

WOMEN'S GATHERING: THE AUCHINLECK MANUSCRIPT AND
WOMEN'S READING IN 14TH CENTURY LONDON

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Women's Gathering argues that MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck) provides key evidence for understanding the early 14th century London literary scene that fostered Chaucer. Reading Chaucer and the Auchinleck side by side, I show that the manuscript's sustained concern about women's agency mirrors Chaucer's, and that the complexity with which Chaucer treats that agency can be found in the Auchinleck too. Furthermore, I argue that the similarity is not due to a direct line of influence between manuscript and author, but stems from a mutually shared 14th century London literary microculture.

The introduction argues that the Auchinleck scribes performed the process of textual collocation as a consciously literary act of gathering, not simply as a collection in a material object. Their collocation of texts spanning multiple genres informs our understanding of their own scribal activity and of Chaucer's. This in turn requires that we acknowledge the London literary culture of the early—and not just of the late—fourteenth century for its contributions to our understanding of the romance genre, and of women's relationship to it. Particularly with the texts that focus on women as agents in history and narrative, I argue that the manuscript genders the reading practices of its 14th century audience and is thus predicated on reading practices that circumscribed 14th century femininity. The dissertation therefore has stakes in the literary history of romance, the development of English as a literary language, and the history of women's relationship to literature.

Chapter one uses Chaucer to reconsider romance's peculiar relationship to women and their reading in the early and late 14th century. In *Troilus & Criseyde*, romance is a source of vicarious experience, but one gendered feminine by its association with language and audience. With the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, Chaucer gendered the pilgrim Chaucer feminine by associating himself with English romance. And finally, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* satirizes the masculine "victory" over women and their texts by provoking Harry Bailey to reveal his own artificially inflated masculinity. In its study of the Auchinleck, this chapter shows that Chaucer's understanding can be extrapolated backwards in time, demonstrating the conceptual similarities between Chaucer's romance genre and that of the Auchinleck scribes.

Chapter two argues that the Auchinleck rewrites British history as a struggle against transgressive females, processing the recent political trauma of Edward II's deposition by his wife, Isabella of France. Where prior versions of insular history more closely follow Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the Auchinleck's *Liber Regum Angliae* breaks tradition by inscribing transgressive women into the standard narrative. Brutus, the patriarchal namesake of Britain and founder of male order, is hemmed in on either side by female representatives of chaos, Albin and Inge. These two show show that the redactor of the Auchinleck's *Liber* was deeply concerned with women's agency in the political sphere, and sought to trouble the London understanding of what had happened in the 1320s. The Auchinleck as a collection should therefore be understood as a response to women's agency in recent English history, an agency that in the *Liber's* view, needed to be reined in.

Chapter three examines two romances, *The King of Tars* and *Sir Degare*, and the pseudo-saint's life *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, to show that texts in multiple genres both deny and

allow women agency by overdetermining their role in reproduction. Particularly births that come about by extraordinary couplings—interreligious, interracial, incestuous, or supernatural—express an ambivalent relationship to women’s self-determination. Women's bodies conceiving by couplings outside of Christian marriage, or within taboo degrees of consanguinity, makes them a nexus of anxieties, a site of promiscuous ideological recombination that threatens—or promises—to unmake social, religious, or political order. The manuscript thus gathers a set of texts in multiple genres that allow women a measure of alienated power through childbirth—not yet the direct claim to agency made by the Wife of Bath, but a sustained consideration of women's agency nevertheless. The romance genre and its adjacent popular genres were thus capable of augmenting the critique of women’s agency that chapter 1 locates in Scribe 1’s use of the *Liber Regum Anglie*.

Chapter four argues that both Chaucer and the Auchinleck participate in a London literary tradition of rivalry between women and clerks. In the Auchinleck, this rivalry is fixated upon the desirable (in)visibility of Mary’s female form. *Hou Our Leuedi Sauter was Ferst Founde* tantalizes with the proposition that the Virgin Mary will remain unclothed until we say our daily prayers, while *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin* suggests that a peek at Mary's body might cost us vision in one eye. The transgressive clerks who peek at Mary nevertheless remain in her good graces through apology. Transgression and apology, as topoi, are reading practices made concrete in the material object of the manuscript as well as fictionally inscribed in Jankyn's “Book of Wikked Wyves.” Chaucer thus elaborates on reading practices that were already well established in the Auchinleck by the time he wrote the *Canterbury Tales*.

Finally, in concluding the argument, I examine the little known Auchinleck *Life of Adam & Eve*, in which Eve commissions the very work in which her life is inscribed. Eve’s alienated agency, her inability to write her own story, expresses the situation of women who commissioned texts from scribes in the early 14th century. Unable to produce texts themselves, women in the early 14th century need their “sons” to do it for them. The clerkly Seth mediates between Eve and text, homologous to the mediation between London clerk and his female customers. The dissertation thus ends with a reflection on how the readings in the preceding chapters must affect our understanding of London reading culture in the 14th century.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew McConnell studied in English and Philosophy at the University of Tulsa and Oxford University as an undergraduate, during which time he was first exposed to Chaucer through the Tulsa Undergraduate Research Challenge, a University of Tulsa program in which students participate in Oxford-style tutorships with senior faculty. Under the direction of Dr. Lars Engle, Matthew read *Troilus and Criseyde*, and with his recommendation was accepted to spend a year abroad at Worcester College, Oxford University. There he studied Chaucer and the romance genre with Roger Dalrymple. In his final year of undergraduate study, Matthew wrote a one-thousand line mock epic poem based on *Troilus and Criseyde* and performed it as his senior honors thesis.

After graduation in 2006, Matthew studied Reformation theology as an intern in the Reformed University Ministries internship program for two years, while working for the ministry at Delta State University in Cleveland, MS. Having completed his internship, he returned to Tulsa to teach high school for one year, before beginning his graduate study at Cornell University in 2010. Under the direction of Tom Hill and Samantha Zacher, Matthew learned Anglo-Saxon, but eventually returned to Middle English romance as a topic of research. In his first year of graduate school, he also studied Langland and the poems of the Pearl Manuscript under Masha Raskolnikov, who became a valued advisor. Finally, in his second year of study at Cornell, Matthew first encountered the Auchinleck Manuscript in a class taught by Andrew Galloway, and began the research that would eventually develop into his dissertation.

For Hannah, myn owene swete herte

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To the staff of the Edinburgh Library, who allowed a lowly graduate student to examine the Auchinleck MS in person, I am also indebted, and hope to return the favor by thinking deeply about the priceless treasure they allowed me to touch and handle.

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Introduction

Bot fals men make her fingres feld
& doþ hem wepe wel sore, to rewe
Her res:
Purth wreches, þat er vntrewe,
Wimen ben holden les. (1-5)

-Alphabetical Praise of Women

These words now find themselves at the beginning of the “Alphabetical Praise of Women,” found in MS Adv 19.2.1, called the Auchinleck manuscript. Like many texts in the manuscript, its first few lines are missing, having been cut out with the miniatures originally found at the top of most of the Auchinleck’s items. In this case at least, the unfortunate loss foregrounds lines appropriate to the manuscript viewed as a whole. A unique text in Middle English, the “Praise of Women” translates an Anglo-Norman source, “ABC a femmes,” found in the contemporary manuscript, BL MS Harley 2253.¹ The two manuscripts also share “The Sayings of St. Bernard” and “The Harrowing of Hell.” The comparison need not end there; Harley 2253 also contains several texts relating to women, and what is more, makes special effort to pair positive representations of women with negative ones. It places “Le dit des femmes” and “Le blasme des femmes” directly next to one another, for instance, and also juxtaposes “The Way of Christ’s

¹ For more on the Anglo-Norman *ABC a Femmes*, see Dove, “Evading Textual Intimacy: The French Secular Verse.” *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*. Dove maintains that the Anglo-Norman text is not the source of the Middle English, but the reverse.

Love” with “The Way of Woman’s Love.” These latter poems have almost identical first lines, but of course diverge greatly—Christ’s love is faithful, as woman’s is not. This pairing of positive and negative portrayals of women by the Harley manuscript markedly facilitates a reading practice of blame and defense and reifies the medieval debate concerning women. By placing these texts next to each other, the Harley manuscript’s internal organization reflects a historical antifeminism that had become a part of contemporary reading practices. Else why locate two such opposing texts so deliberately?

The Auchinleck shows a similar tendency, and this dissertation will establish that its sustained attention to what might be termed “women’s literature” should be considered one of its chief attributes. Women’s literature in the 14th century, it will be argued, was predicated upon the juxtaposition of positive and negative portrayals of women, and reflected the exclusive control that men wielded over textual production. It did not require that women were the exclusive audience, nor even that they were part of it.² They were, however, a subject of intense literary interest regardless of their status as readers or audience members. In a manuscript with the ambitions of the Auchinleck, women’s literature would thus have been an expected and required feature, possibly requested by the client who ordered it. The creativity with which Scribe 1 aims to satisfy the request of his client shows an attempt to include practices which were established (such as those found in Harley 2253), but also to innovate and intensify the literary practices that surrounded women’s literature. The Auchinleck manuscript is thus an artifact of a vibrant 14th century London reading culture, not a random miscellany.³

² To my knowledge, the first person to suggest that the Auchinleck was read or owned by a rich London woman was Felicity Riddy, “Engendering Pity in the Franklin’s Tale,” *Feminist Readings In Middle English Literature: the Wife of Bath and All Her Sect* (1994). She comments upon this possibility in an off-hand way and does not pursue the suggestion further.

³ For a discussion of the difference between a miscellany and an anthology, see Lerer. “Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology.” *PMLA* 118.5 (2003): 1251-1267. See also Stemmler, “Miscellany or Anthology?”

Of course, the Auchinleck is a markedly complex, collaborative project, reflecting multiple intentions as well as blind chance.⁴ From our vantage point several centuries later, these cannot always be teased apart, but this project nevertheless proceeds as if intention and meaning inhering in a material/textual object might be uncovered by careful examination and reading. The usefulness of this procedure can only be confirmed by the productivity of the readings it affords. In the final analysis the claims and stakes of this argument are firmly in the territory of the literary historical, but it must begin by positing a London literary culture that is more fully conscious of itself than many medievalists have been prepared to imagine it. This initial act of generosity, once made, enables a series of readings so persuasive that they will not be easily dismissed.

Amongst the practices that careful study of the Auchinleck can reveal, those surrounding language are obviously the most salient, since the one thing that seems incontrovertible is that Scribe 1's client wanted an English-only manuscript. In the early 14th century, it is nigh unimaginable that an English-exclusive manuscript could come into existence accidentally. The trilingualism of Harley 2253, rather, which contains texts in English, Latin, and French, reflects 14th century norms. Indeed, if the Auchinleck had not survived, medievalists would have claimed that such a project was inconceivable until Chaucer's day. This argues a deliberate decision on the part of the client, rather than the scribe. The extra effort involved on the part of the scribes is conspicuous, especially since several texts in the manuscript might very well have been translated for this very project, and several more received new prologues and other touch-ups. These will be discussed in detail in the coming chapters. For now, it is sufficient to note that a 14th century

⁴ In his introduction to *Imagining the Book*, Derek Pearsall recently warned against taking any manuscript as too pregnant with intention. He rightly reminds us that manuscript evidence is nearly always overdetermined in meaning. Nevertheless, a warning is best taken as a spur to careful progress in this kind of study, not as a sign that all efforts should be halted.

someone very pointedly wanted an English manuscript, and what is more, an English manuscript that *excludes* both Latin and French almost entirely, using them only in very limited ways, and strategically. This fact of exclusion, rather than inclusion, is the most striking quality of the manuscript.

However, the precise import of this English-exclusivity is difficult to determine. Where one scholar sees a nationalist emphasis, another sees a religious one.⁵ The argument has not yet been made that an exclusively English manuscript could result from considerations of class and gender, rather than either of these two categories. Of course, neither nationalism nor religion should be disregarded as categories potentially influencing the manuscript's Englishness. The question at hand is of emphasis, rather than contradiction. It hardly needs to be said that nationalism, religion, class, and gender interact in highly complex ways. It is therefore impossible to exclude the influence of "nationalism" from the manuscript, any more than a speaker of Middle English could exclude her French vocabulary.⁶ The question of emphasis, then, should be phrased as follows: given that any number of categories such as nationalism, religion, class, and gender are operating in the Auchinleck manuscript, which of these was most operative in the client's and scribes' minds when they made the requests and decisions that they did?

For the purposes of the present argument, which concerns the ways in which the Auchinleck scribes imagined their audience, the physical and critical histories of the manuscript

⁵ Turville-Petre's highly influential monograph, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340*, is the source of the nationalistic argument about the Auchinleck. See also Siobhain Bly Calkin's recent and excellent monograph about the Auchinleck manuscript, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, which argues that Saracens were a key symbolic locus for concerns about religious alterity, monstrosity, ethnic identity. It mentions genre as one of the primary interests of the manuscript, and its analyses cross from one genre to another, including the saints' lives as well as the romances and *chansons de gestes*.

⁶ For an article that resists the nationalistic reading while commenting on language, see Djordjević "Nation and Translation: Guy of Warwick Between Languages." *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 57.1 (2013): 111-144. Print.

must be considered together.⁷ Put another way, how the scribes imagined their audience is inseparable from how we imagine it, since our preconceptions delimit and define our accounts of their activities. Many of the questions considered by scholars concern the production of the manuscript, but the models of production that they theorize often have as much to do with the literary activities they prescribe for the period, and those they preclude. Present day scholars, in other words, necessarily imagine an audience, with literacies and illiteracies already built in, even as they analyze the manuscript. They are, in this respect at least, in a position similar to the scribes who compiled the Auchinleck in the early 14th century.

The Auchinleck Manuscript was most certainly compiled in London in the 1330s. London was, in this period, a bit of a lacuna in literary production.⁸ Most of the literary centers were outside of London either at Oxford, or at the religious centers and houses. The London booktrade that does seem to have existed in this period trends markedly toward religious and devotional material. According to Hanna, some of this religious material is quite sophisticated, including English translations of scripture with glossing, while some of it is the most basic religious doctrine.⁹ Both kinds, in fact, appear in the Auchinleck manuscript. The interest in religious texts of this kind corresponds to the demands of London tradesmen, who uniformly

⁷ For a useful summary of critical approaches to the Auchinleck, see Porcheddu "Edited Text and Medieval Artifact: the Auchinleck Bookshop and "Charlemagne and Roland" Theories, Fifty Years Later." *Philological Quarterly*. 80.4 (2001): 463.

⁸ For this and the following, see Hanna's *London Literature*. Hannah further argues that the materials in Auchinleck formed a "set local canon" (15). For detailed information about scribal activity in London during this period, see Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans, 1300-1500* and "A Community of Book Artisans in Chaucer's London."

⁹ Clanchy argues in *Memory to Written Record* that liturgical reading of this type were women's reading specifically (pp. 189-96). He argues the same for legends, which adds another point of interest for female readers of the Auchinleck. For more about women readers, see Farina "Women and Reading," *The History of British Women's Writing, 700-1500*. Also Meale, "...alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englich, and frensch": laywomen and their books in late medieval England," *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*. For women's literate practice in the 15th century, outside the range of this study but potentially important as an argument about later developments, see Krug *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice In Late Medieval England*.

leave first primers and religious material to their legatees, only then entertainment.¹⁰ In this respect, the Auchinleck follows the general demands attested in London wills and other records, while adding a significant collection of romances and other genres of secular entertainment.

The four hundred years of its history between the Auchinleck's production and Alexander Boswell, Lord Auchinleck's acquisition of it in 1740 are wholly unknown. In 1744, Lord Auchinleck donated it to the Advocates Library. During its sojourn in the Advocates Library, several of its texts were transcribed and published by antiquarians, including Sir Walter Scott, who in 1804 had published a description of the manuscript with an edition of *Sir Tristrem*. According to his description, the manuscript's miniatures had already been removed at this time. Walter Scott also believe that *Sir Tristrem* was a Northern translation, and thus sought to claim the manuscript for the Scots.¹¹ In general, 19th century antiquarians mined the Auchinleck's rich vein of medieval romance, typically with a nationalist agenda, though later on, the negative characterization of the genre overwhelmed its value as a source of nationalist pride.¹²

At the creation of the National Library of Scotland in 1925, the Advocates Library passed all its non-legal holdings to the new national deposit library. Early in the 20th century, Pamela Robinson argued in an unpublished dissertation that the manuscript was composed of "booklets," which were produced on speculation and often sold separately. They could, however, be combined to create a larger work such as the Auchinleck. Later, Auchinleck scholarship came to be dominated by the "bookshop theory" advanced by Laura Hibbard Loomis, whose enthusiastic and careful

¹⁰ See Cavanaugh, "A Study of Books Privately Owned in England"

¹¹ A recent study of the orthographic practices of Scribes 1 & 3 shows that *Sir Tristrem* was more likely copied from a Northern translation, since Scribe 1 regularly changes forms to a London type while retaining Northern forms in rhyming positions, where it would be harder to change them. See Runde "Reexamining Orthographic Practice in the Auchinleck Manuscript through Study of Complete Scribal Corpora."

¹² For a playful yet historically interesting account of romance scholarship in the 19th and early 20th century, see John Ganim's chapter "The Myth of Medieval Romance," in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*.

reading of the manuscript led her and most scholars to believe that the manuscript was the first evidence of a commercial lay scriptorium. For some time, scholars pursued this line of thinking, and their adoption of this production model did have the advantage of producing interesting relations between texts. A. J. Bliss, for instance, argued that the Auchinleck's lives of St. Margaret and St. Katherine had a common author, a claim obviously facilitated by a belief in a scriptorium where such work was being done collaboratively.¹³

Several scholars including Judith Mordkoff, A. I. Doyle, and Malcolm Parkes eventually argued that no centralized scriptorium existed. Loomis' insistence that the Auchinleck scribes must have been in the same location was based on verbal borrowing between texts. Mordkoff showed that most of this "borrowing" consisted of stock phrases.¹⁴ Cunningham and Mordkoff later argued that Booklet 3 of the Auchinleck circulated independently.¹⁵ Later, Timothy Schonk argued that the manuscript was a bespoke order, edited and compiled primarily by Scribe 1. The other scribes might be thought of as subcontractors, brought on by Scribe 1 to speed production, but not necessarily having the same investment in the manuscript or working in the same place.¹⁶ This fits well with data earlier provided by A. J. Bliss, who argued that Scribe 3 shows evidence of a

¹³ Bliss, A. J. "The Auchinleck 'St Margaret' and 'St. Katherine'." *Notes and Queries* 3.5 (1956). The common authorship of these two unique Auchinleck texts is still generally accepted, unlike much other work that followed the bookshop production model.

¹⁴ Christopher Cannon further reinforces this point in "Chaucer And The Auchinleck Manuscript Revisited." *Chaucer Review* 46.1-2 (2011): 131-146.

¹⁵ Cunningham, I. C., and J. E. C. Mordkoff. "New Light on the Signatures in the Auchinleck Manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 19.2.1)." *Scriptorium: International Review of Manuscript Studies* 36 (1982): 280-292. Print

¹⁶ Linne Mooney has recently supported the bespoke model, and describe strong economic incentives that would have led Scribe 1 to bring on subcontractors as he did. As Mooney notes, "The data collected on scribes who wrote more than one vernacular manuscript suggests that those who copied the books in less demand, for which there was only a bespoke trade, may have worked, like Mielot, in their lodgings rather than their shops... To do this, none of these scribes need have belonged to the London Guild of Textwriters as long as they live in lodgings outside the City Limits." *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, "Locating Scribal Activity in Late Medieval London." See also her chapter in *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500*, Gillespie and Wakelin, eds. 2011.

chancery hand: Scribe 3 is moonlighting.¹⁷ This is the current understanding of the manuscript's production.

Our perception of the manuscript's production matters primarily because it alters our view of early 14th century literary culture. A lay scriptorium presupposes both demand and supply, a market and a marketing demographic to which the scriptorium could cater. However, as a bespoke product, the manuscript is more likely the quixotic order of a literary enthusiast with a taste for Middle English and enough money to satisfy it with an ambitious, near encyclopedic project. For the present argument, questions concerning the Auchinleck's production are inextricable from the kinds of readings that scholars do. The various ways in which the manuscript and its scribes have been imagined by scholars in the last century all have very different implications for the kind of literary culture in which the Auchinleck was produced. The theory advanced by Pamela Robinson in 1921, that the Auchinleck's various booklets were produced on speculation and combined when a buyer came along, suggests a rather developed market, in which such speculation was a commercially viable activity. It also suggests that scribes, for the successful management of their business, would need to deduce correctly which texts would be desirable, and for whom. It therefore also implies a London literary reading culture with established expectations concerning gender, class, language, and age. All such information is necessary for the creation of a "booklet," which is predicated upon the reading situations for which it is made. Timothy Schonk rejects this model, preferring a bespoke production for the manuscript, which implies a client with strong ideas about what should be in her manuscript. The "market value" of the texts is less an issue in this model, and need not be taken as reflective of general practice, but of personal taste.

¹⁷ Bliss, A. J. "Notes on the Auchinleck Manuscript." *Speculum* 26.4 (1951)

The present argument will assert that gender and class were more operative than any other factors in the client's request for an English-exclusive manuscript, because English-exclusiveness was more closely associated with non-aristocratic non-male persons than with anything else. English functioned as an all-inclusive language in circles where French acquisition was not a given. It would only need to assume such a function if there were indeed a stable market for literature amongst people who did not speak French. To explain the manuscript, we are in need of a culture established enough both as perennially non-Francophone and literarily invested. Indeed, in a country in which the monarch spoke French, and the monarch's mother was French, it would be problematic to assert that French-speakers were less "English." Nevertheless, "English-speaking" could surely have been a part of someone's self-identification. However, was this because they imagined themselves a part of an "imagined community," i.e. a nation, or was this a function of some other kind of social group? London in the 1330s was comprised of readers and non-readers of various stripes.¹⁸ Its production was thus circumscribed by an already existing set of literary practices defining both genres and their functions. Amongst those functions was a set of gendered expectations surrounding texts—gendering of texts themselves, and textual reification of gender. The Auchinleck as a collection was therefore committed to an expected set of genres,

¹⁸ Nevertheless, current scholarly opinion on the Auchinleck is fairly united in its characterization of the manuscript's audience—London, urban, non-aristocratic. Some add familial. Bahr (*Fragments and Assemblages*) mentions that most scholars have agreed since Loomis' "Possible London Bookshop" that the manuscript was produced for a wealthy London merchant or a literate civil servant. Of course no one believes in the bookshop now, but Doyle and Parkes (*The Production of Copies of the Canterbury Tales and the Confessio Amantis in the Early Fifteenth Century*), Schonk, and Hanna (*London Literature*) all agree about the audience. Schonk ("A Study of the Auchinleck Manuscript") and Turville-Petre (*England the Nation*) think of the Auchinleck as being destined for a household rather than an individual, though Turville-Petre is an outlier in positing a country aristocrat as the manuscript's commissioner. Bahr himself believes that it might have been for a guild hall, i.e. for a public, communal audience. A recent dissertation by Tricia Kelly George "The Auchinleck Manuscript: A Study in Manuscript Production, Scribal Innovation, and Literary Value in the Early 14th Century" (University of Tennessee 2014) argues that the manuscript was made for the Beauchamp family, largely due to the presence of *Guy of Warwick* and the manuscript's cost. However, George overestimates both the importance of the romance's presence, and the cost of the manuscript. Furthermore, she takes the designation of the Beauchamp family from Turville-Petre (*Nation*) and others in Wiggins & Field (*Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*).

but also to the functions that those genres served, and gender was one such particular and complex function. The kinds of texts that the Auchinleck scribes gather together serve as the best evidence for the ways that they imagined the needs of their audience. This gives us a sense of the ways in which language, gender, class, and nation were intertwined.

As an attempted first collection of Middle English literature, the Auchinleck aspired not just to the status of a *liber* but of a *bibliotheca*. In other words, it attempted to reach a degree of completeness, to collect texts that would meet every imagined need of its English-reading audience. Certainly not every merchant could dream of owning such a volume. It would have been far too expensive for any but the wealthiest Londoners.¹⁹ But it is quite possible, even likely, that many merchants owned texts in smaller, more ephemeral collections, which were not durable or fortunate enough to survive. A case in point, a small manuscript, belonging to a London fishmonger, contains various statutes related to his trade, but also a Middle English chronicle very like the one in the Auchinleck.²⁰ Obviously, this fishmonger was primarily concerned with the viability and profitability of his business, but he recognized the value of cultural literacy enough to include an abridged Brut. Furthermore, several wills shows merchants leaving books that contain texts like those in the Auchinleck to their children. In 1368, John de Worstede, a London mercer, leaves his portifery, missal, Bible and legends of saints to his son. In 1367, John de Cantebrigge, a London fishmonger, leaves to his chaplain a copy of the *Golden Legend*. A 1361 bankruptcy inventory for Roger Chalket, a London pepperer, shows that he owned “iiii libr’ de romaunc’.” In 1348, Henry Graspays, a London Fishmonger, leaves a book of “romanse” to his

¹⁹ Andrew Taylor has an interesting article on the stages of capitalist speculation in the Anglo-Norman booktrade, which must at some point have become—in the early 14th century was in the process of becoming—the Middle English booktrade. “Manual to Miscellany: Stages in the Commercial Copying of Vernacular Literature in England.” Taylor argues forcefully for the “booklet” production model, in which various sections of the Auchinleck theoretically circulated independently. *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33:1-17 (2003)

²⁰ MS BL Egerton 2885, a manuscript created ca. 1395, little more than half a century after the Auchinleck.

son.²¹ Records of this kind show that demand for texts like those in the Auchinleck existed amongst merchants in London.

Several manuscripts resemble the Auchinleck in its collection of romances, basic religious instruction, and collocation of pro- and antifeminist texts, though these are not exclusively English, as the Auchinleck is.²² A few factors have kept this fact from being recognized. University disciplinary divisions often keep French texts from being considered next to English ones, even where they are found in the same manuscripts. When a manuscript is trilingual, its texts are generally destined to be read by different scholars, never considered together.²³ Still less are manuscripts in French likely to be used as literary context for manuscripts in English.²⁴ Yet there are good reasons that they should. The late thirteenth century was a time of prodigious production for Middle English literature. Many of the romances we have received come from this period, including those in the Auchinleck. Nearly all of them were translations from French. It is therefore unlikely that their translators took from the French tradition the French texts only. Surely there was some continuity of literary practice.

²¹ Susan Cavenaugh, in her 1980 dissertation, "A Study of Books Privately Owned in England: 1300-1450." V.2. p 948, V.1. pp. 141, 163, 175, 381. All records come from Reginald R. Sharpe's *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London, A.D. 1258-A.D. 1688. Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London, at the Guildhall*. London, 1889 & 1890.

²² I would argue, for instance, that the Auchinleck should be read alongside manuscripts considered "household books," since the basic religious instruction in the Auchinleck matches the evident needs of a household rather closely. For a discussion of women and their use of household books, see Anneke Mulder-Bakker, "The Household as a Site of Civic and Religious Instruction: Two Household Books from Late Medieval Brabant," in *Household, Women, and Christianities In Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Phillipa Hardman, moreover, argues that the romance focus of the Auchinleck should cause us to reconsider it as a volume for children, "Popular Romances and Young Readers."

