III amounts to a version of the hermeneutic event *par excellence* at which all history culminates, undergoing interpretive reception by its author, maker, and final reader: the Last Judgment. In this apocalyptic milieu, answerability for linguistic action on the part of authors is amplified by both the semantic polyvalence and rhetorical interminability of textual speech-acts. Long after an author has died, the effects of his or her texts -- each of which is subject to multiple interpretations -- continue to ripple down through the audiences that constitute its history of reception.¹³⁵ As Bakhtin says, every act “is truly real . . . only in its entirety.”¹³⁶ And texts are never-finished acts, always open to new receptions and readings. Robert O. Payne argues that “the Chaucerian speech/poem, like all those the Eagle showed him in the *House of Fame*, is an initially invented construct which, once committed to time, carries into the stream of time some seeds of its speaker and its topics which germinate, grow, bear fruit, and reseed themselves in successive generations of hearers/readers.”¹³⁷ The ascription of answerability in this chronology of the text is particularly difficult given the involvement of multiple agents. This is ethically and politically important. As political philosopher J.G.A. Pocock says: “Agents perform upon other agents, who perform acts in response to theirs, and when action and response are performed through the medium of language, we cannot absolutely distinguish the author’s performance from the reader’s response.”¹³⁸

So is the linguistic agency of a text human or non-human? The answer to this question is yes. It is always both, since an actor is also a network, that is, an author is

¹³⁵ For a memorable accounts of the afterlives of (and caused by) textual speech-acts, see Dante’s *Inferno* V.121-142.

¹³⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993), 2.

¹³⁷ Payne, “Chaucer’s Realization of Himself as Rhetor,” 285.

¹³⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17.

already embedded in a network of sources, intended audiences, and actual readers and commentators. As Latour puts it, “an actor is nothing but a network, except that a network is nothing but actors.”¹³⁹ At distinct moments in Book I, II and III of *House of Fame*, personification enables Chaucer to redistribute human and non-human agencies throughout a network of other actors, and thereby broaden the poem’s treatment of answerability. As Melissa Furrow has noted, medieval authors were certainly answerable for the effects of their texts, something of which Chaucer was well aware, as suggested by his own concern in the *Retractions* that his texts not “sownen into sinne” (X.1081). Chaucer’s characters also are aware of the moral effects of narrative, as evident in the Monk’s intent to provide a tale that “sowneth into honestee” (VII.1967). As Furrow puts it regarding a text’s negative impact,

there was ample warrant for considering secular fictions to be dangerous to their readers, worse than useless, actively harmful....It is not that the fictions are sinful in themselves; it is that they ‘sownen into synne’, are conducive to sin; the author cannot trust his readers to use them right. And if the reader does not use them right, the guilt is not just the reader’s, but the author’s.¹⁴⁰

Furrow places the responsibility for ethical reading squarely on the author’s shoulders. In *House of Fame*, Chaucer explores the antagonism between existentially responsible authorship and the less commendable if widespread aim of linguistic production for the purpose of gaining fame.

Redistribution of Agency I: Dido Redux

The poem takes up the issue of answerability almost immediately with the story of Dido and Aeneas that “Geffrey,” the narrator *persona*, sees portrayed in the temple of

¹³⁹ Latour, “Networks, Societies, Spheres,” 800.

¹⁴⁰ See Melissa Furrow, “The Author and Damnation: Chaucer, Writing and Penitence,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 33.3 (1997): 250.

glass in Book I. Much as Ovid had done in his *Heroides*, Chaucer recounts the story of Dido and Aeneas in a way that centers on Dido's betrayal by Aeneas, granting Dido no less than fifty-six lines of bitter complaint. She surrendered herself and her kingdom to Aeneas, and was rejected. It was a bad alliance, both romantically and politically. Dido is fretfully aware of the potency of speech-acts in the aftermath of her downfall, and bemoans their role in her admittedly voluntary surrender to Aeneas (ll. 253-58, 278, 331). And yet she seems more upset about the linguistic dissemination of her now notorious "name" than about the actual departure of Aeneas. She laments the spread of her besmirched reputation:

'O, wel-away that I was born!
For thorgh yow is my name lorn,
And alle myn actes red and songe
Over al thys lond, on every tonge.
O wikke Fame! - for ther nys
Nothing so swift, lo, as she is! [350]
O, soth ys every thing ys wyst,
Though hit be kevered with the myst.
Eke, though I myghte duren ever,
That I have don rekever I never,
That I ne shal be seyde, alas,
Yshamed be thourgh Eneas,
And that I shal thus juged be:
"Loo, ryght as she hath don, now she
Wol doo eft-sones, hardely" -
Thus seyth the peple prively.' [360]
But that is don, nis not to done;
Al hir compleynt ne al hir moone,
Certeyn, awayleth hir not a stre.
(345-63)

Dido's fear of the prospect of judgment (357) underscores the strong connection between personal responsibility for specific acts -- in this case what she and Aeneas "hath don" (358) -- and their linguistic diffusion in what other persons say about her deeds. Dido quails not so much at the prospect of a life without Aeneas, in other words, but rather at

the murmuring among her subjects and future generations about what her tryst with Aeneas “says” about her *as a person*, that is, as one in whom abides the unity of choice and identity, act and life -- which is to say, answerability. This unity makes the conclusion of the people -- that if she’s acted in a certain way once, then she is likely to do so again (358-59) -- at least understandable, if ungenerous. Actions speak louder than, but also *like*, words, because words are actions, speech-*acts*, for which one is answerable. So even if the indeterminacy of received textual meaning evident in Geoffrey’s sympathetic response lends hope that Dido can modify future opinions of her through renewed courses of decision and visible performance, there is something irrevocable about every act, and hence irrecoverable about one’s past “fame” in light of the quick spread of public information: “But that is don, nis not to done” (361). And there is also a gendered political implication in Virgil’s valorization of the success of a male refugee establishing the Roman state through the betrayal of a female sovereign.

Chaucer, whom the fifteenth-century Scottish poet Gavin Douglas called “wemenis frend” (*Prologues to Eneados* 17.21), has a point to make here regarding Dido’s unfair suffering.¹⁴¹ And yet, if in Chaucer’s retelling Dido’s concern with the spread of slander and rumor does in fact outweigh her concern for the loss of Aeneas as lover, then the introduction of the figure of Fame shifts attention away from male betrayal and recalibrates the retelling as a contest between two female agents, Dido and Fame. The latter indeed surpasses Aeneas in sheer energy and impact. Like Virgil in *Aeneid* IV, Dido personifies the concept of Fame as a singular cause and representation of multiple rumormongering speech-acts by “the peple” (360). The apostrophic

¹⁴¹ See *Virgil's Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas*, ed. David F. C. Coldwell, Vol. 1. STS 25 (Edinburgh & London, 1957).

prosopopoeia of Fame (she is here only addressed, and does not yet appear or speak) has a sort of semantic convertibility with the harmful multiplicity of linguistic dissemination as such: gossip.¹⁴² Fame also functions as a rival object of desire for Aeneas, whose infidelity emerges in relation to her form. Unlike in Virgil's account, Chaucer's Dido claims the real reason for Aeneas' betrayal: "of oon he wolde have fame / In magnyfyng of hys name" (305-06). Not only shifting the focus of the episode away from the binary relation between Dido and Aeneas toward Dido and Fame, even Aeneas is drawn into Fame's orbit of influence; desire for her is the reason for his unfaithfulness to Dido. The effect is jarring, as a hideous personification eclipses even the queen of Carthage in the eyes of Rome's founder. While Aeneas' relationship with Fame moves in the direction of political renown as achieved through Virgil's *Aeneid* itself, Dido's relationship to Fame is clearly negative, as articulated in her "compleynt" (362) in the face of judgment: "I shal thus juged be" (357). Chaucer thus situates the poem's concern with answerability in a lamentation that connects the personification of Fame (349) with the act of judgment, a connection that will reemerge with a vengeance in Book III.

Chaucer as the revisionist author behind all this (or Geoffrey as his *persona*) does not exempt himself from scrutiny. The narrative *persona* admits to the privileged authorial agency of having practiced a certain amount of selective embellishment, and proceeds to gesture toward his responsibility for having his Dido make such claims:

In suche wordes gan to pleyne
 Dydo of hir grete peyne,
 As me mette redely -
 Non other auctour alegge I.
 (311-14)

¹⁴² As Carolynn Van Dyke has noted, "Beyond Dido's apostrophe, unpersonified *fame* pervades the poem [1139, 1490, 1545]. . . . Thirty-four of the word's fifty-seven occurrences do not refer to the Lady Fame." See Van Dyke, *Chaucer's Agents*, 45.

Geffrey's non-allegation of *auctores* enacts a redistribution of poetic agency that deftly appropriates authority from possible source-texts (even *Heroides*) toward Book I's female narrator *persona*. In claiming responsibility for Dido's complaint, Chaucer exposes the ethical problem with Virgil's account, namely, its justification of Aeneas' betrayal of Dido for the sake of fulfilling a particular political destiny and ensuring Aeneas's personal fame. The narrator intensifies the indictment of Virgil in lines 427-32, where the *Aeneid*, referred to pseudo-deferentially as "the book" (429), is scorned for striving "to excusen Eneas" (427) from "al his grete trespas" (428). Why the fuss?

Because, as Laurel Amtower argues,

there is a traceable connection between the model and the subsequent acts of readers: behaviors that are glorified by the canonized authors will continue to be validated by their readers, who look not just to those texts but to the imaginative mythology they inspired to provide examples of traits that will win them esteem in the eyes of their own world.¹⁴³

The emergence of an answerable narrator-*persona* introduces a distinction between the poem itself and the source-texts of Virgil and Ovid that it later directly names (378-79), implicitly highlighting the agency of "secondary translation" that Chaucer exercises in order to make the changes that he does, assuming answerability covertly in 311-314.¹⁴⁴

Or are these four lines from Geoffrey ironic, and meant to satirize the naïve presumption of the narrator-*persona* in privileging the content of his oneiric hallucination over official Latinate accounts of Dido? Rather the pathetic *prosopopoeia* of Dido, with her own apostrophic invocation of Fame, has suggested that a good, morally sensitive

¹⁴³ Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 135.

¹⁴⁴ The term "secondary translation" is from the work of Rita Copeland; it implies a form of deliberate poetic intertextuality that is more inventive than exegetically supplementary in its relation to prior influences and source texts (such as, in this case, Ovid's *Heroides* and Virgil's *Aeneid*). See Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 7.

reading like Geoffrey's is not only *not* impossible, but has in fact just been performed. And yet what is the likelihood of such a reading among Chaucer's contemporary audience in light of contemporary cultural predilections, such as positive valorizations of the English capital's Trojan origin, London as New Troy? Hence the abiding tact Chaucer takes in speaking through the mouth of Geoffrey, as one who complicates any particular decision about who may be responsible for the ethical and social effects of histories of reception of canonical texts, in this case pertaining to Dido's plight. As Larry Sklute has argued, "The anxiety of book one of the *House of Fame*, then, is one about a poet's control, his responsibility as a 'makir.'"¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, by enabling Geoffrey to experience empathy in the face of Dido's betrayal, and to articulate it as an issue of authorial answerability in which Virgil is equated with his textual product, "the book" (429), Book I offers at least one solution to its own problem: everyone is (partially) responsible: author, text, audience, Aeneas and, perhaps, Dido herself. The rhetorical complexity of Chaucer's poetics, with the doubling of first-person voice in the authorial *persona*, the rival versions of Dido, and the compression of all rumormongering speech-acts into the personification of Fame, has facilitated an internal distancing within each pair, half of whom are embedded readers -- Chaucer reading Virgil and reading Ovid reading Virgil, Dido imagining how the people of Carthage will read her betrayal and Chaucer knowing how historical readers already have, and Geoffrey reading (Chaucer's) Dido in the Temple, and all as read by us, each echoing asymmetrically. Seen from the

¹⁴⁵ Larry Sklute, *Virtue of Necessity: Inconclusiveness and Narrative Form in Chaucer's Poetry* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 37. Sklute recognizes the ethical implications of this responsibility: "In book one Chaucer raises questions about the nature and value of poetic appropriation and implies a relationship between the deceptive nature of human communication and the possibly deceptive nature of artistic representation, which is also a form of communication." See Sklute, *Virtue of Necessity*, 39.

perspective of actor-network theory, the poem engenders a network of human and non-human actors and “risky accounts” (Latour) that anticipates the whirling House of Rumor in its interminable proliferation of utterances and its multiple diegetic layering of agencies, implicating all those involved as partially answerable.

Redistribution of Agency II: Personified Speech-Acts

Above we described the specific quality of textual agency as a rippling down of effects through time to multitudes of readers. Moving from Virgilian-Ovidian to Dantean influences, the metaphor of rippling liquid is taken up in Book II to portray the material dynamism of speech-acts. During their garrulous ascent, the Eagle explains to Geoffrey the name of their shared destination -- Fame’s house -- and the natural transmission to it of all speech-acts, primarily sonic ones but textual as well (722).¹⁴⁶ The reference to manuscript rubrication in line 1078 suggests that the utterances that are personified are textual *and* oral -- a paradox that receives further attention in Book III. The Eagle offers a vivid and accurate description of the physical quality of sound as broken air, making “a worthy demonstracioun / in myn imagynacioun,” and perhaps also a fart joke, as Minnis and others have suggested (727-28).¹⁴⁷ After insisting on the teleological “kyndely enclynynge” (734) of sound as an element comparable in its affordances to fire or water, the Eagle likens sonic etiology to a concentric nesting of centrifugal ripples, “every sercle causynge other” (796), and “Ech aboute other goynge / Causeth of othres sterynge / And multiplynge ever moo” (799-801). The image of ripples in a pond doubtless proves helpful for Geoffrey in visualizing the peculiar agency of speech-acts. The producer of a

¹⁴⁶ Admittedly, that differentiation is relatively moot given the performative context of much premodern poetry.

¹⁴⁷ On “cosmic flatulence” in *House of Fame*, see Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 224.

given speech-act analogously relates to the “ston” (789) thrown into water, and Fame’s house, situated conveniently “Ryght even in myddes of the weye / Betwixen hevne and erthe and see” (714-15), is the shore to which all ripples tend. This non-linear confluence of kinetic causality can be theorized as a network of conceptually distinct agents connected through contiguous materiality (ll. 809-822), an aquatic metaphor of sonic actor-networks.

As intriguing as the Eagle’s explanation is, however, it gets radically extended by the transformation of sonic force into anthropomorphic entities at the end of Book II. In response to Geffrey’s query whether there are in fact no beings other than impersonal sound-waves bouncing around in Fame’s house, the Eagle discloses a fantastic *prosopopoeia* that occurs upon arrival at Fame’s “paleys” (1075):

‘But o thing y will warne the,
Of the whiche thou wolt have wonder.
[...]
But understond now ryght wel this:
Whan any speche ycomen ys
Up to the paleys, anon-ryght
Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight
Which that the word in erthe spak,
Be hyt clothed red or blak;
And hath so verray hys lyknesse
That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse
That it the same body be,
Man or woman, he or she.
And ys not this a wonder thyng?’
‘Yis,’ quod I tho, ‘by heven kyng!’
(1068-69, 1073-84)

Why this distinction between what Minnis calls “personified sounds” and the speakers themselves?¹⁴⁸ The delineation and subsequent confounding of dualities is a key characteristic of various agencies in *House of Fame*, whether word/wight, spoken/written,

¹⁴⁸ See Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 195.

red/black, truth/falsehood (1029, 2108). The longer passage above maintains a careful distinction between the appearance of speech-acts as “the same wight, / Which that the word in erthe spak” (1076-77) and the reality that it is, nonetheless, just a “lyknesse” (1079). Payne’s point about Chaucer’s rhetorically versatile *persona* in *House of Fame* applies pertinently to this further anthropomorphosis of utterances; for Payne, the poet – or in this case, any user of language, “create[s] himself in his work in order that the invented, artificial speaker can survive the mortal, natural one.”¹⁴⁹ While evoking the economy of desired notoriety over which Fame presides, this distinction between an artificial speaker and a natural one repeats the political differentiation between public office and private individual with an almost eerie accuracy. What else is a *persona* than the public, spectral image that an author(ity) puts forward to the people? And why else than to appropriate or evade responsibility as the situation requires?

The distinction between a “wight” and his or her personified speech-act(s) will also be vital to the logic of *prosopopoeia* as a form of legal representation in the court setting of Book III. This is because, while first of all registered as fantastic verisimilitude, such that “thou wilt gesse / that it the same body be” (1080-81), the personification of the wight-likenesses functions in the poem as also a form of representative delegation, in the legal-political sense of *repraesentare*, to stand and speak on behalf of another. These figuratively generated proxies will speak in the court of Fame on behalf of the natural speaker or author they represent, defending the latter’s worthiness for a measure of fame. In this regard we can recall the medieval legal meaning of the Latin term *auctor* as not only the author of a revered text, but the responsible person, that is, the agent represented

¹⁴⁹ Payne, “Chaucer’s Realization of Himself as Rhetor,” 283.

in a given case before a law court.¹⁵⁰ As the foray into political personification in Appendix 2 demonstrates, the domains of medieval law and literature overlap with regard to the notions of representation and agency, suggesting their affinity in discursive arenas that depend to such a great extent upon linguistic signification.

This instance of *prosopopoeia* at the doorstep of Fame's palace constitutes a second redistribution of agency within the poem's speculative ecology. In Book I of *House of Fame*, authorial, characterological, and readerly agencies merged, parted, and recirculated. Here in Book II, the device of personification assembles a network of non-human (yet human-like) agents as mediators between, on the one hand, human speakers on earth and, on the other, as we shall see, a terrifying judicial personification. The overlapping of person and utterance in the personified speech-acts is one of the more imaginative theoretical visualizations of answerability; its precedent in this poem came with the earlier identification of Virgil with his "book" (429). Enabling the "delegatory" representativeness of the anthropomorphs, *prosopopoeia* generates linguistic answerability – that is, the unity of art (utterance) and life (person). The scene's evocation of a bodily resurrection, as described in Revelation 20:12-15, thickens this answerability with an eschatological dimension. Within the logic of Book III, the utterances are granted fictive personhood so that they may be held eschatologically responsible, on behalf of their human producers. Thus in the pages to come Fame will be faced not by mere impersonal sounds (as Geoffrey had wondered) but by "para-human" representatives, toward whom it is possible to apply judgment and also feel empathy. In the figurative redistribution of anthropomorphic agency in this eschatological milieu, the poem's central matter of concern, answerability, earlier stressed so strongly with regard

¹⁵⁰ See Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 247.

to the transgressions of Aeneas, becomes once more available for further narrative disquisition, but now with regard to the afterlives of all “speech-actors.”

Redistributed Injustice

While our forays in Books I and II above focused on the ways that rhetorical personification facilitates the transition from non-human to human-like agency, in the beginning of Book III we find nothing *but* personifications populating Fame’s house. The redistributions of linguistic agency here will be neither doled out by Dido nor explained away by the Eagle, but enacted primarily through the namesake householder of Chaucer’s text, a strikingly original figure framed by a network of allusions to the Johannine Apocalypse and based in the rearrangement of classical source material from Virgil and Ovid. With the character of Fame, the device of personification finally operates as the central aspect of the narrative. As Minnis notes, by focusing on Fame instead of her “suster” (1547), that more common avatar of contingency, Fortune, Chaucer was “breaking new ground.”¹⁵¹ More specifically, he was focalizing an inquiry into the ethics of contingency through the lens of linguistic action and authorial/readerly answerability in particular. A closer examination of Fame’s appearance and activity will illuminate how Chaucer’s imaginative and terrifying hybrid entity both personifies the consequences of contingency within literary history and comments in the process upon specific late-medieval variants of eschatological theology and the exaggerated prospect of divine judgment that has already been anticipated with the appearance of the resurrected tidings.

In the description of Fame’s house in Book III, the poem’s eschatological register thickens. Reference to “th’Apocalips” (1385) suggests overall that the (literary) fame

¹⁵¹ Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 184.

which drives suppliants crowding into the hallways of Fame's palace amounts to a rival (albeit satirically failed) version of Christian beatitude.¹⁵² The differences with the biblical Johannine vision, more than the similarities, are what stand out in Chaucer's poem. After moving through halls full of "alle the pepil" (1283) waiting to plead their case, Geoffrey catches a glimpse of Fame herself enthroned as judge:

But hit were al to longe to rede
The names, and therfore I pace.
But in this lusty and ryche place
That Fames halle called was,
Ful moche prees of folk ther nas,
Ne crowdyng for to mochil prees.
But al on hye, above a dees, [1360]
Sitte in a see imperiall,
That mad was of a rubee all,
Which that a carbuncle ys ycalled,
Y saugh, perpetually ystalled,
A femynyne creature,
That never formed by Nature
Nas such another thing yseye.
For alther-first, soth for to seye,
Me thoughte that she was so lyte
That the lengthe of a cubite [1370]
Was lengere than she semed be.
But thus sone in a whyle she
Hir tho so wonderliche streighte
That with hir fet she erthe reighte,
And with hir hed she touched hevene,
Ther as shynen sterres sevene,
And therto eke, as to my wit,
I saugh a gretter wonder yit,
Upon her eyen to beholde;
But certeyn y hem never tolde, [1380]
For as feeble eyen hadde she
As fetheres upon foules be,
Or weren on the bestes foure
That Goddis trone gunne honoure,
As John writ in th'Apocalips.
Hir heer, that oundy was and crips,

¹⁵² Dean Koonce's study is still very helpful for tracing Chaucer's many allusions to the Johannine biblical text. See B.G. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in The House of Fame* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966).

As burned gold hyt shoon to see;
 And soth to tellen, also she
 Had also fele upstondyng eres
 And tonges, as on bestes heres; [1390]
 And on hir fet woxen saugh Y
 Partriches wynges redely.
 (1354-1392)

This personification of Fame has literary precedents, of course. Besides the obvious forebear in Virgil, consider her Boethian “allegorical telescoping,” as Van Dyke calls it, an allusion to Lady Philosophy’s oscillation in stature in Book I of *De consolacione philosophiae*.¹⁵³ And yet her specific manifestation amounts to one of the most bizarre and powerful allegorical assemblages ever anthropomorphized in Middle English. And this power has not only to do with her obvious position of authority, but also the qualitative features of her agency as a conceptual personification, and the particular theological context in which Chaucer was writing.

Fame is, first of all, the personification of the abstract concept of fame. But in what sense does the character described above *represent* all that is implied by this concept, which in turn is a mental-lexical *repraesentata* of experienced concrete events? In this case such concrete events are nothing less than the temporal acts of producing, receiving, and further reproducing linguistic utterances, which is to say, the exponential “multiplicacioun” of enacted language that brings all “speche” to Fame’s house, according to the Eagle. Turning to Chaucer’s main source will be helpful here. In *Aeneid* IV.175-189, approximate to where Dido laments Fame’s dissemination of news of her tryst with Aeneas, Virgil personifies *Fama* in a way that aligns her quite viscerally with the many events surrounding the actual dissemination of a rumor:

¹⁵³ See Van Dyke, *Chaucer’s Agents*, 46.

Rumour is quick of foot and swift on the wing....By night she flies between earth and sky, squawking through the darkness, and never lowers her eyelids in sweet sleep. By day she keeps watch perched on the tops of gables or on high towers and causes fear in great cities, holding fast to her lies and distortions as often as she tells the truth.¹⁵⁴

For Virgil Fame's omnipresence constitutes the "life" of fame – the ongoing "afterlives" of utterances, as "resurrected" in other folk's ears and out of other folks' mouths, heard and told and reheard and retold, rippling across regions and into the future. While in *House of Fame* the character of Fame remains enthroned rather than swiftly moving from mouth to mouth, it is the other specifically Virgilian aspects of Chaucer's Fame that illuminate how she likewise functions as a poetically compressed singularity of multiple linguistic events: in short, she is covered in hundreds of tongues, eyes, feathers, and ears (1377-92; cf. *Aeneid* IV.182-183). These anthropomorphic qualities suggest that Fame embodies both the totality of all acts of reception and the ensuing rumors concerning the utterances received. Her bilateral agency is both omnipotently receptive (ears, eyes) and generative (tongues). Although more clearly expressed in Virgil's text, there is also the sense that Fame is composed of not just multiple personal actions, but multiple persons. In Virgil's text, for instance, a cycloptic face hides under each of her feathers; in Chaucer, the various facial organs are more fragmented but nonetheless reassembled in the multitudes of personified speech-acts whom she judges. For both Virgil's and Chaucer's Fame, the rhetorical device at work could quite clumsily be coined as *polyprosopopoeia* ('many-person-making'). Put more simply, Fame is herself *a public*, or the sovereign assemblage of *res publicae*: 'things (spoken in) public.' Her agency is the symptom and cause of publication, which is another way of describing her as the

¹⁵⁴ Virgil, *Aeneid* IV.181, 184-89. Trans. David West, in Geoffrey Chaucer, *Dream Visions and Other Poems*. Ed. Kathryn Lynch (New York: Norton & Co., 2007), 235.

definitive if indeterminate meta-speech-act (speech about speech). And she is a political ecology unto herself, in that the inclusion of feathers further qualifies Fame as belonging to her own hybrid species, part avian and part female humanoid. The overdetermined figurative layering veers toward absurdity, a key part of the experimental literary effect.

It should be noted before moving forward that Chaucer's use of personification clearly does not have "stabilizing" or predictable effects. Rhetorically anthropomorphizing speech-acts or concepts by no means limits their polyvalence or range of formal manifestation; in fact, it arguably amplifies polyvalence by raising it above non-volitional efficient causality and into the realm of impulse and caprice that are unique to personal agency – and devastating when exercised by a political sovereign or legal justice. This is precisely what makes Fame (not to mention her sister Fortune) so dangerous; she will upset the expected order of things *willfully*. The degree of contingency introduced into the created order by taking divine and human volition into account, as medieval philosophers like William of Ockham insisted, far surpassed anything obtaining under mere physical causal determination, since an order of *impersonal* causes could be explained probabilistically. The dictates of a freely willing agent considerably complicate this, such that *prosopopoeia*, while useful rhetorically to compress complex multiplicities into singular narrative agents (and hence partially obscure the nature of the personified impersonal entities), nonetheless also increases complexity by introducing freely willing (albeit fictional) agents. In this regard, Fame's "sheer unpredictability," as Kerby-Fulton puts it, directly contravenes the supposed limitation and predictability of personification allegory that many Chaucer scholars, from

J. Stephen Russell to Sheila Delaney, have bemoaned.¹⁵⁵ Writing about Chaucer, Delaney puts it this way:

When the sense of possibility, or contingency, becomes part of the writer's perceptual set – and it can only do so when it is a fact of social life – then s/he will not, I suggest, find allegory a satisfactory mode of expression. That is because the allegorical character can display no free will, no irrational or inexplicable ambivalence.¹⁵⁶

The claim that an allegorical personification can “display no free will” seems mistaken in light of Lady Fame. In this dissertation I am arguing precisely the opposite, namely, that the figurative personification of non-humans involves the introduction of *freedom*, albeit fictional (but so is the freedom of even the most realistically “human” of literary characters) into a realm of otherwise impersonal entities and causes.

Recalling the political valence of sovereignty invoked above, it is worth noting that Fame could have been figured as a democratizing agency; while Fame does in some sense represent the multitude of all voices, and hence constitute a sort of parliament unto her self, it seems more accurate to say that she embodies the “tyranny of the majority,” that endemic problem of democratic politics. This parity of polities reflects the interior dynamic of *prosopopoeia* discussed in the introduction, which can shift semiotically between the allegorical singularity of a unified agent and the mimetic multiplicity of a represented collective. Unlike a democratic populace, the personal will of a despot like Fame who is also a judge can assume colossal illocutionary proportions. This rhetorical

¹⁵⁵ See Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 345. Larry Sklute has also noted that Fame not only “has a personified form” but is “an undependable judge.” See Sklute, *Virtue of Necessity*, 43. And Alastair Minnis has called her an “utterly unpredictable queen.” See Minnis, *The Shorter Poems*, 195. For more on the supposed predictability of personification allegory, see Sheila Delaney, *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1990). See esp. ch. 3, “The politics of allegory in the fourteenth century”; and also J. Stephen Russell, “A Seme in the Integument: Allegory in the *House of Fame*.” *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), 171-85.

¹⁵⁶ Sheila Delaney, *Medieval Literary Politics*, 57.

fact, emerging within the intertextual milieu of the poem's allusion to the biblical Apocalypse, suggests that, in addition to being a personification of the concept of fame, Lady Fame also allegorizes the divine judge described in Revelation 20. Yet we must be careful here: Chaucer is not writing a parody of the biblical apocalypse, or of the biblical God as a tyrant. Instead, Chaucer uses references to the biblical apocalypse, combined with images of *Fama* from Virgil and Ovid, in order to satirize a specific late-medieval theological doctrine that did portray God as potentially tyrannical, specifically with reference to the Last Judgment.

The doctrine of divine voluntarism was popular among Oxford circles in the fourteenth century. Proponents like Duns Scotus and William of Ockham engaged in thought experiments about what God, according to his absolute power (*potentia absoluta*), could or could not do. And there were not many things they assigned to the latter category, especially when it came to the Last Judgment. They concluded, for example, in some of the more controversial treatises, that God could save those who lacked the merit for salvation, or damn those who merited grace. As Ockham says in *Questiones Variæ*, "If there were two persons equal in all of their natural features and all of their supernatural habits and acts, [God] could accept the first and reprobate the other."¹⁵⁷ The voluntarists were not saying that God would do this, but merely that, theoretically, he could.¹⁵⁸ Voluntarism sunders freedom from nature and implicitly posits

¹⁵⁷ William of Ockham, *Opera Theologica* VIII.22. See Marilyn McCord Adams, *William of Ockham*. Vol. 2 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), II.1204.

¹⁵⁸ This sundering of God's will from his attributes, particularly his goodness and mercy, had catastrophic effects; scholars rightly point out, for example, that Descartes' "deceiver god," which looms behind his project of radical doubt, is essentially an early 17th-century version of Ockham's thought experiment concerning whether God could intervene in a person's perceptive act of intellection by substituting the resultant concept of an absent object for a concept of the presently perceived object, essentially causing hallucinatory delusion and therefore being, in Descartes' words, a deceiver. See Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

for the first time the possibility of non-teleological self-determination, something at the heart of Franciscan treatments of subjective rights.¹⁵⁹ Chaucer's poem echoes this late-medieval theological tendency to speculate about what a divine judge could do according to the concept of *potentia absoluta*, but with entirely different motives. In the personification of Fame, Chaucer imaginatively unfolds the extreme consequences of divine voluntarism in the course of the poem's fantastic dream-vision narrative. The scale and manner of Fame's distribution of rewards and repercussions actualizes a soteriology that condemns those who are, in a vernacular translation of technical theological language, "gilteles" (1634), and hence deserve good fame. Chaucer's aim seems to be a critical exaggeration of this morally scandalous doctrine about God, which thankfully received official censure by papal authority within Ockham's lifetime. The ensuing narrative spectacle is a wild ride.

Fame's exercise of her absolute power involves the issuing of capriciously inconsistent judgments to nine groups of suppliants that appear before her throne, each representative of and answerable on behalf of a particular human agent in the poem's eschatological *auctor*-network. Fame scandalizes any sense of justice by treating like cases differently:

And somme of hem she graunted sone,
 And some she werned wel and faire,
 And some she graunted the contraire
 Of her axyng outterly.
 But thus I seye yow, trewely,
 What her cause was, y nyste.
 For of this folk ful wel y wiste
 They hadde good fame ech deserved,
 Although they were dyversely served.
 (1538–1546)

¹⁵⁹ See John Milbank, "Against Human Rights: Liberty in the Western Tradition," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 1.1 (2012): 203-234.

Fame's caprice as a divine judge inaugurates a voluntarist eschatology, with Fame in almost every case insisting facetiously that her judgments are based in nothing but her own will and power (1615-22, 1665-66, 1713-18, 1776-99, 1819-22). In Kerby-Fulton's words, "it is as if Chaucer is reenacting in a pagan setting an Ockhamesque nightmare of the Last Judgment gone mad — a Last Judgment, that is, in which everything is decided by divine *potentia absoluta* and nothing by *potentia ordinata*."¹⁶⁰ Fame is an absolute yet inconsistent interpreter, a monstrous bundle of impulsive misreadings (2110-17), an author's worst nightmare: a leviathan *auctor*-network that personification compresses into a unilateral sovereign agent. While she technically represents all acts of reading and reception, Fame fundamentally crystallizes the negative consequences when popular texts and everyday parlance alike spiral down harmful trajectories of misconstrual and prejudice. It is thus that she upsets the logics of answerability and inaugurates a state of affairs in which the producers of speech-acts are no longer responsible for the effects of their speech-acts since misreading may disrupt the best or worst on parchment alike. While the personification of tidings at the end of Book II suggested a widened scale for answerability, the judge before whom they are called to account chooses to bypass distributive and punitive justice altogether. For writers or speakers, neither ethical or literary merit nor demerit of an oral or textual utterance matters as long as Fame presides

¹⁶⁰ See Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, 346. I would even go so far as to argue that Book III of *House of Fame* constitutes a sort of Menippean satire, with its experimental deployment of personification allegory, its affirmation of logical contradiction (1025–30, 2088–91), and its speculative, open-ended parody of the frightening extremes of voluntarist soteriology, one of the hottest philosophical topics of the fourteenth century. While Melody Light Brewer's unpublished 1998 dissertation at the University of Toledo, "Chaucer's *House of Fame* as a Menippean Satire on the Philosophical/Theological Ideas of the Fourteenth Century," makes this case, it does so in connection with the nominalism/realism debates rather than divine voluntarism; and the gestures of Minnis toward *House of Fame* as a form of "parodic-travesty" literature are accurate, but made in passing. In her excellent book length study, F. Anne Payne does not, however, examine *House of Fame* in any detail. See F. Anne Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981).

as sovereign – so why even try to produce good or edifying literature? Indeed, under the reign of this despotic if chaotic sovereign, why not aim solely, as Aeneas did, for fame?

Trying to Live Answerably in the Auctor-Network: Named and Nameless

This hypothetical question conjures the darker subtext of *House of Fame*, in which Chaucer as a budding poet engages brazenly with the random set of facts that he puts forward as adding up to literary history itself. By sundering art and life, deed and doer, the arbitrariness of Fame’s judgments not only discloses as utterly vacuous those writers’ attempts to merit the grace of “reputational salvation” through literary production.¹⁶¹ It also would seem to permit the popularization and even canonization of ethically problematic texts. And yet certain subtle elements in the poem following Fame’s depiction suggest a steadily building counter-insurgency against her, a push toward assembling an alternative network in which authorial agency and answerability have a central place.

The poem critiques Fame’s dominion in two ways; first, by describing the most famous *auctores* of history in negatively ekphrastic terms. Around Fame’s throne are arrayed rows of iron pillars upon which stand personified likenesses of the great canonical *auctores*, recipients of the pseudo-immortality distributed by Fame: Josephus (1433), Statius (1460), Homer (1466), Dares, Dictys, and the infamous “Lollius” (1467-68), Geoffrey of Monmouth (1470), Virgil (1483), Ovid (1487), Lucan (1499), and Claudian (1509). According to the poem’s apocalyptic setting, these canonical poets can also be properly considered as “canonized” in the sense of having attained exemplary sainthood. Along with the fact that Fame’s process for distributing fame effectively

¹⁶¹ See Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, 345.

subverts the supposed literary merit that their exalted status implies, the position of these *auctores* is at a second glance not entirely desirable. In short, the pillared *auctores* are fixed immobile on pillars of iron besides Fame's throne, sempiternally bearing the heavy weight of the famous topics -- Thebes, Troy, etc. -- that they authoritatively describe. The enraptured tone of the narrative *persona*'s wonderment is, as elsewhere, an indication of a contrasting sense, such that even those near the top of Fame's *auctor*-network end up appearing as anything but objects of envy. The canonized poets can be seen more truly as bearing the weight of answerability for achieving historical fame. As themselves morally responsible in Amtower's sense for all the myriad effects of their canonized texts, they do nothing else than remain fixed in Fame's House, more as punishment than reward, at least if Chaucer's revision of Virgil *via* Ovid is any indicator. As Van Dyke puts it, "on pillars lining her hall, fame turns from bearer to burden"; notably, this shift also suggests the versatility of personification in figuring Fame's "nonhuman agency, vacillating between potentate and thing."¹⁶² Through the affordances of *prosopopoeia* Chaucer thus characterizes the attainment of the highest literary fame as something ultimately undesirable and immobilizing, even as Fame herself, through the figurative mutations of personification, remains in flux.

The poem critiques Fame's dominion secondly insofar as Geoffrey displays genuine empathy for the personified utterances who are unfairly condemned by Fame, presumably in order to cultivate the reader's sentiment against Fame's unjust caprice. Resistance to Fame's dominion reaches a rhetorical climax when Geoffrey admits his fear and righteous indignation at her injustice, and his pity toward those who suffer undeservedly. In the following passage, the prior personification of tidings in Book II,

¹⁶² Van Dyke, *Chaucer's Agents*, 47.

while initially functioning to enable the anthropomorphic presence of speech-acts before Fame in an eschatological court, now facilitates Geoffrey's empathetic response toward the suppliants:

'Allas,' thought I, 'what adventures
Han these sory creatures!
For they, amonges al the pres,
Shul thus be shamed gilteles.
(1631-34)

Shame, in Fame's realm the equivalent of damnation, presupposes lack of merit; but these conditions are not requisite here, for even those "gilteles" among the "creatures" are "shamed."¹⁶³ Pity can be felt not for disembodied, impersonal statements -- but for persons, it can. All irony aside, the reader is rhetorically alerted to the travesty of tyrannical sovereignty, and the suffering it inflicts. By personifying the speech-acts, Chaucer has a target at which to aim for evoking Geoffrey's, and the reader's, affect.

In these two ways, Geoffrey rhetorically builds a diegetic mood of resistance to Fame's multiplex agency. I now want to attend to three final passages in *House of Fame*, all of which involve *prosopopoeia*, in order to explore what seems to be the poem's final if tentative message about authorial agency and answerability. After the alarming scene in which many of the nine groups are "dyversely served," Geoffrey is approached by a personified tiding who, perhaps as a parodic version of the angel in Revelation 20, asks him what is he is looking for:

... 'Frend, what is thy name?
Artow come hider to han fame?'

¹⁶³ Kerby-Fulton helpfully situates this passage and surrounding in the context of late medieval salvation theology: "Merit (as here) is just as useless as demerit (to use the language of one of Lutterell's articles against Ockham) in gaining, or even predicting the outcome of, reputational salvation ('good loos'). While Geoffrey expresses shocked sympathy, both Fame's and his own language play on exactly the kind of language, Anglicized in form, we have just seen used in debates about and condemnations of Ockhamist 'Pelagianism': 'good werkes,' 'deserved,' 'gilteles,' and so forth." See Kerby-Fulton, *Books Under Suspicion*, 345.

‘Nay, for sothe, frend,’ quod y;
 “I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
 For no such cause, by my hed!
 Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
 That no wight have my name in honde.
 I wot myself best how y stonde;
 For what I drye, or what I thynke,
 I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
 Certeyn, for the more part,
 As fer forth as I kan myn art.’
 (1871-82)

Rightly upset at the injustice of Fame’s judgments, Geoffrey rejects Fame’s authority over him by disclaiming any desire for fame.¹⁶⁴ He asserts his preference that none but he should have his “name in honde” (1877). Inasmuch as it is a rejection of the sort of immortality offered by Fame, Boitani sees this as a conscientious desire for anonymity.¹⁶⁵ As with empathy above, so here with indignation, *prosopopoeia* is a possibilizing condition that affectively cultivates resistance to Fame’s regime. It gives Geoffrey someone to blame, undergirding an appeal to a standard of justice *above* Fame, a standard that relates to the moral ramifications of textual production. In short, Geoffrey attempts to counter Fame’s power by re-appropriating answerability for his own linguistic agency, insisting that he will accept the consequences for events of which he or his writing has been the cause. This is an important shifting of the terrain. Striving to reintroduce answerability (and hence justice), Geoffrey declares a rival agency – his own – against Fame. In thus combatting the willed arbitrariness that had disconnected author and text,

¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, he likens the state of being dead to the absence of anyone speaking his name. In other words, there may be something about being remembered and spoken of by name that does conflict with death, after all; if this is more than a rewording of the poetic immortality we’ve discussed above, however, then it’s yet not clear how remembrance and naming relate to death.

¹⁶⁵ As Boitani puts it, “Geoffrey does not want the immortality of fame, but relies on his own conscience – a stoic and Christian position....Indeed, he not only refuses immortality, but seems to prefer anonymity as well.” See Piero Boitani, *Chaucer and the Imaginary World of Fame* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1984), 170.

actor and speech-act, Geoffrey enunciates a manifesto for existentially responsible authorship, offering to accept the blame in advance.

And yet by redistributing agency away from the speaking human and back to the speech-acts themselves, a second instance of *prosopopoeia* exposes the futility of Geoffrey's attempt to outflank Fame's dominion. The unnamed "frend" (1873) takes Geoffrey to Domus Dedaly, an impressive subsidiary facility to the palace, a labyrinthine dwelling that simulates Fame's judgments in its volatile motion: "And ever mo, as swyft as thought, / This queynte hous aboute wente / That never mo hyt stille stente" (1924-26).¹⁶⁶ What Geoffrey glimpses inside this House of Rumor complicates things considerably, alluringly intimating a third understanding of linguistic production and reception locatable somewhere between Fame's unjust sovereignty and Geoffrey's desired rival autonomy, an understanding that privileges the agency of language itself above all. In the whirling House of Rumor, utterances are incessantly adapted and emended in the very act of their publication (2060-67), spreading like wildfire and proliferating without control, to the point of embodying contradictory semantic content in what is perhaps the strangest *prosopopoeia* of the entire poem:

And somtyme saugh I thoo at ones
A lesyng and a sad soth sawe,

¹⁶⁶ One possible allusion here, to Dante's *Inferno* V, introduces a further complexity. At the close of canto V, Paolo and Francesca explain that the reason for their damnation to *la bufera infernal* – an abyssal valley's whirling tempest of lustful souls likened to birds – stems from a particular reading experience, in which the affective impress of a romantic encounter in an Arthurian text encouraged them to follow suit (V.128-137). Significantly, Francesca assigns at least partial responsibility for their damnation to the author of that romance, and his text: "that book, and the one who wrote it, was a pander" (V.137). [Literally, Dante has Francesca say "that Galeotto" rather than "pimp" or "pander" (the latter term derives from Chaucer's later depiction of Pandarus in *Troilus*, after all). Gallehault was the go-between in French Arthurian romance who encouraged Guinevere and Lancelot to have an affair.] Assuming along the lines of Furrow's comment above that this implies that the Arthurian poet will himself be eschatologically answerable, the Dantean allusion would seem to militate against Geoffrey's attempt to exempt himself from the dictates of a divine judge. And yet, since it is Fame's arbitrariness as a judge that disallows authorial accountability, the allusion to Dante may in fact suggest just the opposite, and lend support to "Geoffrey's" reappropriation of responsibility for his art.

That gonne of aventure drawe [2090]
 Out at a wyndowe for to pace;
 And, when they metten in that place,
 They were achekked bothe two,
 And neyther of hem moste out goo
 For other, so they gonne crowde,
 Til ech of hem gan crien lowde,
 'Lat me go first!' 'Nay, but let me!
 And here I wol ensuren the,
 Wyth the nones that thou wolt do so,
 That I shal never fro the go, [2100]
 But be thyn owne sworn brother!
 We wil medle us ech with other,
 That no man, be they never so wrothe,
 Shal han on [of us] two, but bothe
 At ones, al besyde his leve,
 Come we a-morwe or on eve,
 Be we cried or stille yrouned.'
 Thus saugh I fals and soth compouned
 Togeder fle for oo tydyng.
 (2088-2109)

Here not only truth and falsehood but also, and more importantly for our purposes, human and non-human agency are "compounded" (2108). Two personified utterances are described as arguing -- that is, producing further spoken utterances -- as they struggle to disembark simultaneously from the House of Rumor. Chaucer utilizes *prosopopoeia* here to distribute language *to language*, intimating that signs can semantically proliferate *ad infinitum*, even if the most engaging way for his audience to grasp this arcane point is through anthropomorphism. Van Dyke suggests that "[t]he gradual personification of gossip expresses the improbable relocation of verbal agency from speakers to words."¹⁶⁷ This is what deflates Geoffrey's attempt to ground the rhetorical agency of his words in his moral identity as an author. Nicholas Watson elaborates:

Coming between events and their afterlife, 'tidinges' generate differences between one moment and the next by recasting the 'soth' of an event within an endless array of alternative versions whose very variance makes its own impact

¹⁶⁷ Van Dyke, *Chaucer's Agents*, 50.

on what happens next. This is an unpredictable process in which, despite the persistence of a kind of cause and effect, any ability to *track* causality is soon lost. Thus does the ‘fals’ become ‘soth’ as well as the other way about; and thus is the future built of the same, fungible but undying phantasmatic material that enables the past to survive, constantly transformed, into the future.¹⁶⁸

So causality and temporality remain intact, it is just that we human agents cannot make sense of it. Much the way Lady Philosophy explains the conundrum of contingent fortune to Boethius as largely a matter of perspective, so Watson here maintains a measure of linguistic causality between utterances, but scraps the possibility of thick answerability by contending that such a measure is all but unknowable. And then, immediately after the conflicted dialogue between the personified tidings, Fame reemerges in full force:

Thus out at holes gunne wringe
Every tydyng streght to Fame,
And she gan yeven ech hys name
Aftir hir disposicioun,
And yaf hem eke duracioun,
Somme to wexe and wane sone,
As doth the faire white mone,
And let hem goon. Ther myghte y seen
Wynged wondres faste fleen,
Twenty thousand in a route,
As Eolus hem blew aboute.

(2110-20)

In the whirling House of Rumor, Fame distributes precisely that which Geoffrey claimed as his own possession in asserting his authorial autonomy: his “name” (1877, 2113), especially colloquially in the sense of reputation. And whether the “hir” in line 2114 refers to Fame or perhaps to the inherent “disposicioun” of each particular tiding, these represent similarly non-authorial agencies beyond Geoffrey’s control. Thus Fame assumes dominion in the *auctor*-network, into which “Geoffrey’s” own “art” must also ultimately

¹⁶⁸ Nicholas Watson, “The Phantasmal Past: Time, History, and the Recombinative Imagination,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010): 17.

enter: “*Every tydyng*” (2111, *my emphasis*).¹⁶⁹ The counter-insurgency has been overrun. Only the nameless “man of greet auctoritee” (2158) at the poem’s non-ending, a figure who generates considerable excitement among Fame’s supplicants, can evade Fame’s orbit; if we interpret his anonymity as intentional, then authorial namelessness appears to be a sacrifice of reputation that ensures the escape from Fame but also the impossibility either of enjoying worldly renown or, more problematically, of being held answerable.

Conclusion: Readerly Answerability

In the end (or lack thereof), Geoffrey cannot evade the bad *auctor*-network ruled by a sovereign Fame.¹⁷⁰ He may presume to hold his own name “in honde,” but Fame holds his earthly reputation in her hands, and distributes his poetic works beyond his control. Geoffrey’s desired autonomy is as much a fiction as the personification of Fame herself, and perhaps no more desirable as a moral exemplar – for what would a rival authorial sovereignty solve? A world of atomized, self-determining authors setting their own literary value is not a literary history of any dynamism or, ultimately, worth. Even if

¹⁶⁹ Even at this juncture in the poem, however, there still may be hope for an ecology of answerability. This hope resides in how one interprets a single ambiguous Middle English pronoun in the passage above: the “hir” of line 2113. Is it “her” or “their”? The former evokes the impulsive mood or disposition of the personification of Fame, whose regime turns on her supreme volition. The latter implies some intrinsic quality of merit possessed by each speech-act, which Fame cannot, in the end, transgress, hence reserving a measure of agency for authors and their speech-acts. And yet: the passage thus enacts the problem it addresses, equivocating? Chaucer’s self-consuming poetic artifact has headed us off at another pass.

¹⁷⁰ Stephanie A. Viereck Gibbs Kamath’s point is relevant here: “if the ‘art’ of Chaucer’s first-person narrator-protagonist lies in his ability to keep his name and his experiences to himself, the poem he narrates is artless indeed, as his name has already been revealed within the dream narrative he relates, set in the revelatory voice of the talking eagle. In truth, asserting the author’s veiling of self-knowledge and name, hinting that these features are discoverable, if only partially and indirectly, through interpretation of a first-person narrator-protagonist who thinks and ‘dries’ (suffers) in [sic] a imaginary realm among fictive others, constitutes the art of the new vernacular allegorical tradition.” See Stephanie A. Viereck Gibbs Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory in Late Medieval France and England*. Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 81-82.

House of Fame has failed to provide Geoffrey with more than the possibility of authority, we may still wonder: is it nonetheless possible to envision an *auctor*-network in which the network does not override the agency of each *auctor*, but rather enables it, sustaining individual intention and multiple reception in carefully situated speech-acts? A different vision of textual production and authority, perhaps, would be one in which each new generation of writers is known to “stand on the shoulders of giants,” as Bernard of Chartres had put it, even while their new texts retroactively qualify all precedents, in varying kind and measure.¹⁷¹ This is a different way of describing the intertextuality and dissemination that Watson somewhat cynically proposes above. Answerable textual authority may reside somewhere near a model of literary tradition that conceives innovation and value as no less collectively determined, but one in which authors and readers, as reciprocal agencies around the text, remain accountable for the moral effects of literature. It’s just that the task of implementing such accountability presupposes other networks of value in concrete contexts of voluntary community that invoke textual authority. Literary history, in other words, is never just literary, but also fundamentally political.

Due in large part to Augustine, reading well in the Middle Ages meant imputing charitable motives and meaning even where none were intended or inscribed, often by way of *allegoresis*. What else is Chaucer’s recuperation of Dido’s suffering, in this light, than the extension of Augustinian hermeneutic *caritas*? Yet with a difference: returning

¹⁷¹ This is similar to the intertextuality described by T.S. Eliot: “what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted.” See T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” *Selected Essays* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1976), 3-11.

to the figure of Dido, a re-generated fictive person, Chaucer attempts to stir the reader's empathy, adapting and giving voice to a concrete figure that Fame had done her worst to silence. Here is a sort of tactical authorial agency right in the midst of the *auctor*-network and right under Fame's nose. Nonetheless, Dido's plight can still be approached callously. The point is that if Fame personifies the aggregate damage (and malign disposition) that histories of misreading can entail, then it is up to other readers (and authors) to follow Chaucer in readapting the narratives of Fame's undeserving victims, women chief among them – even while recognizing that such recuperations are not unilaterally effective, but as dependent on reader-response as Virgil's original. The ellipses at the end of *House* can thus be read as linking the final word of the poem, “auctoritee,” with the world outside the poem; they trail off into each reader's experience of re-entry into post-textual worlds in which their own agency becomes once again a consciously felt reality. In both the poem's absence of an ending and its complex treatment of the problematic of singular and collective agency and responsibility explored through personification, Chaucer reconciles his favorite paradox of experience and authority in the answerability of the reader.¹⁷² And then the question becomes: what precisely do we, as readers and interpreters, owe to those upon whose words we capitalize? Are we in some sense answerable not for Dido as well? To go further, granting the ethical, if not eschatological, imperatives: are we answerable, in part, for Chaucer? Later in his career, in the *Retractions*, Chaucer's answer is yes, and in a rare appeal that rhetorically traverses the centuries, he directly asks for his readers' prayers. There is also much at stake here and now, of course. In the next chapter we will explore

¹⁷² J. Allan Mitchell supposes that Chaucer and Gower “have more faith in their audience than we usually suppose. They assume a great responsibility in readers.” See J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 142.

how one particularly prudential personification risks assuming answerability for another, the latter being almost as belligerent and impulsive a mis-reader as Fame herself.

Chapter 3: Tactical Rhetoric and the Politics of Citation in Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*

The prior two chapters have explored the political contours of Chaucer's deployment of personification in the dream-visions *Parliament of Fowls* and *House of Fame*, with their fanciful settings and haphazard plot transitions, and how the device helps sketch speculative models for conjoint agency across institutional and individual horizons. This chapter likewise examines figurative distributions of agency and answerability in a Chaucerian text, but this time in a more prosaic context; not only "a litel thyng in prose" (VII.937), but that which amounts to a spousal discussion with minimal description of setting even if bearing direct reference to late-medieval political contexts.¹⁷³ Likely composed half a decade later than *House of Fame*, the *Tale of Melibee* constitutes one of the two prose texts in the *Canterbury Tales*. It is what the narratorial Chaucerian pilgrim-persona himself offers after *Sir Thopas* fails to satisfy the Host, who demands something "in which ther be som murthe or som doctryne" (VII.935). While the persona-pilgrim probably hopes to exercise a minor vengeance on the Host for the latter's interruption of *Thopas* by offering a very long tale, this chapter takes issue with readings of *Melibee* that denigrate its substantial bulk as nothing more than a long-winded Chaucerian joke.¹⁷⁴ As my investigation of the dynamics of *prosopopoeia* will indicate,

¹⁷³ All references to Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

¹⁷⁴ While it ranks as the second most popular of the *Canterbury Tales* among Chaucer's early audiences, *Melibee* has not typically been received well by modern audiences, who tend to consider a daring reading of *Melibee* one that inquires into the intentionality and thus irony of its unquestioned dullness. See as exemplary, Edward E. Foster, "Has Anyone Here Read Melibee?," *The Chaucer Review* 34.4 (2000): 398-409. For discussion of early popularity of *Melibee*, see David Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century" *English Literary History* 54.4 (Winter 1987),=: 780.

the political content and figurative details of *Melibee* render it indeed a “murye tale” (VII.964) as well as “a moral tale vertuous” (VII.940), satisfying both the Host’s criteria.

In the *Tale of Melibee*, a fictional man named Melibee has his house broken into by three of his old enemies, whose only goal, it seems, is to violently beat both his wife and daughter. They succeed. The tale’s initial framework is thus rather terse, economical but also economizing in the sense of pertaining to the failed ordering (*nomos*) of a particular household (*oikos*). In the process of Melibee’s response to this housebreaking, the tale assumes an added political aspect through the assembling of an *ad hoc* parliament in which all of Melibee’s neighbors and retinue share their “conseil” about what he should do, which turns out to be the tale’s principal matter of concern. Should he seek revenge on his enemies? Or reconciliation? Unsurprisingly, the decision of the assembly is for war and vengeance, but Melibee’s wife Prudence begs his ear, and for the majority of the tale they are locked in discussion. Their dialogue is punctuated by moments of reflexive theorization on methods of figurative signification related to *prosopopoeia* by which Prudence, herself a personification of the virtue of prudence, aims to persuade Melibee away from retaliation and toward a peaceful, prudent resolution. Far from being a retreat from the political or communal context of the crime, their conversation gestures toward the ecological heart of politics, which begins, for many medieval writers, not at the economic scale of the social unit of the household, which is of course vitally important, but at the composition of the individual person, who is a political ecology (or actor-network) unto him- or herself.¹⁷⁵ My usage of “economy” and “ecology” below

¹⁷⁵ For an example that delineates the scales of political agency, from state to household to individual, see *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa’s Middle English Translation of the De Regimine Principum of Aegidius Romanus*. Ed. David C. Fowler, Charles F. Briggs, and Paul G. Remley. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997).

turns on this difference between the economic realm of household management and the situation of the individual person as not only an actor on the economic scale as a part among other persons within a given household, but as a complex composition, a psychosomatic dwelling or ecology for other agencies: virtues, vices, etc.

Within the narrative movement in *Melibee* from private invasion to public assembly back to private dialogue and finally out once more into public resolution, the form and content of Prudence's dialogic pedagogy will rhetorically open a more ecological scope for political economy, one that acknowledges the role of entities both larger and smaller than the human. In addition to disclosing the complex social whole of which Melibee is but an answerable part and public actor, for instance, Prudence also refers to the disordered parts of the composite network that Melibee is as an individual figure, in the moral psychology of his "propre persone" (VII.1026). In the course of their conversation, Prudence's arguments will strive to facilitate Melibee's shift from crudely wielding the prerogative of cathartic retribution outside the law to newly understanding his own moral identity as constituted by multiple, at times conflicting agencies. But this understanding can only come to fruition by reopening the recalibrated ecology of self and economy of household to the larger political community of which they are part and thus, by synecdoche at the least, rendering them temporarily whole. A public assembly will need to be reconvened at the end of the tale in which a legitimate performance of reconciliation is witnessed and ratified by agents beyond the household. And Melibee's reentry into the public realm of paralegal arbitration will put Prudence's prior pedagogy of dialogue, *allegoresis*, and citation, to the test.

This chapter will proceed by first outlining the tale's political crisis and the rhetorical positioning of its primary agents, Prudence and Melibee. Then I will address Prudence's two interrelated rhetorical maneuvers: the auto-*allegoresis* of names, and the convocation of florilegal "conseil" from manifold cited *auctores*. I attend to these maneuvers as resources that allegorical personification brings to the fore in *Melibee*.

Failed Parliaments and Tactical Rhetoric

While it begins with an assault against Melibee's family, the problem that looms throughout the tale is the potential for the householder's own retaliatory violence. The title character still represents violent masculine vengeance backed by significant wealth and landholding, as evidenced by the large group that gathers in response to his summons. In Chaucer's Latin source, Albertano of Brescia's *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*, Melibee evokes the manorial tyrants of Lombardy.¹⁷⁶ In thirteenth-century Brescia, the violence of a man as "myghty and riche" (VII.966) as Melibee effectively amounts to regional armed conflict. The fact that Melibee's house itself has been breached for no other seeming purpose than the injury of his family implies prior acts on Melibee's part for which revenge is sought by his "olde foes" (VII.969). But it is also plausible to suggest that Melibee's impulsive, retaliatory tendencies should be taken to accurately characterize sovereign rulers across history, especially in light of the subtle changes Chaucer makes to avoid potentially insulting reference to Richard II, one

¹⁷⁶ The most readily available version of Albertano's *Liber* is Sundby's nineteenth-century edition for the Chaucer Society. See Albertano of Brescia, *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*. Ed. Thor Sundby. London: N. Trubner, 1873.

possible intended reader.¹⁷⁷ That Melibee himself will prove an exception to the stereotype of the impulsive sovereign is the hope of *Melibee* and later medieval politics.

There are reasons for such hope at the outset; Melibee's convocation of a parliament to deliberate on the matter of his response to the attack seems to bode well, hinting at his strategic carefulness in hearing the advice of others before acting. In fact, however, the "congregacioun" proves to be nothing more than a kowtowing assemblage of sycophants whom Melibee counts on to ratify his gathering of a mercenary force. Whether Melibee deliberately adopts an ireful "manere of his speech" so as to hint at his actually desired course of action, or whether, as seems more in accord with his character, he simply has trouble dissembling, the process of seeking genuine counsel from "this folk togidgre assembled" is ultimately an empty gesture: "by the manere of his speche it semed that in herte he baar a crueel ire, redy to doon vengeaunce upon his foes, and sodeynly desired that the were sholde bigynne; / but nathelees, yet axed he hire conseil upon this matiere" (VII.1007-09). Effectively silencing elderly, legal wisdom ("an advocat" who is also an "olde wise man" (VII.1016, 1035), the word of the "hochepot" (VII.1257) is for war. The "congregacioun" (VII.1004) is not legitimately conciliar because neither unanimity nor actual differences of perspective are procedurally modulated toward multipartisan resolutions or compromise. Despite the fact that in Albertano's *Liber* this assembly is deemed a *concilium*, the words of its members are far from *consilium*, or counsel – about which Prudence will have more to say below. Instead,

¹⁷⁷ For the resonances between Melibee and various contemporary political rulers and situations, Stillwell's article is still a helpful place to begin. See Gardiner Stillwell, "The Political Meaning of Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*" *Speculum* 19.4 (October 1944): 433-444. A discussion of *Melibee* and its allegorical reference to its political context – which should be noted as an entirely different approach to the political qualities of the text than my own – can be found in Ann Astell, *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 100-102.

in an abasement of what Marsilius of Padua calls the *valentior pars*, this bellicose multitude composed of those Stephen Moore calls “subcharacters” manifests the volatility of mob-rule (*demo-kratos*), as both easily manipulated by (or willingly obsequious to) to sovereign power and hostile to dissenting minority voices.¹⁷⁸ The decision of the “congregacioun” merely parrots what they have already gleaned from Melibee, who, likewise, agrees to follow their advice only when he sees that it matches his intention: “Whan Melibeus hadde herd that the greteste partie of his conseil weren accorded that he sholde maken werre, anoon he consented to hir conseillyng and fully affermed hire sentence” (VII.1050). The sham parliament falsifies legitimate political representation because instead of the sovereign head voicing the will of the *valentior pars*, the former merely reiterates what Melibee has already decided upon, another powerful example alongside certain actions of Nature in *Parliament* of how “descending government” can assume the guise of its “ascending” counter-model.¹⁷⁹ At this point Melibee’s wife Prudence intervenes, walking on eggshells:

Thanne dame Prudence, whan that she saugh how that hir housbonde shoop hym for to wreken hym on his foes and to bigynne werre, she in ful humble wise, whan she saugh hir tyme, seide to hym thise wordes: ‘My lord,’ quod she, ‘I yow biseche, as hertely as I dar and kan, ne haste yow nat to faste and, for alle gerdons, as yeveth me audience.’ (VII.1051-52)

Opposed to the decision to retaliate, as well as to the pseudo-conciliar procedure by which that decision had been reached and ratified, she launches into a critique of how Melibee has quite imprudently and impudently sought and received counsel in a false

¹⁷⁸ See especially VII.1256-1260, where sheer number of constituents is contrasted to the “sapience of persones.” See also Stephen G. Moore, “Apply Thyself: Learning while Reading the ‘Tale of Melibee’” *The Chaucer Review* 38.1 (2003): 87.

¹⁷⁹ See Walter Ullmann, *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975).

council.¹⁸⁰ As the household's rightful *praerogativus*, Melibee can, of course, command her to be silent. And yet he must be momentarily surprised to find himself confronted in his own household by the *victim* of those enemies, who argues *against* retaliation. At such moments it is clear that she is not only a wife; Prudence is also a personification of the virtue of prudence. On the other hand, Prudence is at the same time presented in the tale as a full-fledged female human and not merely a spectral abstraction, as confirmed by Melibee's anti-feminist tirade (which in the course of her subsequent reply, she quashes utterly).¹⁸¹ Her aim, as both woman *and* virtue, is to placate Melibee's impulses and recalibrate his self-understanding, thereby reforming his intimately related activities of self-governance, household governance, and public action. This tripartite division has analogues in medieval understandings of the virtue of prudence. Aquinas, for example, posits the existence of three interrelated types of prudence.¹⁸² The first, *prudentia regnativa*, is most proper to rulers and figures of authority but pertains to all people, who should employ prudence as the virtue "with which a man rules himself," as Burrow translates. Then there is *prudentia oeconomica*, which pertains to household governance,

¹⁸⁰ I would suggest that Chaucer's focus on prudence anticipates and influences Lydgate's fifteenth-century emphasis on the same virtue as a defense against Fortune. Interestingly, Paul Strohm does not acknowledge *Melibee* as a precedent for Lydgate's prudential poetics in his important discussion of *prudentia* in *Politique* pp. 97-99, nor elsewhere in the book, save a passing mention with reference to the term "partie" on p. 237. John Burrow, however, does note Hoccleve's reference to Chaucer in *Regement of Princes* as evidence of the fact that Chaucer's *Melibee* was likely read as offering genuine political counsel. See Burrow, "The Third Eye of Prudence," *Medieval Futures: Attitudes to the Future in the Middle Ages*. Ed. J.A. Burrow and Ian P. Wei (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2000), 45, n.26. See also Paul Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

¹⁸¹ Carolyn Collette has situated Chaucer's narrative within advice texts for aristocratic wives such as *Le Menagier de Paris* and Christine de Pizan's *Treasury of the City of Ladies* that emphasize the virtue of prudence as a peacemaking tactic for "headstrong" husbands. See Collette, "Heeding the Counsel of Prudence: A Context for the *Melibee*." *The Chaucer Review* 29.4 (1995), 416-433.

¹⁸² See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2a2ae.50.1-4.

and *prudentia politica*, which pertains to public action and speech.¹⁸³ Chaucer's Prudence will disclose to Melibee his own psychosomatic composition and political-economic position in rough alignment with these three prudential regimes – *regnativa*, *oeconomia*, *politica*.

As a personification whose agency is primarily linguistic, what is Prudence's method? A consideration of her rhetorical speaking position suggests that Melibee and Prudence can be understood according to differing models of agency related to their social status within the household. A theoretical distinction will be helpful. Social theorist Michel de Certeau defines what he calls *strategy* as a "calculus of force-relationships" that can count "on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization)," which thus serves "as a basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles,' 'targets,' or 'objects'...)." ¹⁸⁴ Melibee is a strategic agent. In the tale, Melibee has a house, a spatial locale from which to draw resources, including both monetary and social capital. In his possession of the *domus*, he has *dominion* within it. He is also at leisure to leave home, while Prudence and their daughter Sophie are not, as the second line of the tale indicates: "Upon a day bifel that [Melibee] for his desport is went into the feeldes hym to pleye. / His wyf and eek his doghter hath he left inwith his hous, of which the dores weren faste yshette" (VII.968-969). They are locked inside.

The speaking position of Prudence, on the other hand, as the subordinate figure in the household, is based on what de Certeau would call *tactics*, which lack a spatially defined jurisdiction. As de Certeau argues, a tactic

¹⁸³ For more on Aquinas' delineation of multiple types of prudence, see Burrow, "The Third Eye of Prudence," 41-2.

¹⁸⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), xix.

insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances....because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities.'¹⁸⁵

Named as she is, Prudence acts tactically rather than strategically, for her agency is thoroughly temporal.¹⁸⁶ Cicero's description of the three internal aspects of *phronesis* (prudence) -- *memoria*, *intellegentia*, and *providentia* -- and their respective correspondence with past, present and future, confirm the virtue's long association with temporality.¹⁸⁷ Aquinas continues the idea by emphasizing that prudence is futural: "*prudentia praecipue est futurorum: praecipua enim pars eius est providentia futurorum.*"¹⁸⁸ Hence prudence relates to "those actions and events in the future which -- unlike those from the past or present -- could be otherwise, and so can be directed to a good end by human foresight."¹⁸⁹ In line with this moral-philosophical legacy, Prudence's most decisive actions in Chaucer's narrative are signaled as happening "whan she saugh hir tyme" (VII.980, 1051A, 1728). Prudence in *Melibee* will deploy insights from the past fitting to the present with an eye toward future outcomes. Her tactics are properly circumstantial and situationist, as iterated in her functionalist principle of action, one of the few that comes directly from her mouth and not from a cited *auctor*: "And take this for a general reule," she says, "that every conseil that is affermed so strongly that it may nat be chaunged for no condicioun that may bityde, I seye that thilke conseil is

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ See David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 221.

¹⁸⁷ See Cicero, *De Inventione*, II.53, ed. and trans. H. M. Hubbell. (London: Heinemann, 1949), 326.

¹⁸⁸ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae.55.7.

¹⁸⁹ See John Burrow, "The Third Eye of Prudence," 39-40.

wikked” (VII.1231).¹⁹⁰ Recalling de Certeau’s reference to tactical agents as “the weak,” it is also significant that Prudence’s earliest status in the tale is as a passive object of sexual-maternal capacity - “bigat upon his wyf” (VII.966) -- and then of male violence -- “betten his wyf” (VII.971).¹⁹¹ Even in the “economic” domain of the household, Prudence only counsels Melibee “as ferforth as she dorste” (VII.974) and “as hertely as I dar and kan” (VII.1052; cf. VII.974). She is fully aware of the risk that his volatile “ire” may turn against her.¹⁹² While de Certeau argues that “political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed” on the model of *strategy*, *tactics* are more domestic and more historically applicable to women and other marginalized groups insofar as “the place of a tactic belongs to the other.”¹⁹³ Significantly, de Certeau connects tactics with rhetoric:

the discipline of rhetoric offers models for differentiating among the types of tactics. This is not surprising, since, on the one hand, it describes the ‘turns’ or tropes of which language can be both the site and the object, and, on the other hand, these manipulations are related to the ways of changing (seducing, persuading, making use of) the will of another (the audience).¹⁹⁴

De Certeau’s association of tactics with tropes anticipates the character of Prudence, who both uses, and personifies, virtuous rhetoric. Chaucer as author also uses rhetoric toward

¹⁹⁰ For more on the significance of Prudence’s principle of case-based ethical deliberation, see J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 139.

¹⁹¹ It is telling that de Certeau even uses “the housewife” as his example, though he situates her in the supermarket where she must tactically choose what to purchase. See de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

¹⁹² In this regard, echoing Collette’s thesis, Wallace notes that the tale could be a “handbook for go-betweens” rather than a typical *speculum principum*. See Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 221.

¹⁹³ De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xix. As de Certeau elaborates, “[m]any everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many ‘ways of operating’: victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong’ (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, ‘hunter’s cunning,’ maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.”

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xx. De Certeau notes further that “[i]n the space of a language (as in that of games), a society makes more explicit the formal rules of action and the operations that differentiate them.” This is the case also with Prudence, who explains to Melibee the operations of language to which he should attend.

the end of persuading his readers, whoever they may be: whether literate English housewives, crowds of civically engaged listeners, or Richard II.¹⁹⁵ In both cases, the tale's use of rhetoric is thoroughly tactical, adapted to the changing conditions and dispositions of internal and external audiences. As Prudence says to Melibee, "Sire, ye ne be nat alwey in lyk disposicioun; for certes, somthyng that somtyme semeth to yow that it is good for to do, another tyme it semeth to yow the contrarie" (VII.1135-1137).

Tactic I: Auto-Allegoresis and the Body Economic

All throughout her discourse with Melibee, Prudence uses hermeneutics rhetorically.¹⁹⁶ As Lee Patterson argues, "Prudence's task is to teach Melibee how to interpret."¹⁹⁷ Her figurative status as both Melibee's wife and the personification of the virtue of prudence enable these shifts in the *ethos* of her narrative agency, evident when she seems to grow in stature, like a Boethian Lady Philosophy, even while always remaining a tactful housewife treading carefully around points that might upset Melibee. Consider VII.1276-1278, where Prudence reiterates the surgeons' earlier advice to Melibee to apply the doctrine of contraries in deciding how to respond to his enemies.

¹⁹⁵ On the possibility of a politically efficacious aural context for reception of Chaucer's *Melibee*, see Michael Foster, "Echoes of Communal Response in the *Tale of Melibee*," *The Chaucer Review* 42.4 (2008): 409-430.

¹⁹⁶ Synthesizing Rita Copeland's seminal work on medieval hermeneutics as a form of rhetoric and Larry Scanlon's emphasis on translation as a means for appropriating textual authority, we can see Chaucer's own prudence as a self-authorizing poetic *auctor*. Writing of *Melibee*, Scanlon puts it this way: "The poet as *auctor* is a translator, whose textual authority inheres in his own active self-effacement before the *sentence* he transmits. It is precisely this self-effacement which constitutes the poet's authority, and which enables him to give past authority his own name." This point reaffirms the importance of the tale being titled after *Melibee* and not Chaucer. For rhetorical hermeneutics and translation, see Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). See also Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, Power: The medieval exemplum and the Chaucerian tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 209.

¹⁹⁷ See Lee Patterson, "'What Man Artow?': Authorial Self-Definition in the *Tale of Sir Thopas* and the *Tale of Melibee*," *Temporal Circumstance: Form and History in the Canterbury Tales* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 118.