²³ See Scahill, "Trilingualism in Early Middle English Miscellanies: Languages and Literature." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003). Scahill argues that trilingual manuscripts, far from being random miscellanies, show evidence of ordering principles that include and even exploit the interplay between Latin, French, and English for literary effects. The present argument would add that the Auchinleck does the same, despite being almost exclusively English, and that the manuscripts mentioned by Scahill, some of which (Harley 2253, for example) share texts with the Auchinleck, are evidence of antecedent practices that influenced Auchinleck's Scribe 1.

²⁴ The statement, for example, that "The Auchinleck is unique, without precedent or emulator," (Boffey & Edwards, "Middle English Literary Writings, 1150-1400"), for instance, is overstated, if we allow bi- and trilingual manuscripts to serve as precedents.

Into this institutional complex of problems, the present argument would introduce MS CUL Gg 1.1, which shows some remarkable similarities to the Auchinleck. Both created in England in the first part of the 14th century, the two manuscripts are almost exactly contemporary, but unlike the Auchinleck, CUL MS Gg 1.1 is trilingual. It contains a table of contents, which lists all the major texts, but excludes several fillers. This is remarkably similar to the Auchinleck, which has Roman numerals at the top of each recto, indicating that there must have been a table of contents at one time. Just as in CUL MS Gg 1.1, which neglects some of its shorter pieces in the table of contents, filler texts do not always make it into the Auchinleck numbering system.

The two manuscripts even share a number of texts with similar content and function, but only if considered across linguistic lines. These include a prose Anglo-Norman chronicle of England, narratives about the life of the Virgin Mary, penitential psalms, “La bounte des femmes,” “Le blasme des femmes,” “Le roman des sept sages,” and miracles of the Virgin. Importantly, it is not a collection of romances like the Auchinleck, but a set of spiritual texts with the same focus as the Auchinleck’s. Curiously, its version of the Chronicle becomes important in this dissertation a second time, in Chapter 2, for mentioning an odd female character named Inge. Inge, it will be argued, crosses linguistic barriers in dangerous ways that destabilize institutions. In this respect, she is a model for the present reading of the Auchinleck, which asserts that the Auchinleck is unique for its time in its Englishness, but not unique in its function. On the contrary, it is very like other manuscripts from the period, if we look across language and institutional barriers.²⁵ The Auchinleck scribes were not attempting something wholly new, but bringing it to an audience for

²⁵ Taylor does an excellent job of pushing us in this direction in “Manual to Miscellany.” He even mentions a manuscript, tragically lost in the Ashburnham fire, Cotton Vitellius D.iii, which at one time contained much of the same kind of material that the Auchinleck does. He posits that this is a transitional manuscript, evincing a middle stage between Anglo-Norman and English manuscript economies.

whom English had special significance. Unlike previous considerations of the Auchinleck, this dissertation considers that significance as a matter of access, which had class and gender valence, more than national.

Hybridity of Genres and the Auchinleck

Contemporary genre theory moves away from the classificatory (typical of Northrop Frye, for example) toward the explanatory. It emphasizes the role that genre plays in making all kinds of situations legible, expanding beyond the literary text to include nearly all forms of communication, verbal or non-verbal. Even objects and structures, which are not normally imagined as having a communicative element, have generic elements to them. For instance, considered as a genre, the museum is a physical structure which governs behavior, and those codes of behavior are communicated in a variety of media, from the verbal to the pictorial, even including the borders, contours, shapes, and spaces of the structure itself. In addition to governing behavior, it indicates how we are to think and feel, which discourses we are to activate, as we observe the objects and displays within. The generic coding of the structure inscribes our experience of the physical environment with cultural meaning beyond what the physical alone could innately contain. The genre is thus the building's superstructure, the sum total of cultural discourses surrounding and governing experience within the edifice. Genre theory as it now stands, then, is an all-encompassing study, not limited to the literary.

Since contemporary genre theory thinks more flexibly about the ways in which texts might have been grouped by 14th century scribes and audiences, it more readily recovers the ways in which different medieval audiences experienced and made use of their manuscripts. The ambition of this argument as a whole is thus the recovery of a kind of historical data: the reception and use

of genre at specific time and place. But since genre is always changing, always and constantly renegotiated by the audiences that receive and (re)interpret it, it also serves as a comment on the ways in which we, as an audience of the Auchinleck, can and should use it now. Every generic (re)construction is simultaneously of the past and the present, a (re)discovery of what has been and a (re)invention of what might be. Hopefully, this will convince scholars to use the manuscript in a new and invigorated way.

Current scholarship on manuscripts, as well as medieval texts more generally, is concerned with the ways that material culture and physical manuscripts inform our understanding of the texts and the cultures that produced them.²⁶ In textual criticism, the manuscript was always this imperfect attestation of a perfect text, but contemporary manuscript studies focus more on the manuscript as it is. In his seminal essay, Stephen Nichols argues:

It is that manuscript culture that the “new” philology sets out to explore in a postmodern return to the origins of medieval studies. If one considers only the dimensions of the medieval illuminated manuscript, it is evidence that philological practices that have treated the manuscript from the perspective of text and language alone have seriously neglected the important supplements that were part and parcel of medieval text production: visual images and annotation of various forms (rubric, “captions,” glosses, and interpolations).²⁷

The present argument takes this approach, focusing only on the Auchinleck manuscript so that its details begin to show their significance, but to Nichols’ list of manuscript attributes might be added collocations. For the most important activity of a scribe is to choose which texts will appear in the same manuscript. The assumption, furthermore, as one might infer from our discussion of scribes above, is that the Auchinleck scribes, particularly Scribe 1, were good at their job.²⁸ They collected

²⁶ Ralph Hanna calls this the “cultural move,” in which codicological data produces “a holistic analysis which reaches beyond books, indeed literature, to society and history.” “Analytical Survey 4, Middle English Manuscripts and the Study of Literature” *New Medieval Literatures 4* (2001), pp. 243-64. Taylor, in *Textual Situations*, makes a sophisticated call for cooperation between scholars in writing about manuscripts, and for manuscript-based study.

²⁷ “Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture.” *Speculum* 65 (1990): 1-10. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.

²⁸ Furthermore, as argued by Matthew Fisher in *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England*, scribes regarded themselves not merely as mechanical copiers but as creative participants in the production of texts.

a manuscript that fit their customer, market, audience—whichever groups one imagines as having a stake in the contents of the manuscript. Their relationship to that audience was, as has been stated, far closer than ours could ever be, so it is their activity, not our own (i.e. our textual editions), that reflects the demands of 14th century London literary culture.

Derrida's 1980 essay, "The Law of Genre," undergirds contemporary genre theory by asserting "performance" over "belonging" as the primary relation between text and genre. The first lines of the essay announce a strict theory of genre identity, "Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres. I repeat: genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix them." Of course, the overt strictness of these statements borders on the parodic, as if the Law of Genre were in fact a schoolboy's lesson, repeated so as to be remembered, internalized, and so enforced. This opening gambit implicitly performs the impossibility of interpreting even a snatch of text without textual interrelations. The fact that describing these lines as parodic is even possible implies a whole set of reading practices necessary for understanding this description: 1) Intellectuals do not speak to each other in bare pronouncements of this kind, 2) naughty schoolboys are made to repeat rules of behavior, 3) the phrase, "I repeat," is appropriate to a demagogue. Together, these lead to the conclusion that Derrida is playing at some kind of schoolboy demagoguery, deliberately mixing genres of statement in order to parody prescriptive genre theory.

All of this passes without full articulation, not as a conscious thought, but occurring automatically—as in fact most generic interpretation does. We are so adept at this kind of operation that much of it can be done without our notice, though of course each of us is more adapted to some social ecosystems than others. This competence, which is always indexed to a

This will become important, particularly in the discussion of the Auchinleck's chronicle, the *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, dubbed by this dissertation the *Liber Regum Anglie*.

specific social setting, might be termed literacy. At the simplest level, we can imagine this occurring at a traffic stop. The one who reads the red signal as “stop” is literate, and participates in a form of literacy. The American who finds himself unable to navigate the UK’s roundabouts is illiterate. Degrees of literacy, then—or perhaps, dispensing with hierarchy, simply myriad literacies—intersect and are experienced by as simply as our ability to navigate any number of social situations. Reading a book is merely one of these social situations, and the graduate student hyperliterate in reading books but unable to read a seminar room will find that he lacks a literacy vital to survival as an academe.

Later, Derrida describes the interdiction against mixing genres in other terms: “as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity” (57). Here Derrida anthropathizes the concept of genre, as if a genre could “announce itself.” And there does seem a moment in the development of any genre, at which the genre does indeed announce itself. At some point, any genre becomes self-aware, as texts begin to announce themselves members or participants. Later still, Derrida suggests that there is “lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination” (57). In other words, though it might seem that a genre consolidates for itself a pure identity as soon as it announces itself, in fact it is at its most permeable, most liable to intermixing: “at the very moment that a genre or a literature is broached, at the very moment, degenerescence has begun, the end begins” (66).

There is a clear reason why this should be the case. When a genre becomes self-aware, announces itself, or is broached, it has reached a saturation point, a level of familiarity with its audience. In the terms used earlier, its audience has attained a literacy specific to this genre. They are well-versed, so to speak, in this particular aggregation of forms, motifs, topoi,

characters, plot structures, etc. Without this literacy, the self-aware gesture would be meaningless, possible perhaps to express, but impossible to interpret. A premature self-awareness might be recognized later, but in its moment it falls flat. This is often what is meant when a work of art is “ahead of its time.” That eventuality, however, is not the reason why “degenerescence” begins when a genre becomes self-aware. At the moment that a genre announces itself, and its announcement is received, accepted, understood by its audience, it has become a literary artifact, “existing” in some sense, in whatever conceptual space such things can be said to “exist,” next to others. And it is impossible for such generic artifacts, existing side by side, for both audiences and authors, to resist each other’s resonance. To be “next to” one another, which is a necessary condition of being a literary genre at all, they must necessarily imprint themselves, bleed through into one another, just as the material pages of a manuscript do. To be a thing implies identity, but identity ineluctably invites intermixing. This is the methodological context for the tables and data below.²⁹

The table below differs from other lists of romances in the Auchinleck by allowing the existence of generic hybrids. Its purpose is to expand the ways in which the romance genre structures the manuscript, by showing that the Auchinleck’s texts often participate in more than one genre. The term “generic genetics” expressly avoids implying that any of these texts “is” one or other of the genres listed. The relationship between text and genre cannot be denoted by a simple copulative. Rather, each of these texts participates in aspects of the genres listed under this term,

²⁹ For an excellent example of the current focus on physical manuscripts in all their complexity, see Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London*. He focuses on several manuscripts, the Auchinleck among them, but organizes his selections around the city of London. Another recent work that follows this trend: Kimberly Bell and Julie N. Couch’s *The Texts and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Laud Misc. 108: The Shaping of English Vernacular Narrative*; this book frequently compares the Auchinleck to Ms. Laud Misc. 108, not only for sharing specific texts, but for following similar generic strategies. The same may be said of Susanna Fein’s *Studies in the Harley Manuscript*.

without being defined or delimited by them. Table 2 does not make any strong claims about what any text “is,” but identifies the multiplicity of generic traditions from which any given text derives its legibility. The first entry, for instance, the *Legend of Pope Gregory*, “is” not a romance, but its male protagonist is a knight whose narrative follows a structure remarkably similar to that of romance knights, and particularly that of Sir Degare. Chapter 3 elaborates on the significance of this similarity. In the mean time, the table below notes romance as among *Gregory’s* generic “genes” because to neglect its inheritance from romance is to ignore its important relationship to the genre. Since this dissertation is predicated on finely distinguished intertextual relations planned by the Auchinleck scribes, it cannot afford to neglect the romance elements in any of its texts.

Table 1: Romance in the Auchinleck

Text	Booklet	Scribe	Generic Genetics
Legend of Pope Gregory	1	1	Saint’s life/Female Saint’s life/Romance
King of Tars	1	1	Romance/Female Saint’s life
Speculum Gy de Warewyke	2	2	Homily/Romance
Amis & Amiloun	2	1	Romance
Sir Degare	3	3	Romance
The Seven Sages of Rome	3	3	Frame Tale/Romance
Floris & Blancheflour	3	3	Romance
Battle Abbey Roll	2	4	List/History/Romance
Sir Guy of Warwick	4	1	Romance
Reinbroun	4	5	Romance
Sir Beues of Hamtoun	5	5	Romance
Of Arthour & Merline	5	1	Romance/Chanson de Geste
Lai le Fresne	6	1	Romance/Lai
Roland & Vernagu	6	1	Romance/Chanson de Geste
Otuel a Knight	7	6	Romance/Chanson de Geste
Kyng Alisaunder	8	1	Romance
Sir Tristrem	9	1	Romance
Sir Orfeo	9	1	Romance/Lai
Liber Regum Anglie	10	1	Chronicle/Romance
Horne Childe & Maiden Rinnilde	10	1	Romance
King Richard	11	1	Romance/History

The above shows that Auchinleck has a sustained preference for romances across all scribes and booklets.³⁰ Scribe 1 copies most of them, but each of the others, under his instruction copied a romance or a romance hybrid. *Speculum Gy de Warewyke* is a homily, but presented as one heard by Guy of Warwick himself. This tie-in with the romance genre presumably intended to make the homily more palatable (though scholars should be careful not to assume that homilies were not enjoyed on their own terms).³¹ The “Battle Abbey Roll” as well should be regarded as a romance tie-in. As a list of knights who were with William the Conqueror, it borders already on the romance genre. But sections of it exhibit sustained rhyme and consonance, making it a quasi-poetic. Furthermore, Booklet 1 contains two texts that are hybrids between saints’ lives and romance, which might be termed apposite hybridism, considering the other contents of the booklet. In every way, then, the Auchinleck earns its reputation as a collection of romances, but one more complexly conceived than a simplistic understanding of genre would allow.

The Auchinleck’s multifarious religious genres also show a complex intertextual design. Fully a third of the manuscript’s extant texts are religious, with most of them featuring a woman in some significant way. The four texts that contain basic religious doctrine are clearly selected to provide the essential tenets of Catholicism in English.³² The *Paternoster*, for instance, provides

³⁰ For more on the Auchinleck’s sustained interest in romance, as well as the complexities of defining romance in this period, see Carol Fewsters, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance*. Fewster agrees with the present argument that the Auchinleck shows a “well established” (38) romance tradition, despite its production being so early in the Middle English romance tradition.

³¹ An interesting point of conflict between romance and homily is cited in Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (14). In a homily in MS. Harley 7322, the homilist decries the relative affective relation that his congregants have to Guy and Christ. Apparently, the romance was too popular for his taste. Roger Dalrymple, in *Language and Piety in Middle English Romance*, finds that Guy of Warwick is a kind of hybrid between romance and saint’s life (123), a description this argument finds attractive, considering the multiple generic claims it makes on the manuscript.

³² Connolly examines 15th century “devotional anthologies” in “Books for the ‘helpe of euery persooone þat þenkiþ to be sauēd’: Six Devotional Anthologies from Fifteenth-Century London.” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003). Though of course much later than the context of the present argument, the 15th century surely shared with the 14th a demand for texts that provided the basics of the Christian faith. The Auchinleck might therefore be considered a devotional anthology too. See also Edwards, A.S.G. “Fifteenth-Century English Collections of Female Saints’

glossing for each Latin line of the Lord's Prayer, which is consistent with the manuscript's general insistence on Englishness. So the religious texts in the Auchinleck are almost all targeted either toward women specifically, or towards those with reduced access to Latin, which would include children and "lewed" men. The spiritual texts also show desire to "complete" Biblical narratives. The Auchinleck's *Life of Adam and Eve*, for instance, ends with Adam's soul being sent into torment, along with a prophecy that his soul would be freed by Christ. Shortly after, the manuscript gives depictions of hell in *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, followed closely by *The Harrowing of Hell*. The manuscript thus performs Adam's residence and subsequent liberation from hell across multiple texts. In another intertextual example of Biblical historical completionism, *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary*, copied by Scribe 1, is later completed by the *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, copied by Scribe 3. The manuscript thus attempts to provide a complete Biblical, theological framework, and it does so across booklets and scribal stints.

Table 2: Religious Texts

Text	Booklet	Scribe	Generic Genetics
The Life of Adam & Eve	1	1	Apocryphal Biblical Narrative
Seynt Mergrete	1	1	Female Saint's Life
Seynt Katerine	1	1	Female Saint's Life
St. Patrick's Purgatory	1		Journey through Hell
The Disputisoun Bitven the Bodi and the Soule	1	1	Body/Soul Debate
The Harrowing of Hell	1	1	Dramatization of the Harrowing
The Clerk who would see the Virgin	1	1	Virgin Miracle Satire/Fabliau
Speculum Gy de Warewyke	2	2	Homily/Romance
The Life of St. Mary Magdalen	2	1	Female Saint's Life
The Nativity and Early Life of Mary	2	1	Female Saint's Life
On the Seven Deadly Sins	3	3	Basic Religious Doctrine
Paternoster	3	3	Basic Religious Doctrine
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin	3	3	Female Saint's Life
How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found	5	1	Virgin Miracle Satire
David the King	8	1	Basic Religious Doctrine

Text	Booklet	Scribe	Generic Genetics
Four Foes of Mankind	9	1	Basic Religious Doctrine

Some of the filler texts included by Scribe 1 complicate this “complete” Biblical framework, however. The two texts above listed as Virgin miracle satire will be discussed in Chapter 4, which argues that they respond to and even satirize the manuscript’s focus on female spirituality. It seems that Scribe 1’s sense of the manuscript was so strong that he could subtly subvert its spiritual agenda. In order for him to do this, female spirituality would have to be one of the categories that he was operating with.

Finally, there are texts clearly chosen for their relationship to women as a literary construct, not classifiable as either romance or spiritual:

Table 3: Other Women’s Texts

Text	Booklet	Scribe	Generic Genetics
þe Wenche þat Loved þe King	5	1	Fabliau? (missing from manuscript)
A Peniworþ of Witt	5	1	Fabliau
The Thrush and the Nightingale	8	1	Debate Poem
Alphabetical Praise of Women	10	1	Acrostic Poem

The groupings of texts provided in the tables above hopefully show that the genres in the Auchinleck are not discrete. The genres they inhabit and perform exists in neighboring conceptual space for the manuscript’s compilers. To be “next to” one another, they must necessarily imprint themselves, bleed through into one another, just as the material pages of a manuscript do. To be a thing implies identity, but identity ineluctably invites intermixing.

This collocation in conceptual space, where genres dissemble as *Dinge an sich*, replicates itself in the collocation of texts within the Auchinleck. In the received manuscript, there are romances existing in their unaltered state, unmixed, pure examples of the genre. These are the marquee romances: *Guy of Warwick*, *Beves of Hamtoun*. They anchor the manuscript, standing at

the head of their booklets and clearly prioritized for inclusion. Their codicological priority as well as the sheer space they occupy in the manuscript quickly earned the Auchinleck a reputation as a romance collection. And so it is, containing many of the received romances, and almost certainly having contained more at one time. And many of the romances occur in the Auchinleck first. They are often the earliest and most reliable texts we have. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm with which the Auchinleck was touted as a romance collection has largely concealed its other qualities.

Too big and too famous to be substantially revised, the large romances of the Auchinleck are closely translated from their Anglo-Norman sources. They are not, in other words, where the conditions of literacy specific to the early 14th century London milieu are likely to be found. The other, smaller texts, however, were subject to a greater degree of revision, and are perhaps even in some cases original to and produced for this manuscript in particular. Fit into interstices of the manuscript, crammed in as filler text or cobbled together from multiple sources and contemporary politics, are the texts difficult to categorize into genres useful to scholars. Yet in these texts are to be found clues to the purpose of the manuscript,³³ not just a romance collection, though certainly that, but a compendium more broadly interested in the many literacies of its day. Romance was one form of literacy, necessary to any kind of cultural aspiration. But the Auchinleck aspires to educate its imagined audience in several literacies, spiritual, political, and cultural. Note that this study seeks a kind of access to that audience—access because it insists that it is real, its traces left in the manuscript and ready to be uncovered.

³³ The recovery of a manuscript's purpose is one aspect of current manuscript studies. In commenting on the closeness of the so-called intentional fallacy, Bahr even suggests that "the author is not irrevocably dead" (*Fragments and Assemblages*).

Booklet/Manuscript : Chapter/Dissertation

Chapter 1 analyzes texts across the Chaucerian corpus for references to the romance genre, uncovering evidence of London readers' expectations about romance, language, and gender. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer's depiction of Criseyde in a ladies' romance reading group suggests that the genre was typically associated with women. Importantly, this does not mean that it was so, but that Chaucer could achieve something by representing it thus. Anachronistic "realism" is only one possibility. Proceeding carefully, then, Chapter 1 reconstructs the conceptual web that Chaucer weaves around the romance genre. Most important to his construction of romance reading is a kind of vicarious experience, available to careful readers, but importantly not to the man of action, not to Troilus himself. Those who read romances are gendered feminine—in Pandarus' case, less masculine—precisely because of their seeking out vicarious experience. Furthermore, Chaucer constructs romance in the vernacular as most feminine of all, though not necessarily linguistically lesser. Latin and vernacular texts run parallel to one another, yet translation and access are great problems. He emphasizes this latter point by making those with access to Latin either less likely to understand, or less likely to communicate their meaning, and he does this along gendered lines. In so doing, Chaucer triangulates gender, language, and genre: he locates them in relation to one another.

Chaucer repeats this triangulation later in his career, in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. Chauntecleer uses his access to male Latinity to score points against his wife Pertelot. By mistranslating his Latin to his wife, he repeats the gendered miscommunications found in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chauntecleer's antifeminist mischief shows that a reading culture in which Latin is masculine and English feminine enables and perpetuates Latinate misogyny. Gender and language differences thereby mutually reinforce one another. Into this relationship, Chaucer once again

interposes the romance genre, revealing that literary practices also reinforce linguistic and gender hierarchies. By placing romance in a feminine position, he demonstrates the ways that one's reading affects one's performance of gender. The pilgrim Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas* demonstrates this most clearly. Or rather, Harry Bailey's negative response to *Sir Thopas* along with his fixation on masculinity, demonstrates that the pilgrim Chaucer's taste for English romance doesn't sit well with his Host's rigid gender categories. The Nun's Priest, on the other hand, receives a blessing on his balls for his tale, because his mastery and mockery of various genres, his hyperliterate Latinity, is the most masculine tale Harry can imagine.

Chapter 1 thus establishes a conceptual framework for the rest of the dissertation, showing that Chaucer's construction of the relationship between genre, language, and gender was remarkably consistent throughout his oeuvre. Even texts separated by a decade link the same familiar triad, and this argues that Chaucer was interacting with a persistent literary historical reality. He links romance, women, and English because a consistent set of reading practices and expectations surround them. By transposing Chaucer's triad back in time to the 1330s, the following chapters read the Auchinleck as the product of a similar reading culture. The function of Chapter 1, then, is to lay the foundations for reading the Auchinleck as a romance collection focused upon the needs and interest of women and the young, rather than as a nationalist volume. Chaucer's construction of women and romance, and their peculiar relationship, will show that the English language and the romance genre were more linked with women and children than they were with the "nation" of England. The Auchinleck's peculiar emphasis of language and genre should be read in the context provided by Chaucer, as I will do in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2 concerns the Auchinleck's metrical chronicle, usually called the *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle (ASEMChron)*, or the *Anonymous English Metrical Brut*

(*AEMBrut*) but in this dissertation labeled the *Liber Regum Anglie*. First, it establishes that the *Liber* was composed for a London audience. Whoever augmented the *ASEMChron* consistently added or expanded upon London episodes, showing a consistent preference for the city whenever a chronicle entry requires a location. Second, it shows that the Chaucerian triad established in Chapter 1 also operates in the Auchinleck's chronicle. The *Liber* responds to the political upheavals of the 1320s by reordering and obscuring them, placing blame for Isabella's rebellion against her husband upon women more generally. In doing so, it breaks the Auchinleck's English exclusivity, in a passage difficult to explain outside the context of London's ambivalent relationship to Isabella.

Chapter 2 thus shows that the London redactor of the *Liber Regum Anglie* sought to displace a sense of communal guilt by gendering it. His revision of British history suggests that not only rebellious queen mothers but women generally embody a chaotic threat to homosocial order. The need for firm control bridges the political and domestic spheres, and universalizes the homely Middle English reading practices of the Auchinleck by rendering them transhistorical. The function of this chapter, then, is to show that the process of revision that transformed the *AEM Brut* into the Auchinleck's *Liber* had the specific purpose of localizing the chronicle to a specific time and place, and of making a specifically antifeminist statement about London and its collusion with Isabella of France. According to the *Liber*, women and womanhood are to blame for the instability of the 1320s, and the actions of Auchinleck women both vicious and virtuous should be read in this context. Within the larger argument of this dissertation, it shows that women's agency in the political sphere was a topic of considerable tension when the Auchinleck was produced, and that establishes the historical context for the readings of the manuscript's romances in Chapter 3.

Building on the concerns established in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 identifies a specific romance motif favored by the manuscript, the abnormal birth, and articulates its use as an expression of ambivalence about women's agency. Careful analysis of three different Auchinleck romances reveals that Scribe 1 selected romances not just for being part of the larger genre, but for their more specific content. In this case, three different romances follow an elegant envelope pattern, in which the mother's story both precedes and concludes after an abnormal son's. The abnormal birth motif structures "The Legend of Pope Gregory," "The King of Tars," and "Sir Degare." Of these, only "Degare" is a simple romance, the other two being hybrids of romance and female saint's life. This cross-generic interest in a single motif also crosses other borders, both scribal and codicological. Scribe 1 clearly instructed Scribe 3 to copy out "Sir Degare," which appears in an entirely different section of the manuscript. For these reasons, the similarities between the narratives have been largely neglected, despite the fact that abnormal birth seems to structure large portions of the manuscript. Furthermore, the manuscript's repeated use of this motif develops the Middle English romance into a genre that resonates with the Auchinleck's specific milieu—or rather, it suggests that the Auchinleck's milieu demanded romances that resonated with it, and that Scribe 1 could cater to that demand. Scribe 1 thus plays a pivotal role in the development of the Middle English romance genre by responding to a London literary culture shaped by Isabella's divisive agency in English politics.

Chapter 3 concludes with an examination of a fourth text, "The Seven Sages of Rome," which alludes to the original abnormal birth of romance, Merlin himself. By including Merlin in the frame tale, "Seven Sages" adds yet another abnormal birth to the manuscript. Furthermore, the infanticidal empress' plot to kill her stepson suggests through Merlin that story-telling itself is a male prerogative, which women might nonetheless appropriate and usurp. Needless to say, "Seven

Sages” is not in favor of such usurpation, finding in the empress perhaps another echo of Isabella. Chapter 3’s function is to develop the argument of chapter 2, which concerns the *Liber* alone, into a more comprehensive commentary on the romance genre. The four texts analyzed in Chapter 3 show that Scribe 1 could collocate several romances and romance-related texts according to a specific motif, and that he did so because it complemented the Auchinleck’s more general stance on the dangers posed by female agency. Isabella’s actions, discussed in Chapter 2, are repeatedly undone by the extraordinary romance protagonists of Chapter 3, who together seem to suggest a way forward for the young Edward III. To succeed as monarch, he must end the intergenerational struggles occasioned by women and their role in reproduction, banishing the spectre of Isabella. However, the empress of *The Seven Sages* also presages another development, the 14th century rivalry between women and clerks, articulated in the following chapter.