With the tone of a scholastic *magister*, Prudence asks how he interprets this advice: “I wolde fayn knowe hou ye understonde thilke text, and what is youre sentence” (VII.1278). Melibee’s incorrect interpretation confuses similarity with difference, but what matters here is less that he has given the wrong answer than that he has in the first place subordinated himself to her instruction. Prudence carefully maintains her rhetorical upper-hand by tactically modulating scholastic diction with appeals to Melibee’s abiding self-interest (VII.1295-1300).¹⁹⁸ Later, impressively elaborating Ciceronian etiology (VII.1354-1404), she utilizes the philosophical distinctions of “Tullius” to deconstruct Melibee’s assumption that he possesses the power needed to obtain vengeance. She abruptly strips him in no uncertain terms of any authority he imagined he could have possessed that would either exceed the law or contradict moral goodness:

‘For sikerly, as for to speke proprely, we may do no thyng but oonly swich thyng as we may doon rightfully. And certes rightfully ne mowe ye take no vengeance, as of youre propre auctoritee. Thanne mowe ye seen that youre power ne consenteth nat, ne accordeth nat, with youre wilfulnesse.’ (VII.1383-1385)¹⁹⁹

Melibee cannot even presume to be an *auctor* -- in the sense of legal agent -- unless he aims at doing what is good. What Prudence will thus teach Melibee is to interpret himself.²⁰⁰ Or, rather, his name: “Thy name is Melibee; this is to seyn, ‘a man that drynketh hony.’ Thou hast ydronke so muchel hony of sweete temporeel riches, and delices and honours of this world that thou art drunken and hast forgotten Jhesu Crist thy creatour” (VII.1410-12). Prudence seizes upon Melibee’s name as a semiotic site in which the relationship between his identity and his agency overlap: “Thy name is

¹⁹⁸ See also VII.1331-1332 for another instance of Prudence’s hermeneutic-rhetorical pedagogy.

¹⁹⁹ For a treatment of law as itself a form of agency, see Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, II.8.v.

²⁰⁰ Chaucer, following Renaud, leaves out much of Albertano’s *Liber* 36, which explores various meanings of the Latin term *posse*, practically equivalent to “ability” or, especially in 36.9, “agency” in the legal sense.

Melibee; this is to seyn, ‘a man that drynketh hony’” (VII.1410). Significantly, Prudence does not mention his action and then his name, but rather, and far more tactically, his name and then his typifying actions.²⁰¹ Hers is what Cicero and Boethius would call an argument by designation.²⁰² She begins with something Melibee cannot dispute -- the fact of his name -- and then etymologizes that name, opportunistically allegorizing his singular identity into a type of action. He thus comes to be seen and to see himself as an allegorical personification of honey-drinking, i.e., sensual self-seeking. With meta-fictional tact, Prudence carefully lifts the veil of the literal sense from a convenient figurative insight latent in her husband’s name, interrupting his current perception of the ordering of himself and his household. She reveals him to himself as the very personification of self-interested, sensual experience.

Interestingly, in the terminology of Althusserian Marxist theory, Prudence’s address would amount to an interpellation, or ‘hailing,’ in which the hailed figure becomes ideologized within a network of representation that defines his scope of agency as a subject.²⁰³ Yet in doing so she has not reduced Melibee to a functional automaton incapable of not drinking honey; rather, assuming his capacity for adaptation -- that is, as a figurative person, enjoying freedom -- she has actually given him a heuristic for progressing toward self-governance, even if only by acknowledging the possibility of

²⁰¹ That Melibee’s name will be central to the tale is contingently reaffirmed in its replacement, uniquely among the tales told by the Canterbury pilgrims, of teller’s (Chaucer’s) name. William Thynne’s 1532 edition of the *Canterbury Tales* did refer to the *Tale of Melibee* as the *Tale of Chaucer*, of course.

²⁰² Relevant here is Ann Astell’s point that “personification allegory...always argues through designation” (32). She cites Boethius’ point in *In Ciceronis Topica* that “An argument is taken from designation when something is inferred from the explanation of a name,” which is precisely what Prudence does with Melibee. What Astell means by the prior statement is that, since personifications are named according to their non-human referent, their actions and words will be seen as conveying something about that referent, although as I have hoped to suggest, the figurative dynamic of *prosopopoeia* is far more complex than this makes it sound. See Ann Astell, *Political Allegory*, 108-109.

²⁰³ See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *‘Lenin and Philosophy’ and Other Essays* (Monthly Review Press, 1971).

moral divergence intimated in his name. Her interpellation of Melibee should thus be understood less in its strategic, Althusserian sense as something performed by institutional state apparatuses (ISAs) than in the term's later parliamentary usage, according to which an official pronouncement could be "interpellated" or interrupted and redirected by another, lower-ranking speaker. This sort of interpellation, in fact, applies to the entirety of Prudence's discourse insofar as she riskily intervenes in the quasi-legal proceedings of the belligerent "congregacioun" and exapts by way of rhetorical diplomacy the assertions of Melibee, who had summoned the sham parliament.²⁰⁴

After citing Ovid and Solomon on the dangers of metaphorical and literal honey ingestion, Prudence extends the *allegoresis* ecologically, understood here as attention to the scale of agents within or around the human:

‘Thou hast doon synne agayn oure Lord Crist, for certes, the three enemys of mankynde – that is to seyn, the flessh, the feend, and the world -- thou hast suffred hem entre in to thyn herte willfully 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; this is to seyn, the deedly synnes that been entred into thyn herte by thy fyve wittes. 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.1420-26)

Through her deployment of what Astell would call "allegorical rhetoric," Prudence effectively shifts attention away from Melibee's household to his bodily person, into which the world, the flesh, and the devil have entered.²⁰⁵ She likens the entrance of the world, the flesh, and the devil into Melibee's heart through the five senses to the in-

²⁰⁴ Interpellation finds a resonant analogue in Ranciere's definition of political action as essentially disruptive. As Bennett puts it, "[f]or Ranciere, then, the political act consists in the exclamatory interjection of affective bodies as they enter a preexisting public, or, rather, as they reveal that they have been there all along as an unaccounted-for part." And later: "a political act not only disrupts, it disrupts in such a way as to change radically what people can 'see': it repartitions the sensible." See Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 105, 106-107.

²⁰⁵ The phrase "allegorical rhetoric" is originally from Michael Murrin, but I use it in the sense of Astell's appropriation of the phrase for Chaucer's late medieval context. See Ann Astell, *Political Allegory*, 6.

breaking of his human enemies into his house through its windows.²⁰⁶ According to Prudence, in other words, Melibee's situation is doubly problematic; not only has his house been broken into, but, if we consider the event at a different scale, he himself has been broken into, so to speak. And the latter is a partial cause of the former, with his sensual self-seeking being what brings him away from home, leaving his family exposed.

We can delineate two reciprocal figurative operations at work in Prudence's analogical reasoning: first, the likening of Melibee's human body to his house; second, the likening of Melibee's house to a human body. While intimately related, each likening involves a specific movement or direction of figuration.

On the one hand, Prudence proposes that Melibee's physical person, a composite of body and soul, is a political ecology, housing any number of impactful entities that complicate his own supposedly unified agency, recalling that 'eco' is equivalent to *oikos*, meaning 'house.'²⁰⁷ His "propre persone" (VII.1026) at a certain scale, is a household unto itself, housing other agents whose interaction impinges on events at the human scale even while lacking a certain economy, or ordering. Quite frightfully, these interior agents may possess him as much as he possesses "his hous" (VII.969). Prudence thus ecologizes Melibee into an actor-network composed of various psycho-somatic-spiritual entities within and beneath the scale of the human: the body, the soul, the world, flesh and devil,

²⁰⁶ But is the latter a gloss on the former, such that the soul's five wounds *are* the five senses in their consenting to sinful actions? Or is the heart itself a house into which deadly sins enter by way of the five senses, allegorized as windows? In other words, are the five senses meant to signify wounds, windows, or both? Or is the entering of sins into the heart another way of conveying the entering of the body and the wounding of the soul by the world, flesh and devil? Stephen Yeager condenses these options into a single gloss: "It is therefore only appropriate that Christ would allow the three enemies to enter his house and wound his wife and daughter, who together personify his soul, because it is in the same way that he let himself be wounded in his five senses by the flesh, the fiend, and the world" (Yeager, "Chaucer's Prudent Poetics," 316). See Stephen Yeager, "Chaucer's Prudent Poetics: Allegory, the Tale of Melibee, and the Frame Narrative to the Canterbury Tales" *The Chaucer Review* 48.3 (2014): 307-321.

²⁰⁷ Canning's terminology in discussing the king's two bodies is notable here: "the king *housed* two completely different kinds of person – his human mortal person and an abstract legal person" (my emphasis). See Canning, "Law, sovereignty, and corporation theory, 1300-1450," 475.

and presumably the virtue of prudence, all of whom are given fleeting narrative status as anthropomorphic entities.²⁰⁸

Directly in line with the *speculum principum* tradition of which *Melibee* is a member, what Prudence thus shows to her husband is that the sovereign must recognize that his singular self is, at another, lower scale, also a network, a functional multiplicity of psychological faculties, virtues and vices, which must be properly ordered through *prudencia regnativa* for the sake of *prudencia oeconomica et politica* beyond the self. The imperative for an assembled unity of agency and identity -- that is, answerability -- that underlies Prudence's rhetorical diagnosis of *Melibee*'s disordered interiority suggests his culpability for the wounds of Sophie, allegorized as his soul. The entities inhabiting *Melibee*'s "private" or "propre person" (VII.1026) need some form of assembled unity in order to compose an ethically answerable actor-network which can ably reject the temptation to drink honey, and hence be fit to govern a given domain, whether body, household or kingdom. If the head abuses its sovereignty and becomes a tyrant bent on attaining singular profit, it is no longer fit to be the head. This is because the head's power should be undergirded by his legitimate representation of the popular multitude; if abused, that power in fact becomes a mere façade. The tyrant's lack of self-governance in fact makes him a slave to his own impulses toward singular profit, which he becomes incapable of sacrificing for the common good, as Giles of Rome theorizes in *De*

²⁰⁸ According to this reading, the soul is Sophie, the world, flesh and devil are *Melibee*'s three enemies, the virtue of prudence is Prudence, and *Melibee*'s body, intriguingly, is *Melibee* himself. In this regard, Prudence's *allegoresis* effectively rescales the domestic dialogue at the narrative's literal level, such that Prudence herself seems to become an embedded agent within *Melibee*'s psychology.

Regimine Principum.²⁰⁹ We have already glimpsed this play out in Melibee's pseudo-parliament.

This brings us to the second figurative movement latent in Prudence's auto-*allegoresis* of Melibee, likening his house to his bodily person. While having been enabled to attain *prudencia regnativa* through conceiving of his embodied person as a disordered multiplicity, Prudence's rhetoric envisions how Melibee can approximate *prudencia oeconomica* through seeing his house (*oikos*) as a discrete singular entity or agent, something needing his prudential governance. The representational affinity between house and body is similarly presumed in the venerable figure of the body politic, which is a helpful heuristic for approaching *Melibee*. Anthropomorphizing a polity, whether Melibee's house or the kingdom as a whole, into a figurative singular agent performs implicit theoretical work. Prudence's tactical personification of the dwelling in which she also abides into the form of her husband's body is meant to supplement her complication of Melibee's multiplex psychology (explored above) with a figure -- that of a domestic body politic -- that conveys the possible reunification of their recently in-broken-into household.

But what is in fact the rhetorical impact of Prudence's allegorical personification of Melibee upon Melibee himself? Recalling at this point Michel de Certeau's notion that the tactic "belongs to the other," we can grasp the narrative effect of Prudence's auto-*allegoresis* by reference to the latter term's etymology, as a form of 'self-other-speech' (*auto-allo-agourein*), or 'speaking otherwise,' and in three ways. Given the fact their discussion takes place behind closed doors, 'speaking otherwise' should be taken to

²⁰⁹ See Giles of Rome, *The Governance of Kings and Princes*, 343-349. Also, recall Prudence's point that agency is not real unless oriented toward the good (*CT* VII.1384).

imply not only the antique sense of allegory as ‘speech said otherwise than (it would be said) in public,’ but also, given the textual composition of these fictional characters, Melibee’s realization of being *other* than his previously understood self, and this primarily because he now knows there are multiple *other* interior (psychological, moral) entities that politically indwell his ecological “persone.” Prudence has distanced his past self-understanding, teaching him to reevaluate the significance of the state of affairs in light of a different image of himself, as not ultimately a self-possessed, sovereign singularity.

Secondly, this self-othering in turn enables Melibee’s renewed relation *toward* “exterior” *others*, amounting to an ethical reconfiguration of his understanding of not only his enemies’ but also his own answerability. He is forced to acknowledge his culpability as an absentee, pleasure-seeking parent, at fault for the wounding of his soul and then, in the same stroke, for Sophie’s wounds.²¹⁰ Thirdly, Prudence’s figurative pedagogy aims to enable Melibee to act *other* than he has acted in the past. There would be no point in taking the time and energy to talk with Melibee if he were not capable of freely choosing to change. The allegorical and literal scales of the text are hence brought into a sort of reciprocity, and what emerges is an actor-network connecting internal and external order and disorder, all three scales of prudence: *regnativa*, *oeconomica*, and

²¹⁰ One of the more notable changes that Chaucer makes to Renaud de Louen’s French translation of Albertano of Brescia’s *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* relates to this. Unlike both of his sources, Chaucer gives the daughter of Melibee a name: Sophie. Thus the tale begins: “A yong man called Melibeus, myghty and riche, bigat upon his wyf, that was called Prudence, a doghter which that called was Sophie” (VII.967). The translation history of *Melibee* sees an interesting evolution of this first line, in fact. In Albertano’s original Latin text, Melibee is named in the first line, but Prudence is not named until after the three enemies break in to Melibee’s house, around line six in Sundby’s edition. In his early fourteenth-century Middle French translation, Reynaud moves up Prudence’s name into the first sentence, but not until Chaucer do we have *Sophie* as the name of Melibee’s daughter, also given in the first sentence. This early condensation of names foreshadows the important role of nominalization in the tale. Likewise, in a 1967 article, Paul Strohm takes this addition as evidence of Chaucer’s interest in the tale as an allegory in which Sophie and her mother Prudence are personifications of Melibee’s interior psychology.

politica. Melibee's proper care for "external" others (on the "literal" level), in this case his two immediate family members, Prudence and Sophie, depends on his prior internalization and exemplification of the virtue and wisdom they allegorically personify. *Prosopopoeia* can shift at a moment's notice toward one or the other figurative scale as Prudence, the exemplary embedded reader, deems diplomatically suitable.²¹¹ Such a movement is far from arbitrary; Prudence operates with full awareness of the rhetorical complexity of a communication event, in which the disposed capacity of the reader and/or listener (whether Melibee or ourselves) is as important as the "content" of the message or the "intention" of the speaker.²¹² Her *allegoresis* of Melibee's name, in effecting this rhetorical redistribution of his agency through shifts in figurative scale, also enables the reader to engage in what Stephen Yeager calls "contingent reading practices," voluntary movements of hermeneutic attention from one semiotic scale to another, from reading the narrative as happening "outside" a singular actor named Melibee (literal), to reading it as happening "within" or even "as" him, as a network.²¹³ The figurative

²¹¹ Stephen Yeager argues for *Melibee*'s nuanced distribution of hermeneutic-ethical agency to the reader by means of Prudence's "strategic [or what we would call tactical] inconsistency": "In *Melibee* stricter and more methodologically consistent interpretive practices lead the titular character to harsher and more violent judgments, while Prudence's strategic inconsistency helps her to advocate on behalf of forgiveness and peace. Paradoxically, contingent reading practices reveal the tale's underlying consistency as an ethical statement – that vengeance is always wrong – while more logically rigorous reading practices, and especially those that begin with the presumption that the text will generate its own consistent truth, allow the text's ethical message to be circumvented." See Stephen Yeager, "Chaucer's Prudent Poetics," 308.

²¹² The sense of "diplomatic" here is meant to evoke both Latour's usage of the term as a name for the sort of activity which can peaceably connect different political and ontological communities, but also in the doubleness (in this case as both allegorical & literal) implied by the etymological root of *diploma*, as a folded or doubled piece of paper. See entry in *OED*.

²¹³ To no surprise, in most recent studies of *Melibee*, recent critical treatments of *Melibee* tend to emphasize the literal sense over and above the allegorical. After all, Albertano titles the first chapter of his *Liber Consolationis* as *Exemplum In Persona Melibei*. The tale is meant as an exemplum, in the generic tradition of the *speculum principum*, from which political rulers can find examples of good or bad rule. But it also offers an allegory of prudence. So which is it? An allegory or an exemplum? Critics can't decide. While Moore notes that given the allegory of *Melibee* "we should not be surprised when [Prudence and Melibee] behave without verisimilitude" (86), Collette closes her study of *Melibee* with these following lines, stressing the Prudence's feminine verisimilitude: "...it is no longer possible to regard the tale as merely a boring, extended collocation of sayings of dead white men, or a tale lacking a 'human element.'"

dynamics of *prosopopoeia*, in other words, afford the reader and protagonist of *Melibee* with an ethically transformative -- or what Eleanor Johnson has recently called protreptic -- hermeneutics.²¹⁴

Tactic II: The Auctor-Network and the Politics of Citation

In Albertano's *Liber*, Prudence also attends to the significance of her own name.²¹⁵ The passage in question, commencing more than five chapters of Latin material that neither Renaud's nor Chaucer's versions include, would have come immediately after line 1114 in Chaucer's text, after Prudence defends women and promises to restore Sophie "hool and sound" (VII.1110) to Melibee, who consequently puts himself under Prudence's governance. Despite its presence only in Albertano's original Latin text, the passage serves to crystallize aspects of her personification that are also amplified in Chaucer's version of the tale, as I will explore below. The following modern English translation is preceded here by line 1114 from Chaucer's *Melibee*:

[VII.1114] 'And, wyf, by cause of thy sweete wordes, and eek for I have assayed and preved thy grete sapience and thy grete trouthe, I wol governe me by thy conseil in alle thyng.' [*Liber* 5.19] *To which she said, 'To live in a prudent way, you will have to possess prudence.'* [5.20] *Melibee responded, 'I possess*

....whatever else we may find to say about it, the fact of Prudence's femaleness lies at the heart of the tale" (429). See Carolyn P. Collette, "Heeding the Counsel of Prudence: A Context for the *Melibee*" *The Chaucer Review* 29.4 (1995): 416-433. This problem has troubled entire generations of Chaucer critics. From Ann Astell to Marion Turner, it is said that in *Melibee* "the different levels of meaning coexist to uncomfortable effect." See Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict*, 189. I propose that it is precisely this lack of being able to settle comfortably on one or the other scale that gives *Melibee* its enduring dynamism. As Yeager has recently resolved, the problem of whether Prudence is a wife or virtue is only an apparent problem....Good wives must exercise prudence, and prudence is a virtue that is by definition situational and embodied." See Yeager, "Chaucer's Prudent Poetics," 313.

²¹⁴ Johnson defines "protrepsis" as "the literary modeling of ethical transformation in a main character who is also the narrator of the work." See Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 10.

²¹⁵ It is important to emphasize here that Chaucer very likely did have access to the Latin original when translating from Renaud. See William Askins, "The Tale of Melibee," in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, Vol. 1. Ed. Robert Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge, MA: D.S. Brewer, 2002.)

prudence because I possess you and that after all is your name. ' [5.21] *Then she said, 'It is not that I am Prudence but that my words are prudent.* ' [5.22] *To which he responded, 'Then tell me what prudence is and what its qualities are, the effects of prudence and how to become prudent.*'²¹⁶

In line 1114, Melibee agrees to govern himself by Prudence's "conseil." In response, Prudence invokes *the virtue of prudence* as something Melibee will need to endeavor to possess (*habere*) in order to live prudently, with increased possession of anything whatsoever not being an unattractive way of describing moral development to a wealthy householder. Melibee's reply is complex, and evinces either sarcasm or naiveté. In either case, what is at stake is whether Melibee metafictionally identifies his spousal interlocutor as the virtue of prudence which he morally possesses, such that for a fleeting moment Melibee seems like a fellow reader alongside us in seeing Prudence as the allegorical personification she also is, or whether he still refers to Prudence as only his human wife, whom he possesses in a legal sense.²¹⁷ It seems safe to assume the likelihood of the latter. Melibee is not so much concerned with his wife's exemplification of *phronesis* and his benefit in having such a quality belong to him as he is of her spousal status as a possessed object.²¹⁸ Melibee asserts his masculine dominion in political economy at the narrative's literal scale, brashly contravening his acceptance of

²¹⁶ See Askins, "The Tale of Melibee," 342.

²¹⁷ As Elizabeth Fowler notes of medieval English common law, "A marriage contract establishes an agency relation in which the wife undergoes a degree of 'civil death.' ... Civil death does not mean loss of all power to intend or act but the fiction of such loss and therefore a corresponding degree of powerlessness and of immunity within a particular community and a particular jurisdiction." See Elizabeth Fowler, "Civil Death and the Maiden: Agency and the Conditions of Contract in *Piers Plowman*" *Speculum* 70.4 (Oct 1995): 768. For more on the importance of legal ownership in and for *Melibee*, see Jamie Taylor, "Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* and the Failure of Allegory" *Exemplaria* 21.1 (Spring 2009): 83-101. For more on Prudence's agency as specifically and vividly female, see Carolyn P. Collette, "Heeding the Counsel of Prudence."

²¹⁸ Melibee's reference to Prudence's name admittedly echoes Prudence's interpretation of Melibee's name, which we examined above, but it is Prudence who does not teach but rather performs her own auto-allegoresis here, interpreting her name in agile response to Melibee's strategic pretension of ownership. In Albertano's *Liber*, this passage precedes Prudence's allegorization of Melibee by no less than three hundred lines, such that the latter should rather be seen to echo the former.

Prudence's elaborate defense of women immediately prior (VII.1063-1111). In other words, while it is as (an allegorical personification of) the virtue of prudence -- and not as a woman -- that Prudence *should* be "possessed," Melibee does not refer to his possession of Prudence in this figurative sense, but rather in the literal and specifically legal-marital sense. Melibee fails here because he does not yet recognize that his wife's personification of the virtue of prudence must involve his own prudential transformation. Contingent reading practices are not unambiguously positive, after all; Prudence uses them to good effect because she has a good end, as we have seen. Melibee's ends are not yet good, so his reading practices evince the danger of sovereign readers combining allegorical and literal modes, privileging one or the other at will, and always to their singular, self-interested advantage. By having Melibee enact these mistakes, and be corrected by Prudence when he aims toward possessive singular profit, readers experience the exemplarity of the tale's literal scale, as a narrative exercise involving an "embedded reader" whose mistakes are meant to seem plausible and yet, because of the grounding of the *sentence* in prudence, wrong because ultimately self-interested above all.

Hence the exigency and tactical brilliance of Prudence's response to Melibee in *Liber* 5.21: *Non ego sum prudentia, sed sum prudentiae verba*. Askins' translation of *Liber* 5.21 is insufficient. The Latin is better rendered as "I am not Prudence, but I am words of prudence [or 'am prudent words']." Even if a possessive pronoun is implied, the first-person singular of *esse* ('*sum*') cannot be predicated as 'are' by the third-person plural *verba*. Askins' translation obscures the precise figurative dynamic of *prosopopoeia* at work in the passage; by glossing *sed sum prudentiae verba* as "but that my words are prudent," Askins' version muddies the fact that Prudence is deflecting Melibee's claim of

possession by dispersonifying herself into a multitude of prudent words.²¹⁹ Manifesting the figurative agility of *prosopopoeia*, Prudence unexpectedly redistributes agency away from herself as a singular speaking subject and into the multiple material elements of the rhetoric she tactically deploys: *prudentiae verba*. To be a personification of Prudence, it turns out, means to enact multiple prudent (speech-) acts. Recalling de Certeau's discussion of tactics and rhetoric, Prudence outflanks Melibee's strategic claim of literal possession and recalibrates from within the notion of possession as something related to virtuous agency rather than marital mastery. Her Wittgensteinian "move" successfully shifts Melibee's attention away from the legal possession of a person and toward the psychological possession of a virtue, and hence rhetorically tenderizes him to want instruction about the nature and effects of prudence, how he can obtain and enact it himself (*quamodo prudentia acquiratur*): "Then tell me what prudence is and what its qualities are, the effects of prudence and how to become prudent." In dispersing herself into *prudentiae verba*, Prudence proves herself to be, precisely, prudent – nothing less than *prudentia animata*.²²⁰

Prudence's hermeneutic dissolution of herself from a singular agent into *prudentiae verba* in Albertano's *Liber* relates directly to her second tactic in *Melibee*, which, similar to her *allegoresis* of Melibee, emphasizes naming. From one vantage, Prudence's claim to be composed of *prudentiae verba* can be understood in a

²¹⁹ For more on "dispersonification" as a phenomenological experience in which a personified entity redounds upon its human reader/perceiver such that the animating verb or adjective assumes a uniquely non-human quality, see Samuel R. Levin, "Allegorical Language," *Allegory, Myth, Symbol*. Ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 23-38. I am using the term "dispersonification" to imply a similar transition from anthropomorphism to non-human form, even while maintaining that this dispersonification also functions as a reclaiming of human (subjective) agency, that which performs the dispersonification. The network is itself an actor, even as the actor is revealed as a network.

²²⁰ Or, "living prudence"; in the Middle Ages, the judge was often called a "living law" (*lex animata*). See Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, II.8.6.

straightforward manner. As a fictional character, her material existence is constituted by inscribed lexemes on parchment. Yet in another sense, the form of action that arguably defines Prudence's rhetorical performance most of all is her convening of a florilegal assemblage, the multitude of named *auctores* whom she cites at every turn. From the very beginning, Prudence has been issuing the names of other figures, and prudently quoting their prudent words. Or as Amanda Walling puts it, Prudence is both compiler *and* compilation.²²¹ Citation comprises the substance of her speech. She may almost be said to *be* the words of *others*; "the place of a tactic," after all, "belongs to the other."²²² Against mid-century interpretations of Prudence as "a most terrible blue-stocking" whose impossible erudition should lead any informed reader to scoff at the tale's lack of literary realism, I want to give closer attention to the dynamism of her florilegal citation.²²³

What can be glimpsed in her prudent citations of named *auctores* is nothing less than the reflexive redistribution of herself into a textual *auctor*-network of *prudentiae verba*. Giancarlo describes Prudence as "one who confounds the borders of high and low, and multiplicity and unity, by her very figure."²²⁴ The multiplicity of which Giancarlo speaks can be understood precisely as the sundry *auctores* she cites by name, whose narrative omnipresence seems to lend them a dialogic life of their own. Solomon, for instance, is cited by name over forty-two times in *Melibee*, exactly as many times as Prudence herself is named; only Melibee is named more, and at forty-nine times only by seven. Tullius Cicero is named eighteen times, Seneca fifteen times, the Apostle Paul ten.

²²¹ See Amanda Walling, "'In Hir Tellyng Difference': Gender, Authority, and Interpretation in the *Tale of Melibee*" *The Chaucer Review* 40.2 (2005): 163-181.

²²² De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

²²³ For Prudence described as a "blue-stocking," see (ed.) Thor Sundby, *Albertani Brixiensis, Liber Consolationis et Consilii* (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1873), xvii.

²²⁴ Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 151.

Compare this to the relatively important human characters of the surgeons, who are named only six times. The point is that members of Prudence's textual assembly far surpass the constituents of Melibee's "congregacioun" in terms of named narrative presence. Overall, there are over five hundred and fifty references to other writers and texts. At a point their invocation comes to seem as less apostrophic than as simple appeals to fellow characters. Importantly, in all but a couple exceptions Prudence refrains from mentioning the name of the texts from which she cites, referring instead to the name of the *auctor* himself, which evokes the answerable unity of identity and agency latent in names already explored with regard to Melibee. One critic has shown that Chaucer intensifies this identification of cited author and text through his unique and widespread addition of multiple dialogue introducers (MDIs).²²⁵ As DeMarco puts it in her important article on law and Ciceronian ethics in *Melibee*, "the quotations speak for themselves."²²⁶

From the actor-network theory inflected vantage of political ecology, Prudence's (and, in turn, Melibee's) deployment of *auctores* enriches the narrative with more existents, a fictional parliament of apostrophized agents and their proverbial "conseil" whose vocal presence in the discussion must be taken into account. Personifying Cicero's prudent temporality, Prudence gathers citations as instances of *sentence* from the past (*memoria*) to apply circumstantially in the present (*intellegentia*) for the sake of occasioning the future end (*providentia*) of peaceful conciliation.²²⁷ Interpreting

²²⁵ See Michael Foster, "Echoes of Communal Response in the *Tale of Melibee*" *The Chaucer Review* 42.4 (2008): 409-30.

²²⁶ Patricia DeMarco, "Violence, Law, and Ciceronian Ethics in Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 30 (2008): 125. Or consider Foster's claim that "*Melibee* can be interpreted as a tale in which books become speech." See Foster, "Echoes of Communal Response," 417.

²²⁷ Nor does Prudence presume to replace a legitimate parliament with her own textual assembly; the named agents, generated in relative privacy, will not suffice to substitute for due process among living bodies. At the tale's conclusion Prudence will ensure that another parliament be held in order to ratify the reconciliation between Melibee and his enemies, but this time around, the moral and political quality of the

Prudence's and Melibee's citation of *auctores* as the summoning of rival constituencies within a prudently transhistorical assembly finds interesting validation in the legal sense of the term "citation." Beyond citation in the referential bibliographic sense, the Latin *citare*, deriving from *ciere*, 'to call,' had in the Middle Ages and still has today a twofold legal meaning, that of summoning someone to court, and that of adducing something as evidence. The latter sense is clearly applicable to the quasi-legal setting of the dialogue, since the presence of the cited *auctores* is essential for purposes of persuading Melibee. Yet with regard to the former, the cited *auctores* also function like a rival council that critically supplements Melibee's false "congregacioun" by contributing its own mixture of prudent advice. Unlike the bellicose assembly of false friends and neighbors, this textual parliament not only contains actual differences of opinion -- suggesting the integrity of its conciliar procedural unfolding -- but also no sycophantic dissembling, even if Prudence herself cannot help but feign anger at one point (VII.1687).

There is also a phenomenological valence to the citation of *auctores*. Many critics have noted that the dialogic plenitude stemming from the represented names and quoted proverbs threatens to slow the momentum of the narrative. Other critics argue, however, that far from contributing to the supposed dullness of *Melibee*, the text's length and recursivity make the reader feel with Prudence -- and countless housewives throughout history -- the fatiguing effort involved in that most important political work of pacifying a belligerent male, especially wealthy like Melibee.²²⁸ As Wallace puts it, "to persist as a

"conseil" of the textual *auctor*-network having been taken into account, the invitations to attend will be more selectively distributed.

²²⁸ Understanding Prudence as a hybrid figure of word-agents should make us recall our analysis of Lady Fame in *House of Fame*. Both Prudence and Fame push the figurative capacities of *prosopopoeia* toward their lexical limits; in their respective literary representation, each is a fictional person effectively assembled of the sayings of multiple named historical persons, Fame toward an almost strategically proliferating chaos and Prudence toward tactical and tenuous peacemaking.

reader of *Melibee*, then, is to experience what subjection to Melibee-like rule means and feels like.”²²⁹ Others note the progressive effect of Chaucer’s translational tactic of deploying descriptive doublets, which add significantly to the overall length of the tale. As Taylor argues, “the expansive doublets of the *Melibee*, by bringing together widely variant elements into a common lexicon, mirror the tale’s plot of reconciliation in civil society,” offering “a new vocabulary of public life” for Melibee’s late-medieval English readerships.²³⁰ Prudence’s garrulousness has a purpose: rather than entertain and distract, Prudence aims to wear out Melibee’s pugnacity with words.²³¹ The citations, on a most basic level, constitute the true micro-events and even inhabitants of the plot.²³² Prudence’s dissemination from singular personification into a virtual colloquy of other named agents also lays bare the political tension between (literal) multiplicity and (allegorical) unity explored with reference to Prudence’s *allegoresis*. As Paxson and Scanlon respectively show, the person-generating powers of *prosopopoeia* are wielded in this case at the discretion of a prudent fictional personification. Prudence’s summoning of droves of named agents to her side demonstrates that the rhetorical device of personification is not something that only Chaucer can deploy, but is available as well to characters.

²²⁹ See Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, 241. For emphasis on the recursive phenomenology of reading *Melibee*, see Moore, “Apply Thyself.” Consider also Scanlon’s reading of the vocal shift from Chaucer the translator to Prudence as “a movement toward ever greater specificity that could itself be described as narrative.” See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, Power*, 208.

²³⁰ See Karla Taylor, “Social Aesthetics and the Emergence of Civic Discourse from the *Shipman’s Tale* to *Melibee*,” *The Chaucer Review* 39.3 (2005), 311. Taylor goes on to note that “Chaucer intends nothing less than to remake civic life, and he does so through a reshaping of civic language” (311).

²³¹ The tactically appropriated and ironically useful antifeminist motif of the talkative woman should not be missed. This motif also appears in *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, III.278-281.

²³² Scanlon puts it well: “The narrative movement of this dialogue, in which Melibee is brought grudgingly to Prudence’s point of view, resisting her citations with his own, demonstrates both the dependence of lay political power on textual authority and its resistance to it. The intricacy with which the tale traces out this dynamic of imposition and resistance is precisely what accounts for the narrative’s dilatory expanse.” See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, Power*, 210.

Most importantly, however, the semantic content of the citations from the various *auctores* is invoked by Prudence to persuade Melibee to avoid wreaking violent vengeance upon his enemies because it is wrong to do so. As with her earlier contention that agency is moot unless it aim at what is right (VII.1384), so here the good goal of peacekeeping functions as her principle of *auctorial* selection, keeping in check the proliferation of new voices *ad infinitum*.²³³ Conciliarity is not good *in itself*, but rather only as an equitable method that assumes a collective commitment to the good, unlike the tyrannical majority of Melibee's first parliament. As the convener of this citational council, Prudence, as the preeminent cardinal virtue not to mention an admirable housewife, ensures such a commitment to the good. And so, despite when the specific contents of particular citations seem to conflict, Prudence's consistent ethical message is that vengeance is always wrong, even if at times Prudence herself needs delicately to couch that message in terms which impress an avaricious and angry householder – such as when she stresses the sheer illegality of seeking revenge without the jurisdiction of a local judge, or Melibee's lack of strength for ensured success in war (VII.1526-1529, 1480-1490). And when this fails she must resort to even more sensitive parlance; in response to Melibee's assertion that he is in fact richer and stronger than his enemies, for instance, Prudence responds in a way that does not inflame his "ire," going so far as to agree with him that poverty and patience can be bad, but followed by admonitions to use wealth virtuously and to fear -- rather than seek -- Fortune (VII.1550-1670).²³⁴ Far from

²³³ In Scanlon's words, "The compilation is never an end in itself. Each citation is directed by the action under consideration, which determines both its selection and its application." See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, Power*, 210.

²³⁴ Earlier, after Prudence argues against vengeance sought outside the law, Melibee opts to put himself under the governance of another female personification, one figured by Melibee as less wifely than maternal. After Prudence notes the importance of appealing to the judge "that hath the jurisdiction" (1443) upon his enemies, Melibee speaks endearingly of that most fickle goddess: "A," quod Melibee, "this

encouraging expedience (although she is practical), Prudence's *prudentie verba* generates an *auctor*-network available to aristocrats like the text's original dedicatee, Albertano's son, who are deliberating on good answerable action.²³⁵

In revealing that Melibee *is* what Melibee *does*, Prudence both acknowledges his agency as sovereign but also requires that it be reformed. She reflexively draws on the affordances of the device of personification to do so. Nominalization, as a key facet of *prosopopoeia*, proves useful for Prudence both as a heuristic for proposing Melibee's own internal differentiation and as a referential site for generating a citational network of anthropomorphic entities. Prudence attends to naming in order to modulate strategies of violent power with tactical rhetoric that centrifugally distributes rhetorical agency into the mouths of past *auctores*, even as she herself names them. Prudence thus complements Melibee's internal psychological multiplicity with her own citational parliament. Just as Melibee is hermeneutically disclosed to be a living ecology of various psychological entities -- the heart, soul, senses, virtues, etc. -- so Prudence auto-disseminates into a network of past *auctores* whose counsel she vocalizes. While Melibee's psychological

vengeance liketh me no thyng. I biþenke me now and take heede how Fortune hath norissed me fro my childhede and hath holpen me to passe many a stroong paas. Now wol I assayen hire, trowynge, with Goddes help, that she shal helpe me my shame for to venge" (VII.1444-1446). In Fortune we can see an important foil to Prudence's citational deployment of past wisdom, for Melibee invokes not only his past experience of having benefitted from the unforeseen and unexpected, but also attempts to embed Fortune within the divine economy of Providence which is, if anyone's, *Prudence's* jurisdiction. She settles on a radical conclusion in order to dissuade Melibee from chasing Fortune, informing him that "have ye noon oother remedie but for to have youre recours unto the sovereyn Juge that vengeth alle vileynynges and wronges" (VII.1458).

²³⁵ The respective arguments by Marion Turner and Kathleen Kennedy that Prudence actually offers strategically expedient rather than tactically prudent counsel to Melibee, such that if he were strong enough to obtain vengeance she would have counseled him to seek it, fail to account for Prudence's circumstantial rhetoric and underlying commitment to peace, which Wallace rightly foregrounds. DeMarco's position that Prudence endeavors to show Melibee that his singular profit need not be inimical to common profit, a basic tenet of Ciceronian ethics, is far more accurate. See Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007) 167-191; Kathleen Kennedy, "Maintaining Love through 'Accord' in the *Tale of Melibee*," *The Chaucer Review* 39.2 (2004): 165-176; and Patricia DeMarco, "Violence, Law, and Ciceronian Ethics in Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 30 (2008): 125-169.

multiplicity evokes the medieval theory of the body politic, Prudence's intertextual multiplicity merges the florilegal with the conciliar, exemplifying a reformed politics of "conseil."²³⁶ Both of her rhetorical tactics draw on the figurative agility of *prosopopoeia*, navigating the metonymic connection between whole and part, unity and multiplicity, sovereignty and conciliarity. While Prudence's *allegoresis* can be seen as an interpellation of Melibee's ideological subject position, so her parliamentary *heteroglossia* discloses a politics of citation, the summoning of further *auctorial* witnesses to the trial of their private, albeit publically imperative, dialogue.

Unending Economies

At the end of the tale, has Prudence succeeded in tactically reforming Melibee's willful violence into an answerably agency? The answer is debatable. As in *Parliament of Fowls* and *House of Fame*, in *Melibee* the device of *prosopopoeia* plays an important role in Chaucer's attempts to maintain the tension between the conciliar and sovereign aspects of narrative figures and events. In *Parliament of Fowls*, the process is short-circuited, and imperial Nature must bestow a state of exceptional sovereignty on the formel as the only way to compensate for conciliar meltdown – sovereignty has its place, in other words. Yet it also can be abused; in *House of Fame*, Geoffrey's resistance to the arbitrary *auctor-*network of literary history is no match for Fame's omnipotence. In the laborious evidence of the *Tale of Melibee*, however, Chaucer is careful, as Strohm says, to "stop short of the more chaotic elements of democracy," having signaled its dangers of slipping into the tyranny of the majority in the warmongering "congregacioun," even while approximating a model of "flat" hierarchy "in which the head of the polity tempers his rule according to

²³⁶ See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, Power*, 206-210.

the collective advice of those best suited to offer counsel.”²³⁷ In accepting his own political-economic finitude as himself a living, ecological *polis*, Melibee learns that he must recognize the limits of his strategic jurisdiction. With the help from Prudence’s rhetorical tactics, Melibee has critically examined himself and, admitting the ultimate alignment of his interests with the common good, is capable of “becoming master of himself and thus master of men,” even if it has taken a good long while.²³⁸

Yet de Certeau reminds us that however successful she has been, Prudence’s tactical peacemaking “depends on time,” and that in the end “whatever [she] wins, [she] does not keep.”²³⁹ Motivating the incessant, vigilant virtue of private political parlance against violence, the virtue of prudence provides a diplomatic, dialogic axiom that Prudence, reminiscent of Sheherezade, has ably performed: *just keep talking*. But until when? Power gets impatient. So what culmination can be invoked in order to avoid a regress into unending deferral, so amenable finally to strategic exploitation? Prudence ultimately puts herself at great personal risk in meeting privately with Melibee’s enemies, during which meeting she arranges a second public assembly for their reconciliation with Melibee. And yet many critics point to a critical moment near the end of the tale that seems to upend the efficacy of her efforts. After Prudence has facilitated the three foes’ meek submission before Melibee, she asks him what sentence he plans to give them at

²³⁷ See Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 163. For instance, along with the importance of singular agency and nominal allegory within *Melibee*, Prudence will supplement Melibee’s failed council of neighbors with a more trustworthy textual parliament, rendering the florilegal (i.e. ‘gathering of the best’) genre into a *narratively* pragmatic rhetoric that makes conciliar assembly into a political ecology of various voices.

²³⁸ See Lynn Staley Johnson, “Inverse Counsel: Contexts for the *Melibee*,” *Studies in Philology* 87.2 (1990), 155. She sees *Melibee* as Chaucer’s coy yet serious counsel to Richard to do what may have seemed the least politically astute thing possible: listen to a woman. The rhetorical subtlety this reading grants to Chaucer seems convincing, as his *Melibee* may have been put forward earnestly, and yet with a semi-satirical sheen for safety’s sake – indeed, as a sort of authorial tactic. More on this in the conclusion below.

²³⁹ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

their next session of arbitration, and he replies: “‘Certes,’ quod he, ‘I thynke and purpose me fully / to desherite hem of al that evere they han and for to putte hem in exil for evere’” (VII.1834-35). Patterson deems Melibee’s words here to be “devastating.”²⁴⁰ Even in the face of so much admonition and good counsel, Melibee simply seems to prefer vengeance. Some critics are not satisfied with this despairing interpretation, however. Matthew Giancarlo has suggested that Melibee’s dispropriative intent, in light of Chaucer’s context of English common law, actually indicates Prudence’s success in averting “outright baronial war” by situating the dispute within proper legal parameters: “as severe as it may appear to us, a sentence of disinheritance (or dispropriation) and banishment was, repeatedly, the normal and in some ways more temperate legal response to political upheaval and ‘treason’ in the period.”²⁴¹ Stephen Yeager has likewise argued that in planning to disinherit and banish his three enemies -- a plan that Prudence admittedly deems “cruel” and “muchel agayn resoun” (VII.1836) -- something else entirely is happening, and *names* are again at the heart of it.²⁴² Recalling Prudence’s earlier tactic of ethical auto-*allegoresis*, Yeager suggests that Melibee’s decision to exile his enemies, rather than stemming from avaricious cruelty, amounts to something more like a hermeneutic mistake, yet one that in its resolution manifests some of the tale’s abidingly productive figurative tensions. Having been earlier taught by Prudence that his three foes can be likened to the world, flesh, and devil, Melibee seems to have

²⁴⁰ See Lee Patterson, “‘What Man Artow?’”, 118.

²⁴¹ See Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, 150. Giancarlo goes on: “As much as the opening allegorical attack on Melibee’s household was an attack on his lineage and patrimony, the move to ‘deherite hem of al that evere they han’ is fundamentally a legal claim on the offenders’ patrimonies and properties. A large part of Prudence’s accomplishment thus derives not just from her ability to sway Melibee with her counsel, but to get the entire conflict moved into a proper court of adjudication in the first place, and to reconstitute the assembly in a manner fulfilling its proper role as a forum for reconciliation” (150).

²⁴² As Yeager puts it, “[t]o Melibee’s credit...we must admit that the allegorical names in the tale in fact encourage a reading of events that entirely justifies Melibee’s decision.” See Yeager, “Chaucer’s Prudent Poetics,” 315.

internalized Prudence's pedagogy so thoroughly that he mistakenly transfers the proper response to the world, flesh and devil -- exile -- to his human enemies:

If the enemies of worldly temptation have harmed Melibee's soul, then 'exiling' those enemies from his life is a perfectly reasonable method for returning his soul to its pristine condition. In this sense, Melibee's "aporetic moment" is not exactly a misunderstanding of Prudence's allegorical argument on its own symbolic terms, but rather a misunderstanding of the argument's intended moral meaning.²⁴³

Yeager indicates how Melibee's "metafictional misreading" echoes and enables an Augustinian affirmation of the ethical value of circumstantial reading practices, in accordance with Prudence's principle in VII.1231 about adapting counsel to fit differing situations.²⁴⁴ If Augustine counseled that Scripture should always be read by Christians with and toward charity, then *Melibee* counsels, so Yeager suggests, that secular *auctores* should always be read with and toward prudence.²⁴⁵ Hermeneutics, as we have seen, is a rhetorical tactic in its own right, as Prudence herself has demonstrated.²⁴⁶ Ultimately, however, Prudence wants Melibee to forgive his enemies, so she needs to bring him back to the literal sense, in which his enemies are again recognized as (also) human. Prudence reminds Melibee that *these enemies before him* are not to be treated as he should treat interior anthropomorphisms, but as real humans. She does this by appealing to their -- and his -- answerability before not only the local justice of the peace but the "sovereyn Juge":

²⁴³ Ibid, 316.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ This parallel between reading scriptural and secular texts can be grounded in the fact that the very allegory of *Melibee*, in which the three enemies of mankind climb through windows and harm the daughter, according to Askins, is itself based in exegetical readings of a biblical passage, Jeremiah 8:21-9:24. See Askins, *Sources and Analogues* I, 377, n. 37.19.

²⁴⁶ For more on the medieval rhetorical use of hermeneutics, see Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

‘Wherfore I pray yow, lat mercy been in youre herte, to th’effect and entente that God Almighty have mercy on yow in his laste juggement. For Seinte Jame seith in his Epistle: “Juggement withouten mercy shal be doon to hym that hath no mercy of another wight.”’ (VII.1867-1869)

This concluding invocation of the larger economy of divine justice in which Melibee himself is accountable provides the parameters to which Prudence admittedly must have recourse, gesturing tactically toward what we might call the infinite scalability of ethical answerability. Exile of *inner* vice, yes; but only in tandem with the forgiveness of exterior, human agents.

It is Prudence’s invocation of unending answerability before God that definitively halts Melibee’s violent wielding of political sovereignty. Prudence almost seems an image of Ambrose of Milan in his confrontation with Emperor Theodosius, censuring the sovereign precisely by reminding him of the human identity of his victims and hence the bearing of divine justice upon his actions.²⁴⁷ What else does the tale’s closing reference to God’s justice *as* mercy perform but a further explosion of the narrative scale? In response, Melibee eagerly seeks full-fledged reconciliation through forgiveness:

‘Wherfore I receyve yow to my grace and foryeve 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 dyngge foryeven us oure giltes that we han trespassed to hym in this wrecched world. For doutelees, if we be sory and repentant of the synnes and giltes which we han trespassed in the sighte of oure Lord God, he is so free and so merciable that he wole foryeven us oure giltes and bryngen us to the blisse that nevere hath ende.’ Amen. (VII.1880-8888)

And so the tale ends. Constituting Chaucer’s original addition that is found neither in the Latin or French texts, these lines vindicate prudent and merciful agency in the world through reference to the unending economy of the Christian God to whom all alike, as

²⁴⁷ See Theodoret’s *Ecclesiastical History*, and also Ambrose, *Epistle* 51.11 to Emperor Theodosius, which I would go so far as to suggest can be read as an epistolary Christian prototype for the *speculum principum* genre.

partially culpable for the injuries of others, are answerable, and by whom all may -- depending on their openness to it based on their actions in life -- be forgiven. There are two points to make here. First, this reference to the divine Judge can be read as countering the dominion of Fame over linguistic agency, and thus as the triumph of the sort of model of intertextual *traditio* gestured to at the end of the last chapter. Prudence's good *auctor*-network ultimately outflanks Fame's bad one; virtue can keep up with, and even surpass, vanity. The glimpse of a vision of literary history contrary to that depicted in *House of Fame* thus emerges. Second, given the reception context of the tale as possibly involving royal or at least aristocratic readers, Chaucer's conclusion is prudent. He assumes the recalcitrance of violent aristocrats to peaceable settlements and, by invoking divine justice, shows himself quite cognizant of the worldly usefulness of a political-theological vision in which divine agency is itself figured as contingent upon the act (or the lack) of mercy amongst humans, who are always situated in interconnected networks, whether they know it or not. Never have the stakes of ethical or political agency been higher -- and never has Melibee come around to Prudence's point of view more quickly.

Tactical Chaucer

It is a viable thesis that Chaucer adapted his Middle English translation of Albertano's *Liber* for a particular, royal audience in Richard II, removing certain proverbs that would be imprudent to offer a young sovereign, including a well-known phrase from Ecclesiastes 10:16 on the curse of having a *puer rex* that would, had Chaucer not omitted it, have appeared just after VII.1199. Various other passages also bear

evidence of Chaucer's modification for the same reason: *Liber* 2.20 (VII.1002-03), 2.44 (1050), 12.2 (1124), 32.13 (1325-26), 35.11 (1359-76), 39.16 (1442-43), 44.1 (1562-65), 45.16 (1587), and 48.5 (1678-80).²⁴⁸ In her study of *Melibee*, Lynn Staley highlights that, in presenting *Melibee* to England's sovereign, Chaucer would have had to "position himself, along with Prudence, on the periphery of events, farsighted, astute, and artfully disguised by the inherent limitations of the role he has chosen for himself."²⁴⁹ Chaucer thus presents his *Melibee* prudently, with the hopes that its display of unflagging female rhetorical virtuosity leading toward political reconciliation will not be taken as impudent, but rather as a serious if somewhat indirect *Furstenspiegel*. As Taylor puts it, "*Melibee* shows that an aesthetic practice need not deny history or historical particularization; it can, as here, be the means by which writers seek to intervene in their own historical situation."²⁵⁰ And that situation may be other than the royal court, too. Foster speculates that the experience of aurally receiving *Melibee* encouraged and, given the tale's length, perhaps demanded intermissions during which took place civic conciliar practices similar to what Prudence advises. He sees *Melibee* as having been "written for an audience of late-fourteenth-century men and women who would have seen in Melibee's and Prudence's discourse fertile ground for a public debate on justice, vengeance, and Christian forgiveness."²⁵¹ Chaucer's rhetorical intervention in translating Albertano's *Liber* into what we know as the *Tale of Melibee*, grounded in what Astell would call "a

²⁴⁸ See Askin's various notes in *Sources and Analogues*, 331-408.

²⁴⁹ See Lynn Staley Johnson, "Inverse Counsel," 155. As she says just prior to this example, "In *The Tale of Melibee*, Chaucer offers a remedy as level-headed as any Richard may have received. He is urged to take the advice of a woman, or a translator, of someone without any genuine political power, and cultivate his wisdom, becoming master of himself and thus master of men. In so doing, Chaucer offers truly inverse counsel, cutting at the roots of both the literary and the political expectations of his age" (155).

²⁵⁰ Karla Taylor, "Social Aesthetics," 317.

²⁵¹ See M. Foster, "Echoes of Communal Response," 411.

prudential recognition,” may thus ultimately be no less tactical than -- or even delineable from -- Prudence’s intervention.²⁵² For we, as readers of *Melibee*, are still talking about it.

²⁵² See Ann Astell, *Political Allegory*, 3. Mitchell similarly notes of *Melibee* that “what the work ultimately depends upon is the prudence of its audiences as co-practitioners in the construction of meaning.” See Mitchell, *John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture*, 575.

Chapter 4: Assembling the King in Langland's *Piers Plowman* B-text Prologue-passus IV

The prior three chapters have focused on Chaucerian texts and specifically on Chaucer's dynamic deployments of *prosopopoeia* in investigating the political and ethical issues of agency, answerability, rhetoric, and virtue across a spectrum of dreamy and domestic contexts. In this chapter and the following we turn toward the works of William Langland and John Lydgate and how their texts address political concerns related to the reign of specific monarchs in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely, Edward III, Richard II and Henry VI. Langland and Lydgate take direct aim at the highest governmental entity, and use personification to inquire synthetically into the dynamics of royal rule.

In his account of Richard II's 1377 coronation, the contemporary chronicler Thomas Walsingham hails his medieval readers as active subjects of political history even while implicitly concealing the ideology undergirding the ceremonial mechanisms of royal power that he describes for them. Walsingham juxtaposes the historical, juvenile body of the young Richard with the institutional ideal of kinship expressed in the various addresses and speeches that others direct at him, until their climactic fusion in Richard's coronation. I will argue that the early parts of *Piers Plowman* do something similar if more diffuse by complexly figuring the king of the early, *Visio* portion of the poem – the *Visio*-king, in prologue-passus IV of the B-text. In their attempt to model a royal response to the epidemic of venal corruption, a model both formative of and accessible to a particular type of popular response, the early sections of Langland's poem use the rhetorical figure of *prosopopoeia* as a device of what Nicolette Zeeman has called

“imaginative theory,” democratizing the questions associated with good governance.²⁵³ In the tradition of the *Psychomachia* inflected with localized and historicized coordinates from his own context and other textual precedents, including Marguerite Porete’s *Mirror of Simple Souls* and the anonymous Middle English *Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of Manhode*, Langland pits personifications against each other in rhetorical contests such that Will’s wanderings amount to a series of too-close-for-comfort discursive tournaments between weird anthropomorphic beings. It is an alliterative philosophical romance that is at once a drama of conflicted ideological speculation. Langland exploits the flexibility of *prosopopoeia* as an engine for generating characterological agents that contribute to a unique exploration of ideal and really-existing royal power. I have settled on the B-text of *Piers Plowman* due to the changes that Langland makes with regard to treatments of kingship in the C-text. One of my two main primary passages of interest, for instance, the so-called “coronation scene,” is entirely excised from the C-text prologue.²⁵⁴

The presence of personifications in Langland’s poetics has received considerable critical attention.²⁵⁵ What I want to contribute is an interpretation of the poem’s legal-

²⁵³ See Nicolette Zeeman, “Imaginative Theory,” *Middle English*. Ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁵⁴ See Emily Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 213. The B-text represents Langland at his most daringly critical of kingship, despite what he later adapted or omitted due to fears of stirring up controversy after 1381. All quotations are taken from William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Complete Edition of the B-Text*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London: Everyman’s Library, 1987).

²⁵⁵ For studies on allegorical personification in *Piers Plowman*, see first of all Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, “Introduction” (on allegory), in *Piers Plowman* (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1967); see also Morton W. Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962); J.A. Burrow, *Langland’s Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Mary Carruthers, “Allegory Without the Teeth: Some Reflections on Figural Language in *Piers Plowman*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 19 (2005): 27-43; Helen Cooper, “Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 5 (1991): 31-48; James Paxson, “Inventing the Subject and the Personification of Will in *Piers Plowman*: Rhetorical, Erotic, and Ideological Origins and Limits in Langland’s Allegorical Poetics,” *William Langland’s Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Larry Scanlon, “Personification and Penance,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 21 (2007): 1-29; James Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-text*, (Essex, UK: Longman, 1990); A.C.

political theorization of kingship in light of the device of personification and its facilitating of a diegetic network of different, non-human agents within and around the *Visio*-king. Langland's use of *prosopopoeia* transforms the narrative field into a political ecology -- and renders specific characters into actor-networks -- such that they may be incorporated into textual forums for addressing questions of human flourishing.²⁵⁶ Some critics have taken notice. Elizabeth Fowler, for instance, has contributed an important analysis of what we may call the political ecology proper to the personification of Mede.²⁵⁷ Besides providing a critical precedent for an attentiveness to the thematic implications of figurative form, surveying Fowler's analysis will introduce us to the context within which Langland explores the necessary contours of royal governance.

Fowler interprets the personification of Mede in light of civil law surrounding the rights of married wives. Attending to the legal roots of *prosopopoeia*, she contends that "the episodes devoted to Mede serve as an experiment in which economic exchange and political constitution are measured using a standard that is drawn from the model of agency that originates in unity of person."²⁵⁸ Put differently, Langland figuratively condenses the diverse forms of venal corruption that plagued official institutions of governance in late-medieval England into the narrative anthropomorphism named Mede in order to analyze and critique those forms. The resultant conclusions are relatively nuanced: while there are socially necessary types of mede (B.231-58) -- later qualified as *mercede* in C.III.290 -- Lady Mede's influence in *Piers* ultimately animates the threat of

Spearing, "*Piers Plowman*: allegory and verbal practice," *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

²⁵⁶ In *Piers*, it is not too much to say that personification constitutes a discursive variant of the Statute of York that enables the dialogic presence of otherwise marginalized, "Common" entities.

²⁵⁷ See Elizabeth Fowler, "Civil Death and the Maiden: Agency and the Conditions of Contract in *Piers Plowman*," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (Oct 1995): 760-92.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 781.

overly monetized social relations to the role of interpersonal “trouthe” or “feith” (III.157) as an ethical principle of economic practice. Alluding topically not only to Edward III’s scandalous expenditures but also to those that were coming to dominate the fourteenth-century legal establishment, Langland dramatizes the infiltration of venal corruption into the fabric of political economy through Mede’s gaining the favor of “justices somme” in “Westmynstre.” Mede also successfully seduces the municipal authorities, “that menes ben bitwene / The kyng and the comune to kepe the lawes” (B.prol.13, 77-78), and destabilizes the ecclesially mediated sacrament of penance, which for Lateran IV was meant to assist in reforming that smallest of social units (the well-ordered soul). The narrator bemoans the fact that Mede – though ever a “mayde” – has effectively become the corrupt tissue connecting the limbs of the body politic.

That Mede herself attempts to monetize even Conscience’s counsel of the king only corroborates the prevalence of numismatic “mercymment” as the predominant grease of late-medieval institutional machinery. Yet even as “her” irresistible influence permeates every level of what Steiner has called “the social real,” it is also the figurative affordances of personification that prove helpful in militating *against* “her” insofar as the device renders the venal negatively venereal by aligning economic exploitation with Mede’s flirtatiousness.²⁵⁹ More complexly, because the rich need not admit their faults if they can speak instead with their pockets, the personification of Mede as a narrative character gives speech to the all-too-persuasive practice of handy-dandy.²⁶⁰ Figured as an anthropomorphic agent, Mede is made to persuade with words as well as monies. This

²⁵⁹ See Emily Steiner, “Political Aesthetic,” 2.

²⁶⁰ In passus IV.75, Langland refers to practices of bribery as “handy dandy.”

has complicated results.²⁶¹ And yet as the narrative moves toward the scene of a parliamentary court in passus IV, it subtly but significantly resituates Mede within a conciliar field of *verbal* conflict that is dominated by those with rhetorical acuity and not just deep pockets, somewhat tipping the scales against Mede.²⁶² This shift marks, in its barest definition, the realm of the political: where banter rather than bribery reigns, and words are the only legitimate currency. By embedding a personified Mede within a public discursive forum that not only can, in theory, resist numismatic influence, but also in which political-economic matters are themselves officially at issue under the sovereign jurisdiction of the Crown, “Langland's thought experiment argues for a newly strong, central control of the economy,” shifting the proper site of adjudication over economic matters from ecclesiastical courts to the royal court of parliament.²⁶³ The threat that bribery still poses to the properly political currency of banter, however, is ongoing; while forced at this narrative juncture of her own public trial to defend herself with speech, Mede can always attempt to redistribute the terms toward monetary means. Even the highest court in the land can be bought. As Conscience later complains to the King, “with hire jeweles youre justice she shendeth” (III.155).

To what extent the literary and legal realms intersect in the figure of Mede has been the concern of a substantial body of criticism.²⁶⁴ My primary focus in this chapter is

²⁶¹ See Elizabeth Fowler, “Civil Death,” 781.

²⁶² As Griffiths notes, “[a]s we move thus between the literal and figurative understanding of words, the episode becomes marked by an ironic tension between the discourse, the medium of language by means of which the narrative proceeds, and the fable, which, despite its ingenuity and lively representational qualities, self-consciously deconstructs itself as the actants recognise themselves and their fellows as metaphors, the arbitrary creations of language.” See Lavinia Griffiths, *Personification in Piers Plowman*, 40.

²⁶³ See Fowler “Civil Death,” 785.

²⁶⁴ See Fowler, “Civil Death”; Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman*; Anna Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in Piers Plowman* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1981); J.A. Burrow, *Langland's Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Kathleen E. Kennedy, *Maintenance, Meed and Marriage in Medieval English Literature*

not on Mede, however, but on the *Visio*-king. It is the King to whom the poem seems to turn as one authoritative enough to restrain Mede's "maistrie" legitimately, but also thereby the one to whom she poses the greatest threat. If Mede can persuade the King, who is *lex animata*, all is lost. Similar to Chaucer's usage of the device in the texts we have explored above, it is through the resources of linguistic *prosopopoeia*, its dynamic capacity to modulate between singular and multiple, individual and institutional forms of agency and answerability, that Langland imaginatively theorizes how the monarch could, in the face of crisis, function both equitably and effectively as the personification of law that his office demands him to be.

The Fictive Form of the King

On the level of literary form, placing a human ruler amidst personified entities (especially one -- Mede -- with whom he is supposedly consanguineous, as Theology insists in II.133) has the effect of making the character of the *Visio*-king seem like a literary personification.²⁶⁵ And in poetic narrative, seeming, as appearing-to-be, is being. Because the king, as a human character, is already a concrete entity, interpreting him as an instance of *prosopopoeia* might seem to render him more abstractly allegorical, a mere mouthpiece of monarchy.²⁶⁶ But in fact, as we shall see, both effects are sustained

(New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); James Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-text*. Essex, UK: Longman, 1990; Andrew Galloway, "Piers Plowman and the Subject of the Law" *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 15 (2001): 117-140.

²⁶⁵ For Griffiths, Langland's personifications "appear in branching complexes, and by a sort of metonymy confer a status similar to their own on those around them." See Lavinia Griffiths, *Personification in Piers Plowman*, 16.

²⁶⁶ The personification of concepts like Mede, on the other hand, entails a movement along the semiotic scale toward the *concrete* or mimetic with each addition of anthropic features or instance of idiomatic inflection. Meeting in the semiotic middle, so to speak, the king and Mede dialogue on a narrative platform enabled by the variegated distribution of anthropomorphic agency in *prosopopoeia*. See Whitman, *Allegory*, 5-6.

throughout Langland's poem. Seeing the *Visio*-king as a personification has direct analogues with how the monarch was theorized in late-medieval Latin political and legal treatises, as possessing two "bodies," one natural, private, and human and the other abstract, public, and institutional. From the twelfth century, English legal authorities hypothetically described the king not only as an individual human with a natural body, but also as a public institution that had legal status on parchment as a fictive or "made" (*ficta*) person, the Crown or head of the body politic.²⁶⁷ This complex model of royal power affirmed the representative function of the monarch as something like the metonymic personification of the totality of the realm, a status that was given implicit sanction in the writings of both continental and insular canon lawyers and civic justices.²⁶⁸

The fact that late-medieval political theories of kingship leaned heavily on rhetorical anthropomorphosis in the legal fiction of corporate personality lends credence to the claim that Langland's text, by bringing the legal fiction of royal corporate personhood into proximity with its similarly fictional cousin in literary personification, "offers an ambitious expansion of the intellectual possibilities of vernacular poetry" for addressing public matters of concern, specifically the nature and limits of royal sovereignty. Langland's personification of the *Visio*-king bears an intriguing affinity with the conceptual imagery developing around late-medieval kingship, and exemplifies how

²⁶⁷ As Elizabeth Fowler has noted, and in terms that evoke the political-ecological aspect of medieval civil law, "some things that are not human are given rights or accorded agency in legal discourse: for example, the Crown, the church, guilds, cities, other corporate bodies, even God (in trial by ordeal, God is asked to make a decision). These personified entities also stand for social relations rather than for particular people. The Crown stands not for a particular Richard II but for a particular set of institutional arrangements, for the set of relations between the particular Richard II and the particular people who are, for example, his councillors, his tenants, the City of Westminster, his subjects." See Fowler, "Civil Death," 768-69.

²⁶⁸ For the definitive survey of this theory of kingship, see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

“the form of sovereignty is imitated by, as well as constructed by, certain forms of cultural expression.”²⁶⁹ While also acknowledging that medieval writers who were developing the early versions of theories of political representation found a versatile resource in the notion of fictional juridical personhood, I want to go one step further than Emily Steiner does in her intriguing foray into legal theories of corporate personhood, and contend that Langland’s use of literary *prosopopoeia* to explore political-legal matters pertaining to the king’s “double personality” not only discloses rhetoric’s importance for legal-political theory in the later Middle Ages, but also enables him to draft a literary world for exploring the proper parameters of royal agency.²⁷⁰ Langland’s poetic figurations of the king and other surrounding characters can be seen as political theorizations in their own right.

Evidence of unrest surrounding royal agency in Langland’s historical context illuminates the poem’s interest in this topic. Passus III-IV of the B-text in particular, likely composed around 1378, would have only gained an added resonance with an inexperienced child-king like Richard II at the reins of the English kingdom. Also relevant is the scandal of Edward’s later years with Alice Perrers, after whom Mede herself may have been modeled, which posed the threat of excessive and unnecessary royal expenditure. As we have seen, the character of Mede threatens to undo the legal framework by which the populace was protected from the power of venal corruption; by the mid-fourteenth century, that framework had arguably begun to enable such corruption, as colloquial poems like *London Lickpenny* vividly describe. In the process of

²⁶⁹ Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28-29.

²⁷⁰ See Emily Steiner, “*Piers Plowman*, Diversity, and the Medieval Political Aesthetic,” *Representations* 91.1 (Summer 2005): 1-25.

theorizing the kind of royal authority needed to address the crisis of the monetary usurpation of social mediation by Mede, Langland's uses of *prosopopoeia*, proliferating into multiple conciliar actors, tactically promote a modified model of mediated monarchy. Langland's last hope, given that the juridical, monastic and municipal authorities have all succumbed to Mede, is the king, whose decisions are made in the name of the body politic, which he simultaneously heads and represents.

B-text prologue: Theorizing the Enactment of Kingship

While civic diversity arguably characterizes later *passus*, the connection of figurative anthropomorphism and political *topos* in the *Visio*-king constitutes the most important figure of Langland's "political aesthetic" in the early sections of *Piers*.²⁷¹ From the prologue through *passus* IV, which Anna Baldwin considers "the only complete dramatic sequence in *Piers Plowman* which centers on the theme of government," Langland negotiates the tense fusion of the king's natural person and the public office he embodies.²⁷² Glimpses of this fusion are latent in the logic of characterization peculiar to personification; while the representation of the natural person of the *Visio*-king who is an active interlocutor with other agents in the poem is arguably more engaging than the shadowy ideal monarch of the prologue, the suspense of the entire Mede episode turns on the fact that the *Visio*-king's actions, as performed by the public, representative of the realm, are therefore of direct consequence for all, especially when he acts as a sovereign by making explicit reference to his crown, as in IV.83-86, or XIX.469. Langland's poetic figure of the monarch plays an analytic function in relation to its historical referent:

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Baldwin, *The Theme of Government*, 24.

whether as reader of the poem or as object of readers' social imaginaries, the active, really-existing king is the *Visio*-king's premise and aim.

We can begin at the "Coronation scene" (B.prol.112-145), which is an example of how rhetorical personification first gains theoretical traction on the question of kingship in *Piers Plowman*, and does so in ways analogous to how kingship is represented in Walsingham's account of Richard II's coronation. Indeed, it is plausible that Langland's account is grounded in the actual ceremony of coronation.²⁷³ The passage is as follows:

Thanne kam ther a Kyng: Knyghthod hym ladde;
Might of the communes made hym to regne,
And thann cam Kynde Wit and clerkes he made,
For to counseillen the Kyng and the Commune save.
The Kyng and Knyghthod and Clergie bothe
Casten that the Commune sholde hem [communes] fynde.
The Commune contrevod of Kynde Wit craftes,
And for profit of al the peple plowmen ordeyned
To tilie and to travaille as trewe lif asketh. [120]
The Kyng and the Commune and Kynde Wit the thridde
Shopen lawe and leaute – ech lif to knowe his owene.
(prol.112-122)

In this passage, Langland suggests that good royal governance depends on the contributions of a conciliar network of multiple agents who advise the king from within and without. The deft figurations in this dense passage merit careful unpacking. No sooner has the *Visio*-king been introduced, in fact, than royal rule is already posited as contingent upon the first and third estates, the former of which is compressed into the agent named "Knyghthod," and the latter of which provides the empowering consensus undergirding the human monarch's role in the office of king: "Thanne kam ther a Kyng: Knyghthod hym ladde; / Might of the communes made hym to regne" (prol.112-13). The

²⁷³ It is possible that *Piers* alludes in general to Richard's coronation in 1377. At the very least, Richard's minority seems latent in Langland's addition of Eccl. 10:16, as well as the reference to "youre fader" (possibly referring to Edward III) in III.127.

dependence of royal power on the Commons precedes the Commons' own voluntary act of subjection, as seen when the Commons later acclaim the king, in Latin, to be their sovereign: "Thanne [c]an al the commune crye in vers of Latyn / To the Kynges counseil -- construe whoso wolde -- / *'Precepta Regis sunt nobis vincula legis!'* (prol.143-45). The vocal hailing of the king designates him as the political representative of popular will, the agent delegated by their constituency, and presupposes that his legitimacy derives at least in part from the assent of the Commons, which takes the form of an illocutionary speech-act.²⁷⁴ In his *Chronica Maiora*, Thomas Walsingham describes the popular delegation of a king in his account of Richard II's coronation. Walsingham describes how, in July of 1377, after the young Richard swears a series of oaths to defend the laws, the Archbishop translates the gist of those oaths into the vernacular, offering it to the laity gathered in Westminster almost as a sort of gift, the receipt of which functions as a sort of unspoken condition for Richard's coronation: "And the people replied with a mighty shout that they were willing without any compulsion to obey him."²⁷⁵ The procedure of this oral "hailing" of the proto-monarch as the people's choice, far from being empty of all but conventional significance, can instead be seen as a vital liturgical gesture on behalf of the popular constituency, which (besides evoking the earliest practices of Athenian democratic election) illuminates the very etymology of liturgy as a "work" (*ergon*) of the "people" (*laos*). Langland's more overtly "literary" and at once

²⁷⁴ My reading differs from Rayner's, who sees the people's exclamation as "bound by fear" (38). As I hope is clear from the analysis above, reading the Commons' exclamation as evidence of their political agency rather than passivity is more persuasive given not only the surrounding details I have explored, but also in light of the fact of Langland's excision of this passage from the more politically conservative C-text, presumably out of a concern for its evincing a popular agency that was no longer safe to promote after 1381. See Samantha Rayner, *Images of Kingship in Chaucer and His Ricardian Contemporaries* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2008).

²⁷⁵ Thomas Walsingham, *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, 1376-1422*. Trans. David Preest. (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2005), 40.

more reflexive text amplifies the significance of this oral interpellation as an essential basis of kingship, dramatizing the constitutionality of constitutional kingship. While much compressed in Langland's prologue, this liturgical procedure for generating or making (*fingere, facere*) a king amounts to the Commons' own auto-personification into the public body of the monarch, now become a singular narrative agent with not only the capacity but also now the sanction for representing the multitude in a political sense. In the prologue of the B-text of *Piers Plowman*, in other words, the composition of the King's public "body" occurs through *prosopopoeia*, and the rhetorical device enacts and manifests the agency of the assembled crowd of citizens in the poem.

Langland's perspicacity is evident in the next line, however, which introduces a figure whose agency implies the possibility that the King will misrepresent his people, thus subtly gesturing to the difference between his theoretical, public body and his natural, private body – the latter of which, in 1378, belonged to an eleven-year old. This figure -- the personified psychological faculty of Kynde Wit -- arrives with an agenda that bears directly on the king's reign: "And thanne cam Kynde Wit and clerkes he made, / For to counseillen the Kyng and the Commune save" (prol.114-15). By creating royal advisors in order to "save" the people, Kynde Wit suggests that the King, if not advised, may in fact function as a bane to the people. Kynde Wit's instantaneous introduction of a conciliar apparatus is meant to enable the private, human person of the monarch to fulfill his public office of the Crown. The proliferation of fictive bodies is notable, as these "clerkes" are persons "made" (*ficta*) by a personification (Kynde Wit) for the sake of a private/public person (king) who himself personifies the Commons. Interestingly, Kynde

Wit contributes as much if not more than the King himself in these early theorizations of social order.