The final chapter of the dissertation closes the envelope opened in Chapter 1. By returning to Chaucer, it takes the concepts and conceits of Chapters 2 and 3 and applies them to the end of the 14th century. In several places in his oeuvre, Chaucer depicts the same appropriation of storytelling found in the Auchinleck’s “Seven Sages,” but in a more overt, perhaps more sympathetic fashion. Three very different Chaucerian women, Alceste, Alison, and Dame Prudence, all show the same willingness to take hold of textual production by manipulating male transgressions against them. By repeating this appropriative act throughout his works, Chaucer reveals his fixation on the gendered differences in access to textual tradition. Moreover, by showing such different women performing the same appropriations, Chaucer reveals a certain sympathy for women’s textual needs. Next, Chapter 4 shows that the Auchinleck’s Scribe 1 had a similar fixation. His selection of filler texts shows his awareness that textuality and sexuality are inextricably linked, and that this leads to a perennial rivalry between clerks and the women who

consume their texts. In two fillers, “The Clerk who would See the Virgin” and “How Our Lady’s Sauter Was First Found,” Scribe 1 repeats an odd image, the naked body of the Virgin Mary, whose state of (un)dress is under scribal control. Where Chaucer shows some sympathy, it seems, Scribe 1 was similarly aware, but reveled in the fact that women must come to him for textual services. This concludes the dissertation’s argument about the Auchinleck by showing that Englishness and textuality are mutually linked by being gendered feminine.

Where Chapter 1 moved backwards in time, using Chaucer to read the Auchinleck, Chapter 4 returns the argument to the late 14th century, using the Auchinleck to read Chaucer. The Auchinleck’s rivalry between women and clerks shows that Chaucer made an existing literary topos more overt and subversive, in order to articulate the relations of power inherent in the economies of textual production. The function of Chapter 4 is to argue that early and late 14th century London shared a reading culture that pitted women and clerks against one another in a contest for control over the texts that clerks wrote and women read. Middle English romance developed under the pressures of this rivalry into a genre uniquely ambivalent toward women’s agency, expressing both their desire for control, and repressing the articulation of it.

The conclusion to the dissertation examines a little-known text, the Auchinleck’s apocryphal *Life of Adam and Eve*. This unique text, found only in the Auchinleck but with parallels in other manuscripts, relates several episodes in the lives of Adam and Eve, and concludes with the death of Adam, followed shortly by that of Eve. Before she dies, Eve orders her son Seth to commit the *Life* itself to writing. The text thus ends with the story of the creation and transmission of the text itself. Importantly for the present argument, Eve does not write the *Life*, but commissions it. The conclusion of this dissertation will not speculate concerning the origin of the manuscript, the identity or gender of its commissioner. To do so would overstep the warrant of

available evidence. However, the *Life* suggests that women were in the position of commissioning texts often enough to be represented doing so in a mythical or Biblical setting. Eve represents women in an awkward position, in need of texts and using them, but unable to produce them. The clerkly Seth must intervene on their behalf, and in doing so he becomes the first in a chain of men who control and transmit women's stories. The dissertation thus concludes by considering the manuscript's self-awareness as a product of clerks who exist in a supply chain begun by women, and by showing how clerks responded to that awareness. Scribe 1 particularly evinces resentment of and resistance to the power of women who play a role in textual reproduction and consumption, as is established in chapter 4, but the Auchinleck's *Life* suggests a broader culture of scribes who were concerned to maintain their monopoly on textuality. To do that, women had to be fit into a narrative space that contained their threatening potential.

Chapter 1: Chaucer and Romance Reading Practice

...and he forth in gan pace,
And fond two othere ladys sete and she,
Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre
Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste.³⁴
-*Troilus & Criseyde* II.80-84

Throughout the 14th century, the generic term “romance,” though certainly used to denote a certain kind of narrative, was not fully differentiated from its linguistic meaning, denoting a non-Latin text, particularly one in French. In CUL MS Gg 1.1, the term is used liberally in the manuscript’s aforementioned table of contents. “Romance” is generally used in the phrase “en romance,” which exclusively means “in French.” The Middle English *Northern Passion*, by contrast, is titled “Livre de la passion nostre seignur Jesu Crist en engleis,” which contrasts implicitly with “en romance.” Another formula appear, however, “Romaunce de...”, can be used with narratives and non-narrative texts alike, “Romaunce de amour” contrasting with “Romaunce del ave maria.” In CUL MS Gg 1.1, the linguistic meaning of “romaunce” thus predominates and is used interchangeably with “en fraunceis.” There is strong reason why this should be so. As a technology of reading, the table of contents in CUL MS Gg 1.1 shaped and was shaped by the

³⁴ I will be using the *Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Stephen Barney, for all quotations of Chaucer.

ways that readers expected to gain access to texts. In a trilingual manuscript, the language of the text being sought out must be noted somehow in the table of contents, since, depending on the literacies of its reader, the language of the text she would turn to was important. There are thus material reasons why the linguistic meaning of “romance” should remain current in the early 14th century when CUL MS Gg 1.1 was produced. The fact that a linguistically sensitive table of contents exists contemporary with the Auchinleck shows that imperfect or attenuated access to texts in a manuscript was a common enough experience to early 14th century readers that technologies of reading were attempting to alleviate the awkwardness of limited literacy. It also casts the Englishness of the Auchinleck in a different light.

Later in the 14th century, when it is commonly accepted that English was increasingly a literary language of choice, the linguistic meaning of “romance” could erode because its function was diminishingly useful. Its generic meaning came to predominate. Nevertheless, the use of “romance” to mean a narrative in French specifically was still current enough for Chaucer to make sophisticated use of this meaning, and it will be the purpose of this first chapter to examine his exploitation of the erosive process “romance” was undergoing. A consideration of Chaucer’s relationship to romance (as a genre) will show that he was keenly aware of the genre’s reinforcement of gender performance, and that at times he interrogated or even undermined that relationship. Furthermore, he uses the linguistic meaning of “romance” to comment upon the interrelations between literacy, reading practices, and gender. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, and later in *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer shows romance in a peculiar relationship to gender both in its standardized generic content and in associated reading practices, providing an important starting point for investigation of the Auchinleck’s relationship to genre and gender. If the Auchinleck scribes compiled a manuscript that employs strategies similar to Chaucer’s, then they arguably

drew from a set of reading practices similar to his, and London's literary interrogation of gender began not with Chaucer but a generation or two before his birth. The following consideration of Chaucer's relationship to romance will thus provide a base set of inferences about late 14th century London reading practices. Transposing these practices back in time by fifty years—across the gap caused by the Black Death in 1343—will provide us with a framework for reading the Auchinleck as a consciously compiled, implicitly gendered literary object.

When Chaucer articulates interrelations between genre, gender, age, and language, he regularly associates English romance with women, with the young, and therefore also with disempowerment. Since Latin and French commanded more prestige than English, and spiritual texts more approbation than secular entertainments, it makes sense that he should do so. As an intersection of negatives, English romance was defined, like women's bodies, by absence—the absence of French or Latin, the absence of spiritual or even literary merit. Nevertheless, Chaucer does a great deal to recuperate the genre, if only by inclusion. Though certainly aware that English romance occupied a low station—possibly the only lower being fabliau—he was clearly interested in the possibilities afforded by occupying that station. In telling English romances, Chaucer self-consciously identifies himself with three negatively charged signifiers—femininity, childishness, and Englishness. In doing so, he associates his own body with a body of texts, and though his outlook must obviously differ from theirs, he operates with categories similar to those used by feminist and queer theory. Chaucer seems keenly aware that bodies operate as signifiers of gender, that gender is a way of making bodies mean, of making them signify forms of domination. He also explores how a body of texts—a genre—might bear or be assigned a gender, and how both genre and gender are imbricated in male authority.

Where education is the privilege of one gender more than the other, languages and access to them become obvious signifiers of power. In 14th century England, men were far more likely to have access to Latin learning than women were. It is not hard to see how this genders Latin. Similarly, though both women and men spoke English, for the most part only men entered into a Latinate literacy as part of maturation. For a growing urban class of men, aging was simultaneously a process of becoming more masculine, and becoming more Latinate. For a clerk, English was the language of his mother, the language he still spoke when speaking to his mother, the only language he spoke when his mother still had parental authority over him. In the 14th century, French too, for both men and women, would have had a class component. London merchants, especially those in international trade, would have had French, but likely a more practical and business-like French than the more literary French of aristocrats. The kind of French one spoke could thus be a marker of class, though even amongst aristocrats, French was not necessarily spoken well. This is clear from the Auchinleck's famous introduction to *Of Arthur & of Merline*, in which the narrator claims he knows many a noble man who cannot speak French, despite French's continuing association with aristocracy. That was in the second quarter of the 14th century. In the final quarter, we find Chaucer's Prioress unaware that her particular form of French is déclassé.

Concerning the interaction of English, French, and Latin in 14th century England, a great deal has been written. In broad strokes, the earlier narrative of the changing relationship between these languages is that English was "conquered" years following the Norman invasion, and thus for political intents and purposes disqualified. It remained suppressed for centuries after, until a spate of translations in the later 13th century, which prepared the way for its eventual reemergence and "triumph" over French in the late 14th, with the advent of Chaucer, the "firste fyndere of our faire langage," and the other Ricardian poets. This narrative served the purposes of scholars

asserting a nationalistic framework for English literature, but is in need of major revision. Of course, there is nothing essentially wrong with the assertion that the upper classes eventually began to speak English again, or that French texts saw a drop in production as the Middle Ages were coming to a close. However, a narrative of “triumph” after “conquest” can pit two languages against one another in a way perhaps more reminiscent of academic departmental rivalries than the lived experiences of medieval Englishmen.

The current interest is in the finer points of interaction between the languages of England. Scholars such as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne³⁵ and Ardis Butterfield have shifted the conversation to the complex borrowings and influences that occurred between the several languages of England. Butterfield writes in *The Familiar Enemy*, “There was nothing isolated or autonomous about fourteenth-century written English, and to use it was to be not only profoundly aware of other languages, but also to be thinking across and among and between other languages” (285). So the current model is of parallel languages that nevertheless touch and intersect in many places. Into that matrix of scholarship, this study of the Auchinleck seeks entry by contributing only to our understanding of the ways that these languages interacted in a very specific time and place, London in the 1330s, and perhaps only for the scribes of the Auchinleck.³⁶ So the present argument insists on the particularity of the manuscript as an object that can reveal aspects of inter-lingual

³⁵ In her introduction to *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain*, Wogan-Browne points out the fallacious division between Anglo-Norman and Anglo-French, the later generally used to indicate textual “imports.” The division bolsters the traditional, implicitly nationalistic 14th century “triumph” of English over French, which had dominated as the literary language of England since the Norman Conquest. This contradicts somewhat Turville-Peter’s theory of English literary nationalism, which he locates in the Auchinleck manuscript, amongst others. Wogan-Browne refers to this division as performing a “ghettoization” of medieval insular French, its continuities with and importance to medieval English literature. She further remarks that “a great deal of further enquiry is needed in which the narratives of historians and literary and linguistic scholars cross-fertilize each other,” and it is toward this very cross-fertilization that this project wishes to contribute. Hopefully there can be further inquiry into the historical significance of literary products such as the Auchinleck.

³⁶ Chapter 2 will examine one of the few instances of French in the Auchinleck, in order to show how such borrowing could be used to comment on the politics of gender and the gender of politics.

interactions, but does not wish to assert that these interactions were imagined everywhere in the same way, or by everyone.

Amongst manuscripts that were created in this time and place, the Auchinleck is certainly unique in the exclusivity of its Englishness, but it is not unique in the features of organization that have been remarked on in this introduction. It provides the basic texts of religious practice in English, the paternoster, penitential psalms, information on the seven deadly sins, and the major points of redemptive history. Creation, fall, redemption, the harrowing of hell, the major life events of Mary—all of these are found within its pages, and together they create a remarkably complete theological picture of the world. This perhaps could be a coincidence if the manuscript were the only such basic theological compendium from this time and place, but CUL Gg 1.1 gives us another such manuscripts, only in French. Together, these manuscripts suggest not accident but design. There was an idea, in this time and place, of a book that could provide the major points of theological history, and this idea existed both in French and English. Only by crossing linguistic boundaries does this become clear.

In the context of Auchinleck studies, the above considerations augment our understanding of its collocations, if we allow that the manuscript's compilers were aware in their own time of these same conditions of literacy, or similar ones, as Chaucer later was. The goal of this chapter, then, is to acquire stolen fire. Chaucer, as a Foucauldian author function, has the advantage of admitting high degrees of complexity in intertextual reading. It is therefore possible to read across the Chaucerian corpus to produce a complex intersection of language, genre, gender, and age. Once that intersection has been produced, however, it might be possible to steal it for the Auchinleck. If Chaucer had an awareness of these issues, might not the ways in which the Auchinleck scribes performed their work also evince awareness of these intersections of power? In fact, it will be

shown that this is the case: the scribes of the Auchinleck had women in mind when they produced their English-only manuscript, and their imagination of what women wanted and needed was indexed both to the functions of languages and of genres.

The most obvious places to begin are those moments when Chaucer directly portrays romance reading. This he does repeatedly in *Troilus and Criseyde*, though his depictions of romance reading are perhaps perilously obvious. A careful analysis will nevertheless show that Chaucer consistently made romance, in both its linguistic and generic aspects, a complex signifier of gender. Less overtly, Chaucer places an oblique reference to romance in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, though what Priest's metonymic allusion signifies is even more difficult to decipher than Chaucer's depictions in the *Troilus*. Finally, this chapter will look at the *Tale of Sir Thopas*, hoping to counteract the generally negative scholarly criticism on Chaucer's intentionally slapdash tail-rhyme romance. In all three texts, Chaucer uses depictions of romance reading either to "reflect" or "refract" the realities of 14th century reading practice.

Both the above metaphoric verbs are necessary to avoid reading Chaucer as straightforwardly representing the reading practices of his day. The ubiquity of the verb "reflect" in literary criticism—most especially of undergraduate criticism—unfortunately obscures the root metaphor, which posits a simple, indexical relationship between representation and its correlative realities. Of course no relationship between representation and reality could ever be so simple. Every mirror, however perfect, distorts its object to some degree. Juxtaposing "reflect" with "refract" defamiliarizes the optic metaphor, suggesting that any act of representation performs work upon that which it represents. Nevertheless, refraction retains some relation to the reality. The task at hand, then, is to describe the mechanism of refraction (perhaps extending the metaphor close to its breaking point, to describe the shape and function of the textual *prism*). In identifying

the work Chaucer performs with the reality of 14th century reading practices, we bring to light, so to speak, the conditions of literacy that he expected his audience to operate within. Put simply, access to historical data can come through analysis of the literary text, but only by examining the relationship between the literary object and historical reality in all its complexity.

This chapter will show how Chaucer imagined genres of literature as functions of gender, and *vice versa*. To enjoy or to perform a genre is to perform one's gender, or to subvert it. Chaucer implicates romance in particular in the production of gendered authority. Even for him, to make use of the romance genre was to subject oneself to social construction. This social reality of gendered genre operated in much the same way as Althusser's interpellation, the hailing by the police officer which subjects the self to social power. In this case, the interpellation is performed by Harry Bailey, who hails the "elfish" Chaucer, forcing him into a pre-existing set of social rules and roles. The conclusion of this chapter, then, will read Chaucer's exaggerated response to Harry's "hailing" as a protest against his bullying interpellation. Chaucer is thus keenly aware that to participate in a genre both enables the subject to operate in a social context, and hems it in uncomfortably, necessitating a rebellion. Chaucer thus presents us with a homology between genre and gender, showing that they function within and reinforce the social norms by which the self is constituted.

Literacy, Language, and Gender in *Troilus and Criseyde*

When Chaucer depicts romance reading in the *Troilus*, he typically represent the character reading in an ambivalent relationship to the genre. At the beginning of Book II, when Pandarus happens upon Criseyde and her ladies reading a romance, the double positioning of the genre is subtly expressed:

...and he forth in gan pace,
 And fond two othere ladys sete and she,
 Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre
 Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
 Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste.³⁷ (II.80-84)

As Pandarus enters, two ladies of rank listen to a romance along with Criseyde, and a fourth “mayden” reads the romance, which, importantly, he calls by the linguistically neutral term “geste,” aloud. Taken as a simple reflection of 14th century reading practice, the scene suggests that aristocrats generally outsourced the taxing work of performing the romance to someone of lower rank, either a servant or younger noblewoman. But this scene does more than simply reflect the historical realities of 14th century reading. A literary *mise-en-abyme*, it recalls the depiction of romance reading found in Chretien’s *Yvain*. Toward the end of his journeys, Yvain finds himself in an enchanted castle, where a young girl reads an unidentified romance to her father and mother:

<p>Mesire Yvains el vergier entre Et après lui toute sa route; Apuyé voit deseur son coute Un prodonme qui se gesoit Seur .i. drap de soie; et lisoit Une puchele devant li En un ronmans, ne sai de cui. (5353-59)</p>	<p>Sir Yvain enters the garden And after him all his company There he sees upon his side A good man who was lying Upon a cloth of silk; and reading to him A young girl in front of him From a romance, I do not know of whom.</p>
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The young girl reading to her parents—Chretien subsequently mentions her mother too—parallels the lower ranked maiden in Criseyde’s reading group. These two scenes, Chaucer’s and Chretien’s, represent romance reading as a group activity, with the younger, subordinate person reading aloud. The shade of Dante’s Francesca da Polenta might hover over this scene too. The *Inferno*’s famous lovers are damned to the whirlwind because a romance of Lancelot excites lust in them. As will be shown later, Chaucer seems to recall this moment again in that other tale of lust, the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*. Of course, Criseyde’s reading company is comparatively appropriate next to

³⁷ I will be using the *Norton Critical Edition*, edited by Stephen Barney, for all quotations of Chaucer.

Francesca's: she enjoys a reading in a group consisting only of women, in a more or less public area of her dwelling. Chaucer thus makes use of prior depictions of romance reading to suggest that Criseyde's literary pursuits are within bounds of propriety. However, it is and must remain unclear whether Chaucer depicts group romance reading because that is how it was in fact read in his time, or because of an established norm for representation of reading determined by literary precedent.

The time of day might also signify something. It is late morning, as may be deduced from Pandarus' sleeping in until a swallow wakes him, though it is not clear whether the time of day is apposite to romance reading or not. Criseyde's late-morning indulgences in romance might be read as an appropriate and realistic pursuit for a female aristocrat, or as a joke at her expense. Already, in other words, we have several layers of overdetermination. Text could refer to reality only or also to other texts. It could reflect late 14th century reading practices, or the reading practice of an "other time." Possibly group reading of a romance would have been regarded as a quaint practice, emblematic of an earlier generation. Excavating any solid information from this scene might therefore seem hopeless. This overdetermination suggests that the status of romance as a genre was for Chaucer too fraught to articulate directly, and he expresses its ambivalence economically. This is an impenetrable scene, one that does not admit easy interpretation, whose details are too laden with meaning to decipher, both because of its relationship to fraught depictions of romance—to *Yvain* and *Inferno*—as well as to the realities of reading practice.

Nevertheless, Chaucer shows himself sensitive to the social context of reading practices. Criseyde might be reading in appropriate company, without men present, an image of women's literacy that is commonly read as the reality but which is suggestive even if women did not read in this way, perhaps especially so. If women of rank did not gather to read romances in the early

morning, then Chaucer's depicting Criseyde doing so takes on particular meaning. An exclusively female reading group might seem particularly uncontrolled, unmonitored by male eyes. However, it seems more likely that Criseyde's reading group was legible to the *Troilus*' 14th century audience because, for wealthy women at least, this was a not uncommon thing to do, and Chaucer uses this common practice to comment on the function of the genre in that setting: Chaucer shows Criseyde using *The Siege of Thebes* as a source of vicarious experience, a way of exploring her immediate environment in a mediated way. Romance functions both as wall and window. Criseyde protects herself from the realities of the siege outside of Troy by fictionalizing the siege that she must experience. In the safety of her living room, not Troy but distant Thebes is under siege. Simultaneously, she peers out at the invading army, attempts to comprehend the destruction of her own city, by means of this surrogate experience.

Before returning to Criseyde's reading scene, it should be noted that the vicarious uses of romance are not limited to women, though still unavailable to ideal masculinity, as embodied by Troilus. The less typically masculine Pandarus, on the other hand, is in love but incapable, for whatever reason, of bringing his suit to a conclusion, and his enthusiasm for Troilus' love affair—however much he professes his friendship—is clearly motivated in part by vicarious pleasure. At the climax of the romantic plot, when Pandarus has brought the lovers together and is certain of the result, the following occurs:

And with that word he drew hym to the feere,
And took a light, and fond his contenance,
As for to looke upon an old romaunce. (III.978-80)

Chaucer's meta-commentary on the reading situation of romance also reaches a climax at this point, with Pandarus acting as the perfect stand-in for the reader of the *Troilus*, who watches the romantic plot unfold but cannot participate. Pandarus wishes to appear as if he is reading a romance, the

implication being that he is not in fact reading anything, but rather openly spying on the consummation of Troilus' and Criseyde's love, with only a pretense of reading. Of course, he figuratively "reads" the romance in which he plays a part. By surreptitiously observing the lovemaking of the romance's two heroes, he stands in the place of the romance's audience. Pandarus, like us, derives vicarious pleasure from his position as unobserved observer. And he further mirrors the audience by holding a romance in his lap. The romance genre is thus the vicarious enjoyment of those who have no direct access to love. This enjoyment is not necessarily feminine, but Pandarus is certainly not performing an ideal or primary form of masculinity. The social function of romance is thus connected to the audience's performance of gender: enjoyers of romance, as reflections of Pandarus are not performing primary masculinity. This reading will be further explored in the section on *Sir Thopas* below.

To women particularly, then, romance functions as an approach without approaching, a look without looking—a form of investigation particularly appropriate to them, since the admission of desire to know makes women suspect. The first female desire to know was, of course, Eve's, and women's agency in pursuing desire was a particularly fraught subject. As will be shown in Chapter 3, the Auchinleck compilers were sensitive to this issue, and their collocation of several similar romances circumscribes women's paths to knowledge. If so, then Criseyde's choice of reading material suggests her vulnerability without fully articulating the danger. Romance reading signifies her assailability—she is reading of a siege, and an extended siege of her own defenses will follow.

As Criseyde's reading scene progresses, Chaucer continues to play with the social expectations surrounding romance by having Pandarus misconstrue the text that is being read.³⁸ In

³⁸ For a detailed reading of this scene, see Paul Clogan, "Criseyde's Book of the Romance of Thebes" *Hebrew*

doing so, he associates both genres and languages with genders. The ladies may be reading from a real romance, the mid-twelfth century French *Roman de Thebes*, but Pandarus refers specifically to the work's "bookes twelve," which indicates that he is thinking of Statius' *Thebaid*. This does not square easily with Criseyde's calling the work a "romaunce," since the linguistic sense of the word was current enough to make it inapposite for a Latin text. Nor is Latin the most probable language for ladies' light reading. Chaucer could be conflating the two texts, or there could be an oblique comment here about the gendered difference between vernacular and Latin literacy. Criseyde and her ladies are reading the French romance, but Pandarus has access to the male Latin textual world, and thinks more readily of the *Thebaid*.³⁹ This implicitly genders the vernacular romance as feminine and Latin epic as masculine.⁴⁰ Yet it is not clear, if there is a joke here, at whose expense it is made. Reading the egalitarian Chaucer into this moment makes Pandarus come off the worse; though Latin was the language of prestige, Pandarus' Latin learning causes him to misapprehend the text that is being read, and to declare, mistakenly, that he knows its twelve-part structure. Latinity is thus imagined not as a privileged perspective but only as one amongst several, and equally likely to cause misprision.

Another reference to the *Siege of Thebes* later in the *Troilus* repeats this pattern—language differences between the genders result in a failure to understand. When Troilus visits his sister Cassandra, she attempts to alert him to the future by way of recounting the past. Cassandra's vernacular summary of the *Siege* is interrupted, in all but two manuscripts, by a Latin summary

University Studies in Literature and the Arts (1985), 18-28. In a talk given at Ithaca College, October 2016, Joyce Coleman argues, along with Clogan and myself, that this scene contains an important mistake on Pandarus' part, in which he mistakes the *Roman de Thebes* for the Latin *Thebaid*.

³⁹ Pandarus is Trojan, of course, but the anachronisms allowable in medieval romance allow him access to future canons.

⁴⁰ In a way, it expands on Carolyn Dinshaw's argument in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, though here it is not reading practices that are gendered but genres and languages.

not composed by Chaucer, intercalated at line 1498.⁴¹ With this authorizing Latinity, the manuscript culture that reproduced the poem interrupts Cassandra. She will continue, after the Latin summary, to provide her own summary. In other words, this is most likely not meant to be understood as Cassandra's own speech. This is not a moment of ecstatic Latinity. It would be nice to imagine that her vernacular speech erupts into Latin, spontaneously attaining a higher level of authority, but the insertion of the Latin summary rather robs her of this moment, sealing her female, vernacular, romance knowledge within the official, male, Latin version of events. Rather, the interruption of Cassandra's speech—the speech that is not her speech—seems less to empower and more to contain. Nevertheless, whether in Latin or a vernacular, the narrative of Thebes seems to contain Troilus too. Cassandra tries but fails to help him understand the genre, as it were, of his own existence, to render it legible to him. Chaucer's references to the *Roman de Thebes/Thebaid* thus reinforce the structure of the narrative, even to the point of making it a prison. Its presence at the beginning and end of the poem hems Troilus into a pre-existing generic destiny. The generic commentary provided by these two episodes represents one of the most important changes Chaucer made to *Il Filostrato*, and argues against the Latin summary's removal.

The modern practice of excising the Latin reflects both the failing cultural capital of Latinity and a modern preoccupation with the single author. It indicates, in other words, something about our own reading practices. Its inclusion, conversely, was the natural result of hierarchizing languages as well as genres and genders.⁴² Possibly, the Latin summary of the *Thebaid* had currency as a mnemonic,⁴³ in which case its inclusion is a case of apposite intertextuality, one text

⁴¹ See Barney's note to *Troilus* V.1498. He does not keep the Latin text in his edition of the poem, though he does assert that Chaucer "probably included it." This is probably deduced from its presence in the majority of the manuscripts, though he does not articulate his reasoning.

⁴² Thorlac Turville-Petre has argued in *England the Nation* for a looser understanding of English, French, and Latin, stressing their imbrications and interrelations.

⁴³ Again, see Barney's note.

calling for another. The culture in which Chaucer's *Troilus* could so fully demand the presence of a mnemonic clearly had uses for both. Even the existence of a mnemonic for the *Thebaid* implies the cultural capital attendant upon such knowledge, and modern editors do not include it because no such capital exists now. Now social capital only attends on knowing the fetishized words of Chaucer, but when the *Troilus* manuscripts were still in use, it was clearly expected that people would know this Latin mnemonic and would want to know. Chaucer and/or the scribes who inserted the Latin summary were being helpful in catering to this social expectation.

There is also an implied hierarchy of genres that results from social function, in addition to the linguistic one described above. In Pandarus' interruption of Criseyde's gathering, he calls on Criseyde to put away her book and dance, and she responds with an implicit valuation of genres:

It sattu me wel bet ay in a cave
 To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
 Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves. (II.117-9)

Criseyde professes herself more interested in *sentence* than *solace*, but of course the irony is that Pandarus has just caught her failing to live up to this very standard. She is not in a cave but in her "paved parlour," and she is not reading saints' lives but a French romance. Criseyde shows herself more vulnerable to suggestion and influence than she would like to admit, not just in her choice of reading material, but in the difference between her choice and the socially imposed hierarchy of genres and languages whose claims she recognizes. Chaucer constructs vernacular romance as the guilty pleasure of the female aristocrat, who reads it for enjoyment but is aware that the object of her enjoyment is of lower value than other genres. Knowledge and enjoyment of male Latin epic is comparatively lofty, but it is not clear that Chaucer sincerely privileges either in this moment. He is keenly aware, however, that they serve different social functions. The relatively low status of romance, both linguistically and generically, results in the ambivalence felt by Criseyde. Her

simultaneous attraction and shame implies that Chaucer could achieve some effect by representing 14th century women caught between conflicting social forces attendant upon reading. Just what that effect was will be explored in the remainder of this chapter.

Chaucer's representation of romance in *Troilus & Criseyde* bears a complex relation to the realities of 14th century social reading. While it is impossible to infer that Criseyde is a straightforward representation of the way women felt about their reading material, it is nevertheless certain that the ambivalence she feels would have been recognized by Chaucer's audience as a rational reaction. Furthermore, Chaucer's representation of attitudes toward the romance genre suggests a possible reevaluation of the ways that texts might have been collected together. Criseyde, caught in the act of romance reading, immediately suggests that her true interest is in a more socially laudable genre, "holy seyntes lyves." The use of one genre as smokescreen for interest in another may be precisely what the Auchinleck compilers had in mind when they paired romances with saints' lives and other pious reading material. By grouping these together, they made it possible to switch quickly between shamefully pleasurable and more laudable genres. The Auchinleck pairs, for example, lives of St. Margaret and St. Katherine with the more fabulous and romantic *King of Tars*, which, as will be seen in Chapter 3, bears other striking resemblances to these texts from Criseyde's "preferred" genre. The Auchinleck also pairs *Amis and Amiloun* with lives of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary. *Sir Degare* comes with texts of basic religious instruction.⁴⁴ The reading practices enabled by these pairings might very well have resembled Criseyde's maneuvering in the scene above. One genre enables facilitates, or serves as penance for, another. Either men or women might wish to do this, but Criseyde's shame at her discovery

⁴⁴ These pairings can be seen in Table 1 in the introduction, which shows the various booklets of the Auchinleck.

and rapid dissembling suggests a special pressure attendant upon women to monitor their reading material.

In closing the book of *Troilus*, then, it seems clear that Chaucer, at the time of composing *Troilus and Criseyde*, was already interested in genre as a social construct, a metatextual web understood by his audience and necessary to them in the interpretation of his work.⁴⁵ He then turns genre into a mirror of his audience, making them aware of their own use of genre as a means of self-understanding—and misunderstanding. We see this most clearly in the scenes analyzed above, in which gender difference is clearly mediated through the texts available to Criseyde and Pandarus, and in which Criseyde (mis)measures herself against a generically mediated standard of behavior. In the next section of this chapter, I will argue that the Chaucer's gendering of genre and language was primarily a function of reading practices evinced in the Auchinleck, and that his consistency in constructing these concepts across his oeuvre further supports the view that enduring conditions of literacy were the cause.

Access and Antifeminism, the Auchinleck and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*

The interconnected functions of language, genre and gender continued to be a subject of interest for Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, their mutual imbrication further marginalizes romance as vernacular and feminine; or rather, Chaucer has the Nun's Priest perform a marginalization of romance to show how the social subject defines herself with and against genres, either performing or subverting accepted social roles. The tale associates all three—

⁴⁵ Paul Strohm has already emphasized the point that *Troilus and Criseyde* requires a knowledge of several pre-existent genres, and is written with high expectations for its audience's capacity to interpret using multiple and complex generic codes. See his chapter on the *Troilus* in *Social Chaucer*.

romance, femininity, and English—with absence or lack. In Chaucer’s London, women’s lack was two-fold, since they had neither Latin nor male anatomy, but the correlative lack of romance is not clear except through the homology Chaucer builds between these three loci. Toward the beginning of the tale, Chauntecleer himself establishes his wife’s lack by demonstrating, or at least attempting a claim to, phallic Latinity. Similar to his depiction of the relationship between Latin and English in *Troilus & Criseyde*, Chaucer has Chauntecleer embarrass his wife (or himself) with an implicit juxtaposition of differing gendered literacies. In mollifying his wife after their discussion of dreams, Chauntecleer quotes a mélange of Scripture and antifeminist standard:

For al so siker as *In principio*,
Mulier est hominis confusio—
 Madame, the sentence of this Latyn is,
 “Womman is mannes joye and al his blis.” (VII.3163-6)

The *In principio* is the Latin for both Gen 1:1 and John 1:1, and places Chauntecleer’s words in a tradition of authorized male speech going back to the creation of the world. *Mulier est hominis confusio*, of course, does not mean that woman is man’s joy and bliss, but his downfall.⁴⁶ This is a standard of antifeminism that goes back to the *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Secundi*, widely known in the middle ages. As in *Troilus*, the question arises in the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, who is in on the joke? It is clear that Pertelote is not, or she would be furious, but Chauntecleer, who though male is after all a chicken, might be no more Latinate than she. So this is either a nasty parting shot from Chauntecleer, or a sincere but ill-informed compliment on his part. If the former, then there is a clear commentary on the maleness of Latin, and the uses of this exclusivity. If the latter, the same still holds, but with the added comment that men also often lack the Latinity which is

⁴⁶ See Severs, on Chaucer’s alteration of his source material. Being so early a 20th century scholar, Severs does not discuss whether Chaucer questions this superior Latinity, but merely admires how Chaucer introduces the “evil advice of women” as a new theme to his source material. “Chaucer’s Originality in ‘The Nun’s Priest’s Tale’.” *Studies in Philology* 43.1 (1946): 22-41. Print.

ostensibly their exclusive demesne. Either way, the languages are gendered by this moment. Latin is clearly masculine, whereas English is comparatively feminine.⁴⁷

Taken together, these examples suggest a gendered pattern for Latin and English in 14th century reading practices. *Chauntecleer/Pertelote* and *Pandarus/Criseyde* both map neatly onto the Latin/English and Latin/French dichotomies, respectively. These class and gender divides more neatly explain the Englishness of the *Auchinleck*, without reference to a rather different sphere of 14th century life than a nascent nationalism, as has been previously supposed.⁴⁸ The more operative factor in the near total exclusion of Latin and French from the manuscript, in light of this reading, is not a sense of nationalism, but of access for specific demographics. The *Auchinleck*, in its Englishness, is accessible to women and the very young, and particularly those of the emergent middle class in London. If its contents were only partially English, dismissing this claim might be easier, but exclusive Englishness begins to look like a matter of accessibility. The argument for a gendered manuscript, in this respect, claims and presupposes less than the argument for a nationalistic ambition. It would be a stretch to imagine that the compilers of the *Auchinleck* believed that they were reifying an imagined English community, much easier to suppose that they wanted their manuscript to be read or heard by an audience to whom English was the only legible or comprehensible language.

⁴⁷ In a comment apposite to Chapter 4 of this dissertation, Ann Astell (“Chaucer’s Literature Group”) argues that *Chauntecleer*’s “combined interpretive and sexual power” over *Pertelote* makes him less fearful of dreams. This link between his clerkly and sexual powers will be important to the analysis in Chapter 4 of the rivalry between women and clerks in 14th century London.

⁴⁸ This chapter is forced to differ with Turville-Petre’s use of the *Auchinleck* in *England the Nation*’s chapter on the manuscript. Since his project explores the possibility of an English proto-nationality, the chapter he writes emphasizes Englishness as a signifier of ethnicity, whereas the present argument must emphasize it as a marker of class and gender. In a way, the two might still be reconciled. I believe the *Auchinleck* is concerned primarily with intra-national problems, rather than international ones. The problem is not the French “out there,” but the women “right here.”

The lesser analyzed texts of the Auchinleck confirm its emphasis on accessibility by treating the Latin as a thing to be translated. The Auchinleck's fifteenth surviving text, *The Paternoster*, contains a prologue that was in all likelihood written for the manuscript. Though the surviving lines do correspond to some found in the much later Vernon manuscript,⁴⁹ their insistence on Englishness and a non-clerical audience are thematically endemic to the Auchinleck:

Alle þat euer gon and riden
 þat willeȝ Godes merci abiden,
 Lewede men þat ne beȝ no clerkes,
 Þo þat leuen on Godes werkes,
 Lesteȝ, and ȝe sschollen here, iwis,
 What ȝoure Pater noster is. (1-6)

This passage quite clearly indicates an expected audience, non-Latinate men, whom it dubs “lewede.” This designation, if taken pejoratively, runs counter to the general Englishness of the manuscript and text, but a few lines later there is some evidence that the epithet could be a reverse honorific, providing evidence that exclusive English-speakers who knew no Latin defined themselves in opposition to a dominating Latinate elite. This kind of group identity operates in the following lines:

Of alle þe clerkes vnder sonne,
 Þer nis non of hem þat conne
 A betere oreisoun, iwis,
 Þanne þe Pater noster is. (15-18)

The sentiment here is that non-Latinate English speakers too might listen to this text and know what their Paternoster is and what it means, and if they do so, their prayers will be equal to any clerk's. The prologue has already explained that the Paternoster came from Christ to his apostles,

⁴⁹ Bodleian Library MS 3938, a manuscript that shares several texts with the Auchinleck, including one of the other two copies of *The King of Tars* and a *Legend of Pope Gregory*, texts that will become important in Chapter 3. See E. Kölbing for the correspondences between the Auchinleck's *Paternoster* and the Vernon manuscript, 'Kleine Publicationen aus der Auchinleck-hs', *Englische Studien*, 9 (1886): 47-49.

and the implication is that it has now come to this English audience, directly from the apostles, without further clerical intermediary. And by their own admission, clerks cannot pray any prayer superior to that of Christ Himself:

Þus seggeþ þise clerkes wise
 Þat mochel connen of clergise. (19-20)

This passage thus allows the “lewede” to define themselves in opposition to “clerkes” who speak Latin, and it performs an equalizing gesture that the clerks themselves must either assent to, or claim superior prayers to Christ’s. The Auchinleck’s unique texts side with a non-Latinate audience that recognizes the cultural claims of Latin, even while trying to appropriate some portion of their social power.

The act of translation is part of this appropriation. Where there is Latin in the Auchinleck, it is immediately glossed, and the manuscript follows this pattern almost without exception. In the *Paternoster*, for example, we find the following:

Pater noster, qui es in celis,
 Þat is to segge þis:
 ‘Oure fader in heuene-riche,
 Þi name be blessed euere iliche.’

The first Latin line of the Lord’s prayer is not only glossed, but worked into the rhyme scheme of the poem, the Latin *celis* rhyming with the Middle English “þis.” We can see from these lines how inadequate a standard description of the manuscript might be, if it remarked only that the manuscript were primarily English, with some Latin. This entirely obscures the manuscript’s appropriation of Latin to overcome Latin. The entire Auchinleck *Paternoster* makes use of interlinear Latin as a way to equalize the “clerkes” and the “lewede.” It is easy to see, then, where the manuscript’s loyalties lie, if we allow that the entire *Paternoster* was written for the Auchinleck, and not just its prologue, as is the case with other Auchinleck texts. This could quite

easily be the case, considering that after the *Paternoster*'s prologue, in the second gloss of seven, it attempts a reconciliation between the groups set up by the prologue:

Ihesu þat boughte lewede and clerkes
Schilde vs fram þe fendes werkes. (67-8)

The fact that Christ has died for both Latinate and non-Latinate Christians should function to unify them. They are both bought at great price and shielded from the Devil's works. This quiet realignment of the two groups shows a thematic unity throughout the work and is in keeping with the priorities of the manuscript context.

The Auchinleck text *On the Seven Deadly Sins* also contains an introduction likely to have been written specifically for the manuscript, which makes reference both to the other texts of basic religious instruction in the Auchinleck, and to their expected audience:

Þer beȝ dedli sinnes seuene,
Þat letteȝ man to come to heuene,
And Ihesu Cristes hestes ten,
Þat children and wimmen and men
Of twelue winter elde and more,
After holi cherche lore,
Euerichone þai sscholden knowe,
But to lerne þai beȝ to slowe.
And þe Pater noster and þe Crede,
Þeroffe ȝe sscholden taken hede,
On Englissch to segge what hit were,
Als holi cherche ȝou wolde lere; (9-20)

The clearest indication that this was written for the Auchinleck is of course the direct reference to the text's own Englishness. Explicit reference to the exclusivity of the manuscript's contents is a hallmark of materials produced for the Auchinleck, and one of the primary indications that the manuscript was pre-planned as an English-only volume. But along with this more clearcut indication of this text's design is the reference to the *Paternoster*, which has already been discussed as having one of the *other* Auchinleck-specific prologues, and which comes directly after the *Seven*

Deadly Sins in the manuscript. It is likely that both prologues, even the entirety of both texts, were written by someone directly involved with the manuscript's compilation. Scribe 3 is a possible candidate, since he copied both texts, but Scribe 1 must also be considered, primarily because his direction is evident everywhere in the Auchinleck. Of course, it need not have been either of these two, but whoever wrote these prologues knew they would appear together in an English-only manuscript that would contain essential religious instruction, and that the rationale for the manuscript's Englishness was accessibility.

These two prologues together begin to demonstrate a pattern of Englishness, along with an awareness of the need for religious instruction. Moreover both prologues also make explicit reference to a kind of audience. The *Paternoster* focuses on "clerkes" and the "lewede," and clearly sides with the interests and perspective of the "lewede" against the "clerkes," even as it performs conciliatory gestures toward the latter. The *Seven Deadly Sins*, however, suggests lines of division not according to literacy or Latinity, but according to gender and age. Quite gratuitously, it might be noted, the prologue directs itself toward "children and wimmen and men" (12), even more specifically toward children "of twelue winter elde and more" (13). This means that of the three prologues that can confidently be said to have been written for the Auchinleck because of their references to its Englishness, all three make reference to some kind of educational agenda (even in the prologue to the romance *Of Arthour & of Merlin*⁵⁰). All three also make explicit reference

⁵⁰ The introduction to *Of Arthour* is oft quoted and much discussed, while the introductions to the Auchinleck's spiritual texts suffer comparative neglect. The above emphasis on the latter, therefore, but the introduction to *Of Arthour* is still pertinent to this argument and quoted below. Note particularly the emphasis on children the benefits of "setting them to books."

Ihesus Crist Heuen-king
 Al ous graunt gode ending
 & seynt Marie þat swete þing
 So be at our bigining
 & help ous at our nede,
 & leue ous wele to spede

5

Auauntages þai hauen þare
 Freynsch & Latin eueraywhare.
 Of Freynsch no Latin nil y tel more
 Ac on J[n]glish ichil tel þerfore
 Riȝt is þat J[n]glische vnderstond
 Þat was born in Ingland.

20

to some kind of audience, even to expected demographics within that audience. And two of the three have a particular interest in children.

The association of children and English should be clear. English is a mother tongue, spoken from infancy, while French generally had to be acquired, unless the household was thoroughly bilingual. Furthermore, the prologue to *Of Arthour* suggests that the acquisition of French was difficult even for members of the aristocracy, who, it jibes, cannot even speak the French that ostensibly characterizes their social class. Even some aristocrats, then, would not necessarily acquire much French, and children, especially those under the age of twelve, as the *Seven Deadly Sins* suggests, would therefore need their religious instruction in English. Women too, if English was their mother tongue, were less likely to have been taught a second language. The implications of this for the Auchinleck are potentially quite important: if English-language texts were the only ones available to women and children (either for reading privately or publicly hearing them read), an English-only manuscript would be keenly aware of its availability to certain demographics. And wherever we can infer that a text or part of a text was written for the Auchinleck specifically, we also see it making reference to women or children or both.

<p>Ʒat we habbeþ euer to don, & scheld ous fram our fon. Childer Ʒat ben to boke ysett In age hem is miche þe bett For Ʒai mo witen & se Miche of Godes priuete Hem to kepe & to ware Fram sinne & fram warldes care, & wele ysen ʒif Ʒai willen Ʒat hem no þarf neuer spillen -</p>	<p>10</p> <p>15</p>	<p>Freynsche vse þis gentil man Ac euerich Jnglische Jnglische can; Mani noble ich haue yseiýe Ʒat no Freynsche coupe seye, Biginne ichil for her loue Bi lhesus leue Ʒat sitt aboue On Jnglische tel mi tale - God ous sende soule hale.</p>	<p>25</p> <p>30</p>
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Returning to the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, we find that Chaucer gives it to the Nun's Priest to make an oblique but typically ambivalent reference to the popularity of the romance genre with women:

This storie is also trewe, I undertake,
As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,
That wommen holde in ful greet reverence. (VII.3211-3)

The obvious irony here is of course that neither the *Nun's Priest's Tale* nor the “book of Launcelot de Lake” is true, meaning that they are equally false, and the Nun's Priest's statement paradoxically true. So this passing metonymic reference to romance could express Chaucer's disdain for the genre, if we take the Nun's Priest as his mouthpiece. However, it is a generally accepted principle of Chaucer scholarship that one ought not assume identity between Chaucer and his characters, even one so virtuosic as the Nun's Priest. And Chaucer, as an accomplished fiction writer himself, could not condemn a genre for its falseness.

The equation between “this storie” and “the book of Launcelot de Lake” should be read within the context of its tale. The narrator's interjection implies that romance is good but false, and in the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, women's speech is similarly both fair and untrustworthy. The larger question at stake here is whether or not Pertelote's advice to Chauntecleer is true, so the implicit commentary is not generic but gendered, less about the faults of a genre and more about its use by a gender. The unreliability of romance is also a way of commenting upon the unreliability of women.⁵¹ Chaucer, as a hyperliterate male author, was of course fully aware that romance was a genre which did not prioritize certain kinds of truth, strict historicity being one of them. But he was also keenly aware that false stories could be regarded as true, and this is likely the content of

⁵¹ Ann Astell (“Chaucer's ‘Literature Group’ and the Medieval Causes of Books”) discusses the “long tradition associating feminine figures with the pleasureable, and therefore perilous, attractions of poetry” (280).

the critique. The comment here, then, is potentially about the forms of literacy common amongst women at the time; Chaucer characterizes women as credulous and likely to misread generic cues, and therefore unable to distinguish between the truth-effects appropriate to different genres of writing.

Of course, the Nun's Priest's oblique antifeminism does not necessarily mean that real women of the 14th century were as credulous as he implies. To infer such facticity would be to misread a generic cue oneself. However, it does mean that Chaucer could achieve a literary effect by claiming that they were, though it is not immediately clear what kind of literary effect this might be. It could, of course, be a sincere description of a real state of affairs, i.e. Chaucer could be making a true statement about Lancelot's popularity with female audiences. It seems quite plausible, as a claim, but it hardly exhausts the potential of these lines. By the time Chaucer wrote the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, the ascription of female interest in, indeed weakness for, romance was already old. In fact, his mention of Launcelot du Lac is most likely an oblique reference to Dante's famous Francesca da Polenta, who herself was reading the Lancelot cycle when she committed the sin of lust that damned her. Chaucer is therefore primarily activating a literary context, and the state of affairs he describes might or might not reflect the reality of his day. Nevertheless, his assertion that women love the Lancelot cycle is comprehensible as a participation in an antifeminist tradition that ascribed certain tastes to women as a way of troubling their relationship to literature. Ascribing to them an abiding interest in false tales that lead to their damnation is therefore one blow struck in an ongoing cultural conflict about women's literary formation. Assuming that Chaucer knew how to land his jabs, we can infer that both women and men would understand the female relationship to romance as traditionally fraught, a bit like the current female relationship to the romance novel, mere mention of which conjures images of a certain kind of

woman compensating for a certain kind of discontent.⁵² Our easy access to that image assuredly had its 14th century corollary too.

Thus within a text about the reliability of women and their advice, the Nun's Priest breaks up his narrative to put the interpretive capacity of non-fictional women in doubt. At least part of the intent is clearly humorous, but this still raises the question, what kind of humor is Chaucer's Nun's Priest engaging in? The tendency to psychologize the pilgrims, i.e. to ascribe antifeminist joking to the Nun's Priest rather than to Chaucer, obscures the degree to which the Nun's Priest, regardless of the degree to which Chaucer imagined his own antifeminist humor as separate from that of his creation, is nevertheless pre-written by a tradition of antifeminism. His "opinions," whatever we imagine them to be, are determined by a discourse that precedes the Nun's Priest and speaks his opinions for him. He is first a participant in this discourse, only then a subject or agent in relation to the discourse, if at all.⁵³ It is, then, far more appropriate to speak of Chaucer's interest in antifeminist discourse than it is to speak of the Nun's Priest's antifeminism, and Chaucer's interest in antifeminism is, from this perspective, less a function of his creativity than his desire to participate in the literary practices of his day. Whatever was Chaucer's intended use of these ideas, it was not wholly original. When speaking of why this passage occurs, then, it is far more appropriate to speak of audience reception than Chaucerian authorship. His audience experienced his authorship of this passage as Chaucer's clever recycling of antifeminism, not as his brilliant invention of it.

⁵² See Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*.

⁵³ While we can and should hesitate to be so fully post-structuralist with actual human beings, there is no problem doing so with fictional ones. While I do not personally subscribe to the idea that everything about human identity is constructed, this is most certainly the case with the Nun's Priest's identity.

Reading this moment in the context provided by the Auchinleck, which collocates and hybridizes romance with women's texts, we can detect a further piquancy to Chaucer's ascription, by providing precedent for Chaucer's use of romance to reaffirm an antifeminist standard. Both the Auchinleck and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* exploit a relationship between gender and genre that was already fraught in the 1330s, and each contributes towards its tensions. The Auchinleck scribes and Chaucer both responded to a reading situation in which audience response was imagined differently along gendered lines. A performance of these texts was conceived simultaneously as a performance of gender: women could object to, and men could affirm, the antifeminist standards activated by the text. Men could also relent, feign innocence, or gallantly take up the women's cause. Chaucer depicts male pilgrims performing each of these reactions in the *Canterbury Tales*. In fact, the Nun's Priest's activation of an antifeminist standard catalogues yet another male generic gambit. By making his characterization of women so intertextual and oblique, the Nun's Priest stealthily scores against the women's side, a form of victory essentially private but more than compensating for this fact by establishing—if only to himself—his virtuoso mastery of hyperliterate antifeminism.⁵⁴ If we insert the Auchinleck as a middle term between earlier representations of the romance genre—those in Chretien de Troyes and Dante—and those in Chaucer, we find that its collocation of texts anticipates Chaucer's fraught articulation of the genre. If Chaucer departs from precedent formula by allowing the romance genre a complex

⁵⁴ Lawrence Besserman, in "Chaucerian Wordplay: The Nun's Priest and His Woman Divyne," explores the implicitly aggressive relationship between the Prioress and the Nun's Priest. Chapter 4 of this dissertation will locate the kinds of aggression displayed by the Nun's Priest and other Chaucerian clerkly figures as a function of general antagonism between clerks and women. But a specific feud between the Prioress and the Nun's Priest complements this idea nicely. The Prioress is as deeply unaware of her genre (its crassness and cruelty) as the Nun's Priest is hyperaware. The conflict between the two is a conflict between both genders and genres, and the differences in the genders' receptions of genre.

ambivalence, making it a source both of pleasure and shame, the Auchinleck reified this ambivalence in physical form

The Tale of Sir Thopas and Chaucer as Feminine Pilgrim

Another key to Chaucer's views on the romance genre comes in his own famously bad *Tale of Sir Thopas*. It has been argued that Chaucer did not like English romance.⁵⁵ The present argument maintains that Chaucer uses *Sir Thopas* not to pillory the genre, but to inflect his own authorial activity with the conditions of literacy that were already associated with romance. In other words, romance was a genre in various ways already associated with women, and in presenting his own romance, Chaucer presents himself as both feminine and child-like. This self-presentation is not simply insincere or parodic, but contains affection as well as critique. It is, in other words, ambivalently, complexly parodic, and a bidirectional critique. Chaucer shows that if the English tail-rhyme romance is childish, the adult male rejection of it is equally so. He does this by allowing the pilgrim Chaucer to be bullied into a position of childishness and femininity by Harry Bailey, a wrong that he addresses by embracing these two positions more fully than Harry can stand.

The feminization and puerilization of the pilgrim Chaucer begins in the prologue to the tale. Harry Bailey describes Chaucer in terms not appropriate to an adult male. He comments on his small waist, calls him a "popet" for any woman to embrace. The ambiguity of this embrace,

⁵⁵ This viewpoint is far from dead. Only very recently, Marianne Børch wrote that this "self-conscious founding father of English literature rather smugly plays with the idea of himself as popular minstrel," (141), that he "rejects his native oral tradition" (142), and describes his relationship to English poetry as an Oedipal struggle. Glenn Wright takes issue with this viewpoint, noting that reading *Sir Thopas* as parody has been greatly assisted by the historical knowledge we have of his authorship. It allows us to invent a persona to which we can attribute whatever attitudes we already hold toward just about anything whatsoever.

either maternal or erotic, mirrors the ambiguity of his further descriptors, “small and fair of face.” Is the woman embracing the “popet” small and fair, or is Chaucer himself so described? Finally, Harry expects that his tale will be “deyntee.” Self-abasement and embarrassment of Chaucer’s narrators is a common enough topos in his work, but it is the precise content of this description, and its relation to the subsequent tale, that makes this suggestive as a refraction of contemporary literacy conditions. Harry Bailey either makes a woman of Chaucer, or makes Chaucer into a child, sitting in a woman’s lap. In response, Chaucer describes his own tale as “a rym I lerned long agoon,” and in telling it, repeatedly refers to the protagonist as a “childe.” All of this associates the tale with women and children.

There are, of course, several possible explanations as to why Chaucer might do this. One is that this kind of romance was popular with women, or perhaps children, who demanded it of women within the home. If so, Chaucer’s parody of tail-rhyme could be further interpreted as a parody of women and children’s literary tastes. However, this does not explain why he should choose himself as the teller of this tale, nor why he should subject himself to Harry’s feminizing and puerilizing gaze. The tale might just as well have been assigned to a female pilgrim. Chaucer’s identification with the voice of tail-rhyme suggests a special relationship to this kind of literature, the simplest one imaginable being that he experienced it as a child, when he was still a “popet in arm.” Harry Bailey’s rejection of *Thopas* could then be read as the self-conscious reaction of the adult male who wishes to disassociate himself from the perceived childishness of the genre. Chaucer’s willingness to associate himself with the genre is the obverse, the willingness to be seen either as childish or feminine or both.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues in “Diminishing Masculinities in Chaucer’s *Tale of Sir Thopas*” that Thopas is developmentally arrested—childlike and therefore asexual” and that “Chaucer the narrator becomes by rhetorical and thematic contiguity connected to both the presexual ‘littel clergeon’ of the *Prioress’s Tale* and to Sir Thopas

But why do this? Though Chaucer often presents himself as foolish in his poems, in this case, Chaucer's willingness to be associated with romance represents an identification with victimhood. Its placement further reinforces this. In the *Prioress' Tale*, the atrocious victimization of a child makes clear the dangers of entering into a pre-existing literate world in which texts both oppress and invite oppression. And in the *Tale of Melibee*, Prudence's use of proverbial wisdom provides another example of a woman who takes control of textual authority. In this case, to prevent her child's victimization from becoming pretext, so to speak, for further acts of violence, as occurred in the *Prioress' Tale*. The *Tale of Sir Thopas* might seem oddly out of place, bookended by darkly violent texts that consider the roles of age and gender in relation to text and victimization.⁵⁷ However, Chaucer's self-identification with women and children in *Sir Thopas*, and his victimization by Harry Bailey, elaborates on the the status of literacy, as well as genre, as a vehicle of power. The genres to which various pilgrims have access often mirrors their status in life. And though Chaucer in reality has access to them all, he gives his fictional double the lowliest of genres to perform.