For instance, the network of conciliar agents within which kingship properly functions is broadened and inverted when all three social estates are personified in the next lines, with the King, Clergy, and Knighthood reciprocating the Commons' earlier agency through the former's "delegation" of the "Commune" as responsible for provisioning: "The Kyng and Knyghthod and Clergie bothe / Casten that the Commune sholde hem [communes] fynde" (prol.116-17). The pun in line 117 discloses in passing that the name of the third estate -- the Commons -- is itself a sort of personification, stemming as it does from the popular agency in cultivating "communes," or edible rations, such that a specific common noun (pun intended) is rendered grammatically proper.²⁷⁶ But immediately afterward, mirroring "his" contribution to the monarch's counsel, it is again Kynde Wit who then transacts with the "Commune," distributing occupational agency as "craftes," in light of which the Commons extends, for the sake of common profit, its newly received agency in the delegation of "plowmen": "The Commune contrevded of Kynde Wit craftes, / And for profit of al the peple plowmen ordeyned / To tilie and to travaille as trewe lif asketh" (118-20). Kynde Wit, sometimes glossed as "common sense" or "natural reason," plays a vital role not only in generating royal advisors whose knowledge of policy can "save" the Commons, nor only in equipping the "feet" (as John of Salisbury would put it) of the body politic with the trade-skills by which they may perform their own necessary social function. Beyond this, Kynde Wit also joins with both of these political personifications, King and Commons, to form and uphold the authority of law by distributing its enforcement beyond the throne

²⁷⁶ See Middle English Dictionary, sense no. 4.

into a familiar tripartite network of personifications – a human individual, a collective entity, and a psychological faculty: “The Kyng and the Commune and Kynde Wit the thridde / Shopen lawe and leaute – ech lif to knowe his owene” (prol.121-22). This process of forming and upholding legal justice can be speculatively characterized as a political ecology in which vertical relations of hierarchy give way in the poetic narrative to a more “horizontal” or collaborative unity-in-multiplicity in which the three participants are affirmed in their different ontologies as mutually constitutive. For a political aesthetic, Langland has thus far sketched an attractive set of relationships, albeit tenuous in their idealized configuration.

Things only get more interesting if we keep reading, as three unexpected civic agents arrive on the scene, as if from beyond, above, and below, respectively: a lunatic, an angel, and a churl. These three contribute words of counsel on their own initiative, broadening in an unexpected because less abstract direction the network of conciliar agents:

Thanne loked up a lunatic, a leene thyng withalle,
 And knelynge to the Kyng clergially he seide,
 ‘Crist kepe thee, sire Kyng, and thi kyngryche,
 And lene thee lede thi lond so leaute the lovyte,
 And for thi rightful rulyng be rewarded in hevene!’
 And sithen in the eyr on heigh an aungel of hevene
 Lowed to speke in Latyn – for lewed men ne koude
 Jangle ne jugge that justifie hem sholde, [130]
 But suffren and serven – forthi seide the aungel:
“Sum Rex, sum Princeps”; neutrum fortasse deinceps!
O qui iura regis Christi specialia regis,
Hoc quod agas melius – iustus es, esto pius!
Nudum ius a te vestiri vult pietate.
Qualia vis metere, talia grana sere:
Si ius nudatur, nudo de iure metatur;
Si seritur pietas, de pietate metas.’
 Thanne greved hym a goliardeis, a gloton of wordes,
 And to the aungel an heigh answerde after: [140]

*‘Dum “rex” a “regere” dicatur nomen habere,
Nomen habet sine re nisi studet iura tenere.’*
(prol.123-142)

The vocal presence of a fool, whose bold words to the king invoke Christ, importantly signals the premodern perspective on madness as a potential mouthpiece of divine agency, the so-called holy fool tradition. This latter connection is further strengthened with the presence of an angel, who offers Latin advice concerning the king’s accountability to his public office. The angel suggests that the king both administers law as a sovereign or public person and yet is subject to law as a natural person (prol.132-38). Reiterating this needful accordance between a king’s actions and the laws he defends the following statement from a goliardic churl etymologizes the royal name (*rex*) as derived from the verb “to rule” (*regere*): “‘Dum ‘rex’ a ‘regere’ dicatur nomen habere, / Nomen habet sine re nisi studet iura tenere’” (prol.139-42).²⁷⁷ Morton Bloomfield has argued that personification allegory, considered grammatically, involves the ascription of an animating predicate to a common noun, which effectively renders the latter a proper noun.²⁷⁸ Relatedly, the churl’s parsing of the king’s name discloses that the Latin term for “king,” *rex*, is the nominalization of the verb, “to rule,” *regere*, such that the Latin term for the monarch involves a form of semiosis akin to personification. In presupposing the predicate *regere*, the name *rex* signifies in a singular speaking agent the infinitely variable set of actions involved in the act of ruling (*regere*). Hence the churl’s parsing comment serves to re-animate what is already a personification -- the noun *rex* -- by

²⁷⁷ Trans: ‘Inasmuch as a king has his name from (the fact of) being a ruler, he possesses the name (alone) without the reality unless he is zealous in maintaining the laws.’ This is an analogue with a passage in Bracton’s *De Legibus*. For more on the connection with Bracton, see Baldwin, *Theme of Government*, 13-16. See also *Bracton de Legibus et Consuetudinis Angliae*. Ed. G. E. Woodbine. Trans. S.E. Thorne (Harvard 1968) 304-06 (ff. 107-08).

²⁷⁸ See Morton W. Bloomfield, “A Grammatical Approach to Personification Allegory,” *Modern Philology* 60.3 (Feb., 1963): 161-171.

referring it again to the predicate *regere* from which it derives, and thereby analyzing the theoretical model of kingship in the very act of protreptically urging its reformed practice.²⁷⁹ As what Fowler calls a “social person,” the (private) king only *is* the (public) king in the activity of ruling, and ruling well: abiding by and protecting the laws, especially when crowned and enthroned in a parliamentary court, as we will find him in later *passus*. Echoing the earlier lines, the churl’s contribution amounts to the disclosure that kingship is not a self-constituting notion, but is dependent upon its relationship with something materially and conceptually other than itself, namely, the many people who are ruled, the act of ruling, and the laws by which the king’s regime binds the body politic. The people’s agency in delegating the King has already been discussed; what is also new in the churl’s comments is the idea that a king is no longer the King if he transgresses the laws, suggesting the important premodern political tenet, seen in Aquinas and many other places, of the people’s legal right to depose a tyrannical monarch. Through their advice, the motley triumvirate of lunatic, angel and goliard fulfill the juridical role of the “clerkes” that Kynde Wit “made” (*ficta*) in order to counsel the King and save the Commons. The substance of their advice, especially its emphasis on justice, mercy, and the contingency of royal rule, corresponds directly to the oaths that Richard II swore at his coronation.²⁸⁰

In both Langland and Walsingham, the vocal intervention of the third estate dramatically qualifies royal sovereignty at the scene of coronation; in *Piers* it is not only

²⁷⁹ The churl’s words thus perform a hermeneutic or what we earlier called auto-allegorical type of *prosopopoeia* that performs “dispersonification” – a figurative imaginary dissolution of the singular institution of the Crown into the multiple finite acts of human ruling after which the king is named.

²⁸⁰ Furthermore, just as Walsingham notes that Richard’s coronation oaths cannot be heard by the people, so the narrative voice in *Piers* had specifically noted that the angel’s Latin speech was unintelligible to unlearned people – “for lewed men ne koude / Jangle ne jugge that justifie hem sholde, / But suffren and serven” (prol.129-31).

the socially marginalized third estate, however, but also socially and ontologically heterogeneous entities that pipe up to advise the king: Kynde Wit, lunatic, angel, etc. Royal rights and duties as expressed at coronation have been theoretically co-implicated within an advisory network of atypical, yet vocal agents. Yet Langland's political foundation narrative is self-consciously idealistic; it presents how things *should* be, not, alas, how they *are*. The failure of the rat parliament at the end of the prologue poses the difference between the ideal and the real, marking their threshold. With the crowd of conciliar rodents quailing before the cat, Langland sends a tactically ambiguous message about the weakness of any conciliar governmental apparatus -- especially parliament -- for representing the interests of the Commons *if* it does not have sovereign (royal) support. This fact motivates Langland to shift his focus toward articulating the agency of the person and office of the king in the face of a wide-reaching crisis to which he must respond. The consequent concern of the following four *passus* is to demonstrate whether and how the carefully situated image of kingship idealized in the prologue can intercept the impolitic economies of Mede, and perhaps reinstate the really existing actor-network of a just and strong monarchy.

Passus III-IV: Enacting the Theorization of Kingship

What resources does Langland's figuration of the king in the *prologue* bring to the political imperatives of justice surrounding the corrupting personification of Mede? Langland's political comment in *passus* III-IV correlates with the poetic form of his method. Having provided an ideal framework of political relations in the prologue, he can unfold an allegorical exemplum of the protracted process of dialogical mediation and

introspective deliberation requisite in proper policy decision-making. *Passus* III-IV add flesh to the somewhat abstract narrative agents in the prologue first by introducing a matter of concern around which they cluster and reconfigure. This shift moves the narrative from categorical references that apply across a range of possible situations that the king may face to a focalized scenography populated by figuratively “thickened” characters who interact purposefully within a specific governmental setting and, in the process, employ idioms of late-medieval legal casuistry, para-legal arbitration, scholastic philosophy, and biblical prophecy. Thus from “Knighthood” and the “Commune,” the poem looks in III-IV toward particular knights and particular members of the third estate, emerging as if themselves the multiple scions of their abstract progenitors in the prologue. Central within this movement from ideal to real is the way that the characterization of the institution of kingship in the prologue is balanced by the portrayal of the personable and excitable monarch in *passus* III-IV, a speaking, temperamental, deliberative human agent dwelling and acting in time. Putting humanized concepts and human characters in an extended face-to-face encounter in the context of a parliamentary or royal prerogative court strikes a dynamic balance between the poem as neither heavy-handed with didactic exempla nor too allegorically abstract, but rather as ripe for a readerly reception that still demands a degree of interpretive effort and investment. Perched between the figurative extremes of mimesis and allegory, *prosopopoeia* enables Langland to produce vernacular “public poetry” in imaginative and hence tactically ambiguous relation to royal policy and jurisdiction.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ See Anne Middleton, “The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II,” *Speculum* 53.1 (Jan 1978): 94-114. For Langland’s personifications as both allegorical and mimetic, see Scanlon, “Personification and Penance.” In a similar vein, Christopher Dawson boldly contends that Langland’s personifications are more

In the figure of the *Visio*-king in *passus* III-IV, the nuanced theoretical coordinates of kingship from the prologue are translated, albeit with some loss, through the redistribution of agency afforded by a thicker form of *prosopopoeia* in which characters speak directly, interact bodily, and yet nonetheless fluctuate between different scales of narrative ontology. Similar to his being embedded within a network of conciliar agents in the prologue, so it is with reference to anthropomorphized non-human entities that the King must realize the fulfillment of his institutional identity, as defined by the legal notion of the king's public body. While charting a course of good governance with the coordinates from the prologue, however, he is also sensitized to the contingent particulars of the social real as they emerge in *passus* III-IV. In this regard the *Visio*-king is an "embedded reader" in Elizabeth Allen's sense, an intradiegetic agent who perceives and deliberates about his proper response to matters of concern based on information that the reader *outside* the text is *also* trying to render intelligible.²⁸² But he, like the reader, needs help from others.

It is primarily the personifications of Conscience and Reason who, with the mimetic and allegorical capabilities of *prosopopoeia*, help in assembling the hybrid image of the *Visio*-king, as an embodiment of "the seemingly self-contradictory concept of a kingship at once above and below the Law," as put forth by English thinkers like John of Salisbury and Bracton.²⁸³ Although the tendency of the rhetorical device of personification within narratives is most typically that of elaborating mimetic details

rounded than even Chaucer's human characters. See Christopher Dawson, "The Vision of Piers Plowman," *Medieval Essays* (New York: Image Books, 1959), 220.

²⁸² In this case, I would submit, the reader and the King share a common resource in the prologue, which functions precisely as a prologue should, providing introductory treatments of the more complex and detailed material that follows it. See Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 1-26.

²⁸³ See Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 143-147.

upon an allegorical-conceptual base, personifications like Conscience tend to develop and morph in multiple ways as the narrative proceeds, as Sarah Wood has recently argued.²⁸⁴ They are not reliably anthropomorphic, at times dissipating into multiple exemplars at a different scale, only to later reunify in a singular body. The accruing ascription of animating verbs to both Conscience and Reason, or the insertion into their statements of addresses to “my lord,” helps thicken the anthropomorphism with details from the literal level of the narrative. Furthermore, they literalize the agential principles of Reason and Conscience in medieval law and public policy.²⁸⁵ In *passus* III-IV, they function in their dialogues with the King on two (fictively represented) ontological scales, both exterior to the King as well as “within” him – on which more below.

While I agree with much of Anna Baldwin’s important political contextualization of *Piers*, my concern is to explore beyond her political conclusions to the complex narrative agency of Conscience and Reason.²⁸⁶ Attending to the latter as personifications

²⁸⁴ See Sarah Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

²⁸⁵ See also Paul Strohm’s claim that “Unlike *synderesis*, for example, Latin *conscientia* was complexly tied to public expectation and the public sphere, pertaining in one of its elements to prosecutorial knowledge mobilized in adverse judicial testimony.” See Paul Strohm, “Conscience,” *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*. Ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 209. See also the discussion of the king’s judgments “according to ‘right and reason’ (‘droit & reson’) in Baldwin, *The Theme of Government*, 23.

²⁸⁶ Baldwin has argued that the portrayal of the King in the *Piers* B- and especially C-text can be taken as evidence of Langland’s growing favor for “absolutist” kingship as the only solution to the legal-political problems connected with Mede that were plaguing late-medieval society, namely, “the corruptible processes of law, and the corrupted members of his Parliament” (22). Baldwin rightly situates the scenes described in *passus* III-IV within the context of the monarch’s Privy Council or some other prerogative court, such as the King’s Bench or the Court of Chancery. But complementary to recent treatments of conciliar politics in *Piers* such as Giancarlo’s, Baldwin sees the *Visio*-King as Langland’s positive if complex attempt to model the sort of absolute monarch needed to overcome the problems represented by Lady Mede. To this end Baldwin makes two important points: first, that the forms of conciliar politics listed above increasingly functioned under the exclusive jurisdiction of royal prerogative. Secondly, that such absolutism is evident in the dynamics of figurative personification operative in Conscience and Reason, since “the king learns justice from the faculties within his own soul, and therefore he cannot be forced to obey their dictates” (21). While resisting the hegemony of a purely “psychological” reading, Baldwin nonetheless defangs the dissenting conciliar efficacy of Conscience and Reason, considered as external advisors to the King, by identifying them with the Natural Law tradition that was itself all but

with semiotic valences both allegorical and mimetic, I will show how specific passages in the B-text make simply implausible Baldwin's reductive claims about Conscience and Reason as nothing more than psychological faculties that are entirely powerless before -- because mere facets of -- the King, or concepts identified without remainder with the Natural Law tradition of governance that royal prerogative had by the late fourteenth-century supposedly absorbed. If one stays close to Langland's poetic phenomenology, to his subtle assemblies of character development and dialogic idiom, the picture of kingship that emerges from *Piers* B.III-IV is far from absolutist, even if indicative of the positive political importance of the king's personal character in a moral, emotional sense, and even of the proper enactment of royal sovereign agency within the conciliar apparatus of Parliament, the only context within which the King, for constitutional monarchy, was actually granted sovereignty.

Conscience's first appearance before the King and Mede in *passus* III is a good place to commence our exploration. After emerging from advisory deliberations (III.101) that subtly echo the King's ideal configuration in the prologue, the King informs Mede about Conscience his "knyght" who "cam late fro biyonde" (III.108). The King includes Conscience's assent as a condition for their betrothal: "If he wilneth thee to wif, wiltow hym have?" (III.109). This sets a careful precedent for the relative superiority of Conscience in the contestive dialogue which follows, which as Galloway has noted "sets the terms in all versions for the genre to become that of a trial of Meed in general terms,

incorporated into the logic of the King's prerogative courts in order to bypass Common Law through extraordinary royal grants of equity. My reading will diverge from hers in attempting to indicate the nuances of political statement that personification facilitates. See Anna Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in Piers Plowman* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1981).

not just her marriage.”²⁸⁷ It is in this legal setting -- one which we saw was prevalent in Chaucer’s deployments of *prosopopoeia* as well -- that Conscience rejects the royal request:

Thanne was Conscience called to come and aere
Bifore the Kyng and his conseil, as clerkes and othere.
Knelynge Conscience to the Kyng louted,
To wite what his wille were and what he do sholde.
‘Woltow wedde this womman,’ quod the Kyng, ‘if I wol assente?’
For she is fayn of thi felaweshipe, for to be thi make.’
Quod Conscience to the Kyng, ‘Crist it me forbede!
Er I wedde swich a wif, wo me bitide!’

(III.114-21)

Conscience appears initially here as an advisor to the King, “knelynge” (116) and hence existing as physically exterior to the King; he is also apparently unaware what the King will request of him, details that in their mimetic literary realism resist a reductive allegorical-psychological explication. Intriguingly, the King hesitates to issue a command, and instead inquires with Conscience whether he will have Mede, “if I wol assente?” (118). Is the King implying that he *does* assent, or is he refraining from clarifying his position, suggesting that his sovereign perspective may not even be sufficient for compelling Conscience? The latter certainly seems more plausible given Conscience’s outright rejection of Mede, followed soon after by his “sothsegging” reminder to the King of Mede’s threat to “youre fader” (III.127) and “youre justice” (III.155). This response, if in its candidness is not in keeping with the status of Conscience as a mere “knyght” (although Conscience is more respectful to the King later, using “my lord” at III.231 and 244), at least accords with the binding nature of

²⁸⁷ Andrew Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, Vol. 1. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 307.

conscientia as a moral-mental faculty, something which -- or, better, someone whom -- the King cannot evade.

For Galloway, furthermore, Conscience can also be seen here as “a composite portrait of the actions and powers of the royal court, and his allegorical status can accommodate something like ‘royal policy.’”²⁸⁸ Recalling our reference to the theorization of kingship in the prologue, seeing Conscience as a personification of policy would effectively render him the proxy for the public body of the monarch, the singular assemblage of the institutional rights and privileges of the Crown. In III.120-121, that personified assemblage adamantly rejects the temptation faced and seemingly accepted by the private, natural body -- the all-too-human King -- of including Mede within the normal procedures of governance. Yet Conscience is also at once the mental faculty after which “he” is named. In addition, he is also a royal advisor and litigating accuser of Mede, as suggested by both the King’s casually adjudicative statements between plaintiffs (III.170-74, 228-29) and Conscience’s own declaration of having been taught by that progenitor of royal counselors, Kynde Wit: “I, Conscience, knowe this, for Kynde Wit it me taughte -- / That Reson shal regne and reaumes governe” (III.284-85). Conscience can accommodate and perform a plurality of social ontologies without imploding narrative and thematic coherence; in fact, Conscience’s threefold role as representing a human individual (advisor), a collective entity (royal court), and a moral-psychological faculty (*conscientia*) clearly parallels the triumvirate of King, Commons and Kynde Wit explored earlier.

The relative stalemate that Conscience and Mede reach, however, bodes ill for any reading of Conscience as alone sufficient, especially when the impatient (and

²⁸⁸ Galloway, *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman*, 308.

therefore) natural person of the King intervenes, asserting a juridical sovereignty he has hitherto seemed to avoid in the face of Conscience, who suddenly seems more like a mere knight: “‘Cesseth!’ seide the Kyng, ‘I suffre yow no lenger. / Ye shul saughtne, forsothe, and serve me bothe. / Kis hire,’ quod the Kyng, ‘Conscience, I hote!’” (IV.1-3). The King leans on his authority to command the immediate reconciliation of Mede and Conscience, and he does so in the same fashion that Chaucer’s Knight bids the Host and the Pardoner to make up, through a kiss of peace. Evoking as it does an out-of-court arbitration, the King’s diction alludes to the custom of the “loveday,” which while ideally intended as a means for sidestepping the corrupt legal establishment, had in Langland’s context of the late fourteenth century also become ripe for exploitation by members of Mede’s bribing retinue, emphasized at other places in the poem (III.158-59). This lends a contextual logic to the fact that Conscience does not hesitate even now to reject the King: “‘Nay, by Crist!’ quod Conscience, ‘congeye me rather! / But Reson rede me therto, rather wol I deye’” (IV.4-5). Conscience’s refusal destabilizes Baldwin’s reductive interpretation. By carefully embedding reference to the mediatory practice of the “loveday” within the King’s expression of sovereign prerogative, and then having Conscience reject that reference as easily as he had rejected the King’s measured request to marry Mede in III.118-21, Langland directly signals not only that “lovedays” are an ineffective solution to Mede’s “maistrie,” but also that the prerogative of an absolute monarch *is as ineffective* when it urges the reconciliation of Mede and Conscience. The results of such a cheap peace would be disastrous. Hence the poem dares to portray moral concern for the common good trumping royal command. Conscience should not be silenced, even by a king.

Yet the proper political solution is to be found in a single, sovereign King – “And oon Cristene kyng kepen [us] echone. / Shal na moore Mede be maister as she is nouthe” (III.289-90). It is just that what a truly “Cristene kyng” is seems to be related somehow to conscientious rule. And since many heads are better than one when it comes to constitutions, such royal sovereignty must be embedded within a conciliar framework that has truth and therefore justice as its guiding coordinate and final criterion. As Conscience prophesies,

‘Shal neither kyng ne knyght, constable ne meire
Over[carke] the commune ne to the court sompne,
Ne putte hem in panel to doon hem plighte hir truthe;
But after the dede that is doon oon doom shal rewarde
Mercy or no mercy as Truthe [moste] acorde.
Kynges court and commune court, consistorie and chapitle –
Al shal be but oon court, and oon b[u]rn be justice:
That worth Trewe-tonge, a tidy man that tened me nevere’
(III.315-22)

This complex reiteration of the prologue’s ideal governmental configuration is directed at the human ruler himself, and is intended to persuade the “Kynges court” in which Conscience pleads his case that “Truthe” or God, and his representative in “a tidy man” named “Trewe-tonge” (322), are in fact the keepers of law and right. But is the King himself “Trewe-tonge,” or meant to be? Perhaps. It is more important that, rather than relying on his own agency, Conscience invites another voice: “But Reson rede me therto, rather wol I deye” (IV.5). Following Conscience’s lead, the King commands Conscience to go and fetch Reason:

‘And I comaunde thee,’ quod the Kyng to Conscience thanne,
‘Rape thee to ryde, and Reson that thow fecche.
Comaunde hym that he come my counseil to here,
For he shal rule my reaume and rede me the beste
Of Mede and of moo there, what man shal hire wedde,
And acounte with thee, Conscience, so me Crist helpe,

How thow lernest the peple, the lered and the lewed!
(IV.6-12)

The King's anticipation of Reason's role as his preeminent counselor amounts to a confession that rationality, like moral *synderesis*, is another vital agency within the actor-network of kingship, operating in concert with Conscience. The facultative reciprocity of Reason and Conscience is admittedly important, and dramatized in Conscience's need for Reason's advice, but the dynamics of introducing a new characterological agent exceed this allegorical import, dilating the narrative by facilitating the generation of further hybrid sub-characters as part of Reason's retinue (as a rival to Mede's retinue). Such sub-characters include one that Galloway calls "Reason's only (quasi-)human servant," the author of the *Disticha Catonis*, "Catoun his knave" (IV.17).²⁸⁹ There is also a second anthropomorphic agent who even in being given a human name, "Tomme," seems even further from human status once we learn his surname: "Trewetonge-tel-me-no-tales / Ne lesynge-to-laughen-of-for-I-loved-hem-nevere" (IV.18-19). And yet his surname does clearly evoke the only true justice of the land prophesied earlier by Conscience: "Trewetonge" (III.322). Is this connection deliberate, such that the second servant of Reason, under Cato, is the same as the "tidy man" fit to embody justice throughout the kingdom, as perhaps the King was meant to do as adjudicator in the high court of Parliament? It may be that the allegorical sense here conveys that truth-telling is a necessary prerequisite at both the highest and lowest social stations, an ethico-linguistic bond that Langland quite seriously maintains would be a key part of reforming the increasingly important legal establishment and the social fabric it presumes to weave.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 379.

Reason and Conscience return safely to the King's court, successfully evading the agents behind the corruption of said establishment, namely, "Warryn Wisdom and Witty his fere" (IV.27), who quite insidiously have business at "th'Eschequer and in the Chauncerye" (IV.29). Reason is, upon arrival, seated higher than even the King's own progeny:

And thanne Reson rood faste the righte heighe gate,
As Conscience hym kenned, til thei come to the Kynge.
Curteisly the Kyng thanne com ayeins Reson,
And bitwene hymself and his sone sette hym on benche,
And wordeden wel wisely a gret while togideres.

(IV.42-46)

The fact that the King seats Reason "bitwene hymself and his sone," beyond its topical reference to the Black Prince, can be taken to imply the importance of present counsel over the genealogical future. Closer to the King's heart than even his child, in other words, are the public matters of concern which only rational deliberation in conciliar form can solve. They demand attention as royal table talk.

Yet almost as soon as the discussion has begun it gets interrupted by the climactic culmination of the Mede episode, and the king is finally forced to act. Two personifications are the primary narrative agents here; after his entrance into "parlement" in IV.47-60, a bloodied Peace presents a "bille" against the figure of Wrong. The allegorical meaning of an injured Peace litigating against the personification of Wrong, who "was a wikked luft and wroghte muche sorwe" (IV.62) seems evident. And yet, as noted in the Introduction, Wrong functions as both a singular agent on the literal level as well as a categorical nexus "within" which any number of human agents and actions can be allegorically assembled. A phenomenological reading of *Piers* would emphasize the extent to which the actions of Wrong are narratively indistinguishable from the actions of

the individuals who constitute referents that are both outside and “inside” the fictional narrative, as what William of Ockham would call Wrong’s integrant parts. Only from this vantage does the urgency of the scene, and hence its dramatic suspense, emerge, since through this networked (or what Paxson would call “isomorphic”) aspect of Wrong’s personification, Langland is able to suggest that in this litigation the monetary settlement of all possible wrongful acts is at stake. Peace’s bill is best understood as a plaint; as Steven Justice has shown, a plaint was an oral and often vernacular form of legal appeal to the private person of the king for immediate justice, and it presupposed the special bond between king and Commons which is evoked by the delegating shout at the scene of coronation.²⁹⁰ The personification of Peace is thus in the same legal position of plaintiff as the 1381 rebels believed themselves to be, a position known in civil law as *tam pro domino rege quam pro seipso*.²⁹¹ Accordingly, Mede cannot but attempt to secure this particular settlement on behalf of Wrong (IV.94-103), making peace with Peace through pence if she can. Peace’s acceptance of Mede’s offer and subsequent plea before the King on behalf of the efficacy of money as a sufficient medium for securing social concord, besides being a complex iteration of what is simultaneously an abstract problem -- can a price be put on peace? -- intimates that, if left up *even to victims* from the Commons, the reins of social mediation would be ceded to Mede. The imperative for the king’s natural person to fulfill his public office by intervening has thus been brought to a tipping point.

Upon learning of Mede’s attempt to pay off Peace for the sake of Wrong, and of Peace’s willingness to be paid off, the king in his parliamentary prerogative issues sentence against Wrong and Mede:

²⁹⁰ See Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 60-63.

²⁹¹ For evidence that the 1381 rebels’ thought King Richard was on their side, see Walsingham, *Chronica*, 123, 125, and 135.

The Kyng called Conscience and afterward Reson,
 And recorded that Reson hadde rightfully shewed;
 And modiliche upon Mede with myght the Kyng loked,
 And gan wexe wroth with Lawe, for Mede almost hadde shent it,
 And seide, 'Thorough youre lawe, as I leve, I lese manye chetes;
 Mede overmaistreth Lawe and mucche truthe letteth.
 And Reson shal rekene with yow, if I regne any while,
 And deme yow, bi this day, as ye han deserved.
 Mede shal noght maynprise yow, by the Marie of hevene!
 I wole have leaute in lawe, and lete be al youre jangling,
 And as moost folk witnesseth wel, Wrong shal be demed.'

(IV.171-81)

In this passage full of personal entities, the king reaches a point of resolve that finally signals his committed and enduring adherence to the counsel of Reason and Conscience. Yet, interestingly, the King's prevalent emotional aspects suggest that good royal governance is enacted not through the subordination of the natural person to the public institution but rather by their dynamic combination and functional alignment. One need not be dry to be moral, or relaxed to be rational. An impulsive human monarch is indeed hazardous, but also sometimes more prone to enact justice expediently when personally motivated by righteous indignation, as here. Yet in maintaining the human king's temperamental personality as a resource against Mede, Langland is careful to have the king swear by "his crowne" (IV.83) because, given that the mainprizing of Wrong would impair the health of the body politic, the sovereignty invested in the king's public person does still need to be explicitly exercised. Within his complex personification of the king, however, we see the tactical oscillation between royal bodies -- the sovereign ruler and his limits -- that defines Langland's deployment of *prosopopoeia* in figuring governance.

Very significantly, the sovereign assertion of royal intent is immediately qualified. Conscience, at once a legal principle and a good shire knight representing his constituency, leaps in to rearticulate the limitations on royal power, echoing the

Coronation scene by pointing out the need for the consent of the Commons, at least if law and “leaute” are going to be “shopen” toward reform: “but the commune wole assente, / It is ful hard, by myn heed, herto brynge it” (IV.183-84). These two emphases, the need for royal power and for limiting it, turn on the double semiotic work performed by making Conscience and Reason at once psychological and advisory, resulting in a division of powers both within and outside the monarch. The closing exchange between Conscience, Reason, and the *Visio*-king articulates this tension of keeping open the circulation of political agency through the internal council of thought and the external council of advice. Galloway’s point that Conscience personifies royal policy also illuminates his mediatory, representative role in this exchange between the *Visio*-King and Reason, the former as a natural human person and the latter as a close analogue to Kynde Wit.

In response to Conscience’s comment, the King swears obeisance to Reason, who in turn insists upon the supplementary role of Conscience. Their conciliar reciprocity could be read as an analogue to the threefold divine ruler under whose auspices they are all alike subject, the Trinitarian God named “Truthe” (I.12, III.319). Gently evoking God’s first-person plural self-reference in Genesis 1:26, which Christian exegetes read as a reference to God’s triune diversity-in-unity, the scene culminates in the king’s first-person plural self-description as a manifold governor, although in *Piers* it is not creation he rules but only a specific political domain. The final scene’s depiction of an admittedly impulsive and emotional human king successfully attaining to the proper exercise of his public office through a process of conciliar deliberation, both with himself and his council, culminates in an expression of genuine satisfaction, and even pleasure: “Als

longe as oure lyf lasteth, lyve we togidres” (IV.195). Satisfied here is Ulpian’s principle of imperial sovereignty, “what pleases the prince has the force of law” (*quod principi placuit*), that Bracton appropriated so delicately from Roman law and resituated in the English definition of constitutional monarchy.²⁹²

Royal Actor-Networks

Rhetorical *prosopopoeia* has facilitated this depiction of a supplementary conciliar aspect in and around the very person of the King himself. Reason and Conscience undulate, as Langland needs them to throughout *passus* III-IV, from being the king’s allegorized psychological faculties to being his external conciliar advisors in a court of law to being the fruit of his actual policy decisions. Yet how was it that these two personifications successfully attain the favor of the quasi-personification of the King against Mede? The answer has to do with the versatile affordances of figuration as applied to Conscience and Reason in making them operative agents within the narrative on multiple ontological scales, something that is ultimately denied to Mede, who attempts and yet fails to embed herself within the body politic and the personal favor of the King. Through his dialogue with the personifications of Conscience and Reason, the king is variously portrayed as *sovereign over* and *conversant with* but also *composed of* and *subject to* other entities. Rather than privilege either an “absolutist” or “conciliarist” reading of the *Visio*-king, as Baldwin does, I think *passus* III-IV can be seen

²⁹² As Kantorowicz notes, Bracton “deduced from the word *placuit* not an uncontrolled and God-inspired personal rule of the Prince, but a council-controlled and council-inspired, almost impersonal or supra-personal, rule of the king. What ‘pleased the Prince’ was Law; but what pleased him had, first of all, to please the council of magnates, and therefore Bracton elaborated this argument, when he continued: [What had pleased the Prince is Law] – that is, not what has been rashly presumed by the will of the king, but what has been rightly defined by the *consilium* of his magnates, by the king’s authorization, and after deliberation and conference concerning it...” See Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 151-52.

simultaneously as a representation of the highest engine of late-medieval English government, the public person of the Crown seated in Parliament, *and* a dramatic scene unfolding inside the mind of the natural person of the king, a dream of actionable deliberation akin microcosmically to Langland's larger poem in its speculative urgency. The power of *Piers'* dynamic of *prosopopoeia* emerges in full force only if we assume that Langland expects his readers to maintain the two figurative aspects of the rhetorical device in tension -- private-psychological interiority and public-conciliar exteriority -- and neither privilege nor exclude either form of dialogic transaction from this lively vision of royal answerability.

If we refuse to privilege either the interiority or the exteriority of Reason and Conscience to the royal psyche, the *Visio*-king can be seen as a subject of psychological and institutional unity *and* plurality. The figural effect of Langland's political personification, in other words, suggests that the conciliar network of multiple advisors which "counseillen the Kyng and the Commune save" (prol.115) *is* the parliamentary psyche, so to speak, of the public royal office. With an equal if not higher degree of figural nuance than that of John of Salisbury's notion in *Policraticus* of the body politic as being composed of all the natural bodies in the realm, Langland offers an expansive because ontologically diverse vision of politics both allegorical *and* in keeping with the *Furstenpiegel* tradition. This is perhaps latent in the logic of each genre, for the latter sees personal royal conduct as connected with a kingdom's well-being and thus implies that even the activity of mental faculties -- distinct from yet a part of individual human beings -- have immense significance for good governance.²⁹³ In figuring royal

²⁹³ Consider, for instance, how Giles of Rome dedicates the first part of his *De Regimine Principum* to the personal conduct and psychology of the king. See *The Governance of Kings and Princes: John Trevisa's*

deliberation as an actor-network premised on dialogic interaction that is composed of multiple agents who, rather than relating and reconciling merely through Mede's monetary means, take the time to talk "togidres," Langland keeps the King precariously suspended between absolutism and indecision, either of which would surrender social mediation to Mede. Within the "ontological metaphor" of the body politic, the King's privy council and the enactment of its content in the court of Parliament are figured as the unfolding activity within the metonymic cranium of the Crown (itself a metonym for the person of the king even while being the institutional office he occupies).²⁹⁴ In this way the poem performs the interpellation of the highest public office, the Crown, proposing the proper conciliarity of the multiplex person of the king as nothing less than a royal actor-network.

Middle English Translation of the De Regimine Principum of Aegidius Romanus. Ed. David C. Fowler, Charles F. Briggs, and Paul G. Remley (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997).

²⁹⁴ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 34.

Chapter 5: Royal and Authorial Agents in Lydgate's *Triumphal Entry of King Henry VI into London* and *The Fall of Princes*

In this chapter I will address two poems by John Lydgate, both of which can be classified as examples of his “public poetry.” The first stages a poetic revision of a choreographed event in order to draw more fully on what *prosopopoeia* brings to political rhetoric, connecting literary and legal representation delicately yet directly. While Langland used the personifications of Conscience and Reason to complicate the royal office from within, Lydgate interrogates the nature of the relationship between the king's two bodies as seen from without by a range of allegorical agents, human and non-human. The second poem, the massive *exempla* compilation known as *The Fall of Princes*, returns at a key meta-fictional junction to the topic of authorial agency that we explored in Chaucer's *House of Fame*, but now as a political concern situated for Lydgate in a Lancastrian laureate context.

Taking Sovereignty to the Streets: The 1432 Triumphal Entry Verses

Triumphal Entry describes a performance of political spectacle of the highest order: the return of a young Henry VI to England from France, and specifically his entry into London on Thursday, the twentieth of February, 1432. Henry VI's entry, much like his father's return from victory at Agincourt in 1415, is styled as a Roman triumph. In 1432, the imperial pretensions are dampened, however, by the nonage of the event's central figure, the king. Resisting tendencies to reduce the 1432 verses to propaganda, which they also are, I will read Lydgate's adaptive version of the event as in fact a complex “literarization” of history, evident most of all in the amplified agency of

personified abstractions who cluster around Henry's royal body as so many nonhuman advisors. The form and content of their messages to Henry, himself a child among men, amounts to a pedagogy of governance wherein the complex theorizations of kingship receive tactical rhetorical treatment.

While the *Piers* tradition deriving from Langland assumes in such poems as *Richard the Redeless* and *The Crowned King* the task of alliteratively scolding Richard for his excessive expenditures, to some extent doing so in order to legitimate the new Lancastrian regime, the untimely death of Henry V in 1415 inaugurates a second wave of Lancastrian cultural interpolation. The motivating factor? The crisis of royal governance in light of Henry VI's minority. Like Richard II upon Edward III's death in 1377, so Henry VI was ten-years of age when in 1432 he entered London in a triumphant procession celebrating his double monarchy of England and France, having already been crowned twice, once in 1429 and then again in 1431. London's mayor at the time, John Wells, commissioned the monk-poet John Lydgate to versify and vernacularize the Latin prose account of that triumphal entry written by John Carpenter, the city clerk. The result is what is now called either the 1432 verses or "King Henry VI's Triumphal Entry into London," in either case a strange text that mixes poetic fiction with historical chronicle. As Pearsall has noted, "[t]he flexibility of our concept of poetry is given a sharp test by Lydgate's verses for the *Triumphal Entry*."²⁹⁵ That strangeness becomes intelligible in light of the poem's multilayered political context. Beyond the mayoral and municipal interests of London's citizens, which both Carpenter and Lydgate foreground in different ways, the regency council plays a part in shaping the events behind the poem. Established a decade prior upon Henry V's death in order to assume the reins of the government until

²⁹⁵ Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 171.

Henry VI came of age in 1437, this council, constituted by Humphrey of Gloucester, John of Bedford and Bishop Henry Beaufort, faced numerous difficulties in coping with the crisis of a *puer rex*.²⁹⁶ This was aggravated by the fact that one member of the conciliar triumvirate, Humphrey, was less than eager to surrender power to an underage monarch, especially with John of Bedford away at war in France. Strategic expressions of both mayoral and regency-conciliar priorities mitigate the otherwise unabashed celebration of royal power in the verses.

Indeed, while a royally propagandistic document on its face, the poem emphasizes the fact of the royal minority, to the extent of applying certain constraints upon the young king. In effect, Lydgate's 1432 verses depend on functionally ambiguous juxtaposition of rhetorical emphases in order to mitigate the political anxiety surrounding a *puer rex*. First, it lavishly celebrates the double monarchy, welcoming Henry VI as nothing less than a victorious conqueror as resplendent as Caesar in his imperial glory. Second, however, it choreographs the royal minority's (and hence the regency council's) publicly imagined continuation through the deployment of allegorical personifications as rhetorical proxies for theorizing the limits of Henry VI's power. On the one hand, the poem spectacularly pretends that Henry VI is not a boy at all, and revels in the international power of England in an extravagant display that Lydgate's verses amplify with characteristic aureate style; the Roman imperial allusions in this work by England's

²⁹⁶ Nolan's remark is on target here: "the 'new constitutional' model of fifteenth-century kingship is distinctly optimistic; it suggests that even though the absence of an adult king created insurmountable difficulties in a polity organized around the royal will, 'political society' as a whole was so committed to maintaining the authority of the monarch that it continued to function as if the king were fully capable of exercising his power. The process of representation, that is, continued to function as if the disruption of Henry V's death had not happened; by vesting all authority – indeed, all 'publicness' – in the person of Henry VI, the lords of the realm were, in this reading, able to gloss over and conceal the absence of an adult king." See Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16.

first poet laureate are not coincidental. On the other hand, the poem subtly gestures toward the king's nonage, insisting in fantastic and factual terms on the need for continued oversight from various agents, human and non-human as well as monetary support from the civic polity of London, whose mayor commissioned the verses.

Attending to the collusions of municipal and regency-conciliar forces casts Lydgate's adapted version as a deft endeavor of multi-partisan strategy directed at both upholding *and* limiting the power of the royal institution. The poem is able to perform this double rhetorical function, through its unique adaptation of *prosopopoeia*. Lydgate's changes to the original Latin version literally animate the historical inhabitants of the text, distributing life and voice to what are inert, silent figures in Carpenter's account. Lydgate's characters are *ficta*, "made" differently. Resisting Nolan's soft denigration of personification allegory in Lydgate's public poetry, which passes off "personified figures" as "typically medieval" in her otherwise generous study, this chapter supplements her account with a formal attention to the poem's critically propagandistic mode, exploring how, as Henry VI moves from pageant to pageant, he is figured as a silent child caught between a manly mayor and various anthropomorphic representations of masculine protection, female instruction, and fiscal and legal obligation. Besides being complex agents who surround the young king in networks of counsel, these personifications, in Lydgate's literary revision of Henry's entry, speak in English to the crowds rather than, as in Carpenter, merely holding up Latin placards. Lydgate uses personification not only to democratize Latin public records but also to proffer

sophisticated portraits of governmental tension within and between the king and other socio-political actors, all of whom, in one sense or another, are personifications.²⁹⁷

And yet not all the persons in the poem are allegorical; before the pageants begin, the poem's patron, Mayor Wells, rides out to the boy-king in welcome. In his bold welcome, one almost gets the sense that the silent boy-king's triumph is being coopted by a civic spokesperson whose name, cunningly encoded in a later pageant, orchestrates events that follow. Like Scipio in *Parliament of Fowls*, Mayor Wells is a paternal figure, inviting Henry to his "chaumbre" (63c) of London, not unlike a proud father showing a boy his new room.²⁹⁸ Lydgate's delicate rhetorical posturing introduces an additional factor. Rather than presenting the king's response to the mayor's welcome, Lydgate pleads poetic incapacity to describe the "Noble devyses, dyvers ordenaunces" (66) that follow. This careful use of the humility *topos* betrays the duplicitous logic of propaganda that several scholars have identified in Lydgate's commissioned writings, implying that not only the mayor but also Lydgate is a "civic mouthpiece rather than subjective creator."²⁹⁹ But in *Triumphal Entry* this is a false contrast; it is precisely through his creative additions -- such as an enhanced use of personification -- that Lydgate speaks with civic, as opposed to merely royal, support. Lydgate is thus very much a subjective creator in the 1432 verses, even as he personifies himself as an inadequate municipal versifier. The mayor is counting on Lydgate's embellishment of Carpenter's Latin

²⁹⁷ Nolan rightly argues for the importance of this poem as an example of literary discourse "that emerged during a specific period of crisis as a means of publicly negotiating historical conflicts." See *ibid.* 28.

²⁹⁸ All quotations are from "King Henry's Triumphal Entry into London, 1432," in John Lydgate, *Mummings and Entertainments*. Ed. Claire Sponsler (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010).

²⁹⁹ C. David Benson, "Civic Lydgate," *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*. Ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame, IN: ND Press, 2006), 152. For a careful discussion of Lydgate's public poetry as "propaganda," see Scott-Morgan Straker, "Propaganda, Intentionality, and the Lancastrian Lydgate" in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*. Ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2006), 98-128.

account with paeans of London and craftily choreographed counsel for the *puer rex*.³⁰⁰ It is in this latent civic agenda that the poem's figurative adaptations in addressing kingship can be understood most fruitfully.

The king processes through a total of nine pageant stations in the course of the triumph, with the fourth forming a sort of climax. In the course of the first few pageants, the unspoken fact of Henry's minority, evident to the poem's earliest audiences but somewhat opaque to posterity, works subtly to reverse the celebratory event through the negative emphasis on what Henry lacks, thus destabilizing any reading of the 1432 verses as thoroughly royal propaganda. For instance, by offering the king protection, the first pageant's "sturdy champeoun" (74), a martial figure brandishing a sword atop a tower, subtly evokes the very political crisis that the *Entry* seems designed to conceal -- the royal minority of Henry VI. For unlike his father, Henry VI has never victoriously engaged on the battlefield; he is only ten years old, and therefore quite factually in need of protection, a defender of sorts. The first pageant thereby gestures toward the distinction between the king's natural, immature body that needs protection and the institutional or "public" body of the martially victorious and celebrated *dignitas* that he is still technically too young to assume, a political corollary to the rhetorical duplicity that the triumph as a whole strives carefully to maintain. The royal public institution is the subject of celebratory praise, while the king as human child remains, as Straker has put it, "a king in potential" to whom advice can and should be directed.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ It is also true that Wells himself contributed a creative element, serving as "a double for the poet, engaged, like Lydgate, in the task of creating an aestheticized fictional world." See Nolan, *John Lydgate*, 236.

³⁰¹ Straker "Propaganda," 120.

In the third pageant “a tabernacle surmountyng of beaute” (227) houses Dame Sapience, who asserts her sovereignty over not only Henry, but over all kings of the past:

‘Kynges,’ quod she, ‘moste of excellence,
By me they regne and moste in joye endure,
For thurh my helpe, and my besy cure,
To encrece theyre glorie and hyh renoun,
They shull of wysdome have full possessioun.’
(260-64)

Kings, according to Sapience, need counsel from a higher-ranking female figure like herself. There is a distinctively maternal aspect here. Just as the mayor had assumed a paternal role, so Sapience takes “besy care” (262) with an almost domestic or economic care. Reading from a document meant for “yonge kynges” (268), she insists on the imperative for royal submission to multiple sapient agents: “Understondith and lernyth of the wyse, / On riht remembryng the hyh lorde to queme, / Syth ye be juges other folke to deme” (269-71). Henry’s royal exercise of judicial power requires his abandonment of juvenile ignorance and submission to those who, as exemplars of Sapience (i.e. “the wyse”), represent her manifold influence in governance, which, she therefore seems to imply, is conciliar, grounded in advisory expertise.

In these statements, as is thereby intimated, Sapience also enunciates the agenda of another figure who looms large behind the curtains of the triumph: Humphrey of Gloucester. Scattergood and Saygin have respectively noted Gloucester’s role in the historical event of Henry’s entry, to the extent of his requesting this third pageant as a part of the regency council’s plans for Henry VI’s education.³⁰² A program of education was set up for Henry VI at his father’s request under Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of

³⁰² See Susanne Saygin, *Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (1390-1447) and the Italian Humanists* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 57. See also V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Blandford Press, 1971), 149.

Warwick, which began in 1428 and continued until Henry VI was declared old enough to reign in 1437. The extent of Humphrey's actual involvement is unclear, but his possible role suggests an important network of influence surrounding the event of the triumph itself, its dramatic machinery, and Lydgate's literary adaptations of both. It also signals that at least one member of the regency council recognized that literary modes of discourse are effective for public political persuasion, especially -- as we will see the poem emphasize -- given the disjunction between the king's private and public bodies. In his study of Lydgate, Mortimer notes that "Watts has shown that [Humphrey of] Gloucester played the council off against the young king in these years, arguing that 'he inaugurated a new politics' and was the first to exploit 'the dependence of the monarchical system upon the private person of the king.'"³⁰³ In the very pageant that Humphrey may have requested, the versatility of personification is primarily evident in a similar tension between public and private, general and specific, namely, the dialectical relationship between the political specificity of the poem's topic and the categorical universality of the allegorical speaker's signified concept, in this case wisdom. It must be Sapience (and not Humphrey) who expounds upon the virtues of conciliar rule from the pageant stage because as a proxy for the concept of Wisdom she does not *a priori* embody the partisan interests of an individual human member of the regency council, even if she functions covertly as the latter's own "civic mouthpiece."³⁰⁴ The rhetorical force of personification here turns on the way in which talking concepts with unambiguously positive value (such as Wisdom) can convene or effect the 'bringing together' (*conventio*) of an internally differentiated political collective. And if

³⁰³ See Mortimer, *John Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, 55. See also John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120.

³⁰⁴ Benson, "Civic Lydgate," 152.

propaganda is “an alliance between political authority and culture to harness a community in pursuit of that authority’s ends,” then that is precisely what personification here facilitates.³⁰⁵

Except that Lydgate is a better poet than Humphrey. In the fourth pageant, the poem offers its strongest qualifications of the king’s power by situating Henry in even tighter networks of supplementary authority, subjecting his triumphal entry to direct political-theoretical cross-pressures. The king’s legal minority, which has had a subtly subversive effect in the first three pageants, literally meets him face to face in the fourth pageant as he approaches the “Conduyte made in a cercle wyse” (274): “And myddys above in ful riche array, / Ther satte a childe of beaute precellyng, / Middis of the throne rayed lyke a kyng” (276-78). While these lines are relatively straightforward, the political significance of an effigy of an enthroned “childe” (277) dressed “lyke a kyng” (278) is anything but simple. The theory of the king’s two bodies, partially deriving from the legal fiction of corporate personality, holds that the legally fictive person -- in this case the public office of the monarch -- was itself a legal minor requiring the guardianship of an adult human custodian, a role typically filled by the natural, human person of the monarch.³⁰⁶ Yet with Henry VI only ten years of age, the custodial function needed fulfillment by other means. A coherent and relatively uncontested protocol had been implemented in only a short time for outlining these conciliar intermediaries while Henry VI was not even a year old, deriving, according to R. A. Griffiths, from

the realization in the later Middle Ages that the sophistication and complexities of royal administration and government made it possible to conceive of the king as both an individual and an institution, in other words that he had personal (or

³⁰⁵ Straker helpfully contends that “Triumphal Entry” “is integrative propaganda of the sort that communities use to define, unite, and promote themselves.” See Straker, “Propaganda,” 121-22.

³⁰⁶ See Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 372-383.

private) and public capacities that might be separately identified. The exceptionally young age at which Henry VI succeeded gives his minority unique importance in perpetuating this particular, exquisite, fiction which has characterized the British monarchy ever since and enabled a pragmatic (though not always peaceful) attitude to rulership.³⁰⁷

In other words, along with the double monarchy, the nonage of the natural person of Henry VI inaugurates a *double minority*. Relatedly, the king-as-minor is visualized in pageant four *both* as the effigy on stage, which may represent the legal minority of the institutional Crown, *and* as a prepubescent human. Henry himself remains silent, an onlooker and public pupil, while it is the effigy with whom the emerging agents interact and engage. First of all the figures of Mercy, Truth and Clemency emerge. As had occurred in the second pageant, here three female allegorical personifications assume a position of spatial privilege over (the effigy of) the enthroned king: “[t]he Kyngis throne strongly to embrace” (285). Beyond the allegorical message that a king needs to rule mercifully and truthfully, their physical envelopment of the immobile body of a boy-king, along with the earlier verb Lydgate selects to describe their influence, “governe” (l. 279), makes their relation with the effigy of the *juvenis regalibus* to be one of multiple tutorial instruction, that is, a council. Along similar lines, Carpenter’s Latin account cites a Solomonic proverb from the Vulgate that Lydgate loosely paraphrases in the vernacular, Proverbs 20:28: *Misericordia et veritas custodiunt Regem, et clementia roboratur thronus eius*.³⁰⁸ According to the Latin, Mercy, Truth and Clemency are *custodians* of the king, that is, guardians and caretakers of a minor. Good royal governance is again predicated upon a form of wardship that has affinities with Sapience in the third pageant,

³⁰⁷ R.A. Griffiths, “The Minority of Henry VI, King of England and France,” *The Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England*. Ed. Charles Beem (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 165.

³⁰⁸ The NKJV translation is as follows: “Mercy and truth preserve the king, / And by lovingkindness he upholds his throne.”

and the legal wardship described above. If Lydgate implies an overlap between the three virtues and the three regents, this would seem to be flattering if covert endorsement of that conciliar triumvirate, something useful at a time when the king was of “an exceptionally young age,” as Griffiths puts it.³⁰⁹

Even while the double minority can thus function as an opportunity for rhetorically entrenching the power of the regency government over and against an inexperienced ruler, it is also inevitable that Henry VI will begin ruling in full possession of his monarchical rights and privileges in only five years time. The remainder of pageant four anticipates that future by situating the king’s agency within specific boundaries. Enter, around line 290, several sets of human agents, two judges and eight sergeants of law, who proceed to express the contours of a diffused body politic in which municipal and conciliar authority has a strong place. While greater in number, these figures all but personify another trio of basic political concepts, “echon representyng / For comune profyte, doom and rihtwysnesse” (295-96). Lydgate’s choice of the Middle English term “representyng” here has a productive double meaning; he is using it in a political sense, as becomes clear if we consult Carpenter’s original Latin phrase *judicium et justitiam corporis politici repraesentantes*, noting the reference to the *corpus politicum*, or body politic.³¹⁰ But Lydgate’s poem also implies the sense of *repraesentans* synonymous with *ficta*, both juridical terms for a person (*persona*) that is “made by law” as well as philosophical terms suggesting the ontological status of imagined entities. The complex of connotations offers a semantic context in which Lydgate’s literary representation of legal representatives, in placing human political figures on the same diegetic and mimetic

³⁰⁹ Griffiths, “The Minority of Henry VI, King of England and France,” 165.

³¹⁰ See Appendix III in *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis; Liber Albus, Liber Costumarum, et Liber Horn*. Vol. III. Ed. Henry Thomas Riley. London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860.

field as allegorical personifications, can stress that other humans (legally trained ones, at least) have publically representative power. And they speak on behalf of the public when they insist that “[h]onour of kyngys, in every mannys siht, / Of comyn custum lovith equityte and riht” (298-99). In other words, people honor rulers when rulers uphold the law. The implication, as earlier with the champion’s defense and the goddesses’ gifts in the second (99-203) pageant, turns on the inverse point: that kings who do *not* love equity and right will not be honored by the people – nor should they be.

In this counsel, the judges and sergeants represent common profit as a limit on the power of the king. The king is constrained by the concepts of right rule to respect the public on behalf of which they speak, since the former are the very spokespersons that constitute “the wyse,” as Sapience deemed them: “Folke that be trewe and well expert in lawe” (306), whom “kyngis...shulde aboute hem drawe” (305). The message articulated to Henry is apparent: continue to heed the guidance of others, including the tripartite regency council, judges, and civic attorneys of London, ideally because they represent the (interests of) Commons. Their representation of common profit, based in the emergent parliamentary theory of delegated spokespersons (*quod omnes tangit*), can be seen as a form in which the legal roots of *prosopopoeia* in Quintilian resurface within a later political context. Yet we should not forget the phenomenological fact that this is a group of grown men speaking to a young boy.

In the last stanzas, where Lydgate directly compares London to Rome, France to Carthage, and the young Henry VI to “Sesar Julius” in “tryumphe...with his victorie” (517, 523), *prosopopoeia* emerges again as a dynamic figure. Lydgate consciously deploys allusions to ancient Rome that imply his awareness of their political force, as is

fitting considering his authorship of *Serpent of Division*.³¹¹ Ultimately, as Nolan has shown, the poem recuperates the Roman triumph tradition, about which more below.³¹² Beyond the parameters of Nolan's study, however, personification complicates this tradition by disallowing any clearly predominant political theme. Lydgate puts city and king into a grammatically interpersonal -- and potentially rival -- relation, launching into an apostrophic personification of the city of London that far surpasses the mayor's rather measured praise of Henry, which had also insisted on reference to London:

Be gladde, O London! be gladde and make grete joye,
 Citee of Citees, of noblesse precellyng,
 In thy bygynnyng called Newe Troye;
 For worthynesse thanke God of alle thyng,
 Which hast this day resseyved so thy Kyng
 With many a signe and many an observaunce
 To encrese thy name by newe remembraunce.
 (510-16)

It is London that "resseyved" Henry, doing so "to encrese *thy* [London's] name" (516 *my emphasis*). Grammatically, the king is still a sort of passive agent here, absorbed into the capitol city's personified female agency. This conflict of monarchy and municipality sets up a parallel with an earlier text, complicating the imperial allusions in the process.

For the rhetorical personification of a civic municipality has Roman precedent. Writing under the reign of Nero, the young second-century BCE poet Lucan had to be

³¹¹ Lydgate himself produced his own version "of lucan" in his *Serpent of Division*, which describes the appearance to Caesar of "an olde Auncien lady triste and drery in a mantell of blake," above "the sturdy Ryvere callyd of lucan Rubicanis." See John Lydgate, *Serpent of Division*. Ed. Henry Noble MacCracken. (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), VII, p. 56. Interestingly, however, Lydgate does not name this female figure as the genius of Rome, which she is in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, likely assuming it to be apparent to his readers.

³¹² In the *Chronica*, Thomas Walsingham records a royal event of similarly imperial resonance: "The city indeed had been decorated with so many banners of gold and silver and silk and with so many other devices to delight the minds of the onlookers that you might have thought you were seeing in London the actual triumphs of the Caesars or looking upon the surpassing splendour of Rome as it once was" (Walsingham, *Chronica*, 38). The occasion? The preparations for Richard II's entry into London and coronation in July 1377.

careful in figuring the agents of political history in his *Pharsalia*, at least as careful as Lydgate, who knew and translated portions from *Pharsalia* in his earlier *Serpent of Division*. In book I of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the personified genius or spirit of Rome confronts the audacious Julius Caesar, telling him to lay down his arms and not fight against Pompey and the republic, lest he actually succeed and thus appropriate political sovereignty with imperial dimensions: "Where further do you march? / Where do you take my standards, warriors? If lawfully you come, / if as citizens, this far only is allowed" (*Pharsalia* I.190-92). Although he trembles at Rome's warning, Caesar does not ultimately heed it, instead entering to conquer and overthrow the republican order. Similarly if more subtly pitting capital against ruler, Lydgate's London has not received Henry without reservation. We have seen as much in the speeches of various allegorical and legal representatives, which echo the words of Lucan's Rome, though with more deliberate indirection and conciliar nuance. Does Lydgate's closing praise not of Henry but of a personified "Newe Troye" evince a basically republican nostalgia meant carefully to resist the excessive laudation of imperial triumph and royal sovereignty embodied in the English "Sesar Julius," Henry VI?

Whether or not Lydgate has Lucan in mind in his 1432 verses, it is clear that Lydgate's Henry VI, Lucan's Julius Caesar, and Lydgate's Julius Caesar in the prose work *Serpent of Division* all share at least this in common: an encounter in an urban milieu with at least one authoritative feminine personification who urge(s) good governance. For both Lucan and Lydgate, moreover, the power of the royal-imperial office is or should be theoretically limited by conciliar agencies, whose voices emerge poetically in the imaginative distribution of anthropomorphic agency. For Lydgate, unlike

for Lucan, however, the Julius Caesar of imperial pretensions was an exemplum of *failed* rule; *Serpent* is an essentially a tragic text, despite Caesar's victory over Pompeii and later defense of Rome. What sort of ruler Henry VI would become remains to be seen at the time of the 1432 verses, but the idea that he should heed the advice of other fictive actors and the conciliar institutions they represent is what the event of the Entry, and Lydgate's poem, advises, even as it styles Henry VI as a triumphant emperor. Lydgate is being politically prudent; it was Pompeii's refusal of a second triumphal entry to Julius that instigated the latter's decision to cross the Rubicon and march troops into the city, against that city's own (fictive) warning, as Lucan imaginatively portrays it. Thus, even while it is the Julius Caesar who returns from conquering Gaul as a victorious general to whom Lydgate likens Henry VI (returning from Gaul -- i.e., France -- to England) and not the Julius Caesar who later sparks civil war by crossing the Rubicon, as a reader of Lucan Lydgate would perhaps not have been surprised if he had lived long enough to see England itself break out into a sort of *bellum civile* in the conflict between Henry VI and Edward IV.

The Politics of Fortune in Lydgate's Fall of Princes VI.1-518

Approximately one year before Lydgate versified Henry VI's triumphal entry into London, but still two years after Henry VI had been crowned King of England in Westminster, Humphrey of Gloucester commissioned John Lydgate to begin what would become the largest work of the poet's career, a behemoth exemplary narrative collection called the *Fall of Princes*, which ended up amounting to over thirty-six thousand lines of verse. A vast collection of tales about rulers who fell through the sometimes deserved

vicissitudes of Fortune, Lydgate's text is a translation of Boccaccio's mid-fourteenth-century *De casibus virorum illustrium*, primarily as mediated through a 1409 French prose version by Laurent de Premierfait, *Des Cas des nobles hommes et femmes*. Begun in 1431 and finished in 1439, the translation took Lydgate almost a decade to complete. Lydgate characteristically expands upon his French source, most notably by way of adding original moralistic envoys, specially requested by Humphrey of Gloucester as "remedies" against Fortune's unstable regime. Along with the nuanced portrayal of Fortune as capable of being resisted by prudent rulers, these envoys bolster the suggestion that Lydgate was deliberately situating *Fall* within the generic parameters of both *de casibus* and *speculum principum* traditions, the latter typically intended to fortify rulers against threats both within and without the ruler and his court.

While the majority of its lines are dedicated to instances of narrative *exempla*, the rhetorical device of allegorical personification proves an important structuring principle in the *Fall of Princes*, as scholars have recently noted. Fortune is a good example of how events are addressed by way of personification.³¹³ Dividing Boccaccio's original nine-part text into thirds (a division Lydgate carefully maintains), the personification emerges at the beginnings of both Book III and VI. Fortune appears in the first instance in an ultimately violent encounter with the opposing personification of Poverty, and latterly in a fraught dialogue with the persona of the author of Lydgate's ultimate source, Boccaccio, whom Lydgate refers to as "myn auctour Bochas" (VI.447). Kamath says of these allegorical interludes as they appear in Boccaccio's original *De casibus* that they

³¹³ The important notion of Fortune as a personification of "eventfulness" is derived from J. Allan Mitchell's *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature*, especially chapters 1 and 5. Kamath has recently noted that, as the "central concept of *De Casibus*" Fortune "finds expression as a personification." See Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 156.

“play a significant role in establishing Boccaccio’s authority in the context of a contemporary as well as classical literary tradition.”³¹⁴ Given that, as Mortimer notes, “the *Fall of Princes* is one of the most consistently partisan poems Lydgate ever wrote,” Lydgate’s poem is focused on investigating questions of political as well as literary authority.³¹⁵ Boccaccio dedicates his *De Casibus* to a friend, Cavalcanti; Laurent and Lydgate, by contrast, are commissioned by “powerful aristocratic patrons,” the Duc de Berry and Humphrey of Gloucester, respectively.³¹⁶ The political inflection of their translations increases accordingly as they adapt and elaborate upon Boccaccio’s earlier Latin text, with Lydgate primarily working from Laurent’s 1409 expanded Middle French version, as noted above. And yet “[e]ven as Lydgate’s text sets for itself a determined task of Lancastrian apology,” personification allegory plays a vital role in “the emergence of a more pessimistic counter-awareness,” which is itself supplemented by a positive vision for the critical role of public poetry in speaking with sideways glances to those in power, even patrons.³¹⁷

In what follows, I will argue that the vivid interlude between Fortune and Bochas in *Fall* VI works as a meta-fictional site for the imaginative theorization of political and authorial agency and authority.³¹⁸ Interestingly, within the first five-hundred lines of book VI, Lydgate treats multiple topics that we have seen in the chapters above: the so-called naturalization of politics, as in *Parliament of Fowls*; authorial agency and its

³¹⁴ Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 156-57.

³¹⁵ Nigel Mortimer, *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes: Narrative Tragedy in its Literary and Political Contexts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 40.

³¹⁶ Paul Strohm, *Politique*, 94.

³¹⁷ Paul Strohm, *England’s Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 190-91.

³¹⁸ Along with *King Henry VI’s Triumphal Entry into London*, Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* functions as a limit case on one end of the spectrum of political rhetoric in the group of texts we have explored in this study, with Langland as the most specifically “liberal” and reformist, and Chaucer somewhere between Langland and Lydgate as a relatively stable royalist with more tactically ambiguous rhetoric.

relation to personal ambition and ethical answerability, as in *House of Fame*; moral virtue and female rhetoric as political forces, as in *Tale of Melibee*; and the complex composition of royal identity and conduct as components of good governance, as in Langland's *Piers Plowman* and Lydgate's 1432 verses. My treatment of Fortune's personification in Lydgate's *Fall* will make a sort of fugal recapitulation of these topics.

The Natures of Fortune

In the first lines of *Fall of Princes* VI, Lydgate refers to Fortune in terms that suggest her existence on both literal and figurative levels of literary representation.³¹⁹ Foregrounding *prosopopoeia* as an effective heuristic in politically advisory narratives like *De casibus*, Lydgate describes the usefulness of personifying Fortune for “shewyng to us a maner resemblaunce.” Immediately after this rhetorical reflection, Fortune herself appears. As Bochas sits musing “in his studie” (VI.1) about the instability of “wordli thynges” and the impossibility of making Fortune “to be stable, / Hir dayli chaungis been so variable” (6-7), suddenly she materializes before him in an alarming spectacle:

To hym appered a monstrous ymage,
Partid on tweyne of colour & corage,
Hir rihte side ful of somer flours,
The tothir oppressid with wynter stormy shours.

Bochas astonid, fearful for to abraide
Whan he beheld the wonderful figure
Of Fortune, thus to hymself he saide:

³¹⁹ In addition to the passages examined below that imply Fortune's literal and allegorical significance, note also the meta-fictional moment later, when Fortune refers to a section in Book III, blaming Bochas for depicting her there as the loser in the wrestling match with the personification of Poverty. She is at once a reader of and a character in *Fall of Princes*: “And thou of purpos for tesclaundre me / Hast writt ungoodli a contrarious fable, / How I wastled with Glad Poverté, / To whos parti thou wer favourable, / Settest me abak, geyn me thou wer vengable” (VI.491-495). Kamath elaborates with reference to Bochas as narrator: “Issuing this rebuke, Fortune identifies herself as the character featured in the fable recounted by the narrator even as she enters into the level of textual reality occupied by the narrator.” See Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 158.

‘What may this meene? is this a creature
 Or a monster transffoormyd ageyns nature,
 Whos brennyng eyen sparklyng of ther liht
 As doon sterris the frosti wyntres niht?’
 (VI.18-28)

Like “resemblaunce” above, the choice of the term “ymage” implies the manufactured quality of Fortune, while referring to her as “the wonderful figure” that perplexes Bochas suggests both rhetorical artifice and anthropomorphic presence. Like *fiction*, so *figure* derives from the Latin infinitive *figere*, meaning “to make.” Etymologically, a figure is, like a *ficta*, ‘a thing made.’ Adding to her complex semiotic ontology, Fortune exists as a composition of two complementary physical realities, “partid on tweyne,” described in meteorological terms with one half bearing summer flowers and the other suffering winter showers. Fortune’s monstrousness stems from this fusion of natural opposites, and thus in her partial anthropomorphosis. Fortune has no feet, but

an hundred handis she hadde on ech part
 In sondri wise hir giftes to depart.

Summe off hir handis left up men aloffte
 To hih estat of worldly dignite,
 Anothir hand griped ful unsoffte,
 Which cast another in gret adversite:
 Gaff oon richesse, another poverte,
 Gaff summe also bi report a good name,
 Noised another of sclandre & diffame.
 (VI.34-42)

The image here is of Fortune’s “armys” (74) as the rotating spokes of her notorious wheel, which while lifting up some princes in that very motion cast down others.³²⁰ In the

³²⁰ Fortune evokes Chaucer’s Lady Fame; she is an agent of status, the bestower and remover of social honor, wealth, suffering, slander. Her chromatically manifold garment is likely a Boethian allusion (43-49), but also perhaps more directly derives from the multicolored robe of Alan of Lille’s Natura in *De Planctu Naturae*, which itself derives from Boethius.

diversity of her *effictio*, Fortune can assume the shape of other human figures, animals, mythological beings, and other non-human forms. The Protean range is astonishing:

Dulle as an asse whan men hadde haste to gon,
And as a swalwe gerissh of hir fliht,
Tween slouh & swift; now crokid & now upriht,
Now as a crepil lowe coorbid down,
Now a duery and now a champioun.

Now a coward, durst nat come in pres,
And sumwhile hardi as leoun;
Now lik Ector, now dreadful Thersites,
Now was she Cresus, now Agamenoun, [60]
Sardanapallus off condicioun;
Now was she mannyssh, now was she femynyne,
Now coude she reyne, now koude she falsli shyne.

Now a mermaid angelik off face,
A tail behynde verray serpentyne,
Now debonaire, now froward to do grace,
Now as a lamb trefable & benigne,
Now lik a wolff of nature to maligne,
Now Sirenes to synge folk a-slepe
Til Karibdis drowne hem in the deepe.
(VI.52-71)

The stanzas layer rhetorical devices here, deploying antonomasia in lines 59-61 and anaphora throughout with the temporal thrust of “Now,” such that through Bochas’ eyes Fortune makes these rapid changes in the present, displaying the power to change her own shape in a spectacle of figurative ontology. The scene that begins with Bochas musing on the utility of *prosopopoeia*, ends with his confusion before Fortune as a visible and unexpected instance of *prosopopoeia*. In seeking to mitigate the negative impact of this figure, Bochas, who “control[s] the means of expression by which we come to know Fortune,” has his work cut out for him.³²¹

³²¹ See Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 94.

The dynamism of Fortune's narrative appearance bears a deeper philosophical significance. Nigel Mortimer argues that in Lydgate's version of Fortune he modifies Boccaccio's *De casibus* and especially Laurent de Premierfait's *De cas* by tactically dissociating Fortune from God's will and aligning her with the concept of pure contingency.³²² This choice generates a certain ambiguity in the application of the moral envoys, since "it is difficult to offer ethical counsel to anyone who wishes to avoid downfall if you have just provided an exemplum which attests to the irrational, ineluctable workings of an amoral force."³²³ Paul Strohm has seen this ambiguity as the side-effect of Lydgate's generic adaptation of tragedy, in which the *De casibus* tradition, primarily oriented in the twelfth- to fourteenth-centuries toward advising a resigned "caution" in the face of contingency, becomes carefully assimilated to the *speculum principum* genre with its emphasis on princes' "action" against the regime of Fortune.³²⁴ Anthropomorphosis assists in imagining the finitude of that regime. Since a person bears an intrinsically moral answerability as a free agent (rather than an impersonal force), the utility of rhetorically personifying Fortune is that of enabling a concerted resistance to a conceivable, singular adversary to whom blame can be attached, rather than an amorphous force.

³²² See Mortimer, *John Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, 183-185.

³²³ Ibid, 187.

³²⁴ Locating this shift in the stereotypically "dull" fifteenth-century, Strohm emphasizes the importance of Lydgate's innovative impetus within a larger "proto-Machiavellian moment" that saw secular reason and pragmatic, this-worldly ends begin to eclipse eschatological consequence as a motivating factor in the realm of political deliberation. For Strohm's argument, see *Politique*, especially pp. 1-20 and 87-104. I agree generally with Strohm's argument, although there are important qualifications that can be made. I would follow J. Allan Mitchell in noting Strohm's strategic quotation practices (see excerpt from *FP* on the bottom of page 98 in *Politique*), for instance, and may want to qualify his characterization of Boccaccio on p. 92 of the same book with the Italian author's statement in *De Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* that, precisely through its incitement of a desire for renown, poetry "is an agency of moral regeneration of the state." See Lawton, "Dullness," 790.