The *Tales* have long been appreciated as a catalogue of writing styles and genres. From a genre perspective, this is not merely one aspect of the *Tales*, but their defining feature. A considerable number of the *Tales* operate simultaneously as narratives and catalogues, the *Monk's Tale*, for example. *Melibee* merely intensifies this tendency, and its sometimes baffling presence is neatly justified by regarding the *Tales* as a generic catalogue.⁵⁸ It also helps us to see *Sir Thopas*

himself." *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the "Canterbury Tales" and "Troilus and Criseyde"*. Peter G. Beidler, ed. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998. The argument is similar to mine, in that I note the puerilization of the pilgrim Chaucer.

⁵⁷ This order, moreover, is internal to Fragment VII, and appears consistently across manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*.

⁵⁸ This explains both the presence and the content of *Melibee*, which behaves like a list of proverbs rather than a narrative. And it certainly suffices better than regarding Chaucer's second tale as merely bad, or worse, a shaggy dog tale. Even quite recently, Edward Foster suggested that *Melibee* was never meant to be read by anyone at all,

from a perspective that deemphasizes parody, a refreshing change that might be necessary for scholarship on Chaucer's quirkiest tale to advance.⁵⁹ This is not to deny that *Thopas* is meant to poke fun at conventions; it would be impossible to read the poem without that as an element. But describing *Thopas* as listing conventions rather than parodying them helps us to see its activity more neutrally. That neutrality might in turn be vital to understanding the function of *Thopas*' irony. The question remains, why write a *bad* tail-rhyme romance? Partly, at least, to motivate Harry's masculine interruption. But in a way this also begs the question, is "Thopas bad? What follows will be a defense of its repetitions. In a way, it is structurally perfect, diminishing as it goes,⁶⁰ as it heads toward Harry's silencing interruption. But before it ends, it catalogues a whole series of poetic topoi, which Chaucer uses elsewhere too, though never with the same "prikyng" intensity. Does density of topoi necessitate parody? This might, after all, be a virtuosic set of rhymed lists. This is suggested by its presence next to other "listing" texts, "Melibee" and the "Monk's Tale," though also the "Nun's Priest's Tale," if we read it as a hybridizing catalogue of genres. This suggests a way of reading "Thopas" without the lens of parody.

"Sir Thopas" is a romance structured by lists.⁶¹ The romance is thus always pricking us with its point, even when it is only gesturing at the idea of a list. Here follows a list of lists:

even in Chaucer's time ("Has Anyone Here Read *Melibee*?"). The piece must have been written in a fit of whimsy (is it a brilliant meta-satire?), because it is a patently bad explanation for a text that Chaucer took pains to translate, and which exists in several French manuscripts. Nevertheless, Foster's piece at least indicates how necessary a genre perspective on the *Tales* might be.

⁵⁹ Glenn Wright has already deemphasized the parodic aspects of the tale by showing on the one hand that our binary concept of parodic/non-parodic is anachronistically misapplied to the 14th century, and on the other that reading *Thopas* as a parody has served a scholarly agenda of marginalizing English romance. . "Modern Inconveniences: Rethinking Parody in the Tale of Sir Thopas." *Genre* 30.3. University of Oklahoma

⁶⁰ See Burrow, John. "Sir Thopas: An Agony in Three Fits." *Essays in Medieval Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. 61-65.

⁶¹ Further consideration of this point may be found in Stephen Barney's "Chaucer's Lists." *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*.

Table 4: Lists in *Sir Thopas*⁶²

No.	Triad	Content	List	Lines
1	Thopas' Qualities	Features	Whit was his face as payndemayn, His lippes rede as rose; Is rode is lyk scarlet in grayn, And I yow telle in good certain He hadde a seemly nose. His heer, berd was lyk saffroun,	725
2		Clothing	That to his girdel raughte adoun; His shoon of cordewane. Of Brugges were his hosen broun, That coste many a jane.	735
3		Knighly skills	He koude hunte at wilde deer, And ride an haukyng for river, With grey goshauk on honed; Thereto he was a good archer; Of wrastlyng was there noon his peer, Ther any ram shal stonde.	
4	The Forest	Beasts	He priketh thurgh a fair forest, Therinne is many a wilde best, Ye, both bukke and hare...	755
5		Plants	There spryngen herbes grete and smale, The lycorys and the cetewale, And many a clowe-gylofre; And notemuge to putte in ale...	760
6		Birds	The briddes synge, it is no nay, The sparhawk and the papejay, That joye it was to heere; The thrustelcok make eke hir lay, The wodedowve upon the spray...	770
7	Preparation	Food	They fette hym first the sweete wyn, And mede eke in a mazelyn, And roial spicerye Of gyngbreed that was ful fyn, And lycorys, and eek comyn, With sugre that is trye.	855

⁶² Though the exact number is not fixable, because of the ambiguity in how many items constitute a list and in where one list ends and another begins, some moments in the tale are, of course, unambiguously discrete and list-like. This list, if it errs, errs on the side of generosity, both in what qualifies as a list, and in breaking the lists apart. There is good reason to err in this direction, however. Given that listing is one of the primary gestures of *Sir Thopas*, it seems reasonable to include everything that could possibly be construed as list-like, in order not to leave anything out. Scholars can then make up their minds about the validity of the above divisions. There is further reason, however. The structure of the lists above seems quite neatly divisible into parts.

No.	Triad	Content	List	Lines
8		Chest Armor	<p>He dide next his white leere Of cloth of lake fyn and cleere, A breech and eek a sherte; And next his sherte an aketoun, And over that an haubergeoun For percynge of his herte;</p> <p>And over that a fyn hauberk Was al ywroght of Jewes werk, Ful strong it was of plate; And over that his cote-armor As whit as is the lilye flour, In which he wol debate.</p>	860 865
9		Armaments	<p>His shield was al of gold so reed, ... His jambeux were of quyrbouilly His swerdes shethe of yvory His helm of latoun bright; His sadel was of rewel boon, His brydel as the sonne shoon, Or as the moone light.</p> <p>His spere was of fyn ciprees...</p>	875 880
10	Punchline	Romance Heroes	<p>Men speken of romances of prys, Of Horn child and of Ypotys, Of Beves and sir Gy, Of sir Lybeux, and Pleyndamour— But sir Thopas, he bereth the flour Of roial chivalry!</p>	900

The first triad establishes his knightly qualities in three discrete arenas, his features, clothing and chivalric skills.⁶³ The second triad catalogues the forest's beasts, plants and birds.⁶⁴ The third

⁶³ There has been some debate as to whether the description of Sir Thopas' features is genuinely knightly, due to the feminine description of his red lips and cheeks, and his fair skin. In another place (line 836), Sir Thopas is described as having "sides smale," another potentially feminine detail. However, it is also the case that he has gathered together descriptions that are used unironically in other romances, such as Horn. He seems therefore both to be gathering together a list of knightly features, and suggesting that Thopas occupies a feminine position. Indeed, the sense of femininity is produced by the very act of gathering all these qualities together, which both gestures at the way women are described in romances and subjects Thopas to a sustained erotic gaze.

⁶⁴ The beasts consist only of "bukke and hare," but are worthy of inclusion on several counts. They make an elegant triad of the kinds of things found in a forest: birds, beasts and plants. They thus play a part in the aggregate effect of all this listing, which is to mock the ways that content can be determined less by mimetic description of reality and more by the constraints of literary convention and form. This is not to cast doubt on the actual presence of bucks and hares in Flemish forests, but rather to point out that their being mentioned has less to do with reality and more to do

prepares for Sir Thopas' battle with Sir Oliphaunt. I have broken up the arming into two sections, both because Chaucer does in fact cease to list in between the two (so that Thopas might swear an oath to kill the giant), and because the first clearly constitutes its own section, being the preposterously long set of things that Thopas uses to cover his chest.⁶⁵ The final list, which bears the whole point and turns the entire exercise into an overt meta-consideration of genre, is the list of romance heroes. Breaking up the previous lists as I have, this comes as a neat and climactic tenth, which is consistent with the numeric symmetry that has already been noted by scholars.

Ending the tale with this list of heroes removes the veil, as it were, from Chaucer's sources. If the gradually developing joke of *Sir Thopas* is to gather together all the conventions of a genre, then this is the punchline, in which the tale's relationship to the genre is made fully overt. But is the mention of these English texts meant to pour contempt on them or to make them appear better by contrast? The audience of *Sir Thopas* would, after all, realize how much better these romances are than *Sir Thopas*, and the moment seems calculated to annoy precisely those people who *like* romances:

Men speken of romances of pris,
Of Horn Child and of Ipotis,
 Of Beves and Sire Gy,
Of Sire Libeux and Pleindamour—
Bur Sire Thopas, he bereth the flour
 Of real chivalry! (VII.897-902)

with the convenience of the poet.

⁶⁵ Preposterous, but not in the sense of unrealistic. Though long ago J. M. Manly tried to argue that there were redundant items present, making the arming absurd. The debate has continued for some time, with scholars defending the list as accurate, and more recent attempts to revive the absurdity argument on different grounds. See Mark Diccio, "The Arming of Sir Thopas reconsidered" *Notes and Queries*, March 1999. Diccio considers the combination of items ridiculous, rather than the over-completeness of the list. I think the latter is closer to the truth, though not because of any relation to the reality of arming. The joke, in its essence, is about convention and genre, not about real arming practices.

The joke here is not that English romances are bad, but that *Sir Thopas* clearly attempts to be one, and fails so utterly. It amuses not because Chaucer shows how much cleverer he is than tail-rhyme romancers, but that he pretends *not* to be. Furthermore, if the joke were aimed tail-rhyme romance as a genre, then Chaucer certainly missed his chance to direct the humor of his punchline: the Host's aims his tirade solely at Chaucer for being such a failure.

This view contrasts with a long tradition of criticism of *Sir Thopas*, in not finding the meaning of the tale in a mean-spirited or contemptuous attack on tail-rhyme romance. It should not be assumed that this amounts to a denial of any parodic or corrective elements in the tale. Clearly, Chaucer is pointing out what happens when the conventions of a genre overwhelm content with formula. There is therefore a certain amount of critique inherent to the tale, but scholars have no reason to suppose that Chaucer did not include himself in that critique. The tale might represent his own reliance on formula; Chaucer himself elsewhere uses every one of the formulas found in *Thopas*, though never of course with the same density. Yet scholars continue to read the tale as an outright rejection of English tradition, as if there were no middle ground to be explored. They all too quickly forget that in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, we very probably have an instance of Chaucer's reworking of an English tale. Though we do not have a version of the loathly lady story that pre-exists Gower's or Chaucer's, in all probability there existed some tale before either of these.⁶⁶ It is known, for instance, that a loathly lady was associated with challenges to King Arthur's court at one of Edward I's Round Table performances in 1299.⁶⁷ Chaucer should therefore not be seen as

⁶⁶ It has recently been suggested that Gower is the ultimate source of the loathly lady who helps solve a riddle about women, having drawn it from folk material. See Russell Peck, "Folklore and Powerful Women in Gower's 'Tale of Florent'" in *The English Loathly Lady Tales*. This seems unlikely, and it will be assumed that there existed a fairly developed tale before either Gower or Chaucer wrote their more literary versions.

⁶⁷ See the introduction to *The Wedding of Sir Gawain to Dame Ragnelle*, TEAMS edition. There is also the interesting case of the tale of Gamelyn, which exists exclusively in manuscripts that also contain the Canterbury Tales, yet was not authored by Chaucer. It's attestation in a total of twenty-five manuscripts along with the Tales has led scholars to speculate that Chaucer had included it his paper, and was likely to adapt it for one of his pilgrims. See

the demolisher but the defender of English romance. He knowingly takes up an unpopular—because unmasculine—cause, and this is the reason for his victimization by the Host.

It has been supposed that with *Thopas* Chaucer signaled a break with tradition. But even if we accept that *Thopas* is indeed a kind of parody, we need not read it in this way. Far from enacting a violent demolition of a dead genre, *Sir Thopas* performs as many of the gestures of romance as it can manage, in ironic fashion, precisely in order to breathe new life into those gestures, which might have appeared dead from constant “prikking.” The previous readings of *Sir Thopas* ride roughshod over its more gently corrective qualities (its chiding overuse of dead metaphors and stock phrases) in order to construct it as a kind of attack on romance. As already noted, the critical consensus on insular romance reflects more on the needs of academia than it does on the reality of romance itself. To be sure, there are few if any romances that employ irony in the way that *Sir Thopas* does, but many of these romances were written well before *Sir Thopas*. It would have been impossible for them to deploy the gestures and strategies of romance in an ironic fashion because they were not yet established. Earlier romance, in this schematic, is foundational to the genre, whereas *Sir Thopas* builds upon that foundation, and Chaucer's irony is more a function of his position in the genre's history. In identifying himself with the romance genre, he lowers himself in order to raise it up, a self-abasement for the sake of the genre's social status.

Knight, Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales. TEAMS If we were to put a generic spin on the manuscript evidence, however, we might rather argue that those who selected Gamelyn for inclusion with the Tales saw no conflict between the writer of *Thopas* and a thoroughly English romance. Whichever way we interpret the data, it is clear that the supposed distaste that Chaucer had for English romances is less solidly attested than has been supposed.

Harry Bailey and the Reception of Genres

The conclusion of this chapter might be left to Harry Bailey. Harry's responses to the pilgrims' tales become more vehement in Fragment VII, often called the literature fragment, where both the *Nun's Priest's Tale* and the *Tale of Sir Thopas* find themselves. The section of the tales beginning with the *Shipman's Tale* and climaxing with the *Nun's Priest's Tale* sees his most intrusive moments, as well as his most effusive praise. The literature fragment has been thought to be Chaucer's response to a set of problems relating to genre and storytelling.⁶⁸ However, the generic commentary contained in this Fragment VII intersects throughout with concerns about gender. As the fragment carries on, Harry becomes progressively more concerned with the gender of his story-tellers, as well as with his own. He addresses the Prioress as if "it had been a mayde." Later, the pilgrim Chaucer draws his attention for being curiously unmasculine. Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* leads Harry to confess that he fears his own wife, who is more physically imposing and dispositionally warlike than he is. Perhaps in response to this embarrassment to his masculinity, he then begins a search of the company's most masculine story-teller. Dissatisfied with Chaucer both for his physique and his first tale, Harry selects the Monk for being a "tredefoul," a dominant breeding rooster. When the Monk's tale fails to please, he lands on the Nun's Priest, whose tale finally satisfies Harry's desire for a masculine story-teller and story. The literature fragment is therefore both commentary on the art and genres of storytelling, and upon the ways that storytelling affects/effects the teller's performance of gender. Harry thus stumbles on an important social reality: to perform a tale is simultaneously to perform, or to destabilize, one's gender.

⁶⁸ This goes as far back as Gaylord's 1967 article, "Sentence and Solaas in Fragment VII of the Canterbury Tales: Harry Bailly as Horseback Editor." *PMLA* 82.2, pp. 226-235.

Harry's response to the *Tale of Sir Thopas* is not merely a commentary upon tail-rhyme romance or English literary foibles, but a response to the perceived gender of the genre that Chaucer has chosen. His feminizing and puerilizing description of the pilgrim Chaucer precedes Chaucer's similar description of Sir Thopas, which are themselves an echo or reflex response. This has often been read as Chaucer's distaste for the genre, but the present argument sees Chaucer's embarrassment as merely a reflection of the contemporary uses of tail-rhyme. Since tail-rhyme was a specifically English formal generic combination, it was likely used by non-Latinate, non-Francophone women for their own reading, and for reading to their children. The link between women, children, and tail-rhyme romance is thus a result of 14th century reading practice. This is corroborated by Chaucer claiming that *Sir Thopas* is a rhyme he heard long ago, which likely means in childhood, as well as his framing the taste for the genre as a feminizing detail. Chaucer was aware that the kinds of power wielded by the masculine textual tradition are predicated upon a denial of femininity and childishness.⁶⁹ A foreclosure of these unmasculine traits means that certain genres become publicly unacceptable. The pilgrim Chaucer is therefore at fault, from Harry's point of view, for being unaware of the ways that his own tale affects his public persona.

The *Tale of Melibee*, as a response to Chaucer's interruption, has similarly been misinterpreted as a revenge through boredom.⁷⁰ This, of course, ignores the popularity of Chaucer's source material, and the probable welcome that an English translation would have received. It also effaces Harry's response, which is enthusiastic rather than bored, and dismisses the general medieval enthusiasm for collected wisdom. Most importantly, it ignores the

⁶⁹ In *Minding the Body*, Potkay and Evitt similarly argue that in "Adam Sciveyn" Chaucer figures himself as a victim of rape, another instance in which he intentionally cross-genders himself, presenting himself and his text as victim. See their chapter, "Chaucer, Rape, and the Poetic Powers of Ventriloquism."

⁷⁰ See Benson's note on the *Tale of Melibee* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, (923-4).

gender/genre explanation for the tale's placement. The *Tale of Melibee* plays a key role in the "unmanning" of Harry, causing him to admit his fear of his own wife. Harry reestablishes his masculinity by latching onto the Monk, whose body impresses him, but whose tale subsequently fails to please. The repetition of men whose masculinity is not enough to protect them from the vicissitudes of fate is too much for him, and along with the Knight, who is understandably unmanned by tales of noble men fallen from their station, he demands that the Monk cease his generically-minded anthology. Harry thus takes certain kinds of tales as affirmation of his masculinity, others as defamations, and his response is therefore predicated upon the genre of tale that is being told. The "literature fragment," then, turns out to be a revenge against the hyper-masculine Harry after all. The simplistic explanation that Chaucer bores Harry as a revenge ignores the textual evidence and projects our own modern distaste for proverbial wisdom onto the pilgrims, who clearly share no such distaste. The revenge on Harry for his behavior is more subtle, and involves the entire sequence of the "literary fragment."

The *Nun's Priest's Tale* comes at the climax of this sequence. Harry's response to the Nun's Priest's tale makes it clear that it is not merely an excellently told tale, but one that reflects on the Priest's masculinity and male body:

"Sire Nonnes Preest," oure Hooste seide anoon,
"I-blessed be thy breche, and every stoon!
This was a murie tale of Chauntecleer.

The Host's blessing of the Nun's Priest's breeches and balls for the tale of Chauntecleer suggests that the Nun's Priest's anatomy is responsible for his tale-telling ability. But the Host continues to compliment the Nun's Priest, making a fuller description of his physical presence than has yet appeared in the *Tales*, since his portrait in the *General Prologue* is lacking. He compliments the Priest's neck and breast, and his eyes and complexion as well, and he attributes to him the sexual

prowess of the rooster Chauntecleer. By so expertly mixing genres, he has demonstrated greater mastery over the textual tradition than any other pilgrim, and by extension, greater masculinity.⁷¹ Harry's responses to the tales reveal a great deal about his generic and gender expectations. His use of literary genre and text to gender those around him reveals how superimposed both qualities in fact are. Genre is the social reality of a text determined after the telling of a story, as gender is the social reality of the body, imposed upon the body after its creation. These impositions operate at least in part through political power, if we read the Host as king in the ersatz society of the pilgrimage. The only other figure to impose an end to a story, the Knight, is an obvious enforcer to his regime, and Harry himself vociferously underwrites the Knight's interruption of the Monk. Male political power therefore operates through the policing of narrative, as does the male prerogative over representation of gender, as the Wife of Bath points out.

To demonstrate the necessity of this policing work, and the ways that it operates through narrative, the "Literature Fragment" vacillates wildly. The cheerful effects of a fabliau being obliterated by a disturbing Marian miracle story, they are in turned covered over by an almost manically cheerful romance, interrupted and replaced with either with a narrativized series of proverbs or a proverb-laden parable;⁷² next a series of tragedies, also interrupted for being too sad, leads into a hybridized tale, virtuosic in its summary of the tales up until this point. The cheerful tales, *Sir Thopas* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, are patch-up jobs, one of them inept, the other expert.

⁷¹ Peter Travis' recent *Disseminal Chaucer* that contains a chapter on the Nun's Priest's body. In that chapter, Travis argues that it was potentially transgressive to enumerate the parts of a man's body, just as Chaucer the pilgrim does for Thopas, and Harry does for the Nun's Priest. There is a queer potential in this enumeration, encouraging as it does and extended male gaze upon a male body.

⁷² See Tom Hill, *Chaucer Review* 46.3, 2012, "Chaucer's Parabolic Narrative: The Prologue to the *Tale of Melibee*, Lines 953-8" for a discussion of Chaucer's use of the term "proverbes" and its meaning. Hill maintains that Chaucer understood "proverbes" to be closer to what we think of as a parable, and that the pilgrim Chaucer thus refers to the allegorical nature of the narrative. This uncertainty about the genre in which *Melibee* belongs complements the point being made by the present argument, that literary genres require significant policing to maintain their identity. This policing of genres mirrors the Hosts policing of genders.

But one notes that throughout the fragment the various genres activated by the pilgrim's exist in stark contrast to one another, rather than delicate counterpoint. Genres efface and replace each other in this fragment. Their interaction with one another is not gentle but even a form of violence, and this violence disguises itself most effectively with a politically mandated mirth. It will be shown in Chapter 4 that vacillation between seriousness and mirth was a strategy also afforded by the Auchinleck, and that containment and control of gender was an expected product. In the literature fragment, Chaucer therefore dramatizes a reading practice also in evidence in the early 14th century. If the conditions of literacy under scrutiny in Chaucer's literary fragment were anything like those that attained for the compilers of the Auchinleck, then their collection of romances in English was a gendered project from its inception. The person who ordered their bespoke project was not necessarily a woman,⁷³ but the commissioner of the Auchinleck understood that romances were a genre used by women and children. Chaucer's gendering of both languages and genres in the texts considered in this chapter perfectly coincides with the kinds of texts selected for the Auchinleck. Its Englishness, romance, and spirituality all connote femininity and childishness.

This feminine volume was not, however, to be completed without masculine interventionist revision. The next chapter will show that reworking of the Auchinleck's abridge *Brut*, which was likely done for the manuscript itself, directly responds to the gender politics of the 1320s, specifically the recent deposition of the English monarch by his own wife, and her subsequent fall from public approbation. The Auchinleck *Brut*'s redactor made sure that the volume to which he contributed would not be without comment on women's agency in both the home and politics.

⁷³ An examination of women's roles in every kind of textual activity can be found in Finke's *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England*. She maintains, along with the present argument, that English was a matter of access, and that patronage was often a way for women to be involved in textual production otherwise barred to them.

Chapter 2: “Hir Lord to Slen with Trecherie:”

Women and Political Order in the Auchinleck Manuscript

On October 15th, 1326, Isabella of France issued at Wallingford a proclamation detailing her reasons for invading England. This declaration sharply criticizing the Despensers was posted in London in an attempt to secure the aid of its citizens. Claiming true allegiance to her husband Edward II, she states amongst her reasons for coming to England the following rationale:

Et le Coronne d’Engleterre destrue en divers maneres, en desheritaunce de nostre Seigneur le Roy, & de ces Heirs.⁷⁴

[...And the Crown of England destroyed in diverse manner, to the disinheritance of our Lord the King, and of his Heirs.]

With this Isabella positions herself as the protector of the realm, freeing the king from wicked counselors who have led him astray. She claims loyalty to Edward II, while hinting at the potential conflict of interest between the present king and his heir Edward III, emphasizing that the Despensers’ self-aggrandizement potentially came at the cost of Edward III’s wealth and security in his future position. The proclamation as a whole was calculated to secure the allegiance of the aristocracy as well as the general populace, and in that purpose it was largely successful. London submitted to Isabella the same day.

⁷⁴ See Rymer, Thomas. *Foedera, Conventiones, Litterae, Et Cujuscunq[ue] Generis Acta Publica, Inter Reges Angliae Et Alios Quosvis Imperatores, Reges, Pontifices Principes, Vel, Communitates Habita Aut Tractata*. Searchable text ed. Burlington: TannerRitchie, 2006

Though Isabella's position was in fact dependent upon the help this proclamation seeks to secure, the confident voice with which she commands and requests aid, "mandoms et prioms," suggests an imposing female will, come to restore order to a beleaguered island and people. This female voice, however, is largely a mirage; she was in fact surrounded by a number of male counselors, most notably Roger Mortimer, who might have penned these words for her. Of course, she was certainly capable of writing them herself, but her lover Mortimer almost certainly had some degree of input. Nevertheless, she was the legitimacy and the public face of the campaign. Even if the proclamation was written entirely by Mortimer or others, Isabella and her counselors clearly recognized that the narrative of their invasion of England and deposition of Edward II only held together because of Isabella's presence and position. The story they concocted, then, is of a righteous wife, loyal to her husband but critical of his deeds, and assigning the blame for the latter wholly to his counselors the Despensers. Their correctness in gauging the desires and sensibilities of the English people can be seen in the results.

It was thus under the influence of this powerful French, female voice that London turned on Edward II, though the city might not have come to see this turn as an act of treachery (perhaps, not even as a turn) until years later. After the death of Edward II, after the arrest and execution of Roger Mortimer by Edward III, London's support of Isabella must have begun to look rather different. For a time, Edward II's unpopularity had enabled Isabella to position herself temporarily as a liberator. As soon as it became clear that she and Roger Mortimer were intent upon self-aggrandizement and enrichment, their popularity evaporated. London and other cities likely found themselves feeling hoodwinked, taken in by a liberator who turned out to be an oppressor. The removal of Isabella and Roger Mortimer from power came, then, a welcome restoration, though the subject must have remained a touchy one, even after Isabella's influence was contained. The

Auchinleck finds itself in this tricky situation, in which the king is publicly on good terms with his mother, but has very visibly executed her lover and stripped them both of power. It must therefore curry favor with Edward III, distancing itself from his mother without appearing to do so. Or rather, since Edward III was not the manuscript's target audience, the Auchinleck must satisfy its intended audience that loyalty to the king has been rightly performed, even while expressing discomfort with having supported in Mortimer a now-disgraced opponent of the king. In a way, however, the Auchinleck's relationship to Isabella was even more difficult to express, necessarily ambivalent and fraught.

The struggle to position itself as an object of London provenance whose loyalty is firmly with the young king can be seen most clearly in the Auchinleck's *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*.⁷⁵ The Auchinleck text is a unique redaction of the *Metrical Brut* tradition, which for some time has been considered merely an anomalous version of the family of texts called the *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle (ASEM Chronicle)*, though more recently it has been suggested that this family should rather be called the *Abridged English Metrical Brut*.⁷⁶ Either title is somewhat deceptive in the present case: what has been called in the Auchinleck either the *ASEM Chronicle* or the *AEM Brut* is in fact a unique redaction of a preexisting text, quite distinct from any of the other extant versions and appropriately distinguished from them. In distinguishing the Auchinleck version from other versions, this chapter will dub the Auchinleck version of the

⁷⁵ For versions of the *ASEMChron* other than that found in the Auchinleck, see Zettl, *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*. London: Pub. for the Early English Text Society by H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1935.