Lydgate negotiates this more progressive position by way of Fortune's interlocutor, Bochas, even as their dialogic confrontation leaves open the efficacy of virtue in resisting the unpredictable forces of change.³²⁵ As their dialogue proceeds, Lydgate follows and elaborates upon Boccaccio's text, pitting the complex agencies of an authorial *persona* and a hybrid *prosopopoeia* against one another, something that emerges most clearly from the text by analytically following the dialogic thread in its relative order. Suspicious of Bochas' intent to enable princes to overcome contingency through reading *De casibus* texts, Fortune will have none of it. She wants to make it clear to Bochas that such effrontery against her sovereign haphazardness will not succeed. After her monstrous appearance, she says so in explicitly political terms:

‘Wheryn Bochas, I telle the yit ageyn,
Thou dost folie thi wittis for to plie;
All thi labour thou spillest in veyn,
Geyn my maneres so felli to replie, --
Bi thi writyng to fynde a remedie,
To interupte in thi laste dawes
My statutis and my custumable lawes.’
(VI.148-54)

The paradox of the fact that the personification of the concept of uncertainty itself here claims to possess “customable lawes” verges on parody. Herein, however, lies the unique efficacy of *prosopopoeia*, compressing contingency itself into the guise of nothing less than an autocratic ruler. At its heart, the stanza puts two sources and forms of agency into opposition: the author's rhetorical “labour” (150) of “writyng” (152), and Fortune's “maneres” (151) and “statutis” (154) of polymorphic figuration. These respectively authorial and fortunal agencies are Lydgate's primary vehicle for imaginatively

³²⁵ This evokes Kamath's point about *Fall* that “[t]he model of authorship conveyed by allegory allowed authors to implant their proper names or attributes in a way that demands individual attention in the context of a wider literary tradition, depending upon the cooperative investigation of readers.” See Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory*, 172.

theorizing the question of how rhetorical and political agencies intersect. Recalling how Geoffrey's attempt at a mirrored autonomy fails to evade or outflank Fame in *House of Fame*, what is similarly at stake here is whether the rhetorical labor of authorship can rival Fortune's anti-political agency. In contrast to Chaucer's poem, things look more hopeful. To begin, Lydgate deflects into the past his new "proto-Machiavellian" emphasis on the possibility of overcoming Fortune by having Fortune indict "philosophres olde" whose "labour" she identifies or at least pairs with

'...Travaile off poetis my maner to deprave,
 Hath been of yore to seyn lik as thei wolde
 Over my fredam the sovereynte to have.
 But of my lawes the libertes to save,
 Upon my wheel thei shal hem nat diffende,
 But whan me liste that thei shal dessende.'
 (VI.156-161)

Insisting that her "fredam" is threatened by a rival claim to "sovereynte" on the part of -- not princes, but *poets* -- Fortune assumes that rhetorical and thus literary-authorial agency has political power.³²⁶ In the final two lines of the stanza, Fortune retaliates by asserting her prerogative over all philosophers, princes, *and* poets. To support this claim, she shifts idiomatic registers. Rather than identify herself directly with God's will, Fortune figures herself according to models of eventfulness in Nature, moving away from assertive, royal statements toward a more defensive appeal to her similitude with non-human creation. Fortune's initial appearance and first speech in *Fall VI*, in fact, can be parsed according to rhetorical shifts between self-reference to her agency as alternatively natural (ll. 20-21, 26, 50-53, 162-72, 175, 183-89, 192-93) and political (ll. 127-61, 173, 190-91, 206-210,

³²⁶ As David Lawton notes, the relations between the literary and the political were perhaps the closest ever in the fifteenth-century. See Lawton, "Dullness," 792.

211-12). The desired effect is one of forcing her interlocutor's resignation in the face of the inevitability of her adaptable dominion:

‘Whi sholde men putte me in blame,
To folwe the nature of my double play?
With newe buddies doth nat ver the same,
Whan premeroles appeere fressh & gay? –
To-day thei shewe, to-morwe thei gon away.’
(IV.162-66)

Fortune, in accord with the personal ingenuity of her figurative ontology, strives rhetorically to embed the experience of contingent change that she represents with the impersonal entities of Nature, here the harmless budding of flowers. She camouflages her capricious duplicity within a reification of natural forces, deploying the same intensifying anaphora that Bochas had used earlier:

Now is the se calm and blandisshyng;
Now ar the wyndis comfortable & still;
Now is Boreas sturdy in blowing,
Which yonge sheep & blosmys greveth ille.
Whi also shold I nat have my wille,
To shewe my-silf now smothe and aftir trouble,
Sith to my kynde it longeth to be double?
(VI.169-175)

Just as Chaucer in *Parliament of Fowls* had let the stratification of the avian parliament according to species types suggest the problems with naturalized politics and conciliar form, so Lydgate here lets the contradictions inherent to Fortune's claim for two opposing types of agency -- political and natural -- speak for themselves. Through her attempted self-naturalization, Fortune effectively claims to occupy a middle position between divine executrix and random chance. The implicit but never foregrounded assumption is that, if Fortune's destructive antics accord with the natural order, *and* she is

indeed an agent of God, or at least a permanent fixture in the divinely ordered creation – then she is also beyond political resistance or poetic remedy.³²⁷

Reasons to hope this is not the case soon resurface. Lydgate *via* Bochas emphasizes two specific means by which Fortune may be overcome: virtue and rhetoric. Immediately after clarifying that the real reason he plans to write is less for notoriety than “Teschewe slouhthe & vices al my lyve” (234), Bochas confronts Fortune’s attempt to naturalize -- and hence render inevitable -- her own agency:

Yit koude I rekne thynges that be stable:
As vertuous lyf abidyng unmutable,
Set hool to Godward of herte, will & thought,
Maugre thi poweer, & ne chaungith nouht...
[....]
A man that is enarmed in vertu
Ageyn thi myht to make resistence,
And set his trust be grace in Crist Iesu,
And hath al hool his hertli advertence
On rihtwisnesse, force & on prudence,
With ther suster called attemperaunce,
Hath a saufconduit ageyn thi variaunce!
(VI.242-245, 253-259)

Against the instability of Fortune’s wheel, a life of virtue can overpower all forces of change – here is the new political message that Strohm identifies in Lydgate’s *Fall*.

Along with this shift in vernacular political theory, several more anthropomorphic figures are generated: “rihtwisnesse, force & on prudence, / With ther suster called attemperaunce” (257-258). Beneath or perhaps within the agency of “a man that is

³²⁷ What is not addressed is the philosophical contradiction of likening natural necessity and free volition, especially without reference to any sort of Boethian “conditional necessity.” Bochas’ interesting and otherwise apparently tangential etiological discussion of “destyne” (284) and “Predestynacioun” (299) addresses this distinction in precise theoretical terms, and rejects Fortune’s claim to somehow embody both necessity and freedom: “Predestynacioun nouthur prescience / Nat apperteene, Fortune, unto the” (299-300).

enarmed in vertu" (253), other moral agents reside. Ultimately, Fortune finds herself outnumbered:

Thei sette no stoor be thi double wheele,
With supportacioun of other ladies thre;
Ther trust stant nat in maile, plate or stel,
But in these vertues: feith, hope & charite,
Callid vertues theologicie,
Which with foure afforn heer specefied,
Thi wheel & the han uttirli defied.
(VI.260-266)

These are no gentle ladies; and, despite Strohm's emphasis on the four cardinal virtues, and hence his neglect of the above stanza in *Fall* and his focus on Lydgate's *Disguising at London*, it is the "other ladies thre....callid vertues theologicie" which undergird the "foure afforn heer specefied." Lydgate seems to offer less of a secularized model of proto-Machiavellian strategies, in other words, than a distinctively Christian political theology in which the virtues together compose the citizen or king as an anti-fortunal actor-network.

One of the virtues is put forward as vital for the exercise of specifically rhetorical agency, for "langage [should] conveied be bi prudence" (324; cf. 353, 389). After tactical introduction of an important classical figure in whom virtue and rhetoric preeminently inhere -- "Tullius, cheef prince of elloquence" (327) -- Bochas elaborates on the value of prudent language, much like a Chaucerian text in which prudence plays a significantly garrulous and politick role, Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*. The political foundation narrative of "kyng Amphioun with his fair langages" (339) provides the occasion for connecting prudent speech to the peace of a well-ordered state: "wher is pes is prudence policie / In ech kyngdam and every gret contre" (353-54). Comparable in its effects of contesting the

“violence” (364) inspired by Fortune, the peacemaking use of “fair langages”

complements the possession and exercise of virtue:

In ther discords tween kyngdames & cites,
Afftir the sharpenesse of thi cruel rage
Onli bi mene of speche & fair langage,
Folk be thi fraude fro grace ferr exilid,
Wer be fair speche to unite reconcilid.
(VI.374-78)

Asserting that there is “no mateer so ferr out of the weie” (408) that prudent rhetoric cannot resolve it peacefully by “voidyng dyvisioun” (405), Lydgate *via* Bochas refers to his own poetic project in *Fall* (cf. 397), implying subtly that the compilation of tragedies of fallen princes in which Fortune dwells may itself serve as a further instance of “faire speche” (410) with positive -- that is, anti-fortunal -- political impact. Rhetoric, and its late-medieval public enactment in poetic authorship, can prove effective against Fortune. Cognizant that he still depends on Fortune’s provision of further narratives in order to execute this project, however, Bochas tactically redirects the very resources of “gracious language” (409) toward persuading Fortune to assist him, “& gan speke faire” (430) to her. Bochas’ subsequent appeal to the hope that “his fame myhte ferther spreede” (435) as a reason for seeking Fortune’s help can be seen as dissembling, and while it seems that Fortune sees through his pretense (cf. 470-76), prudent virtue and rhetoric can mitigate the consequences of her wheel’s ineluctable downturn. Through the combined forces of various sub-human moral agents and any number of cited examples of past persons, Bochas deploys rhetorical figuration within poetic narrative in order to combat the “central concept” of his behemoth commission, Fortune herself. That his own name remains subject to Fortune and Fame in the “Hous of Fame” is a small price to pay, ultimately, for the potential real-world impact of practical, public poetry like *Fall*.

Bochas (and Lydgate), unlike Geoffrey (and Chaucer), considers it one worth paying. He hopes that his princely and civic readers will feel the same.

But beyond the metafictional setting of the dialogue between Fortune and Bochas, has personifying Fortune helped Lydgate articulate and defend rhetorical and political prudence? Our prior discussion of double agencies figured by personification in the first section of *Fall* VI -- authorial and fortunal, natural and political -- has indicated the double utility of personifying Fortune. In Mitchell's words,

Fortune is in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* metonymic of the contingent, mutable historical events she disposes but does not adequately stand in for as proxy. Bochas -- attempting to derive narrative artifacts from Fortune at the same time as disavowing the sovereignty of Fortune -- conscripts this figure as both accomplice and adversary.³²⁸

Is Fortune, therefore, either "a convenient fiction....[or] the name of that which gives access to a dynamic becoming?"³²⁹ Building upon perhaps an etymological sense of "convenience," that of "coming-together" or convening, I contend that the compression of multiple contradictory natural forces and unnatural features in Fortune has *both* amplified *and* complicated the power of allegorical personification. On the one hand, *prosopopoeia* enables Fortune's participation in discourse with Bochas, bringing an abstract concept onto the concrete scale of narrative existence and interlocution. On the other hand, Fortune can appear and change shape at will; these facts and her hybrid features suggest the limits of anthropomorphic figuration, and render her both overtly fictional and yet all the more unpredictable in her narrative presence. The ultimate witness to the productive rhetorical power and potential political impact of personification comes, however, in the admission of Fortune herself, who cannot stand

³²⁸ Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 95.

³²⁹ See *ibid*, 96.

being represented in human-shape. In her closing statements, Fortune reiterates at length her dissatisfaction with being figuratively anthropomorphized:

In this mateer your witt doth never feynte,
Ymagynyng liknessis in your mynde,
Lik your conceitis ye forge me & peynte,
Sumtyme a woman with wenges set behynde,
And portreye me with eien that be blynde.
(VI.456-460; cf. 491-495, 498-504)

Fortune expresses unhappiness about being portrayed in anthropomorphic terms, and she claims somewhat unintelligibly that poets personify her out of a desire for fame, a card played well by Bochas, as we have seen above. Yet the poetic ingenuity (456-458) required for enacting this figuration generates hope for a reformed laureate role -- one of speaking truth to power *through fiction* -- that Lydgate with tactical irony has Fortune promise to Bochas, “[t]hi werk texpleite the laurer for to wynne” (517). In doing so Lydgate – himself a hopeful for the “Hous off Fame” (514) -- is in the process of appropriating that role for himself, Bochas’ hopeful successor.

For the ultimate question is not whether figuratively anthropomorphizing Fortune (or any concept) fails to exhaust the concrete, multifaceted reality of the concept’s referent. The question at issue here and in each chapter above is whether figurative anthropomorphosis, as a form of imaginative theorization, gives added traction to a reader’s investment in and grasp of the agencies at stake (including their own) in public matters of concern addressed within and around a particular text. If the introduction of fictional agents can thicken the actor-network of author-text-reader in such a way that agency can be redistributed toward more equitable outcomes (whether regiminal reform, conciliar governance, authorial humility, domestic and regional peace, or otherwise), then *prosopopoeia* can be seen as non-identically recuperating its early legal role in the new

mixed realm of poetic and political representation in the late Middle Ages. Producing fictional persons not only heuristically expands the narrative commons wherein possible conversations about the common good unfold, but also addresses and analyzes specific affairs of state by helping human rulers conceive the prospects of governance and association within the imaginative milieus of interaction we have been calling actor-networks, or ecologies. These are both models and goods of political process, as suggested in closing below.

Conclusion: Royal Readers

Thus exposed to a variety of literary modes -- exemplary narratives, moralizing envoys, allegorical interludes of metafictional theorization -- princes have much to consider in the process of reading *Fall of Princes*. Yet it was not only princes who were meant to read *Fall*. Scanlon sees exemplary narratives in the *speculum cum de casibus* tradition as performing the rhetorical coronation of any readership:

spectacles of royal power invite the viewer's identification with the monarch at their center....such identification is essential to the *Fall of Princes*. By morally enjoining his readers to put themselves in the position of his exemplary monarchs, Lydgate implicitly offers them discursive participation in royal power.... To the extent they moralize the princely falls they behold, [readers] can control the process of identification, sharing the power, but protecting themselves from the punishment.³³⁰

By thus democratizing the function of royal counsel to readers, exemplary narratives serve to interpellate audiences as active citizens capable of imagining what they would do if put in positions of royal power, faced with challenges that require prudent virtue. The dialogue between Bochas and Fortune in *Fall* VI supplements this exemplary logic with a reflexive component, deepening the reader's awareness of the complex fortunal agencies

³³⁰ Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, Power*, 345.

that princes face and, through allegorical personification, broadening the applicability of *de casibus* narratives that otherwise might be so particularly related to royal circumstances that they are irrelevant to readerly fortunes.³³¹ And yet what of the text's preeminent reader, Lydgate's patron Humphrey?

Seen in light of its patronage context, the *Fall of Princes* -- like the 1432 verses -- has been interpreted as outright propaganda. As we saw above, Straker defines propaganda as "an alliance between political authority and culture to harness a community in pursuit of that authority's ends."³³² Yet this definition, whatever its strengths, does not quite capture the partisan rhetorical positioning of *Fall* with regard to its patron. While being "valued by its patron for its embodiment of ethical and political wisdom," Lydgate's *Fall* goes further; it "promot[es Humphrey] to the rank of a celebrated potentate at a sensitive time in English parliamentary history."³³³ In Book II, Lydgate had described his patron thus: "Stable in study alwey he contune / Settyng aside all chaungis of Fortune" (II.389-90). The implication is that, as Mitchell puts it, "Humphrey has to be an exception to the *Fall of Princes*."³³⁴ The idea that the patron is an exception from the matters at issue in the narratives, specifically the destructive agency of Fortune, reenacts in rhetorical form the "state of exception" that Giorgio Agamben has delineated within the concept of political sovereignty.³³⁵ The figure of the sovereign lawgiver, according to Agamben's reading of Roman law, is by definition

³³¹ As Mortimer notes, "the cathartic impact which is generated by the *casus* form (and, chiefly, the fear aroused in the reader lest a similar fate should befall him) is subverted [...] when detail and accusations are so particular, it is difficult for a reader to feel that the same misfortune could happen to him or her." See Mortimer, *John Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, 39.

³³² Scott-Morgan Straker, "Propaganda," 122.

³³³ See Mortimer, *John Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, 61; and Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 106.

³³⁴ Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 107. David Lawton likewise notes that in relation to Fortune's humiliation of princes throughout history, "Duke Humphrey has to be cast as some sort of exception." See Lawton, "Dullness," 786.

³³⁵ See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1-31.

above the law, and hence exempted from the law's binding power. In this way the sovereign is given license to act without penalty even against laws that bind all others. By suggesting that its patron is immune from Fortune in this way, Lydgate's *Fall* assumes a propagandistic aspect. Yet personification again proves vital in qualifying this suggestion, as we can better understand by comparison with one of *Fall*'s most important Middle English precedents.

John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* deploys personification in crafting a politically sensitive poet-patron relationship, qualifying patronal and propagandistic discourse with a more figurative idiom of political rhetoric: tactical anthropomorphism in dialogic form. John Gower helped establish the sort of public role for poetry that Lydgate was to exploit and expand.³³⁶ In the prologue to the first recension of his *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1386-1390), Gower describes his encounter with Richard II, who had by then already begun to practice the abuses of power that instigated the Appellant crisis and its suppression in the Merciless Parliament of 1388. A decade later Richard would become an all but absolutist king, introducing policies of sovereign exceptionality such as the Treason Act of 1397. This putatively parliamentary act aligned the monarch's private and public bodies to the extent that any negative criticism against Richard's private person could be deemed as treason against the Crown. The act totally identified royal sovereignty -- otherwise a function of the king's public body as legally constituted by the commonwealth and sanctioned by conciliar institutions -- with the singular human monarch. It was this

³³⁶ For more on the affinities between Gower and Lydgate, see J. Allan Mitchell, "John Gower and John Lydgate: Forms and Norms of Rhetorical Culture," *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture, c. 1350-c.1500*. Ed. Peter Brown. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009. 569-584; and Derek Pearsall, "The Gower Tradition." *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*. Ed. A.J. Minnis (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1983). For a good recent study of Gower and political, public poetry, see Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio Amantis* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2014).

monarch who invited Gower onto his ship of state, a barge on the Thames. It was a meeting orchestrated, Gower wryly informs us, by Fortune herself:

In Temse whan it was flowende
As I by bote cam rowende,
So as Fortune hir tyme sette,
My liege lord par chaunce I mette;
And so bifel, as I cam neigh,
Out of my bot, whan he me seigh,
He bad me come into his barge.
(*CA Prol.* 39-45)³³⁷

Richard goes on to “charge” Gower to compose “som newe thing,” a charge fulfilled by the *Confessio* itself. It is a charge that must be scrupulously followed, as a realization of the sovereign’s will: “For that thing may nought be refused / Which that a king himselve byt” (74-75). Yet even in admitting the latter, Gower’s text seems at one remove from an unambiguous affirmation of Ricardian power. Rather than suggest the far-reaching dictate of a beneficent monarch, the lines quoted above describe a relatively casual conversation that simultaneously casts a shadow of royal caprice across the *Confessio*. The presence of the personification of Fortune in line 41 subtly if crucially qualifies the nature of the king’s meeting with Gower, and hence of the king’s own request as by no means something that obviously or naturally derives from a concern with common profit. By embedding his meeting with Richard within the larger regime of Fortune, Gower also delimits the sovereignty (74-75) of Richard’s commission of *Confessio*, leaving the sort of space for adapting his political allegiance in the recensions. Richard is no less capricious, and precisely therefore *less* politically agential in a positive sense, than Fortune herself. Thus emerges a certain textual-authorial agency, with its own contingent

³³⁷ All quotations from John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 1-3. Ed. Russell Peck (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004-2013).

contours, that counters -- even while being enabled by -- the patronal-royal imperatives of the patronal context.

Among other changes, Gower removes the personification of Fortune in the third, Lancastrian recension -- why? To tip the scale away from Ricardian caprice and toward an acknowledgement of poetic rhetoric's positive agency in the field of political influence. In the place of Fortune's agency, not to mention the entire meeting and conversation with Richard II, is an extended reflection on the political impact of poetic writing.³³⁸ In Gower's words,

If no man write hou that it stode,
The pris of hem that weren goode
Scholde, as who seith, a gret partie
Be lost; so for to magnifie
The worthi princes that tho were,
The bokes schewen hiere and there,
Whereof the world ensampled is;
And tho that deden thanne amis
Thurgh tirannie and crualte
Right as thei stoden in degre,
So was the wrytinge of here werk.
Thus I, which am a burel clerk,
Purpose for to wryte a bok...
(CA prol. 41-53)

Whereas in the first recension it is the king himself that charges Gower to write the poem in a conversation occasioned by Fortune, here Gower presents the poem as a self-motivated endeavor, one driven by his authorial "purpose" (53). Conscious of the important role of literary rhetoric for political order, Gower attributes the composition of this poem to his own initiative, effectively politicizing the poetic enterprise. Gower hopes

³³⁸ Replaces is a more accurate term than "revises," as Peck has noted, given the equivalent length of deleted and added lines. See Russell Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 8. Peck notes that "it suggests more than revision; it amounts to obliteration. The content of the new passage is markedly different than the nostalgic autobiography of the first."

his readers will “drawe into remembrance / The fortune of this worldes chance, / The which no man in his persone / Mai knowe, bot the god alone” (69-72). In these lines the personification of Fortune that we saw in the Ricardian recension has been more directly replaced by the concept of the impersonal “fortune of this worldes chance,” which is no less hazardous in its unknowable effects, but very different than Lady Fortune. Several lines down, Gower refers to a king who, it is intimated, is very different than Richard. Gower dedicates his text to “myn oghne lord, / Which of Lancastre is Henri named” (86-87). Peck’s suggestion that, in the face of Ricardian misgovernance in the final decade of the fourteenth-century, Gower was increasingly capable of reimagining the English monarchy as more disseminated finds concentrated exemplification here in the disappearance of Richard and the depersonalization of Fortune. For Gower’s evolving poem, there seems to be some relation between Ricardian rule and the personification of absolute contingency – and the same could be said, perhaps, for Chaucer’s Lady Fame. If it is true that Gower’s changing poetics of personification in the recensions relates to -- or reflects -- his genuine political views, then such would seem to exculpate Gower of political expediency in making the changes he did to the prologue.³³⁹ Rather than partisan sycophancy, Gower’s tactical shift in poetic figuration reflects a more thoughtful change in perspective, one that identifies, and is admittedly careful about expressing too loudly, the instability of ill-defined royal sovereignty, even while being realistic about his own

³³⁹ For critical interpretations against the expediency of Gower’s motives, see Anne Middleton, “The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II,” *Speculum* 53.1 (Jan 1978): 98; and Russell Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 8-10.

“patronal” imperatives.³⁴⁰ That Richard was to be deposed less than a decade after Gower’s third recension intimates that his political sights were right on target.

Admittedly, the shift from having the presence of a sovereign, active patronal figure in the prologue in the Ricardian recension to a passive dedicatee in the third, “Lancastrian” recension complicates the author-patron relationship, to say the least. As both patron and ruler in the first recension, Richard performs a similar role for and in Gower’s *Confessio* that Humphrey does for Lydgate four decades later. Likewise, the *Confessio* performs a similar role vis-à-vis Richard as Lydgate’s *Fall* would vis-à-vis Humphrey. Lydgate may have taken lessons from Gower’s *Confessio* in his meta-exploration of patronage context in *Fall of Princes*, not only in the scenes that evoke Lydgate’s authorial and Humphrey’s patronal roles, but also in the dialogue between Bochas and Fortune. Bochas’ responses to Fortune in book VI come from the mouth of a critical and politically informed author not unlike the Gower of the Lancastrian recension, each certain that reading *de casibus* narratives can have reformist impact on real regimes. And both poets support the cause of a Lancastrian duke with royal pretensions, though only Henry of Bolingbroke’s hopes come to fruition.

We can, in fact, discern a tragic irony in the way that Humphrey’s rhetorical sovereignty belies his frustrated ambition to appropriate actual political sovereignty during Henry VI’s minority, despite the fact that Humphrey would manage to preside over Parliament the same year as commissioning the *Fall*.³⁴¹ Consider Scanlon’s comment above about non-royal readers discursively participating in royal power, moralizing the falls of others and avoiding the punishment. If the poem figures Henry as

³⁴⁰ For more on Gower’s *Confessio* as a “patronal” text, see David Carlson, *John Gower, Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth-Century England* (Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 14, 200.

³⁴¹ See Mortimer, *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes*, 53-60; and Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness*, 106-107.

the Lancastrian exemption from not punishment but discursive participation, then by the same token it ironically precludes him from any rhetorical identification with royal power. Such subtlety was all Lydgate could afford, perhaps, throughout most of the *Fall*, but “in the very last envoy,” Lydgate boldly “slams home the moral of the whole book to Humphrey himself,” which Lawton goes so far as to call a sort of “revenge.”³⁴² Even moral Gower does not go as far as Lydgate in this regard. The latter’s closing envoy to Humphrey threatens to undo the sovereign exception of patronage that had otherwise been carefully crafted. The upshot? Fortune holds sway over even those who, like Humphrey, presume not to need to read the narratives of demise that *Fall* recounts. Whichever ruler they support, however, Gower and Lydgate open and close their vernacular *de casibus* poems with gestures toward the possibility of a virtuous Lancastrian conquest of “this worldes chance” (*Confessio* prol.70). In both, the absence or overcoming of the personification of Fortune marks this possibility.

Given his own political decline, which reads like a *de casibus* narrative and is in fact included as one in the *Mirror for Magistrates*, one could be forgiven for thinking that perhaps Humphrey really never did read *Fall*.³⁴³ But while Humphrey falls in *Mirror*, Lydgate’s *Fall* is given gentler treatment by the authors of that later text – but only just. As Strohm notes, the multiple authors of the *Mirror* brought a copy of Lydgate’s *Fall* into their editorial meeting for the 1559 edition of *Mirror*. While their ultimate decision was not to reissue *Fall* and instead to “usurp Bochas rowme” by composing a new work,

³⁴² See Lawton, “Dullness,” 786. As Straker also says, “It is a fundamental misunderstanding of Lydgate to assert his complicity in his patrons’ self-interested and aggressive agendas, because such an assertion overlooks his willingness to criticize those agendas.” See Straker, “Propaganda,” 121. For the final envoy to Humphrey, see Lydgate, *Fall of Princes* IX.3541-3588.

³⁴³ As Mortimer notes, “Humphrey himself is inscribed into the *de casibus* tradition which his commission did so much to foster.” See Mortimer, *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes*, 56.

“[n]evertheless, Boccaccio and Lydgate are brought respectfully before the meeting, assigned a place at the table, as it were, and acknowledged as precedential in the syndicate’s activities.”³⁴⁴ This passing instance of *prosopopoeia* in Strohm’s critical description of the sixteenth-century reception history of *Fall* crowns our study of the significance of anthropomorphic agency for endeavors in political rhetoric. In personifying their poetic predecessors, the editors of *Mirror* echo the activity of Chaucer’s Prudence in assembling a citational parliament and, by casting their editorial/authorial activity as revolutionary usurpation, they obliquely perpetuate the triumph of Bochas over Fortune, disclosing the dynamic affinities between political authority, anthropomorphic agency and rhetorical poetics in the later Middle Ages. As Quintilian had put it long before, “a speech cannot be conceived without being conceived as the speech of some person.”³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Strohm, *Politique*, 89.

³⁴⁵ Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae* IX.ii.32.

Conclusion: Recapitulation and (Realist) Speculation

In the course of the above chapters, we have explored the literary texts of three late-medieval writers: Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, and John Lydgate. Their work represents a significant corpus in which *prosopopoeia* is used to address issues of public, often political, concern.³⁴⁶ Within the parameters of this study, I have explored how instances of poetic personification can be interpreted as a means for redistributing agency, composing actor-networks that attempt to allocate answerability more equitably among human and non-human agents. In allusions to political milieus, this has involved negotiating between sovereign and conciliar institutions, alternately centralizing and democratizing representative agency as situations demand or permit. A political focus has opened out into more philosophical considerations, such as the relationship between natural and voluntary community, allegorical and literal meaning, moral responsibility, necessity and freedom (and contingency), and human and non-human, all of which have accrued varied resonances in close-readings of multiple texts.

After exploring various premodern political theories that used rhetorical anthropomorphosis, we saw in chapter one how Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* navigates relations of individual and collective, as well as free and instinctual, agency through the personification of Nature and a parliament of birds, ultimately in order to explore the tension between politics and sexuality and its unexpected resolution in female prerogative and festive procreation. In *House of Fame*, redistributions of agency across literary history and into Fame's realm manifest the simultaneously affective and ethical

³⁴⁶ Besides several other texts by Lydgate, there is also Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*, John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, key portions of Thomas Hoccleve's *Male Regle*, along with anonymous texts like *Dives and Pauper*, *Assembly of Gods*, *Court of Sapience*, *Richard the Redeless*, and *Mum and the Sothsegger*, just to name a few.

affordances of *prosopopoeia*. In this poem, personification incites the reader's empathy even while enabling the eschatological depiction of an hybrid anthropomorphism whose sovereign injustice pits itself against authorial attempts to recuperate the moral agency of texts. In Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee*, the moral agency of past texts congeals into an *auctor*-network of citations as wide as the tale itself, though no wider than the personified virtue who both rhetorically embodies and narratively instigates that network toward the tactical reconciliation of violence in forgiveness, again with an eye toward the *eschaton*. In *Piers Plowman*, the crisis of monetarily mediated agency against social equity motivates the production of personified conciliar-psychological agents whose interaction on several scales, both within and around the complex person of the sovereign, echoes the ideal theorization of royal governance. In Lydgate's writings, royal governance comes under the tutelage of an array of personified agents, both in the spectacle of Henry VI's civic entry and in the accounts of Fortune's hard lessons in *Fall of Princes*, the latter mitigated by poets like Bochas and the rhetorical figuration they deploy as a political agency in its own right.

Rhetorical personification is a very specific type of figurative language, and its negotiation of allegorical and literal-mimetic meaning has been central to our analyses of literary texts. In the introduction, we referred to Lavinia Griffiths' study of *Piers Plowman* in order to galvanize one of this project's larger goals, that of indicating the complexity and dynamism of a literary device that has all too often been passed off as simplistic and primitive. Griffiths identifies a unique phenomenological dynamism within the device: "[b]ecause there can be considerable variation in the degree of 'concreteness' or 'abstraction' of each of these [personifications], the transformation of the concept or

principle into the being in the story can engender a number of different forms.”³⁴⁷ The forms are diverse instantiations of an image of visualizable human-ness that persists and underlies every personification. That image amounts in a narrative to unified bodily presence and linguistic agency. So, if “[t]he personification trope allows for some exploration of an abstraction – and of a person,” then what have we learned about what it means to be a person in this study of making persons (*prosopopoeia*)?³⁴⁸ One thing we have learned is that one is never a person in isolation. This is an ethical, political, epistemological, and ontological statement that has horizontal and vertical dimensions. We have seen how these dimensions intersect in more “diagonal” formulations of both answerability, whether immediate or *post-mortem*, and representation, whether conciliar or sovereign. The ethical and political aspects, with occasional theological resonance, have defined the parameters of my study.

Looking a bit beyond those parameters toward epistemology and ontology, a second thing we have seen is that, since all anthropomorphism masks a fundamental limitation of human perspective, the practice of generating fictional persons is at its best both reflexively and critically deployed, albeit oriented toward an ideal whose pursuit has the potential to shape the real. Griffiths notes that personification allegories “see abstract intellectual systems – cosmology, ethics, logic, history – in terms of human relations.”³⁴⁹ Rather than concluding that personification is therefore reductive by default, I turned in the Introduction to the suggestive work of thinkers like Bruno Latour for theoretical resources that justify a renewed attention to the heuristic affordances of figurative anthropomorphism, especially when aiming to democratize deliberation and discussion

³⁴⁷ Lavinia Griffiths, *Personification in Piers Plowman*, 50.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 63.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 105.

on matters of public concern. In this way, the device of personification operates as a method to satisfy rhetorically the conciliar principle of *quod omnes tangit*. In the “politic” deployments of premodern *prosopopoeia* that we have examined, this has had to do largely with exploring forms of representative governance and equitable association. While the same political concerns abide today, various “eco-” disciplines – political ecology, post-growth economics, eco-theology, etc. – strive to articulate the need for modes of defamiliarized perception and material convocation in our localized and global *oikoi*.³⁵⁰ Anthropomorphism has a part to play.

And so here is not a closing but hopefully an opening speculation. If thought of as a rhetorical – and therefore social and perhaps to an extent legal -- means for redistributing agency beyond the standard channels of power in an inert, instrumentalist universe, *prosopopoeia* can contribute significantly if subtly to re-enchanting the common world of nonhuman and human creation and sub-creation.³⁵¹ Ideally, this re-enchantment would help lure our current social imaginary away from objectifying and commodifying modes of vision that encourage policy without equity and agency without answerability. For Johann Huizinga was, after all, wrong on two counts in his *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. First of all, in assuming that philosophical realism is the sign of a primitive mind – we now have a revamped (speculative) realism.³⁵² A word of caution nonetheless: while Jane Bennett suggests that there is “something to be said for moments of methodological naivete,” any recuperated philosophical realism would need

³⁵⁰ For examples of the latter, see Bruno Latour, “Will non-humans be saved? An argument in eco-theology,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009): 459-475.

³⁵¹ The term “sub-creation” was coined by J.R.R. Tolkien to refer to the creative activity of creatures, especially human art. See J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories,” in *A Tolkien Miscellany* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 2002), 134.

³⁵² See footnote 381 in Appendices for Huizinga’s perspective on this front.

to steer far clear of the ill-motivated literalism of, say, the rioters in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*.³⁵³ The idiocy of presuming to track down – and *kill* – an imagined personal agent named Death is hilarious, but no less violent. Given their own resultant deaths, the tale is a sober reminder of the limits of any “methodological naivete” involved in rhetorical anthropomorphism, even when utilized as a self-conscious element in, for instance, political ecology. The methodological naivete must be undergirded by a critical vantage, which is itself always already embedded in a deeper epistemological humility. As William Desmond puts it in a reflection on anthropomorphism, “we have to name otherness in a way that names our failure to name otherness.”³⁵⁴ In this regard, the expression at the beginning of this conclusion regarding my study's limitation in scope can be supplemented by expressing a limitation of method, for it takes – and I have practiced in my readings above -- a certain willing suspension of disbelief, in Coleridge's original sense, to overcome cognitive prejudices and standard patterns of allocating agency, and to think more seriously about fictional realism and its Bakhtinian appreciation of speech-acts and the effect of language in the world.³⁵⁵ As Elizabeth Fowler has noted, “[a] strong explanation is necessarily an action that changes human experience.”³⁵⁶ Granting that language can change the world of its referents is less nominalism than a sort of realist ethnography, something Latour exemplifies. Secondly, beholden to a pessimistic positivism, Huizinga wrongly presumes that the world is devoid of any living agency save the human mind, which must therefore impose its

³⁵³ See Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 17.

³⁵⁴ See William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 135.

³⁵⁵ See Benjamin Schneider and Tatjana von Solodkoff, “In Defense of Fictional Realism,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 59.234 (January 2009): 138-148.

³⁵⁶ Elizabeth Fowler, *Literary Character*, 24.

epistemological straightjacket on an inert, lifeless cosmos. Against this point, figurative anthropomorphism, for all its obvious limitations, can nonetheless ably and entertainingly admit the impression, whether premodern or non-modern, that “there lives the dearest freshness deep down things.”³⁵⁷ Besides humbling anthropocentric pretensions to mastery over created things (even concepts!), *prosopopoeia* imagines the ubiquity of agency and life, a kind of *élan vital* among a plurality of modes of existence, which might be the more accurate and more evidential perspective, too.³⁵⁸ Tolkien suggested that, among humanity’s “profounder wishes,” is “the desire to converse with other living things” – can we include “non-living” things?³⁵⁹ Yet where to draw that mystifying line – or why draw it at all?³⁶⁰ In seeking association with what is not itself by giving the only form it can give – that is, its own – the human practice of linguistic person-making evinces at once an infinite desire and a finite capacity. It is a wise idiocy.³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ See Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” l. 10.

³⁵⁸ See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1944); Erazim Kohak, *The Embers and the Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

³⁵⁹ See J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 134.