⁷⁶ See the recent edition by Una O'Farrell-Tate, with a very useful introduction on the various manuscripts in which this family of texts may be found. O'Farrell-Tate's edition of the Chronicle is based on the text in Royal 12.C.xii, a manuscript of the West Midlands that contains another, much shorter version of the text, which is likely closer to the original. However, the present argument depends on the differing contexts and contents of the two manuscripts to establish the Auchinleck's *Liber* as a text in its own right. The Royal version deserves to be edited on its own merits, of course, but not because it is 'superior' to the Auchinleck version, which is not a 'corruption' of a prior text—even if it significantly disarranges British history. In this case, the assumptions of traditional textual criticism serve us rather badly.

chronicle the *Liber Regum Anglie*, as it is called in the manuscript's *explicit*—or simply the *Liber*, for brevity. This retitling is meant to signal that the present interest is not in a group or family of texts spread across manuscripts, but in this precise redaction, as it is found in this manuscript. And, as will be seen from what follows, there is good reason to separate it.

Dating and Locating the *Liber Regum Anglie*

The significance of the text for study of the Auchinleck hangs upon its having been written specifically for the manuscript's direct context, if not for the manuscript itself, the reasons for its anomalies being explained by the Auchinleck's geographical and historical provenance. The most important fact for dating the *Liber*, and thus the manuscript, is contained in its final lines, which were clearly an update of a pre-existing *AEM Brut* text. The only prior version of the text ends with the execution of Piers Gaveston, and Edward II is still reigning king. In the *Liber*, however, Edward II loses his kingdom because of the wicked counsel of Hugh Despenser.

After him regned a stalworþ man,
Edward his sone of Carnervan.
He les his lond, saun faile,
Þurth his wicked conseyle,
Þurth sir Howe þe Spenser,
Þat was his wicked conseyller. (2338-2343)

The update is an obvious one to make for any chronicler concerned with remaining *au courant*. After the deposition of Edward II, Piers Gaveston was no longer pertinent, as the Despensers had become the more apposite political opponents to mention. The *Liber* is at pains to excuse Edward II for what happens, calling him a “stalworþ man” and following the narrative suggested by Isabella and Mortimer. Edward II loses his land through wicked counsel, just as in Isabella's letter.

The lines that directly follow then make it clear that the *Liber* was produced after his death in 1327:

He no regned here
 Bot eyztetene zere.
 At Berkele dyed þe king,
 At Glowcester is his biriing. (2344-2347)

This would seem to set the *terminus post quam* for the *Liber* directly after Edward's death, but Helen Cooper has suggested that the limit should be set even later, due to an easily overlooked passage about Lancelot and Guinevere:

Þerafter aros wer strong
 Þurth þe quen in þis lond.
 Launcelot de Lac held his wiif,
 Forþi bitven hem ros gret striif.
 Lancelot was a queynt man,
 For þe quen sake he made Notingham;
 Þe castel wiþ mani selcouþe wonder
 Cauis mani he made þervnder
 Riȝt in þe hard ston. (1075-1083)

Cooper argues that this passage places the text after Edward III's arrest of Mortimer in Nottingham Castle, since the caves underneath famously served as Edward's point of entry. The general acceptance of Cooper's argument has adjusted the *post quam* to 1330, and the manuscript too was therefore almost certainly created in the 1330s.⁷⁷ This places the text in the period of London's disillusionment with Isabella and Mortimer.

Though scholarship is fairly unanimous in dating the Auchinleck manuscript's production in and around London, there is no firm agreement as to the geographical provenance of the *Liber* as an individual text. Cooper believes, based on linguistic evidence, that the *Liber* is from the Midlands. However, several of the *Liber*'s additions to the *AEM Brut* place it in London. At the

⁷⁷ See Cooper, "Lancelot, Roger Mortimer, and the Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript" in *Studies in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts in Honour of John Scattergood: 'the Key of All Good Remembrance'* (2005).

founding of London, the *Liber* modifies Brutus' deeds to include the London Stone. Though other versions of the *AEM Brut* contain the founding of London by Brutus, the Auchinleck's *Liber* adds the local attraction of the London Stone. The words carved by Brutus upon the stone also intensify his relationship to the city and make the *Liber* an expression of a particularly London pride. The *Liber* also modifies the section on Cassibelanus (947-990) to mention that Julius Caesar renamed London when he took it, and that Cassibelanus defended England at London. The earlier Royal 12.c.xii does not contain this information. Lines 1139-1262 contain an episode about the hallowing of Westminster by St. Peter himself, who appears to a fisherman, granting him a miraculous catch of fish and creating a Greek ABC upon the walls of Westminster Abbey. The announcement of this event by the fisherman also serves to explain the name of Charing Cross. Spelled as "chering" in the text, the location is possibly misconstrued as "Cheering Cross," since Peter crosses the Thames with the fisherman and cheers the king and archbishop with his miracle. The attention given in this episode to the hallowing of Westminster Abbey and the naming of Charing Cross suggest that the *Liber* was written for a London audience, who would be the most obvious audience for a miracle story of this type. The table below (Table 6) lists every change related to London made in the *Liber*, comparing with the slightly earlier *AEM Brut* text contained in MS Royal 12.C.xii.

Table 5: A Comparison of London Episodes in the *Liber* and the *AEM Brut*

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
Brutus founds London [The Auchinleck greatly expands this section to include the London Stone,	Brut made Londen first wiþ game & 3af it his houne name, Newe Troye, for he cam First fram Troye & it bigan. Brut sett Londen ston & þis 77ords he seyð anon, '3if ich king þat after me come Make þis cite wide & rome	Londone he made furst wiþ gome And 3ef hit his oune nome, Newe Troye, for he com Furst from Troye & hit bygone. (97-100)

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
which has an inscription making London superior to Troy.]	As ichaue bi mi day, 3ete herafter men sigge may Pat Troye nas neuer so fair cite So þis cite schal be.’ Pilke time, þurth Brutus mouþe, Newe Troye it was name coupe. (453-66)	
Death of Brutus [Auchinleck locates Brutus’ burial near the Thames; Westminster did not yet exist.]	Biside New Troye he was ded & ybirid þer so he bed, Wel neye Temes on þe lond Per þat Westminster stond. Westminster was nou3t bigun þo No 3eres after mani & mo. (481-86)	At Westmustre he was ded Ant yburied for so he bed. (121-22)
Eboras constructs York [Roughly identical]	He made 3orke wide & rome O lengþe & brede he it mete More þan Londen bi seue strete (498-500)	Euerwyke wes his meste wone Ant he Euerwike made & met More þen Londone bi seue stret.(142-44)
Lud constructs Ludgate [Adds the location of Lud’s burial at Ludgate.]	At Londen he made a gat & 3af it his owen name, Ludgate, in his game. King Lud regned here Four score & sex 3er, At Ludgate liþe his bon Yloken in a marbel ston. (528-534)	At Londone he made a 3ate Ant clepede hit after ys nome Ludgate al wiþ gome. (164-66)
Burial Place of Bladude	At Ludgate liþe his bon Biside his fader depe in a ston. (595-96)	N/A
Hengist Addition [The Auchinleck’s unique and lengthy Hengist episode (lines 655-876) mentions London several times, most significantly	Do went Hingist sone anon Into Londen sone he come; Pe buriays alle curteys & fre Welcomed him fair into þat cite. Hingist hem answerd anon, ‘Wele be 3ou, gode men ichon, Do Brut first þis cite ches Newe Troye ycleped it wes, & sepþe þo þat went her þurth For king Lud, Luddesburth.	N/A

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
renaming it Hingisthom]	& nov, lordinges, ich warn 3ou alle Hingisthom 3e schullen it calle.' (727-38)	
Julius Caesar takes “Hingisthom” [In the <i>Liber</i> , more detail is added to Julius’ invasion of England, including the building of a London tower]	Purth gret strengþe þe cite he nom Pat was ycleped Hingis[t]hom. For it was wiþ strengþe ygete, Londen þe cite he dede clepe, & so it schal be cleped ay Til þat it be domesday. Purth strengþe of hond & g[r]et tresour At Londe[n] he dede make a tour. (957-64)	N/A
Cassibelanus defends England [Auchinleck locates the defense of England at London]	He come to aseyl Julius Cesar; Er þat he were þerof war, & er þe tiding was to him come, Cassibalan was in Londone. He drof Julius Cesar out of lond Wiþ kni3tes stef & strong. (969-74)	He caste out Iulius Cesar Pat was emperor of Rome Out þisse londe sone, And tuye him ouercom, Ant at þe þridde time Cesar him nom. (244-48)
Hallowing of Westminster [The entire hallowing episode is an addition of the Auchinleck’s <i>Liber</i>]	& anon for þat tiding Pat ich stede is cleped Chering. þe fischer went to þe king & told him of Peters fischeing, Of him & of þe bischop bo. þe king in hert was ioieful þo & seyde 'couenaunt ichil þe hold For þe tiding þou hast me told. (1243-50)	N/A
King Alfred buried at St. Paul’s Cathedral	Pus liued þe gode Alfred Euer til he was ded. He regned viii & xx 3er To seyn Poules men him bere. (1531-34)	Ant see he regnede her Four an tuenti folle er. At Seint Poules ligge is bon, Buried in a marbre stone (482-85)
Edgar calls a parliament at London	At Londen he made a parlement Wharþurth he was to Wales went. (1737-38)	At Londone he hued a parlement Wareþurth Wales wes yschent (726-27)
Edrich & Knut	At Londen in a soler Ani3t after þe soper	At Londone in a soler, A nyht after soper, Bituene Edrich & þe kyng

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
[final two London episodes nearly identical]	Striif & chest þer aros; (1881-84)	Aros a repreo[f]ing. (848-51)

In the table above, it is quite clear that whoever altered the *AEM Brut* into the *Liber* habitually expanded pre-existing episodes that related to London, and added a few more that were not present. Most likely he did so because either he or the person for whom the text was intended had an interest in a London mythos. This would perhaps be enough, but it seems that the linguistic evidence linking the *AEM Brut* texts to the Midlands does not hold for the *Liber*. Auchinleck scribe 1, who copied the *Liber*, is identified by the *LALME* as Linguistic Profile (LP) 6510, located on the London/Middlesex border. Furthermore, many of the forms used to identify scribe 1 as LP 6510 are found in the London episodes listed above. These include: þis, mani, schal, fram, þan, ʒif, strengþe, ycleped, coupe, and more. Others are found in either the Albin or Inge episodes, or both. These include: hir, hem, mani, ani, oʒain, miʒt, cleped, etc. It is therefore abundantly clear that whoever reworked the *Liber*, whether Scribe 1 himself or someone else, was from the London area, and was most likely writing for a London audience.

In a way the suggestion that the *Abrided English Metrical Brut* exists in six different manuscripts has misled scholars into ignoring the highly specific character of the Auchinleck text. Only three exist from the second quarter of the 14th century, and the rest are very late 14th or 15th century redactions. The only versions of the text roughly contemporary with it are in MS Royal 12 C.xii and in MS Rawl. Poet. 145, a fragmentary text. The Royal version is therefore the best candidate for comparison with the *Liber* to see what alterations the scribes might have made to their existing text. It can be dated just prior to the Auchinleck due to its ending: the Royal text ends with the execution of Piers Gaveston, while the Auchinleck elides Gaveston and ends with

criticism of the Despensers and the death of Edward II. The Auchinleck version, therefore, is quite clearly an update of the Royal text, or something very like it. But the *Liber* does more than simply update the *Abridged English Metrical Brut*. It adds episodes of significant size and rearranges British legendary history. Both the *AEM Brut* and the *Liber* seek to tell the story of British history in a digestible form—in English, and much, much shorter than Geoffrey of Monmouth's widespread and widely believed *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The Royal text is much closer to the *Brut* tradition that inspired it, and could accurately be described as an abridged *Historia*. But the Auchinleck's *Liber* makes numerous additions to its source material, and these additions alone exceed the entire Royal version in length. It therefore deserves to be considered a fully different text, which responds to its specific context: London in the 1330s.

Though it would perhaps be justifiable to claim that the text was written for the manuscript itself, considering its uniqueness and unique appropriateness to its codex, no such claim is in fact necessary. The *Liber* was almost certainly recomposed into its present state in roughly the same context as the Auchinleck's production, and it might simply have been an obviously appropriate inclusion considering the manuscript's ambitions. Either way, however, this inclusion was an act with literary implications for the Auchinleck compilers, specifically Scribe 1, in whose hand it is written and who did most of the editing for the manuscript. However, the literary significance of collocation has not been considered fully until now, and it is for this reason that the *Liber* remains understudied as a particular text responding to a specific time and place. The ways that it interacts with that specific context in two of its major additions, the Albin and Inge episodes, will be examined in the next few sections of this chapter. First, however, it is necessary to establish more firmly the *Liber*'s sources for those additions.

The *Liber*'s Two Major Additions, Summaries and Sources

The *Liber* additions radically augment the ideology of the text, blending it with the other texts in the Auchinleck, and orienting it outward toward the rest of the manuscript. Surrounded on all sides by texts that expand its various episodes, the *Liber* invites further reading, and in doing so implies a design for the manuscript's use. There seems, moreover, to have been an established connection between romance and chronicle.⁷⁸ In some cases, the *Liber* gestures toward the rest of the manuscript simply by pointing to other texts, as when it briefly mentions that Guy lived during Athelstan's reign. In a more complex move, the *Liber* also prompts other texts in the manuscript by suggesting their genre, as when it suggests miracle stories by recounting the dedication and blessing of St. Paul's. Or it might suggest the Charlemagne romances when it relates the acquisition of Christ's relics. So there is generic as well as direct suggestion of texts.

The two most salient additions, however, strongly suggest antifeminist traditions that were active in the fourteenth century. For purposes of comparison, one might look to Walter Map's *Disssuasio Valerii ad Rufinum*, a standard antifeminist text since the thirteenth century, which contains the following passage about Eve:

Prima primi uxor Ade post primam hominis creationem primo peccato prima solvit ieiunia contra preceptum Domini. Parentavit inobedientam, que citra mundi terminam non absistet expugnare feminas ut sint semper indefesse trahere in consequentiam quod a matre sua traxerunt. Amice, contumelia viri est uxor inobediens. Cave tibi!

[The first wife of the first Adam, after the first creation of man, ended the first fast with the first sin. She gave birth to disobedience, which until the end of the world will not cease to

⁷⁸ See Chris Given-Wilson's *Chronicles: the Writing of History in Medieval England*. According to Given-Wilson, the *Scalachronica*, written by Sir Thomas Gray, is apparently influenced by romance, "Gray remarked that [Edward Bruce] performed the sort of deeds in Ireland 'which would make a great romance if it were all recalled to mind' (*qe serroit une graunt romaunce a rementyner tout*)" (104). For Gray, chronicle abuts romance: the two border one another, and moreover romance perfects tales of deeds treated imperfectly in chronicle. The deeds recorded in chronicle can be of such a nature that they deserve to become romance, to receive a fuller, more poetic (less barely factual?) treatment. Romance is the distillation of chronicle.

overcome women, so that they are ever tireless in drawing out to its fullest extent what they took from their mother. Friend, a disobedient wife is an affront to her husband. Beware!]

Though not a direct source for anything found in the *Liber*, the above passage typifies a tradition that a medieval author or editor would draw upon to make alterations of the kind found in the *Liber*. It performs its work by locating female transgression in a legendary “other time,” then draws a connection to a more proximate “now.”

It is possible that the Walter Map passage above influenced another of the Auchinleck’s texts. The Auchinleck’s unique *Life of Adam and Eve* corresponds with curious precision to Map’s apocryphal assertions about Eve. In the *Life*, Eve commits the first human sin, but also prematurely ends the first act of penance. After leaving the garden, the first man and wife are unable to secure any food. As a solution, Adam proposes a fast in which both Adam and Eve stand in a river for forty days and nights, in an attempt to assuage God’s anger and coax food from him. Eve is tricked by the devil into leaving the river early. The analogy between this narrative and Walter Map’s invective suggests that both texts operate within the same antifeminist tradition. They charge women with a carnality that threatens homosocial bonds particularly, since in Christian theology man’s relationship with God the Father is conceived as a homosocial bond. Consider also Map’s address to an unnamed “friend,” who stands in for any man reading the text, and whose implied presence draws Map closer to the male reader by suggesting a shared dilemma: the rebellious nature of women. This demonstrates that antifeminism’s strategy is closer to the inverse of Map’s claim: men strengthen homosocial bonds through shared antifeminism.

As will be seen in this chapter, the editor/author of the *Liber* makes use of the same strategy. Locating the root of female “disobedience” in a distant original act of rebellion, it connects that originary framework to “current” relational struggles between husbands and wives. The resulting

homology unilaterally manipulates conflicts in the husbands' favor. In other words, this redaction is the product of multiple intertextual considerations. The *Liber* turns the pre-existing *AEM Brut* tradition into a piece of London propaganda, while also injecting (un)healthy amounts of antifeminism. The redactor of the *Liber* crafted an antifeminist text that would react productively with other texts in the manuscript, as well as the political context of the London literary scene into which the Auchinleck arrived.⁷⁹ That literary scene, it has been suggested, was greatly affected by the recent political upheavals initiated by Isabella of France's campaign against her husband, in which London had cooperated, and by the sudden execution of her lover, which happened at Tyburn within present-day London. The antifeminism in the *Liber* and its self-identification as a London text might therefore be two aspects of the same thing—an attempt to process the political trauma of these events.

If so, then the redactor of the *Liber* processed that trauma by eliding Isabella from recent history entirely. The description of Edward II's reign, quoted above, makes Hugh Despenser's role the determining factor in Edward's deposition, failing even to mention Isabella and Roger Mortimer, who had effected it. However, he adds numerous accounts of unruly women, who disturb the political order by opposing husbands and kings. The table below shows all the episodes concerning women in the Auchinleck's *Liber* and the *AEM Brut* of Royal 12.C.xii.

⁷⁹ It has already been noted by scholars that this text contains references to others in the Auchinleck. In particular Thorlac Turville-Peter suggests, in his chapter on the Auchinleck in *England the Nation*, that the *Liber* functions as a kind of index for the manuscript. For instance, the reference to Guy of Warwick points at the presence of that romance in the manuscript. But this reference is not original to the Auchinleck version. The original additions, I think, have better cause to be analyzed in this way, and though Turville-Peter also points out that the saints' lives are a feminine equivalent to the masculine romances, he does not push the gendered play of the manuscript beyond that observation. This argument will hopefully take the next few steps by showing that the *Liber* reflects the Auchinleck's gendered design, and not just its putative nationalism.

Table 6: Episodes Concerning Women in the Auchinleck and Royal 12.C.xii

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
Albin Episode	A conspiracy of princesses, led by Albin, to murder their husbands. Betrayed by the youngest, they are banished, land on the future island of Britain, consort with devils, and birth a race of giants. (1-360)	N/A
Corineus wrestles Gogmagog [essentially identical]	When Cornius herd þat Pat Brut of his leman spac, Of Ernebourwe þat maiden hende, To Gomagog he gan wende & him pelt wiþ swiche strengþe Þei he wer more þan he o lengþe, Pat fourti fot roume & gret, Into þe se he made him lepe. (427-34)	Þo Corineus underzat Þat Bruyt of ys lemman spac, Of Erneburh þat maiden hende, To Geomagog he con wende Ant him putte wiþ suche streynþe, Þah he were more þen he of leinþe, Pat fourti fet roumede & grete Into þe see he made him lepe. (77-84)
Hingist's Law	In winter he schuld take penis þre Bi no lesse no schuld he be - Þe tvay in mete & drink & fere, Þe þridde for to glad his chere; I[n] somer four penis he schuld haue - No lasse no schuld he take no kraue - Þe þre penis in mete & drink For trauail & his sore swink, Þe ferþe peni spende he schold On fair wimen 3if he wold. (705-14)	N/A
Hengist's Wives	Fife & þritti childer he wan on seuen wiue. Þe seuen & tventi wer kinges strong, Þe best bodis in ani lond; Werroures þai were & fair men, Kinges oþer erles Hingist made hem. Maidens children he hadde eyzte, Fair leuedis & wele yteyzte; Al he gan his londes þurth gon,	N/A

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
	Quenes he made hem euerichon. (860-68)	
King Leir [King Leir is betrayed by his daughter in A, but R only mentions him briefly]	King Leir regned here Nouȝt bot þrettene ȝer For he dede as vnwise man: Wiþ his douhter he ȝaf his kingdam To a wicked fals couward Pat was his owen steward. So his douhter & hir hosbond Drof king Leir out of lond. (881-88)	After Bladud, wes heir Ys oune sone þat hatte Leyr. He made Leircestre wiþ gome Ant ȝef hit ys one nome. After him reigned his sone bold þat wes icleped Denewold. (213-18)
Guinevere & Modred [Modred appears in R, but is replaced by Lancelot in A]	N/A	Ant þo þe tiding him wes icome þat Moddred hys cosyn Englond wolde bynymen him, Ant hede yleye by þe queen, Geneure, þat wes bryth & schene, þat wes king Arthures wyf þat he louede so ys lyf. (290-96)
Guinevere & Lancelot	Perafter aros wer strong þurth þe quen in þis lond. Launcelot de Lac held his wiif, Forþi bitven hem ros gret striif. (1075-58)	N/A
The Mantel No Cuckold Can Wear	A messenger to þat fest was come þat hete Cradoc, Craybonis sone. He hadde a mantel wiþ him brouȝt, To no cokkewold wiif nas it nouȝt. Who so wil to Glastingesbiri gon ariȝt þat mantel he mai se wele ydiȝt. (1107-12)	N/A
Inge Episode [R has Rowenne, as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's <i>HRB</i> , while A replaces	Inge arrives in Britain as a refugee from a Spanish famine. She receives land from the British king equal to that covered by a bull's hide. Inge then organizes a betrayal of the British king, and "wassail" serves as her signal for a mass stabbing. Britain is renamed England after	Rowenne at was so feir may Furst saide by is day To kyng Fortiger "wassail", Ant at onsuere wes "drinkhail". (337-40)

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
Rowenne with with Inge]	her, and descends into a period of plural kingship. (1263-344)	
Edith	Charles douhter þe riche king. Damisel Edip̄ was hir name, Michel sche loued solas & game. Pilke Edulf wan bi his wiife Fiue sones bi his liue: (1450-54)	Charles dohter e grete kyng. Dame Iudyth wes hire nome, Muche he louede gle & gome. (455-57)
King Edward's Daughter/Sister	King Edward's children. One of his daughters (also confusingly called his sister in the Auchinleck) marries an Earl Alfred. After suffering terribly in labor, she swears an oath to Christ never again to sleep with her husband. (1545-78)	N/A
Athelstan's Sister and the Gift of Christ's Relics	Athelstan's sister marries the king of France, who gives Athelstan a great gift. In addition to three hundred white steeds with jeweled bridles, he makes gifts of Constantin's sword, which contains a nail that pierced Christ's feet, as well as Charlemagne's spear, which pierced Christ's heart. The banner of St. Morris, and a piece of the true cross enclosed in crystal appear in the list as well, along with three thorns from Christ's crown. (1599-662)	N/A
King Edwin Unlawfully Sleeps with his Married Cousin	& sone anon after him Regned his sone Edwin. He was a man of swiþe gret pris, Bot of his bodi he was nouzt wiis. þe first day þat he croun nam He bireft a ful gode man Of his wiif for hir fairhed - Of Crist he hadde litel mede - & þei sche was his cosyn. Perfore he suffred þe more pine. (1701-10)	N/A

Episode	Auchinleck	Royal 12.C.xii
King Edward killed by his Stepmother Estirnild	After him regned Edward his sone Sone his liif was him binome, For he no regned here Bot vnneþe þre 3er For Estirnild his stepmoder - Seld be þer ani gode - 3af him pousoun, þat he was ded, To make hir sone Achelred King to be in Jnglond; (1783-91)	N/A

As with the London additions, it is clear that Auchinleck's *Liber* almost uniformly expands episodes involving women, and adds several more. A few cases are of special note. The *Liber* reintroduces some detail about King Leir's story that show the redactor was at least superficially aware of the story as it appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth. Where the Royal text merely mentions a Leyr who founds Leicester, the *Liber* mentions Leir's betrayal by his daughter. However, the youngest daughter who restores Leir to his throne in Geoffrey of Monmouth does not appear in either. Perhaps this aspect of the Leir story was too on the nose. The Auchinleck text also importantly replaces Modred with Lancelot, as has already mentioned. Before the Arthurian section of the chronicle closes, the *Liber* also adds a short aside about a mantle no cuckold can wear, perhaps alluding the recent and fairly public cuckolding of Edward II by Isabella and Roger Mortimer. Since the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot triangle seems to have been the chronicle's way of speaking about the affair, this seems likely. This episode in the *Liber* thus functions almost as a *roman à clef*.

The two largest *Liber* additions are both antifeminist in nature: the first is the story of Albin and her murderous sisters. The second is the traitorous Inge. Together, these two additions comprise twenty percent of the text. Both women transgress the bounds set for them by the male order, and in both cases, the island of Britain is renamed, making them in effect the political equals

and opposites of Brutus. So the redactor has reworked British history as a struggle against transgressive females, who threaten to overthrow the order established by males and monarchy. This quite likely expresses some anxiety about the power wielded by Isabella in the years just prior, and distances London itself from the deposition of Edward II. Both the additions concerning women and the London additions, therefore, play a part in the chronicle's positioning of London *vis à vis* the monarchy. By eliding Isabella from English history and assigning a destabilizing role to women generally, the *Liber* deflects blame from London for any recent political disturbances.

British history, in the *Liber*, does not begin with the destruction of Troy, as in all other versions of the *AEM Brut*. In the *Liber*, it begins with the egregious female transgressions committed by the daughters of a heathen king of Greece, whose attempt at assassinating their husbands is recounted in the first 352 lines. The opening episode, which takes up fifteen percent of the total lines in the *Liber* and is the largest of the Auchinleck additions, is a kind of a micro-romance.⁸⁰ It tells the story of Albin, who conceives a plot to kill her husband and shares it with her sisters, who conspire with her to murder their husbands too. But they are betrayed by the youngest sister, who loves her husband enough to tell him of the plot. When the king of Greece is informed, he banishes his daughters, all except the youngest, who remains with her husband. The banished sisters are set adrift, and after month at sea they land on the island that will be Britain. They name it Albion after Albin and, after consorting with the devil, bear a race of giants. Years later, when Brutus arrives, he kills the giants, renames the island after himself, and the whole of British history follows.

⁸⁰ This point was argued some time ago by Jean H. Burrows, in her unpublished thesis dissertation, *The Auchinleck Manuscript: Contexts, Texts and Audience*, in which she notes the *Liber's* activation of more than one contemporary secular and religious genre. She does not draw any broader generic conclusions from this observation, however, regarding the Auchinleck's strategic exploitation of available generic resources. Burrows also attributes the interest in such an episode to the recent deposition of Edward II by his mother, Isabella of France.

The most probable source for this episode is a little-known Anglo-Norman poem called *Des Grantz Geantz*.⁸¹ The redactor of the *Liber* seems to have been following a vogue for this material, in that Albin begins showing up in various prose Bruts around this time, both in English and French. The *Liber*'s redactor might even have translated his French material, since poetic narratives of Albin's tale are otherwise unknown in this period. If so, then he combined it with something like the *AEM Brut* as it is found in Royal 12.c.xii to produce the first portion of the Auchinleck text. As will be seen, the changes made to *Des Grantz Geantz* resonate with other contents of the Auchinleck manuscript. Admittedly, if this were the only addition to the *Liber*, then the redactor's understandable impulse to include as much as possible of Britain's legendary history would sufficiently explain the presence of this episode without any additional theorizing. But many of the other additions to the text contain episodes that include misbehaving females: the story of Inge, Guinevere's affair, and the mantle that no cuckold can wear. And these contrast nicely with the story of Aethelstan's exemplary sister, whose beauty leads to England's acquisition of Christ's relics from the French. The consequences for female transgression are tremendous, while the rewards for model femininity are great. All of this suggests that the inclusion of Albin was only one of several alterations intended to recast British history as a struggle against the female threat to homosocial male order.

In the second of the two major additions, Inge arrives in Britain, starving and tired, as the leader of a group of refugees from a Spanish famine. Despite her Spanish provenance, she tells her story of woe to the British king in French, the only French passage to appear in the Auchinleck's *Liber*, and the only multi-line, untranslated French passage in the entire manuscript. She requests

81 Edited Georgine Brereton in 1937, the poem is *likely* the source of the addition to the Middle English *Liber*, rather than the other way around. Brereton infers this because translation from Anglo-Norman to Middle English is the regular course of things.

an amount of land that can be covered by a bull's hide, builds a castle, and then invites the king to a feast. At the feast, she coordinates a mass stabbing, which she initiates by exclaiming “wesseyl.” Unlike Albin's failed assassination attempt, this plan succeeds, and Britain, now called England after Inge herself, is plunged into a period of chaos and plural kingship. Inge's aggression is odd and unmotivated, considering how hospitable the British have been. Furthermore, other than the Auchinleck's *Liber*, she is found only in much later versions of the *AEM Brut* from much later manuscripts. These include the BL Additional MS 19677 (1390-1400), CUL MS Dd 14.2 (c. 1432), and CUL MS Ff 5.48 (c. 15th), and it is unclear whether these might have taken Inge from the Auchinleck's much earlier version.⁸²

Besides these later versions of the *Abridged English Metrical Brut*, only two other mentions of Inge exist. The first is in CUL MS Gg 1.1, a manuscript produced in England in the first half of the 14th century, primarily in Anglo-Norman. This contains a prose Anglo-Norman *Brut*, which may be derived from something close to the *Liber*.⁸³ The Inge of CUL MS Gg 1.1 is therefore of considerable interest for anyone considering changes made to the *AEM Brut* text for this specific manuscript. Second, Robert Mannyng also mentions an Inge at the precise same point in British history in his translation of the *Historia Regum*, though he dismisses her as an invention of the “lewed.” It has been reasoned from his comment that her story was well known in the 14th century. Yet the Auchinleck is one of the earliest mention of Inge, perhaps the earliest,⁸⁴ and one of only

⁸² For more information on the various texts of the *AEM Brut*, see the helpful introduction and appendices to Una O'Farrell-Tate's edition. This argument differs from her opinion only by suggesting that Inge was not in fact well known. The manuscript evidence that she was a commonly known figure is all dependent to some degree on the original story in the Auchinleck, since every other version is later than the Auchinleck's *Liber* and shows its general influence.

⁸³ Zettle, who produced a critical edition of the *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle* (1935), the same text as the *AEM Brut*, by a different name, believed that the CUL MS Gg 1.1 text was translated from something like the Auchinleck's *Liber*, while Dominca Legge (1947) suggested that they both derive from a French source. Turville-Petre (1997) sides with Zettle.

⁸⁴ The precise date of CUL MS Gg 1.1. being unknown.

three. She is completely absent from the 200 year old Brut tradition until the Auchinleck adds her to it, and Mannyng's comments come directly on the heels of the Auchinleck version's composition. It is even possible that Mannyng is thinking of something like the Auchinleck's *Liber* when he dismisses the story of Inge. The reading that follows will show that, at the very least, the Auchinleck's Inge could not have been invented by the "lewed," as Mannyng suggests, but was the invention of someone who knew the *Brut* tradition well.

Mannyng is nevertheless certainly correct that Inge does not appear in his source material, or indeed any text at all until the Auchinleck's *Liber* or the Anglo-Norman prose Brut of CUL MS Gg 1.1. But every element of Inge's story appears scattered throughout the *History Regum Britanniae*, in pieces. Inge's story amalgamates a number of episodes from the earlier *Brut* tradition, all of which can be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum*, the urtext for the tradition. Amongst these may be found: Hengist's request for the land covered by a bull's hide, Hengist's treacherous mass-stabbing, and Ronwen's bringing the greetings "wassail" and "drink heil" to the island. Also, quite probably, the story of wanderers from Spain being settled in Ireland, as well as an unnamed woman and her companions stabbing the king, which leads to a period of anarchy and plural kingship. In other words, Inge is not a story invented by the 'lewed,' but a literary amalgamation of more than five different episodes, all taken from the *Brut* tradition. It is highly improbable that the Inge story as it is found in the Auchinleck's *Liber* was invented by anyone unfamiliar with Geoffrey of Monmouth, and this leads us to the conclusion that the Inge story was not widespread, but the invention of someone well-read enough to produce a literary amalgamation of this sort.

Alternately, if there were indeed at one time an oral traditional of an Inge whose name was widely believed to be the source of the name "England," then the redactor of the Auchinleck's

Liber might have taken the name from this tradition while ascribing deeds to her that he found reported in the *Historia Regum*. This would mean that Robert Mannyng was not making up the 'lewed' provenance of the Inge name. However, the fact that he mentions her in his chronicle at the precise moment in history when she also appears in the Auchinleck's *Liber* indicates that he associated her with the same episode that the *Liber* does, meaning that he must have been familiar with an Inge who was at least partly a literary amalgamation close to what we find in the Auchinleck. This does not clinch the case that he was responding directly to the Auchinleck's *Liber*, but it is likely that he was at least a bit familiar with a version of the text more similar to the *Liber* than to the more standard texts of the *AEM Brut*.

This leaves the question as to whether this amalgamated Inge was indeed original to the Auchinleck, and written by someone closely connected to it, possibly even one of the six scribes. Ultimately the facts that could decide this argument in the affirmative are inaccessible, but there is compelling literary evidence that someone close to the Auchinleck produced the Inge amalgamation. Her story complements much of the material in the *Liber*, as well as material in the rest of the Auchinleck, and it will be the project of the rest of this chapter to read the Inge and Albin episodes closely enough to build a case upon that complement, that the *Liber* was reworked from the pre-existing *AEM Brut* into a version of British history specific to the intended purpose of the Auchinleck. Furthermore, this chapter will argue that the *Liber* and its reworking reflects the Auchinleck's design with women in mind—both as audience and as social constructs.

Albin & Eve: Acts of Original Sin

The Albin episode, as an addition to the pre-existing *AEM Brut*, reframes insular history as a struggle against women who destabilize the homosocial bonds that structure society. The *Liber*

is at pains to establish women as a threat, regardless of location or era. In describing her father the Grecian king, the Chronicle draws on the formulas of romance to sway the chronicle's audience to his side. He is a “noble kniȝt,” a “duhti man,” “stalworþ & strong,” and the “best bodi jn ani lond.” His daughters are described in similar terms. They are the fairest maidens of that country. These stock descriptions indicate that we are to suspend our normal judgment of this heathen king. His description in these terms, the terms of a romance protagonist, diminishes anxiety about his heathenness and sympathizes with his concerns, priorities, and agenda. His bodily wholeness, maleness, and conformity to chivalric masculine identity are capable of overriding his status as a religious and cultural other. This is one profound technique enabled by formula. Stock description enables the imaginative leap from one time and place to another. Far from a failure to represent the king in more interesting and less formulaic terms, these stock descriptions are the hard-won invention of a generic tradition. They are a product of the intertext, and they marshal the accumulated feeling of the romance genre to indicate—instantly—how to think and feel about this Grecian king. The presence of so many romances in the Auchinleck manuscript only strengthens this effect. The word “douhti,” for instance, appears in nearly all of them, and usually several times. The importation of this term into a chronicle brings with it the gendered logic of romance, which is less foregrounded in the *AEM Brut* as it stands in other manuscripts.

In addition to the ways in which the Albin episode as a whole reframes the history of Britain as a struggle against female transgression, the small changes made to the Anglo-Norman source intensify these transgressions. In fact, a direct comparison of the *Liber's* Anglo-Norman source suggests that Eve's transgression was in mind when the redactors of the *Liber* translated their Anglo-Norman material:

Afterward sone anon
 Beldest soster of euerichon -

Me par orgoil de lur meyme
 E par fierte e grant rage

Hir name forsoþe hiȝt Albin -
 Sche hir biþouȝt in iuel tim
 Of tresoun al for to do,
 Hou sche miȝt hir lord slo.
 Þe deuel jnto hir hert aliȝt
 & conseȝ[l]d hir anonriȝt
 After hir sostren for to sende
 & tel hem alle ord & ende
 Hou sche hadde yþouȝt to do,
 Hir lord wiþ tresoun for to slo. (33-44)

Purpenserent grant outrage,
 Par un grant damage avoient.
 Mes rien a lur pout a mal turner
 Ceo qu'il avoient en penser. (36-42)⁸⁵

As can be seen above, the *Liber* expands on its Anglo-Norman source by asserting that the devil “into hir hert aliȝt.” Demonic influence is wholly absent from the beginning of *Des Grantz Geantz*, in which Albin and her sisters all conceive the plot together, without the prompting of any devils. Both changes seem designed to make the scene more like Eve's transgression; as a single transgressor who leads others astray, and in her cooperation with the devil, The *Liber's* Albin parallels Eve. The Auchinleck text manages an even more intense misogyny than medieval interpretations of Genesis, in that Albin herself is the origin of her transgression, which prompts the arrival of the devil a moment later. This exaggerates the Edenic fall, for in this case, Albin's fall results from her own transgressive tendency. Albin conceives the plot on her own, without the help of the devil, who only encourages her to extend the plan to all twenty sisters. Antifeminist amplification aside, the analogy between Eve and Albin is clear. Eve corrupts the world at the beginning of world history, while Albin corrupts the island at the beginning of British history.

A further change to the *Liber's* source material increases Albin's role in persuading her sisters to kill their husbands, making her similar to Eve in another respect. Both women use speech to destabilize relationships around them, and in her abuse of speech particularly, Albin represents an intensification of the Anglo-Norman source's antifeminist content. She possesses the

⁸⁵ The quotation of *Des Grantz Geantz* is taken from the long version, edited by Brereton, 1937.

manipulative capacity to misrepresent her own fall, framing herself as the victim of an overbearing husband:

“Sostren” sche seyde “ich am bitreyde,
 Mi lord me holdeþ so in eye
 Ðat y dar nouzt oþain hi[m] say
 Word no half in halle no bour.
 Ðat is to me gret desanour,
 Perfor ichil awreken be
 Of him when ich mi time se.” (64-70)

Albin’s speech, unique to the Auchinleck’s *Liber*, suggests a rationale for her plot that is simultaneously more complete and less plausible, less appropriate to the romance genre in which the episode operates. *Des Grantz Geantz* merely asserts that the daughters conceive their plot together “par orgoil de lur meyme/ E par fierte e grant rage,” through pride of their aforementioned [nobility], and through cruelty and madness. This explanation seems appropriate to the romance genre, though (or perhaps because) less specific than the one in the *Liber*. Albin’s rationale, on the other hand, suits a fabliau more than any other genre. The complaint that her husband’s surveillance keeps her from opposing him in any way is a specific grievance appropriate to the domestic pettiness of the fabliau genre. But that does not mean that it is simply inapposite. It is, rather, complexly inapposite; it mixes genres to a specific purpose. The nature of Albin’s complaint brings the entire episode closer to the London urban setting in which it was likely to be heard, making Albin’s rebellion resemble more common household conflicts. Thus, though inapposite to the genre initially performed by the *Liber*, it suits the text’s expected reading situation—hence, complexly (in)apposite.

Simultaneously, the Albin episode balances its activation of antifeminism by providing a positive female exemplar.⁸⁶ When the youngest sister objects to the plan, the *Liber*'s redactor alters her objection to be a matter not just of her own desire, but of her conformity to a proper model of femininity. Her defection is described quite differently in the two texts:

Hir lord þat was a ʒongling
 Sche loued mest of al þing
 Also schuld ich gode wiman -
 Ac mani on so do no can. (115-118)

Ele ne voleit a nul feur
 Damage veer de sun seignur; (85-6)

The French states only that she wished no harm at any price to befall her husband, whereas the English continues by asserting that every wife should so love her husband, and yet that many cannot. Note how removable this second couplet is. It supplies no further information about character or plot, and serves solely to impose a perception of ideal femininity, unnecessary even for the completion of the sentence or the rhyme scheme. Yet in these four lines the composer of the *Liber* accomplishes a great deal. The husband's youth significantly points to the sexual appropriateness of the union, contrasting it implicitly with marriages in which the male is older, such as that between Chaucer's January and May in the *Merchant's Tale*. Indeed, the word "ʒongling" potentially alludes to the established tradition of concern about age-appropriateness of married partners reaching back all the way to Tristan and Yseult. Furthermore, the youngest sister's love for her husband is made emblematic of all appropriate feminine behavior, and the opposite, the possibility of egregious transgression of the norm, is also articulated. This imposition of normative femininity reaches beyond the confines of the narrative to implicate the present moment. The *Liber* briefly switches tense from past to present, to suggest that some women, right now, are incapable of loving their husbands.

⁸⁶ A common practice. See Blamires, *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended*. Also Bernau, "Medieval Antifeminism

This short couplet shows how antifeminist discourse can press upon its audience with combined weight of the textual tradition, becoming as effective absent as present. In fact, this moment demonstrates that the antifeminist tradition can be most effective as an absence, where it cannot be overcome. The sidelong glance at women invokes the entire body of antifeminism and immediately recedes. Using that “body,” it gestures toward the reading situation, toward the audience and the conditions in which they are experiencing the *Liber*. The gesture is as formulaic and, in a sense, throw-away as the romance formulas that precede it, but like those formulas, it activates a whole body of literature. And yet, it would be too simple to read this alteration as a simple slander against women. We must not divorce this text's mobilization of antifeminist ideology and misogynist sentiment from the reading practices that surrounded it. If there is antifeminist content, we must ask why and to what effect that content has been called upon. Let us not forget that the effects this text achieves are metonymic and intertextual.

That is the primary reason why the anti-feminist discourse in this text can be simultaneously simplistic and evocative. Albin's self-representation and the youngest sister's ideal love function as metonymies for antifeminism, activating discourse going all the way back to St. Paul. Of course, this strategy is only as effective as the audience is literate, which is why it is so significant that the Auchinleck gathers together such a variety of pro- and antifeminist texts. Intertextual from the outset, the manuscript's design allows each text to expand the literary effects available to the others. Any number of other texts in the Auchinleck bear witness to the variety and energy intrinsic to this discourse. It contains a debate poem about the virtues and vices of women, an alphabetical praise of women, two female saint's lives, and other texts in which the ability of female protagonists to effect their own designs is the source of considerable tension. These latter will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Inge & Isabella: Women Who Kill Their Lords

The *Liber* redactor's reworking of source material can be seen even more clearly in the second of the *Liber's* major additions, the Inge episode, whose probable provenance has already been discussed. It remains to explore the implications of the amalgamated episodes from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Since most if not all of the Inge material was taken from the existing *Brut* tradition, its recombination into the imposing female figure of Inge indicates a self-aware use of the *Brut* material, and represents an impressive evocation of politically dangerous femininity. In previous scholarship it has been assumed that Robert Mannyng's depredations of the Inge story were accurate, but medieval claims of textual precedent are not uniformly trustworthy, so it is not impossible that both the *Liber* and Robert Mannyng make a spurious claim to the existence of a written Inge tradition that predates the *Liber*. In either case, the *Liber's* redactor (or his source) must have taken the Inge tradition and associated it with several different episodes from the *Brut* tradition. This could not have been done by anyone unfamiliar with Geoffrey of Monmouth or the succeeding *Brut* tradition, and it is the primary reason for denying that any written Inge tradition existed before the Auchinleck's *Liber*. The "lewed" could not have invented anything beyond the false etymology Inge/England. So from the above consideration, it is clear that the *Liber's* most literate and deliberate rewrite of British history deserves more attention.

The introduction to the Inge episode makes ties to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum*, even as it signals a break with tradition by reinventing Geoffrey's Ronwen as Inge. In all previous versions of the *Brut*, and one contemporary with it, the character who introduces 'wesseyl

& drinkheyl' to Britain is Hengist's daughter Ronwen, while in the *Liber*, this cultural mixing is performed by Inge.⁸⁷

In þat time wite 3e well
 Com first 'wesseyl & drinkheyl'
 Into þis lond, wiþouten wene,
 Þurth a maiden brigt & schene.
 Sche was yhoten maiden Inge;
 Of hir men can rede & sing. (1263-8)

The above shows the degree to which the redactor of the *Liber* was reworking his material. Taking the 'wesseyl & drinkheyl' lines from the pre-existing *AEMBrut*, he replaces Ronwen with Inge, giving his invention an air of authority by claiming that 'of hir men can rede & sing.' Once the redactor has introduced Inge with this spurious authorizing gesture, he begins to tie his various additions to the *Chronicle* together:

Lordinges, corteys & fre,
 Þis lond hap hadde names þre:
 First men cleped it Albion
 & seþþe, for Brut, Brete3ne anon,
 & now Ingland icleped it is
 After maiden Inge, ywis. (1269-1274)

This passage makes Inge and Albion the rivals of Brutus. These two transgressive women hem Brutus in on either side, as the chaotic origin and ineluctable fate of male order, respectively. Even if labelled with critically dismissive term, "hackwork," these lines gesture toward a thematic unity, organized around the feminine as threat to political stability. At the very least, then, this indicates that the *Liber's* redactor operated with some self-awareness in rewriting the *AEMBrut* with a misogynist twist.

87 The major previous versions of the Brut, of course, would be Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, and *Lazamon's Brut*. The version of the Abridged English Metrical Brut contemporary with the Auchinleck *Liber* is the aforementioned one contained in Royal 12.C.xii.

Later on in the Inge episode, the *Liber* contains the only true lapse in the manuscript's commitment to English. The Auchinleck rarely departs from English, and when it does do so, in every other case it is a Latin line with interlinear glossing in English, as in the *Paternoster* and *David þe King*, or in a macaronic poem, *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers*, clearly a filler text, though not therefore insignificant.⁸⁸ *The Sayings* are, after all, a satiric poem on the troubles of Edward II's England. French, then, has a political edge in the Auchinleck, so it cannot be insignificant that when the king greets Inge upon her arrival in Britain, she responds to him in French:

Trauaile somes par mere sauage
 Enfebli somes de graunt feym
 Kar y nous defaut vin & peyn
 Ore e argent aseȝ auoms
 Puruiaunce de ceo feroms
 De vostre seygnorie prioms endos
 En vostre reume auer repos. (1310-15)

This relatively large passage of untranslated French represents a marked departure from the manuscript's norms, and it appears at a crucial juncture in the *Liber's* account of insular history.

This French speech simply is no mere lapse in the manuscript's commitment to English, but a rather avant garde linguistic literary effect introduced by the *Liber* redactor.⁸⁹ The author deploys French at a significant juncture in the poem, not when it made the most factual sense to do so, since Inge is supposed to be from Spain, but at the narrative crux of the chronicle. The French spoken by Inge ruptures the Englishness of the poem at just the moment when the monarchy of

⁸⁸ Chapter 4 will deal at length with the importance of fillers in the Auchinleck manuscript.

⁸⁹ A recent article by Thea Summerfield, "And she answered in hir Language': Aspects of Multilingualism in the Auchinleck Manuscript," suggests that we should consider carefully the implications of a French segment in the otherwise self-consciously English Auchinleck manuscript. Her suggestions is that audience members would have had at least some familiarity with French, and that we need to remember that linguistic competence is not a binary, but must be described as a spectrum. The audience would, at the very least, be able to recognize the language as French, though it is probable that at least some could do more than that.

England is about to be overthrown by Inge's treachery. It would be possible to read this moment as an association of French and treachery, amenable to a nationalist reading of this passage and the manuscript as a whole. But French was still the accustomed language for public proclamations and high-level political business in England. It is therefore important that this moment further links French and treachery with femininity as part of the *Liber's* general strategy of constructing the feminine as an originary and perennial threat.

Her French speech associates Inge with Isabella, and in all likelihood, the redactor of the *Liber* was aware of the effect his French addition to the metrical *Brut* would have. He cannot have been unaware of the recent political upheaval that led to 'þe 3ong king' Edward III's reign, and the image of a French-speaking foreign princess who lands on the island and overthrows the regime cannot have been a politically neutral one at this time. Inge's request for aid, furthermore, parallels Isabella's in her letter:

Pur quoi nous vos Mandoms & Prioms, pur commun profit de vous toux & chescun de vous, endroit de fey, nous soietz aidaunt, bien & leaument, toutz les soitz, que vous verretz lieu & temps, & par toutes les voies que vous saveretz & pourretz...

Though Isabella uses a more commanding tone than Inge, her proclamation is at heart a request for aid sent to the city of London. The fact that Inge kills the king and enriches herself inappropriately after making her request for land must also have struck audiences of this text as similar to Isabella. It is interesting, then, that the conditions of Edward II's deposition and death are almost entirely elided from the history.⁹⁰ The *Liber's* redactor only allows himself an update

⁹⁰ Angela Florscheutz remarks in *Marking Maternity in Middle English Romance* that Richard I is hampered by "maternal interlopers," and that his historical relationship with Eleanor of Aquitaine is largely effaced. Considering the similarities between their mother-son dynamic and the one existing between Edward III and Isabella, this is unsurprising. She also notes that Auchinleck, which is the earliest English copy of *Richard Coer de Lyon*, elides Richard's parentage, while later versions add it back in. See her chapter, "Forgetting Eleanor: *Richard Coer de Lyon* and England's Maternal Aporia."

of Edward II's political indiscretions. Whereas earlier versions of the metrical *Brut* had mentioned Piers Gaveston as having been recently beheaded, this version leaves out Gaveston and suggests that Edward II's downfall was through “his wicked conseyller” Hugh Despenser. The redactor elides the recent deposition of the king by his own mother, displacing the recent political upheaval brought about by a powerful woman into the two major additions, in which princesses rebel against their husbands and rightful lords.

Recent scholarship on the Auchinleck manuscript has emphasized its nationalistic concerns over gender. This argument proposes that this moment in the *Liber*, in which a woman effectively dissolves the male political order, is neither primarily a gender nor a political comment, but an intersection of the two. Inge's problematic French speech, intruding into the exclusive English of the manuscript, has thus far settled the question in favor of the political, since it associates spoken French with the power to unmake British politics. The switch into French, in this manuscript context, is so flamboyant and pointed—not to mention logically incoherent, given Inge's provenance—that there cannot but be a nationalistic point. But the possibility that Inge's French might have been inspired by Isabella makes the case less certain. Her actions placed King Edward III on his throne, and though by the time the Auchinleck was in production she no longer wielded political influence, the memory of her actions must still have been in the public consciousness.

It is not clear whether Isabella's French or her femininity was more traumatic to the English mindset. In the final, analysis, however, it is not necessary to settle the question, at least not framed in this way. Rather than haggle over the primacy of one or the other—are women degraded by associating them with French, or is French degraded by associating it with women?—it would be more productive to posit a triangulation of concepts: French associated with women associated with a destabilizing effect. Positioned together as they are in this text, embodied in the literary

amalgamation of Inge, they can each degrade the other. The corrective offered by this argument, then, is not to efface the nationalistic character of the *Liber Regum* or its anti-French sentiments, but to point out that the gender discourses activated alongside the nationalistic are equally part of its strategy.

The London *Brut* and London women

When the *Liber's* two major additions to the Metrical *Brut* are thus read, they rewrite recent history, for the most part eliding women's role in contemporary 14th century politics, while displacing it to a mythological period. This is the most convenient way that a more conventional history of Britain such as the *AEM Brut* might be adapted to make ahistorical and universal claims about the nature of gender. Simultaneously, the *Liber's* universal antifeminist claims deflect responsibility for the deposition of Edward II onto a more diffuse target. When women's agency and transgression are relocated to an ordinary period such as Albin's, or a long-forgotten epoch such as Inge's, their actions take on the authoritative patina of age. And when recent political history provides such a stark example as Isabella's, all the necessary points are in place for a strikingly misogynist claim about the nature of women. The inaccuracies of the history and the infidelities from the *Brut* tradition are thus explained by the gendered concerns of the *Liber's* redactor.

It is not clear who benefits most from the simultaneous foregrounding and elision of women from British history. A word may thus be said in favor of female patronage for this history. Women stand to gain the most from distancing themselves from someone like Isabella, of course, since they are the likely targets of misogyny resulting the Queen mother's negative associations. It has been suggested that women, as patrons, were responsible in this period for chronicles that

foreground women.⁹¹ If Scribe 1, who copied this text and might even have redacted it for the manuscript, was working for a female patron, then he did give a complexly ambivalent treatment to the task he was given. It is hard to imagine a woman being especially pleased with the result, but as will be seen in Chapter 4, Scribe 1 finds other ways of subverting his obligations to his female audience.

Beyond the Auchinleck's *Liber* exists a broad landscape of other *Bruts* in Latin, French, and English, each with its own variant versions. The *Anglo-Norman Prose Brut*, which comes into existence at the beginning of the 14th century,⁹² and originally extended to 1307, sees a number of rewrites that extend it to the same period covered by the *Liber*. The *ANP Brut*, however, does mention Isabella, though the precise impact of her ingress and deposition of the English monarch changes from version to version. The most vitriolic of the *ANP Brut* texts⁹³ implies that both she and Roger Mortimer were responsible for the violent murder of Edward II. Other versions are more circumspect, implying that when scribes and authors copied the *ANP Brut*, they were sensitive to the political implications of what they were copying, and were fully capable of editing what they considered to be sensitive or inaccurate portrayals. This corroborates in French what the present argument has asserted for the English tradition, that rewriting the *Liber* was a way for its redactors to process the political trauma of Edward II's deposition by Isabella. That process was different for different redactors and scribes, according to the information they had, or their estimation of the

⁹¹ See Laura Barefield, *Gender and History in Medieval English Romance and Chronicle*, especially Chapter Two, "Women's Patronage and the Writing of History: Nicholas Trevet's *Les Cronicles* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*."

⁹² See Julia Marvin, "Albin & Isabella: Regicidal Queens and the Historical Imagination of the Anglo-Norman Prose *Brut* Chronicles" for a useful panoramic of the variations and history of the *ANP Brut*.

⁹³ The presence and alteration of the Albin episode in this angriest of the *ANP Brut* also shows that this specific material was considered a reflection of contemporary events. In this version, Albin's assassination plot succeeds, and the king banishes his daughters. Strikingly, he gives them sufficient food for their journey, and these more egregiously criminal princesses fare significantly better on their journey. So while their transgressions are worse, their treatment is better. This suggests that Edward III, who pensioned his mother even as he removed her from power, acted correctly. See Julia Marvin for the full articulation of this argument.

involved parties' guilt, or their sense of the utility or safety of casting blame. What seems certain, however, is that the representation of recent politics was both deemed necessary and in need of sensitive handling.