³⁶⁰ See Rowan Williams, “Mind all the way down: On Darwin’s Pious Idea.” *ABC Religion and Ethics*. 24 June 2011. Web. 9 December 2014. Williams argues for the latency of consciousness in matter, implying a “realism” that lends *prosopopoeia* scientific warrant: “The possibility of a first-person perspective, if it truly emerges from the unfolding logic of material combination and recombination, simply tells us that the notion of a necessarily ‘mindless’ matter is not sustainable. If the nature of a gene is to carry a message, it is the nature of the recipient vehicle in a new generation to be able to ‘understand’ it. To adapt a famous remark about one mythological cosmology, it’s mind all the way down. Intelligence as we define it entails self-consciousness, the first-person perspective; but something seriously analogous to intelligence has to be presupposed in matter for the entire system of transmitted patterns and ‘instructions’ to be possible.”

³⁶¹ William Desmond explores this paradox: “Philosophy has named itself the search for wisdom. And wisdom entails some fulfillment of the desire for knowing. Yet what if we attained a breakthrough into such wisdom? Knowing implies a relatedness or community of knower and known. What would our breakthrough into such metaxological mindfulness mean? While we still seek wisdom, there is a disjunction between knower and known, a surpassing of the dualistic opposition of self and other? But if we totally surpassed this opposition would not the result be a kind of idiocy?” See William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others*, 309.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.

Definitions of Personification in Late Antique and Medieval Rhetoric: Emporius, Priscian, Isidore of Seville, Alberic of Monte Cassino, Averroes (Ibn Sina), Evrard of Bethune, & Geoffrey of Vinsauf

Emporius' definition in his fifth-century text, *De Ethopoeia*, emphasizes how the device of *prosopopoeia* generates a fictional agent. Like Quintilian, Emporius cites Cicero's *In Catilinam* I.27 as a paradigmatic example of personification. He contends that the figure of personification "involves giving words to the dumb and creating a person who does not really exist, as when M. Tullius attributes words to the province of Sicily or represents the republic as speaking; this is called *prosopopoeia*."³⁶² Note his mention of how the device involves "creating a person who does not really exist," with the example of Cicero's attribution of speech to a regional polity. Personhood and politics can be seen to rub shoulders here.

In the sixth century, Priscian's *Progymnasmata*, destined to become a medieval school text, "featured twelve exercises which students used to compose and practice speeches for each of the three rhetorical genres: epideictic, deliberative, and forensic."³⁶³ Priscian delineates the subtle yet important difference between impersonation (*ethopoeia*) and personification (*prosopopoeia*) as tantamount to the shift from representing humans to representing non-humans. For Priscian, Cicero's passage serves to exemplify the latter:

³⁶² Joseph M. Miller, Michael H. Prosser, and Thomas W. Benson, *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 35.

³⁶³ William Purcell, *Ars Poetria: Rhetorical and Grammatical Invention at the Margin of Literacy* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 29.

Impersonation is the imitation of speech accommodated to imaginary situations and persons; for example, one might compose a speech such as Andromache would have spoken over the dead Hector. This becomes personification, which the Greeks call *prosopopoiian*, when the speaker is given a personality contrary to its true nature; for example, Cicero gives speech to the fatherland and to the republic in his invectives.³⁶⁴

Such an exercise, useful for its encouragement of “imaginary adaptations,” was often fused with forensic *controversiae*, which later was adapted for exercise in the medieval art of *dictamen*. The transmission of techniques ensured that the formal qualities of the figure, which served specific legal purposes for Cicero and Quintilian, were not lost in later periods.³⁶⁵ Note the reference to Cicero again, and how giving speech to “the republic” exemplifies when “the speaker is given a personality contrary to its true nature” -- oratorical ability and ontology are closely linked.

Isidore of Seville’s early medieval encyclopedic *Etymologiae* constitutes another important link connecting classical and medieval rhetoric.³⁶⁶ Besides also giving *In Catilinam* I.27 as an example of the device, Isidore extends its range to non-human entities in the natural world: “We likewise introduce speaking mountains and rivers or trees, placing a personality on a thing which does not naturally talk; this is frequently used in tragedies and orations” (*Etym.* II.13.2).³⁶⁷ Like Quintilian, Isidore refers to the literary or dramaturgical use of personification “in tragedies.” And like Priscian, he also considers the capacity of speech as a sufficient condition in distributing anthropomorphic personhood.

³⁶⁴ Priscian, *Progymnasmata* I.9; quoted. in Miller, ed., *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*, 64.

³⁶⁵ Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic*, 215.

³⁶⁶ As Jon Whitman says, “[i]n the Middle Ages, the word [personification] normally has the general sense in which Isidore of Seville defines it: ‘the fashioning of a character and speech for inanimate things’ (*cum inanimalium et persona et sermo fingitur*)” (*Etym.* II.13.1).” See Whitman, *Allegory*, 270.

³⁶⁷ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, Vol. 1, Books I-X (Charlotte, VT: MedievalMS, 2005).

Four centuries later, in his *Flores Rhetorici* (c. 1087), Alberic of Monte Cassino echoes both Quintilian and Isidore in lauding the device's power and – before once more citing *In Catilinam* I.27 -- referring to examples of anthropomorphized mountains, rivers, and animals:

Nor would I be silent regarding *prosopopeia*, for it is not a technique to be ignored. It is a method of applying foreign characteristics to objects; that is, it ascribes to things qualities which nature does not bestow. It often happens, for instance, that a phrase about an inanimate object attributes one of the senses to it. Thus we say, 'The mountain pricks up its ears,' 'the river pays attention,' 'the wolf shouts in reply,' 'the tiger is conciliated,' 'the answer presents itself.'³⁶⁸

Sensitive to the deployments of personification in everyday parlance, Alberic posits the device's usefulness for conveying a range of agencies beyond speech to multiple non-human entities, whether animal (wolf, tiger), mineral (mountain), or conceptual-verbal (answer).

Similar to Alberic, in book XVI of his twelfth-century *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*, Averroes (Ibn Sina) of Cordova suggests that the figure is widely used:

The sixth kind [of representation] is famous and widespread and the Arabs use it – that is, when the qualities of an animate thing are attributed to an inanimate one, like speech or reason. The Greeks call this figure *prosopopeia* (personification), that is, the invention of a new person, as when speech and the power to reply are ascribed to inanimate objects.³⁶⁹

Like Isidore, Averroes describes personification as the animation of lifeless entities, a certain ontological quickening that, he suggests with reference to the Greek etymology, amounts to the “invention” of an entirely new person.

³⁶⁸ Alberic of Monte Cassino, *Flores Rhetorici* VII.6; qtd. in Miller, ed., *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*, 155.

³⁶⁹ Alex Preminger, O.B. Hardison, Jr., and Kevin Kerrane, eds., *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974), 368.

Lastly, writing as contemporaries in the thirteenth century, Evrard of Bethune in his *Graecismus* (c. 1212) and Geoffrey of Vinsauf in *Poetria Nova* (c. 1245) echo one another and earlier definitions of the figure. For Evrard, *prosopopoeia* is a device by which inanimate objects are given voice.³⁷⁰ For Geoffrey, similarly, personification happens when “I fashion a new person by giving the power of speech where nature has denied it.”³⁷¹ As with earlier definitions so in Geoffrey’s, a person is made when speech is bestowed. As Quintilian had put it, “assuredly a speech cannot be conceived without being conceived as the speech of some person” (*IO IX.ii.32*).

³⁷⁰ William M. Purcell, *Ars Poetriae*, 49.

³⁷¹ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova* IV.1268-69. Trans. Margaret Pims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007), 62.

APPENDIX 2

Political Personification: Some Late-Medieval Developments

The discussion which follows is meant both as an elucidation of a relevant discursive context for the literary personifications we will examine in the chapters of this dissertation, as well as an analysis of various political instances of *prosopopoeia* in their own right. In the process I hope to lend plausibility to the claim that, in light of the increasing prevalence of the legal fiction of personhood as an influential factor in late-medieval political thought, the rigid distinction between literary and political is only problematically applied to premodern poetic texts that deploy *prosopopoeia*. The seminal concepts in medieval discussions of political representation -- which James Madison considered the political genius of Europe -- can be illuminated by attending to the way that they rely on anthropomorphic figuration.³⁷²

1. Legal Fictions of Corporate Personality

The central place that a late medieval thinker like Sir John Fortescue gives to laws as ligaments in the body politic reflects the increasingly legal idiom of late-medieval political theory, something that picks up speed in England around Bracton's writings on constitutional monarchy and "primary" documents like the 1215 Great Charter itself. As M.V. Clarke says in her study on late medieval political representation, "no activity can properly be styled political which does not help directly to create or to modify public law."³⁷³ The specific activity pertinent for our purposes is the legal fiction of corporate

³⁷² James Madison, *The Federalist* no. 14. Quoted. in Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 164.

³⁷³ See M.V. Clarke, *Medieval Representation and Consent: A Study of Early Parliaments in*

personality, which treats social collectives or in some cases non-human entities as singular personal agents, often doing so for casuistic purposes. Legal personality has notable affinities with how literary personification anthropomorphizes non-humans in narrative. For one, the existence of both a legally fictive person and a literary personification is only textual and intellectual. It may not be too much to say that legal discourse has a literary or imaginative aspect, delineable in its use of fictions of personification.

The legal fiction of corporate personality gained increasing currency in the political theory of the later Middle Ages, but its roots are early. St. Paul's epistolary formulations of the Church as the body of Christ (in 1 Corinthians and Colossians) and St. Augustine's elaboration on this in the notion of the *persona ecclesiae* as well as his Ciceronian discussion of the commonwealth in *Civitate Dei* XIX are important milestones in treating a large and diverse institution as a singular, personal agent. Walter Ullmann locates the proper commencement of the Middle Ages in Constantine's conferring of corporate status upon the Church.³⁷⁴ The Glossators' eleventh- and twelfth-century application of the term *persona* to corporate secular entities indicates how ecclesiological doctrine precipitates political development.³⁷⁵ The definitive formulation of this application comes with Pope Innocent IV, formerly the canon jurist Sinibaldus

England and Ireland, with special reference to the Modus Tenendi Parliamentum (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936), 291.

³⁷⁴ "The fusion of Roman and Pauline notions relative to the corporation makes the Constantinian settlement governmentally and juristically understandable." See Walter Ullmann, *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 36.

³⁷⁵ As Antony Black has noted, "Both the techniques of representation and the very idea of assemblies as the legitimate arena for collective decisions, owed a great deal to the church." Black goes on to locate the possible "origin of the idea of representation" in the reciprocal relation between a bishop and his diocese; in the words of St. Cyprian, "the church is in the bishop, the bishop in the church." See Black, *Political Thought*, 165. And Quillet relates this: "It is paradoxical that this practice starts in ecclesiastical institutions and spreads out from there to the purely temporal structures of society." See Jeannine Quillet, "Community, counsel, and representation," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350-1450*. Ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 557.

Fliscus, who is generally credited with the invention of corporate personality as it came to be understood in later medieval thought.³⁷⁶ In two passages of his *Apparatus* (c. 1245), a commentary on the five books of decretals of Pope Gregory IX, Innocent casuistically elaborates the basis for corporate personality. Regarding the first passage, Maximilian Koessler explains that

the rule was announced that when an ecclesiastical corporation of the type called a college (*collegium*) was supposed to deliver an oath, it had the option of doing this in the form of an oath sworn by a single person, representing the college, rather than in the form of oaths respectively sworn by the several members of the corporation.³⁷⁷

The fiction in this case amounts to a person who is a part of a whole who is enabled to speak not only for but “as” that whole. The development of corporate personality occurs as a response to the notion of delegation, enabling the representation of a collective or institution by a chosen individual or “agent” in the legal sense who embodies and can speak on behalf of that corporate singularity.³⁷⁸ Here we already see the close ties with parliamentary representation, explored below.

In the second passage from his *Apparatus*, Innocent IV addresses the question of whether a corporation could be excommunicated. In reversal of an earlier law, he replied in the negative, “since Corporation as well as Chapter, Tribe, and so on, are legal terms

³⁷⁶ The increasing conciliarism of the fifteenth-century western Church is another example, with Nicholas of Cusa’s *Catholic Concordance* setting down a seminal account of conciliar process that draws on the seven ecumenical councils (with some influence from Marsilius of Padua) and is later taken up and echoed in English politics in formulations of constitutional monarchy. See Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*. Ed. and Trans. Paul E. Sigmund (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁷⁷ See Maximilian Koessler, “The Person in Imagination or *Persona Ficta* of the Corporation,” *Louisiana Law Review* 9 (1948-1949): 437. In this first passage, significantly, corporate personality functions as “a device of legal technique whereby certain practical problems could be solved in a convenient way, namely, the treatment of a corporation as a separate legal entity” (438).

³⁷⁸ See Quillet, “Community, counsel, and representation,” 554-55. There are various further distinctions, expressed by the various titles of *syndic* and *procurator*, the former of which speaks in his own name as a sort of witness, and the latter of which speaks in the name of the community. The latter is hence more akin to personification *per se*, while the former is akin to what Paxson calls an istoype.

rather than names of persons.’”³⁷⁹ And what a legal person lacks that a natural person – a corporeal, numerically individual human -- does not, is a soul.³⁸⁰ Although Innocent also held that (representatives of) corporate personalities could not act in bad faith (a position eventually superseded by the modern theory of representation in tort), he did, “on another occasion, recognize[] even the idea of criminal responsibility of corporations.”³⁸¹ In any case, far from an aspect of primitive realism that animated every inanimate entity, in the Middle Ages “legal terms” are granted a type of existence that is reflexively understood as being only functional and fictive.³⁸² Innocent’s acknowledgement of this suggests an implicit understanding of the figurative semiosis at work within corporate personality, which had its uses but also its limits.

In the middle of the thirteenth century Innocent IV inaugurated a legal discussion that would snowball in decades to come, and become a subject of no small controversy.

The next important figures to contribute to this discussion both belong to the school of

³⁷⁹ Quoted in Koessler, “The Person in Imagination,” 438. In the original Latin: “*quia universitas, sicut est capitulum, populus, gens et haec nomina sunt juris et non personarum.*”

³⁸⁰ Koessler again: “Since the corporation could only be treated *as if* it were a human being, but actually was no human being, law could not extend the effect of the fiction to such matters in which the specific legal measure was based upon the assumption of the existence of a human soul in the affected subject. Therefore, [Innocent] believed the fiction could not be applied when the issue was whether the sanction of excommunication could be meted out to a corporation.” See Koessler, “The Person in Imagination,” 439.

³⁸¹ Ibid, 438, n.16. The fact that a medieval pope may have been the first to theorize the possibility of holding a corporate person – a corporation – legally responsible is important for the history of law. In this second example, in any case, we see the legal fiction of corporate personality as a term of law, a “deeming” (as it would later come to be called), rather than the representation of the whole by a part, which is arguably more “materialist” in having the legal person also be a natural person.

³⁸² In his *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, J. Huizinga aligns philosophical realism with allegorical *prosopopoeia*, but in such a way as, like a good modern nominalist, to denigrate both as “primitive,” a trend he inherits from nineteenth-century anthropology: “In this larger sense [realism] may be considered inherent in the civilization of the Middle Ages and as dominating all expressions of thought and of the imagination. Undoubtedly Neo-Platonism strongly influenced medieval theology, but was not the sole cause of the general ‘realist’ trend of thought. Every primitive mind is realist, in the medieval sense, independently of all philosophic influence. To such a mentality everything that receives a name becomes an entity and takes a shape which projects itself on the heavens. This shape, in the majority of cases, will be the human shape. All realism, in the medieval sense, leads to anthropomorphism. Having attributed a real existence to an idea, the mind wants to see this idea alive, and can only effect this by personifying it. In this way allegory is born...” See Johann Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the Dawn of the Renaissance* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor: 1954), 204-205.

Commentators, Bartolus of Sassoferrato (d. 1357), the renowned Bolognese jurist, and his disciple Baldus de Ubaldis (d. 1400). The Commentators expanded upon the understanding of corporate personality suggested by Innocent IV, arguing that a corporation is “composed of a plurality of human beings and an abstract unitary entity perceptible only by the intellect and thus distinct from its human members.”³⁸³ In Baldus, the scale of corporate personhood is expanded from a particular *communitas* to the entire *populus*, such that the term *populus* simultaneously refers to the historical aggregate of members of a state and to an abstract juristic person with rights and duties distinct from its material constituency.³⁸⁴ Corporate persons are thus fictive not because they do not really exist, but in the sense that they are “made” (*figere, fictum*). Hence medieval jurists, innovating in light of the absence of the term *persona* in a legal sense in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, referred to them as *personae fictae*.³⁸⁵ Jurisprudence is a realm where nonhuman entities take on fictional personal reality, that is, a realm of *prosopopoeia*.

Not surprisingly, a notorious philosophical curmudgeon was to emerge and oppose the juristic apparatus of fictive personality: William of Ockham. For the same reason that Ockham found it expedient to oppose philosophical realism, which posits the real existence of universals, he also wrote against the juristic theory of corporate personality by asking what reality outside the soul a legal person corresponds to. In other

³⁸³ See Joseph Canning, *The Political Thought of Baldus de Ubaldis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 186.

³⁸⁴ See Canning, J.P. “Law, sovereignty, and corporation theory, 1300-1450.” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350-1450*. Ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 454-76. As Steiner, glossing Canning on Baldus, puts it: “the corporation is like a body because it is an abstract construct with a *basis* in material reality: it is not a real *person*, it is perceived more by the intellect than by the senses, but it nonetheless participates in material reality through its members and acts through the instrumentality of its members. It is an abstraction that gives form to a material reality, and thus as a whole it maintains a nonsymbolic relation to its parts.” See Steiner, “Political Aesthetic,” 8.

³⁸⁵ Canning, “Law, sovereignty, and corporation theory,” 474.

words, he recognized the reality of mental representations like legal fictions (*ficta*) while insisting that no group of people can empirically *be* a singular artificial person, except as “made” in language.³⁸⁶ In a bold move, Bartolus responded to Ockham’s critique, insisting upon the methodological difference between the disciplines of philosophy and law that enabled the latter to invent and deploy fictions of personality in the name of applied practice. His statement is startling for its medieval assertion of the usefulness of fiction:

The philosophers tell us there is no real difference between the whole and its parts, and this is true in the proper sense of actual reality; nonetheless we believe it is essential for us jurists to sustain the juridic fiction which treats the *universitas* as a reality quite distinct from its individual members.³⁸⁷

Bartolus’ point is undergirded by the priority of practice over theory in law.³⁸⁸ Legal fictions of personality, in other words, are created when a need arises; they are functionally emergent.

Gaines Post has established the important place of anthropomorphic rhetoric in premodern canon and civil law by demonstrating that late medieval theories of political representation were articulated with conceptual aid from the legal fiction of corporate

³⁸⁶ Distinguishing between essential parts, without which a whole would not be a whole, and integrant parts (all other parts), Ockham argues against the material basis for the Commentator’s functional understanding of corporate personality in delegated representation by pointing out that “the parts of a community clearly come under the heading of integrant parts, which make [sic] is difficult to see how they could, without absurdity, be taken for the whole.” See Quillet, “Community, counsel, and representation,” 563. As Quillet further explains, “There seems to be a constant tension in [Ockham’s] work between [representation by delegation] and the theme of unanimous consent required by his individualist perspective, and supported by his literal interpretation of *Quod omnes tangit*, to the point where Bartolus himself responds to his criticism of the conception of the community as a moral or fictitious person, and its implications” (564).

³⁸⁷ Quillet, “Community, counsel, and representation,” 564.

³⁸⁸ As H.M. Cam says, “long before jurists and scholastics began examining into the bearing of a word, representation, the thing itself, was already on the scene as an obvious common-sense solution of constantly recurrent problems.” See H.M. Cam, “The Theory and Practice of Representation in Medieval England,” *Historical Studies of the English Parliament*, Vol. 1: *Origins to 1399*. Ed. E.B. Fryde and Edward Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 270. Antony Black says much the same: “on the whole it cannot be said that parliamentary theory kept abreast of practice.” See also Black, *Political Thought*, 166.

personality. Two important manifestations of this will be explored in what follows: parliamentary representation and late medieval theories of kingship.³⁸⁹ They exemplify the respective and loosely related concepts of conciliarity and sovereignty that define late medieval institutions of representative governance. An exploration of their institutional contours in relation to the legal fiction of personhood will help clarify how this is so.

2. Parliamentary representation: parts speaking for wholes

The form of the late-medieval institution of Parliament in England is a combination of aspects from its origins in the Germanic and Nordic *alding*, along with developments in conciliarist ecclesiology appropriated into secular political thought. In the later Middle Ages, the frequency and cost of wars, especially with France, meant that English Parliaments increased in frequency, providing the occasions and reasons for refining institutional procedures and protocols. In the formalizing of parliamentary procedure, a substantive theory of political representation emerges that exemplifies what Ullman calls “ascending” government.³⁹⁰ Scholars have noted that in the late Middle Ages developing understandings of parliamentary representation drew from the legal fiction of corporate personhood.³⁹¹ Recall Innocent IV’s account of corporate personality

³⁸⁹ The first is an instance of what Ullmann would call, on the one hand, “ascending” government and the second of a mixture of “ascending” and “descending” government. It is telling that Ullmann, in his theoretical description of the theme of “ascending government” himself makes conscious use of figurative language: “Power ascends, allegorically speaking, from the broad base of the whole people and culminates in a Ruler who has no power other than that which the people have conferred to him.” See Ullmann, *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages*, 30.

³⁹⁰ See note 388 above.

³⁹¹ Gaines Post’s study is still seminal in this regard. See Gaines Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State, 1100-1322* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), especially chapters I-IV. As H.M. Cam says in terms which indicate both mechanisms of representation – conciliar and forensic -- as forms of rhetorical “device,” “Mr. Gaines Post has convincingly linked the early summoning of representatives to assemblies in Spain and Italy with the Roman lawyers’ device of the plenipotentiary attorney representing his potential in a court of law: a conception that fits in very neatly with the *persona ficta* of M. Lousse’s corporations.” See Cam, “The Theory and Practice of Representation,” 269.

as a function of collegial representation cited above. Yet other notions from Roman law also influenced the development of parliamentary theory, in tandem with legal personality.³⁹² For example, Pope Innocent III's emphasis on the *quod omnes tangit* formula in *Codex* 5.59.5.2, taken up initially for defining the conciliar representation of clergy, began to have an effect in secular government institutions such as parliament, as Antony Black has shown.³⁹³ *Quod omnes tangit* was meant to ensure that magnates – ultimately including the King -- did not burden their constituencies with extra taxation without the latter's consent. The formula in its entirety suggests that free consent is at the heart of “ascending” government: *quod omnes tangit ab omnibus approbetur* – “what touches all must be approved by all.”³⁹⁴ And the mechanism by which the principle of free consent was obtained was representation.³⁹⁵

Representative capacity on the part of an elected or delegated agent was expressed in condensed form by the phrase *plena potestas*, “full power,” which refers to the full power to speak on behalf of constituencies in parliament, the highest judicial court of England.³⁹⁶ The notion of *plena potestas* also evokes Innocent IV's discussion of

³⁹² For a discussion of the connection between Roman legal fictions and parliamentary *plena potestas*, see Cam, “Theory and Practice,” 269 and 272. See also H. Koenisberger, “The Powers of Deputies in sixteenth-century Assemblies” *Etudes*, XXIV (1962): 211-43. In speaking about Roman law, Elizabeth Fowler notes that “the primary form taken by the law's social persons is fundamental to the deep structure of our own political economy.” See Elizabeth Fowler, *Literary Character*, 27.

³⁹³ See chapter six in Black, *Political Thought*.

³⁹⁴ It should be noted that the privilege given to ascending government in *quod omnes tangit* was balanced in practice by the fact that it was only the king who had the power to convene Parliament. And, as Cam has argued, “Everything turned on whether a national representative assembly was or was not of use to the king: if it was, he convoked it; if not, he used [other means].” This descending factor maintained a tension within governance that saw shifts in power, depositions of kings and magnates both. See Cam, “Theory and Practice,” 276.

³⁹⁵ As Antony Black has put it, “Parliaments depended for their success, development and credibility upon specific procedures and specific modes of political thought. These amounted to what we now call representation.” See Black, *Political Thought*, 163.

³⁹⁶ In his historical survey of *plena potestas*, Edwards has provided documentary evidence of a variety of Latin phrases synonymous with or comparable to *plena potestas*, since the term itself did not come into its full and accepted usage until late in the thirteenth century, appearing in the writs for the parliaments of 1290 and 1294 as well as quite emphatically in the *Modus tenendi parliamentum*. The representatives of the

corporate personality as a convenient fiction enabling one agent to representatively “personify” a collective. The fact that Innocent IV’s delineation of the legal fiction of corporate personality in his 1245 *Apparatus* occurs within a decade of the 1254 parliament that extends *quod omnes tangit* to the laity – a watershed moment for “ascending,” conciliar government -- suggests an important development in late medieval thought surrounding representative personification as a device “full (of) power,” so to speak.³⁹⁷ Black extends this by pointing out that the mereological relation between a delegated representative and a given constituency is analogous to the relation between Parliament itself and the entire realm.³⁹⁸ What a delegate is to Parliament, Parliament is to the body politic.

A certain metonymic figuration can thus be discerned in the articulation of parliamentary representation inasmuch as a plenipotentiary part speaks and acts for a whole. Or we could invert it and say that a collective whole thereby acts through – indeed, *as* -- a singular agent. The notion of an actor-network, as discussed in the

important 1254 parliament, in which the clerical principle of necessary consent before taxation was first applied to the laity, came *vice omnium et singulorum*, “in place of all and each”; of 1264 *pro toto comitatu*, “for the whole community”; of 1265 *ex parte communitatum comunitatum*, “out as a part of the assembly of the community”; of 1275, *pro communitate dicti comitatus*, “speaking for the fellowship of the community.” See J. G. Edwards, “The *Plena Potestas* of English Parliamentary Representatives,” *Historical Studies of the English Parliament, Vol 1: Origins to 1399*. Ed. E.B. Fryde and Edward Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 137-41. The phrase from the writs for 1290 demands that representatives come “*cum plena potestate pro se et tota communitate comitatus*” (qtd. from 138).

³⁹⁷ Clarke explains that in 1254, “Commons came to Parliament empowered to act by express mandates from their constituencies, and their action involved both the exercise of independent judgment and co-operation with others. They were thus qualified to contribute to that friction of minds which is the driving force of political discussion. The Parliament of estates was the public assembly of a coherent society, organized within its own frontiers and of considerable geographical extent; in dependent partnership with the Crown, especially in connection with taxation, it had a direct share in the creation or modification of public law.” See Clarke, *Medieval Representation and Consent*, 314-15.

³⁹⁸ As Black puts it, “Parliament itself came to be seen as a corporate body (*universitas regni*) so that the procedures and rights of corporations under ‘common law’ (that is, Roman law as currently interpreted) should be available to it. Parliament stands in the place of the whole, partly because it is comprised of wise and virtuous persons who are select members of the community; and partly because those present have been expressly chosen by those not present, as in the case of towns which send corporate representatives (*procuratores, syndici*).” See Black, *Political Thought*, 166.

Introduction, is helpful for tracing similar redistributions of *potestas* in literary narrative. The *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum*, a fourteenth-century Latin document, describes in some detail the redistribution of representative agency as part of the procedure of an actual parliamentary session. In a section titled *De casibus et Iudiciis Difficilibus* ('Concerning Difficult Cases and Judgments'), the author describes the process of delegating a representative in a way that indicates the metonymic aspect involved in compressing the deliberative agency of a multitude into a singular, personal agent. The passage from *Modus* is worth including here to convey the process:

And if by disagreement between [the peers of Parliament] and the King and any nobles, or perchance between the nobles themselves, the peace of the kingdom be disturbed, or the people or country troubled, so that it seem to the King and his council that it be expedient that this business be treated of and amended by the consideration of all the peers of his kingdom; or if the King and kingdom be troubled by war, or if a difficult case arise before the chancellor of England [in the King's absence], or if a difficult judgment be to be rendered before the justices, in such like cases, and if perchance in such like deliberations all or at least the greater part cannot agree, then the earl steward, the earl constable, and the earl marshal, or two of them, shall elect twenty-five persons out of all the peers of the realm, that is, two bishops and three procurators for the whole clergy; two earls and three barons, five knights of the shires, five citizens, and [five] burgesses, which make twenty-five; and these twenty-five may select twelve from among themselves, and reduce themselves to that number, and these twelve may reduce themselves to six, and those six may still further reduce themselves to three, but those three cannot reduce themselves to a less number unless license be obtained from our lord the King; and should the King give his consent, then those three may reduce themselves to two, and one of those two may delegate his power to the other, and thus, finally, his ordinance will stand superior in authority to the whole Parliament; and so by reduction from twenty-five persons to one individual person, unless the greater number be able to come to agreement and give judgment; in fine, one single individual, as it is said, who cannot disagree with himself, shall ordain for all; reserving to our lord the King and his council the power of examining and amending such ordinances after they have been written, if they know how and wish to do so, so that it be there then done in full Parliament, and with the consent of Parliament, and not otherwise.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ *Modus Tenendi Parliamentum: An Ancient Treatise on the Mode of Holding the Parliament in England*. Ed. Thomas Duffy Hardy (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1846), 18-21. See also M.V. Clarke, *Medieval Representation and Consent: A Study of Early Parliaments in England and Ireland, with special reference to the Modus Tenendi Parliamentum* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1936).

In the face of difficulty and disagreement, the “ascending” (Ullmann) process of delegation amounts to a compression of the *potestas* of an entire network of representative figures into a singular actor, “who cannot disagree with himself.” Besides its usefulness for avoiding unending disagreements, this coagulation of agency into a single speaker enables representation to operate as a literally “convenient” device – a figure for ‘bringing (agents) together’ (*con-venio*) -- in order to reach institutional, and ideally regional, concord. Our literary texts of interest navigate the complexities of this political ideal, and offer opportunities for analyzing how personification mirrors the representative agency of non-humans by bestowing human-like form and speech.

3. Sovereign representation: royal persons, natural and public

The complementary governmental position to that of parliament is, of course, the monarch himself, who is mentioned throughout the passage from the *Modus* as possessing both an enabling and a limiting prerogative. Antony Black further notes that parliaments “were the means by which kings were able to gain entitlement to income from their subjects, both their major vassals and others, over and above what they could acquire through applications of existing feudal contracts and rights.”⁴⁰⁰ And yet in England the monarch’s power was far from absolute; partly due to charters and robustly conciliar institutions like Parliament, late medieval English kingship was increasingly constitutional, which the development of *quod omnes tangit* and *plena potestas* helped ensure. A lively culture of theoretical reflection on kingship in the late Middle Ages --

⁴⁰⁰ Black, *Political Thought*, 163.

before and after 1215 -- was one of the more important means for refining the parameters of royal power, and anthropomorphic figuration played a key part in that refinement.

As Kantorowicz, Myers, Griffiths, Canning, and others have respectively shown, late medieval theories of kingship draw from the legal fiction of corporate personality, especially when applied to a kingdom.⁴⁰¹ As Canning says, “The immortal corporation of the kingdom established an abstract and thus also undying royal office or *dignitas* which was operated by each individual ruler in succession.”⁴⁰² There thus arose a distinction between the individual human monarch’s natural or material body and the public immaterial “body” of the institution of the king, analogous to the corporate person of the realm. As Canning notes, “the king housed two completely different kinds of person – his human mortal person and an abstract legal person.”⁴⁰³ The latter is a consummately political instance of *prosopopoeia*. Because the public body of the king was a corporation whose material members formed a multiplicity not only in space but also in time, questions of part and whole, which in conciliar politics are related to spatial issues of contiguity and number, were oriented toward the chronological unfolding of continuity and time.⁴⁰⁴ For instance, the “public” body of the king was said to be a “perpetual” person, or a *persona in perpetuum*. This perpetual entity was sometimes held to symbolize the realm as a whole, the *communitas regni*, particularly in order to ensure the

⁴⁰¹ See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Henry A. Myers, *Medieval Kingship* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1982); R.A. Griffiths, “The Minority of Henry VI, King of England and of France,” *The Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England*. Ed. Charles Beem (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 161-93.

⁴⁰² See Canning, “Law, sovereignty, and corporation theory, 1300-1450,” 475.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ It is crucial to note that the “immortality” or “perpetuity” of corporate personalities was also emphasized; hence, the legal existence of the corporate person of a guild, for instance, persisted through time, since its individual members died, and yet the legal personality itself perdured. Quite similar in this sense to the significance of dynasty and succession for the corporation of the Crown, so material procreation formed the basis for the justification of the “immortality” of the legal personality of corporations. See Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 273-313.

inalienability of the fisc, or public treasury, by the private person of the human monarch, ensuring that the particular monarch at any given point was unable to sell off or appropriate as inheritance any public land or assets. This led to the king as a public, intellectual person (*persona intellectualis et publica*) being considered by jurists like Baldus to be the primary agent and “source of action” (*principaliter fundat actus*) among the two, so that the natural, human person of the monarch, on the other hand, was at times theorized as a delegate of the institutional person, for only the public person could be said to possess sovereign office, or *dignitas*. The public, sovereign person entered the realm of the visible when the human king was crowned and seated in parliament, which led to the prevalence of the governmental metonym *par excellence*: the Crown. The powers and rights of royalty accrued to the human king only insofar as he remained aligned with the nonhuman, institutional actant of the Crown, itself the signifier of an abstract person that cannot die: *dignitas non moritur*.

This web of human and non-human agents constituted the theoretical labyrinth that was the early legal context of constitutional monarchy, such that the private, human king could be deposed without infringing on the rights and privileges accruing to the public person of the king. In the late-medieval English context, in other words, the figurative schizophrenia of the king, with both natural and public identities, enabled conciliar institutions to limit the agency of the human monarch. In referring to the king’s nonhuman public person, parliament could constrict tyrants by the very structure of the position they had assumed in being crowned. The legal fiction of the king’s two bodies attains to a productive tension in the late medieval English monarchy that it was to lose in

later periods with the burgeoning of absolutist kingship.⁴⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the richness of the notion of the king's two bodies as a form of political *prosopopoeia*, besides not being lost on modern thinkers, was also taken up as a topic of poetic intervention by writers such as Langland and Lydgate, as we have seen in the above chapters.⁴⁰⁶

In suggesting the important role of anthropomorphic figuration in late-medieval political theory with regard to the legal fiction of corporate personality and its “embranchments” in parliamentary representation and royal persons, I have indicated how rhetorical *prosopopeia* functioned as a catalyst in the development of political representation.⁴⁰⁷ These forays provide contextual coordinates for exploring the affinities between poetic and political personification in the Middle Ages in properly literary texts, implying that formal aspects of poetic structure both reflect elements of -- and facilitate potential influences upon -- extra-textual reality.⁴⁰⁸ As Elizabeth Fowler has suggested, assuming rightly that the most important political activities are linguistic, “a strong

⁴⁰⁵ See Francis Oakley, *The Medieval Experience* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 103-135; and Gaines Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought: Public Law and the State, 1100-1322* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

⁴⁰⁶ Regarding the former, consider James Paxson's comments on the *persona ficta* of the king in *Poetics of Personification*, 44. Additionally, see Brian Rotman's use of the idea of the king's two bodies and the “rhetorically assembled co-presence of these bodies” as a model for talking about the three bodies of the mathematician. See Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 130.

⁴⁰⁷ Startlingly little medieval literary scholarship has recognized let alone treated this connection, aside from Fowler, Paxson, and Steiner to varying extents. For instance, in the conclusion of *The Poetics of Personification* James Paxson acknowledges that “[a] historical focus on changing ideologies of economy and government would also illuminate the ascendancy of personification as a primary public form of expression at the close of the Middle Ages,” and Emily Steiner has more recently argued in *Documentary Culture* for the importance of legal personhood in the devotional rhetoric of Deguileville's allegorical *Le Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*. See Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification*, 170; and Steiner, *Documentary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17-45.

⁴⁰⁸ Helen Barr's formulation is felicitous here: “the formal features of language used in literary texts are essentially freighted with social resonances...to examine the literary language of texts in detail is simultaneously to examine the kinds of sociological work performed by literary texts.” See Helen Barr, *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

explanation is necessarily an action that changes human experience.”⁴⁰⁹ And as I hope my study to have indicated, the device of personification, uniquely adept at strengthening explanation by making diverse ontological communities speculatively available to human experience, is just such an action.

⁴⁰⁹ Fowler, *Literary Character*, 24.