The Auchinleck's particular solution of eliding both Isabella and Mortimer entirely from the history might result from the nearness of these events to its own context. London might very well have felt particularly implicated in bringing Isabella and Mortimer to power, a feeling compounded by fear when Mortimer's body hung for several weeks just outside of the city. Considering that the issue was close to home, so to speak, it is unsurprising that the Auchinleck's *Liber* feels a need to distance itself further from these events than other contemporary chronicles. Though Isabella does not appear in the *Liber*, she does appear in *Middle English Prose Bruts* probably derived from one of the *ANPBrut* texts discussed above.⁹⁴ Even the letter sent by her to London appears, closely, if not exactly copied from a real version of it. The letter as it appears in versions of the *MEPBrut* follows Isabella's thought for thought, though not word for word. Nevertheless, it is clear from its inclusion and careful paraphrase that the letter was considered an historical watershed. The precise import of Isabella's career varies from text to text, but not the sense of her significance. The *Liber*'s redactor clearly felt the need to discuss Isabella without mentioning her too directly. Hence his dramatic revision of British legend, creating Inge out of odd old ends stol'n from Geoffrey of Monmouth.

This chapter has endeavored to prove that, at the very least, the Auchinleck's *Liber* should be considered a text that develops a complex strategy for dealing with the political clime in which

⁹⁴ For a precise and thorough classification of *Middle English Prose Brut* texts, see Lister Matheson, *The Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle*. The difficulties in sorting out versions of the *MEPBrut* are myriad compared to those for the *AEMBrut*, which only exists in six manuscripts and a fragment. By comparison, the *MEPBrut* became one of the most widespread and popular texts of the late Middle Ages.

it was written, namely London in the 1330s. This implies that there was a readership for historiographical digest written in English. In itself, this is not surprising, since the desire for this kind of text is well established by the manuscript record. There are over 150 extant copies of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* alone, and it is clear that toward the very end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th, digests of Geoffrey of Monmouth like the *AEMBrut* were being composed and copied at an extraordinary rate. Though only six copies of the *AEMBrut* exist, including the Auchinleck's *Liber*, prose versions in French, Latin, and English are so common that they rival the *Historia Regum Britanniae* in number. If there was a market for a secular vernacular text in late Medieval England, it would be for a shortened Brut. Its translation into every language spoken on the island, in both prose and metrical verse, furthermore suggests that it was desirable in every imaginable reading context. The *Liber* itself, however, exists only in one copy, and this could very well be due to its precisely calibrated appeal to a London audience.

The *Liber*'s presence in the Auchinleck suggests that it too was produced for a London readership, if we allow that the compilers who included it were indeed sensitive to its London sympathies. It is impossible, of course, to be unshakably certain. Nevertheless, the theory proposed in this chapter fits data in every way that the manuscript can provide it. Its construction, dialect, and decoration all point to London. The texts most unique to it, such as the *Liber*, provide textual traces of its London provenance too. There are texts that suggest other areas of England, such as *Guy of Warwick*, which has a case for Warwickshire and the Beauchamps built around it, or *Sir Tristem*, which pulls the manuscript even farther north. But these texts, being famous romances, had general appeal, and would have delighted a London audience as much as any, whereas this takes a text that had broad appeal, the *Brut*, and tailors it specifically for London. So while rival

theories will most likely always coexist, this argument sides with London both in manufacture and reception, and the above data supports that decision.

If the *Liber* and manuscript are thus linked to London, the Auchinleck begins to reveal more urban readership than has thus far been known. The redactor's strategy in suiting his text to the environs in which it was most likely read shows his sensitivity to context, and his desire to fit his work to its specific task: that of reconciling London to its recent past—or rather, assisting London in smoothing it over. In diverting attention from London's support of Isabella, moreover, he chooses a convenient target, one prepared for by antifeminist discourses already prevalent in England. Women generally, then, become a convenient scapegoat for a community in need of someone to blame, while the accusations leveled against them, being coalesced in Albin and Inge, remain diffuse enough to avoid any more tangible form of recrimination. Women are to blame, but only in a period of history distant enough to function as metahistory. While this does not necessarily mean that women were an expected part of its readership, it does suggest that sensitivity to women was on the redactor's agenda, and a female readership could certainly explain this fact.

In the next chapter, a similar sensitivity to women is examined in three of the Auchinleck's romances. Sensitivity, however, should be understood not as an essential respect for women, but as a recognition that they form a part of a textual strategy. More likely, the texts in the next chapter were part of a strategy of control, much like that of the *Liber*, which asserted male, textual control over 14th century politics by removing women's influence from recent events. This complicated relationship to women's agency exists in all three of the next chapter's texts: *The King of Tars*, *Sir Degare*, and *The Legend of Pope Gregory*.

Chapter 3: Extraordinary Births and Alienated Female Agency

Beginning with the perception that the Auchinleck is a romance proto-anthology, scholars are as likely to neglect what distinguishes the manuscript as a 14th century London production as notice it. When the compiler of the Auchinleck began the task of collecting a variety of Middle English texts, not just romance, into one volume, he was assuredly not employing as fixed a set of generic guidelines with which to choose one thing or leave out another. Whereas a twentieth-century scholar might see an inordinate number of romances for a manuscript of the period, and decide that it must be therefore be a generic compendium, the fourteenth century compilers of the Auchinleck did not operate with such clear-cut categories. The degree to which they recognized groupings of their texts, therefore, cannot be simply ascertained, nor can we assume that those groupings operated in the way might imagine. Nevertheless, where there is clear and repeated overlap in thematic and narrative content, we might infer that they recognized a form of kinship, and kinship, as a euphemism for genre, is perhaps a more useful, because flexible, way of thinking about the three texts that form the core of this chapter: *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *The King of Tars*, and *Sir Degare*. All three texts contain a similar motif—a term that will be examined below, but the motif itself might be termed “abnormal birth.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ *King Richard* is also a fourth text that contains the extraordinary birth motif, or would have, if the Auchinleck

The structure of the manuscript suggests that its compilers chose these three texts for this specific motif. The first two texts, *Gregory* and *Tars*, are found in booklet 1, a subdivision of the manuscript noted for its thematic unity and spiritual focus. *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, being the first item to survive in the present manuscript, was originally the sixth, and *The King of Tars* follows directly after. Their thematic resonance is the more interesting due to their close collocation, especially since the booklet was completed by Scribe 1 alone. His editorial role in the manuscript makes it likely that the content of the texts was considered in their placement. *Sir Degare*, on the other hand, is found in booklet 3, which is less unified than booklet 1, containing a mix of genres and scribal hands. However, its apparent disorganization belies an underlying plan. Booklet 3 was initially the work of scribe 3, who copied the first seven (nearly all) of its texts. The last two, *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers* and *The Battle Abbey Roll*, were copied by scribes 2 and 4 respectively. It is with these last two texts that the textual numeration and content of the booklet go astray, so these two texts might be regarded as fillers, despite their possible resonance with other portions of the manuscript.⁹⁶ However, the core of the booklet, the group of seven texts copied by scribe 3, clearly emphasizes spiritual texts for basic religious instruction and contains the third text in the manuscript that features an abnormal birth. There is therefore a distinct possibility that scribe 1 knew his own plan for booklet 1 when he asked scribe 3 to begin his similar booklet. In assigning texts to scribe 3, scribe 1 seems to have narrowed his criteria considerably

redaction were an A-text. The Auchinleck version of *King Richard* is considered an example of the B-text, which does not contain the portions about the birth of Richard, in which his mother is revealed to be some kind of spirit averse to the sacraments. Finlayson, citing Loomis, believes that the Auchinleck text is earlier, and that the story of Richard's fabulous birth is a later addition. See Finlayson's "'Richard, Coer de Lyon': Romance, History, or Something in Between?" (*Studies in Philology* 82.2 1990) and Loomis' *Medieval Romance in England* (1924;1960), especially pp. 148-9.

⁹⁶ *The Four Philosophers* is a short political satire found on a single recto, and it clearly resonates with political texts like *The Simonie*. *The Battle Abbey Roll* has been widely speculated on as containing clues to the identity of the manuscript's commissioner. Most recently, see a dissertation by Tricia Kelly George "The Auchinleck Manuscript: A Study in Manuscript Production, Scribal Innovation, and Literary Value in the Early 14th Century" (The University of Tennessee, Knoxville 2014).

beyond the common constraints imposed by exemplar poverty, and none of the three texts under discussion is at the end of a booklet, where one might expect to find filler texts. The codicological data, it will be shown, suggests that scribe 1 was able to choose texts for himself and assign texts to the other scribes according to the texts' very specific content, rather than for conforming to a more broadly defined genre or because of a paucity of available exemplars. This would mean that the first three booklets of the Auchinleck were planned with romance, female spirituality, and abnormal birth in mind.

Scholars have already noted the Auchinleck's emphases on romance and female spirituality,⁹⁷ but this chapter will argue that the motif of extraordinary birth provided a further criterion for the Auchinleck compilers. Attention to this motif adds sophistication and richness to readings of the Auchinleck romances. Scholars have infrequently located such sophistication and richness at the beginning of the 14th century, half a century prior to the flowering of Ricardian literature. However, if we cannot accept that there is sophistication in an early 14th century manuscript, simply because Middle English had no sophistication in the early 14th century, we will be begging the question. Since the romance focus of the manuscript and its interest in female saints' lives are both very well established, we might frame our investigation of the extraordinary birth motif simply as a further refinement of the way that these two emphases operate. The extraordinary birth motif dovetails nicely with the other two. Its link with female spirituality is obviously Marian. The centrality of Christ's extraordinary birth to 14th century culture, literary or otherwise, needs no elaboration, and it makes perfect sense to see an interest in extraordinary birth

⁹⁷ See Jean H. Burrows' dissertation, "The Auchinleck Manuscript: Contexts, Texts, and Audience" (University of Washington, 1986), particularly for an interest in romance that goes beyond the traditional definition. She includes the *Short Chronicle* amongst the Auchinleck texts that perform romance. For the interest in spiritual texts, see particularly a dissertation by Pamela Robinson, "A Study of Some Aspects of the Transmission of English Verse Texts in Late Medieval Manuscripts" (Oxford, 1972).

motifs arising naturally from this centrality. And as we shall see, the passivity with which Mary accepts the Holy Spirit's impregnation of her body becomes paradigmatic for all three texts in this chapter. That passivity is the model of female agency—to accept, after all, is a form of choosing. The abnormal birth motif's link to the romance genre is perhaps harder to intuit, but we find it incarnate in the texts themselves. Both *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *King of Tars* combine elements of romance and spiritual text. The generic ambiguity of these two texts is mirrored in the ambiguity of women's bodies. Always fleshly and secular, they are nevertheless simultaneously the gateway of Christ and, in Tertullian's words, "the devil's gateway."⁹⁸ In *Gregory*, *Tars*, and *Degare* as well, female bodies combine a perilous permeability with passive resistance, incarnating the possibility of a union between contraries. In so doing, they are emblematic of the Auchinleck's generic mixing: romance and saint's life, sacred and secular, sentence and solace.

Defining Extraordinary Birth

The term 'motif' conjures earlier 20th century scholarship, when the identification and classification of folkloric motif was in its heyday. Earlier 20th century scholarship expended prodigious effort in producing a classificatory web that could intercept every instance of a motif through texts and time. To produce that web, however, it was often, if not always, necessary to gloss over the variations that occur from instance to instance. Indeed, in order to conceive of the motif index as a project at all, it is necessary to marginalize difference while centralizing structural similarity between narratives. From one text to another, one must be convinced that one is looking at the same "thing." The initial manufacture of these intertextual relations was therefore

⁹⁸ *De Cultu Feminarum* I.1 See Blamires, *Woman Defamed*.

necessarily characterized by a panoramic, all-encompassing view that minimized—sometimes obliterated—fine detail. The forest dominated the landscape, never individual trees. And the resulting motif indexes inadvertently reify motifs as *Dinge an sich*. And though expertly pursued by scholars such as Laura Hibbard Loomis, who in addition to her work on the Auchinleck MS traced the roots of countless motifs,⁹⁹ motif identification and cataloging their connections cannot be the endgame of contemporary scholarship. Scholarship thus owes a great debt to those whose panoramic view made it possible to identify these motifs, and simultaneously needs to move beyond that view.

Current interest in motif traces change over time not merely as variation, but invention, and therefore capable of bearing scrutiny as the medium of culture and ideology. The interest of scholars is thus shifting toward the fine detail, and it is now possible to conceive of reading strategies that account for small variation, the large-scale panorama having been well taken care of. In keeping with this new focus, Helen Cooper's *Romance in Time* explores the diachronic development of several broadly defined motif/memes¹⁰⁰, such as the quest, the rudderless sea journey, the faerie mistress, etc. These are the bones of romance, as it were, the substructure that supports the genre, and several of these can be found in the Auchinleck manuscript. But the Auchinleck also contains another motif endemic to romance, the motif of abnormal/supernatural birth. The most basic definition of this motif, as it will be explored here, is the birth of a protagonist whose conception occurred outside of society's regulative structures, most particularly in a case

⁹⁹ Her *Medieval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Noncyclic Metrical Romances*, initially published in 1924, was republished over forty years later in 1969.

¹⁰⁰ Helen Cooper's recent work on motif, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*, conceives of motif as meme, a proverbially burr-like narrative element that sticks in the mind, or perhaps in the culture. In addition to giving the panoramic view that makes it possible to identify them, Cooper tracks the ways that these motifs mutate to fit the time and culture working them into its texts.

of incest¹⁰¹ or bastardy; in addition, one or other of the parents might be supernatural or religiously “other.” These might in another study be considered separately, incestuous and supernatural conception being conceptually distinct enough to merit discrete treatments, but in the present argument, the interest is in the way motif operates in a specific manuscript, and in the Auchinleck, the two sides of the abnormal/supernatural birth motif serve similar functions and even blur together on occasion.

Thus understood, the motif of abnormal birth is both broad and basic enough to be included in the substructure of romance. It appears across the spectrum of medieval insular romance. And like the other constitutive elements of romance explored by Cooper, its various instantiations serve both to establish and interrogate differing ideologies in different periods. In its early instantiations, beginning with Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, abnormal birth performs its ideological work—both foundational and disruptive—in the imaginative space that links authority and legitimation of rule with lineage. The insular romance tradition, with its emphasis on the chivalric and courtly setting, its concern with families, the establishment of identity, and the concomitant ideological baggage, served as a battleground of the imaginary in which competing conceptions of rule and authority could measure their respective worth.¹⁰² The constantly shifting uses of abnormal birth in English romance would suggest, however, that even the simplest and

¹⁰¹ Cooper mentions incest as related particularly to the rudderless sea voyage, which serves to purify the community of contagion without incurring further penalty by harming a child innocent of wrongdoing. Mother and child are set adrift and left to God’s providence. However, Cooper does not explore the a/s birth motif independently of the rudderless sea voyage.

¹⁰² This description of English romance differs from its traditional critical reception, which has characteristically marginalized the anonymous metrical romances as ideologically and linguistically simplistic. Even the work of someone like Stephen Knight, who takes pains to prove that English romances can and do have ideological content, still does little more than assert that they reinforce the ideology of the ruling elite. See his “Social Function of the Middle English Romances” in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers. Knight’s chapter represents a step in the right direction, but it is clear that the attitude toward English romance that I am describing survived right into the 1980s and even beyond.

shortest of the romances can register significant ideological content when read for the presence and subversion of this motif.

R. Howard Bloch identifies abnormal birth as a fundamental to French literature in the 12th century and beyond,¹⁰³ but since both continental and insular romance share common origins, his insight—*mutatis mutandis*—might be applied to English literature as well. Bloch's analysis of the abnormally born Merlin focuses primarily on the French *Huth*, but the portions of the *Huth* mentioned derive ultimately from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Bloch argues that Merlin is a central figure for understanding medieval culture, even beyond the 12th and 13th century French milieu that is his focus: "...Merlin's central (inclusive, neutral, and fundamentally ethnocentric) vision of a society which is, as his lack of paternity infers, is radically *other* takes as its own point of departure the comprehensive index of cultural elements and the deduction of its innermost laws" (5). In other words, the regulative power of heredity depends ultimately on some *other* power, something extrinsic to normative paternal descent. In both the continental *Huth* and the insular *Historia*, authority passes from generation to generation through descent. Simultaneously, however, Bloch argues that it cannot be turtles all the way down, so to speak. The originary source of authority is extrinsic to its normal means of conveyance.

In commenting specifically on the Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Bloch locates its importance "beyond the specifics of a struggle between opposing dynastic houses...in the region of a deep, though historically determined, mental structure that assumed power to be legitimated through recourse to origins" (82). Bloch's mention of "opposing dynastic houses" refers to the *Historia*'s role in the self-legitimation of the Angevin monarchy, and his claim that the *Historia* "lies beyond" this struggle is a way of appropriating Geoffrey of Monmouth for his

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own work, despite the *Historia's* being clearly intended as a specifically insular piece of propaganda.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the “deep mental structure” that associated power and birth, was for Bloch clearly common both to insular and continental culture, and in exploring the importance of the abnormal birth motif to insular romance, Bloch's insight in the quotation above is fundamental. The legitimation of power through origin being deeply ingrained into both cultures, it seems only reasonable to conclude that abnormal birth would attain the status of a meme. It could not but operate with a burr-like capacity for transmission and self-propagation.

Though of course not itself a romance, the *Historia* is therefore fundamental for understanding a number of generic traits shared by many romances, whether in England or elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ Geoffrey of Monmouth's monumental work is the most significant traceable source for the abnormal birth motif as we find it in romance. As a Latin text, it offered instant international accessibility. There are currently 217 known manuscripts, the last two having been discovered in the past twenty years. Its influence only broadened as it was swiftly adapted for audiences not literate in Latin—into Anglo-Norman by Wace and Middle English by Layamon before the end of the twelfth century. The *Historia* introduces Arthur as king and Merlin as prophet and wizard,¹⁰⁶ and transmits the motif of abnormal birth into the later romance tradition by making Merlin the son of an incubus. From there, Merlin's abnormal birth passes into Wace and Layamon, Robert de Boron (in which he is the son of the antichrist), and thence into the Vulgate Merlin. And in later

104 For more on the *Historia* as a piece of propaganda, as well as a piece of romance history, see the section on the *matiere de Bretagne* in D. H. Green's, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance*. For its concern with just kingship, see Echard's first chapter in *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*.

105 Accepting Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* as essential to the wider context of romance has led to considerable scholarship in the last few years. Geraldine Heng, for instance, argues that the *Historia* is essential in understanding romance as a developing fantasy of nationalism and empire, though for her, it is not abnormal birth but abnormal consumption—cannibalism—that most characterizes that fantasy.

106 Arthur appears much earlier in the *Historia Brittonum*, formerly attributed to Nennius, but the text refers to him as *dux bellorum* and *miles*, never as king. Merlin appears in the B version of the *Annales Cambriae*, but it is only when Geoffrey amalgamates the figure from Welsh sources and the *Historia Brittonum* that Merlin emerges in a form recognizable to us as the Arthurian character.

romances such as *Sir Gowther*, it is clear that Merlin's birth was readily available as an archetype of the motif.

The changes that Geoffrey makes to his source greatly amplify the extraordinary elements of Merlin's birth, clearly locating the source of authority in the supernatural. The introduction of Merlin in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* is drawn directly from the *Historia Brittonum*,¹⁰⁷ in which king Vortigern looks for a boy without a father, whose sacrificed blood will prevent his tower from being swallowed into the earth. In *HB*, he finds a boy whose father is not known, but who is definitely not the son of an incubus. Geoffrey thus augments his source with elements from Apuleius' *De Deo Socratis* to make the birth of his own Merlinus Ambrosius more extraordinary. In the initial form given to it by Geoffrey, the motif is thus associated with the establishment of authority. Merlin's assistance and supernatural knowledge allow King Vortigern to build his tower, the edifice of his symbolic authority, and Merlin's magic allows Uther Pendragon to sleep with his rival's wife, siring Arthur. All these alterations clearly comment on the supernatural source of political authority.

In 14th century London, the extraordinary birth motif had mutated from its initial function of legitimating royal authority. The examples of the motif found in the Auchinleck are the earliest attested copies of the works in question; *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *The King of Tars*, and *Sir Degare* all appear for the first time in early 14th century London. The *Legend* tells of a young man born of incest who accidentally marries his mother, and subsequently rises to the rank of pope. *Tars* tells of a fleshlump born of a forced interfaith marriage. And finally, *Degare* tells of a child born of a princess who is raped by an elf-knight, and contains strong suggestions of incest. In

¹⁰⁷ I will refer to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* as the *Historia*, while referring to the *Historia Brittonum* as *HB*, for the sake of brevity and clarity.

medieval narratives, a child born under such conditions is almost always extraordinarily fated somehow, but these three narratives seem to have been collected for the Auchinleck because they interweave the child's fate with the mother's. Extraordinary births in the Auchinleck still reflect contemporary notions of authority and lineage, but they add to this an interrogation and subversion of these concepts' relationship to gender.¹⁰⁸ The *Legend of Pope Gregory*, with its envelope structure, enfolds the protagonist's story within his mother's. The unlawfully born child compounds the mother's guilt, and then absolves it. In *Tars*, the female body becomes the continuation of religious warfare by other means, affirming the centrality of Western Christian paternity. The abnormal birth of a lifeless fleshlump expresses fourteenth century English fears about Saracen domination, and locates Christian resistance in the female body. The procreative powers of women's bodies thus become a symbol of renewed agency for the West. In *Sir Degare*, abnormal birth expresses an otherwise repressed critique of English patrimony. The birth of Degare is surrounded by tensions inherent in aristocratic reproduction, which threatens to end itself with its own ideology of purity unless reinvigorated from the outside. In each case, women's bodies become a site of tension, whether intra- or intercultural, but with the promise of an ultimate reinvigoration of agency.

As a closing theoretical caveat, there remains unanswered, and perhaps unanswerable, the question, if there is a repressed female agency in this story, why is it repressed, and why does it take the form that it does? Slavoj Žižek warns in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, that in analyzing dream or fantasy, it is not sufficient merely to identify latent content. One must ask why it was

¹⁰⁸ In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson articulates a view of narrative—including even simple narratives like romance—that insists on multiple ideologies. While moving beyond his strictly Marxist stance to include other discourses, we can wholeheartedly agree that romance and its motifs are not the simplistic constructs that scholars have made them out to be, but heirs to multiple strains of ideological thought

necessary both to disguise and to express the idea of female agency with the abnormal birth motif. The simultaneous gestures of disguise and display suggest a powerful ambivalence about female agency in the fourteenth century. The motif functions as a space not just for a single and hegemonic viewpoint, but for multiple views to be measured against one another. There is never just one ideology present in the romance motif. Rather, we must always be looking for a competing or resisting conception of the world. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson articulates a view of narrative—including even simple narratives like romance—that insists on multiple ideologies. While moving beyond his strictly Marxist stance to include other discourses, we can wholeheartedly agree that romances and their motifs are not the simplistic constructs that scholars have made them out to be. On the contrary, they are the vital offspring of a polyvalent culture, and heirs to multiple strains of ideological thought. They evince a deep desire to control female sexuality and the means of reproduction, both biological and cultural. Simultaneously, all three texts covered in this chapter struggle to recognize female agency in a new way. In *Sir Degare*, for instance, the denial of freedom to the princess serves the male desire for self-reproduction. Women have to be limited in freedom because of their monopoly on reproduction, and their tendency to wander from male control, means that there must be constant male anxiety over the capacity to reproduce. Female sexuality must be controlled, the reproductive capacity channelled to male ends. But repression and control necessitates a female response, whether or not the culture surrounding *Sir Degare* was ready to make that response explicit. The inability to admit both these things at once necessitates, it will be argued, the new use of the extraordinary birth motif explored in this chapter.

The Legend of Pope Gregory

The structure of the manuscript makes it clear that the *Legend of Pope Gregory* had content that was known to Scribe 1. As has already been noted, many of the texts in this section share a spiritual focus, and at one time there were probably more that shared generic qualities. The Auchinleck, as we have received it, now begins with the *Legend of Pope Gregory*, though it was originally the sixth text in the manuscript.¹⁰⁹ In addition to this commonality of content, the transition from one text to another always occurs in the middle of a quire, which implies that they were placed together with some degree of forethought. When we add the fact that all these texts are religious in nature, the pre-planning of this booklet becomes obvious. This has led scholars to argue that these first six quires of the Auchinleck (before the transition to scribe 2's stint in booklet 2 at the beginning of quire 7) were a preplanned booklet, which might have circulated independently of the larger manuscript.¹¹⁰ The *Legend* was therefore most certainly picked for inclusion in the Auchinleck because of its content, not because of any exigencies of production. This does not necessarily establish that the abnormal birth motif was a factor, but other aspects of the Auchinleck's construction corroborate the claim.

Reaching beyond booklet 1, there seems to have been significant planning around the interrelations between booklet 1 and the booklet begun by Scribe 2. The structure of that booklet

¹⁰⁹ The first quires in a manuscript are vulnerable for obvious reasons, though other kinds of damage have also. The apparently random number of folios per quire belies the original order of this section. Each quire was eight folios before the manuscript was ransacked for its miniatures. Arthur Bahr, in *Fragments and Assemblages*, has tried to reinvent this loss as a *felix culpa*, by noting that the greater emphasis on the *Legend* has revealed its thematic resonance with other parts of the manuscript.

¹¹⁰ See Pamela Robinson's 1972 dissertation "A Study of Some Aspects of the Transmission of English Verse Texts in Late Medieval Manuscripts" (Oxford 1972). Robinson modified the Loomis Bookshop theory by positing that booklet 1 was produced as a self-contained and independently circulating booklet before it became a part of the Auchinleck manuscript. The stakes of this claim are of concern for book production in the early 14th century: Robinson's theory means that booklets could be produced speculatively, which implies a larger market than a purely bespoke trade. After the breakdown of the bookshop theory, this theory is of less influence, but the thematic unity of booklet 1 is still generally accepted.

is as follows:

Table 7: Booklet 2 of the Auchinleck, in Detail

Qui	Foliation	Texts with Manuscript Numeration
7	39r-46v	XV. <i>Speculum Gy</i>
8	47r-48r? stub	XV. <i>Speculum Gy</i>
	Fol 48 is a stub, showing some text. <i>Speculum Gy</i> probably ended on its recto side. Per usual, the miniature hunters sliced out this page for the Amis & Amiloun miniature.	
	48v? stub-54v	XVI. Sir Amis & Amiloun
9	55r-61(a)v stub	XVI. Sir Amis & Amiloun
	Fol. 61(a) is missing, but was once the final folio of quire 9, containing the transition between Amis & Amiloun and the Life of St. Mary Magdalene. It was removed according to the usual pattern, for a miniature.	
	61(a)v stub	XVII. Life of St. Mary Magdalene
10	62r-65v	XVII. Life of St. Mary Magdalene
	65v-69v	XVIII. Early Life of Mary

As in booklet 1, every text in booklet 2 but the first begins mid-quire, so it can be inferred that the texts placed here are on some level intended to be next to one another. The obvious objection to this inference is that, if textual content determined textual placement in the manuscript, *Speculum Gy* would obviously go next to the romance of *Guy*, which begins booklet 4, yet this is not the case. But supposing that the manuscript was a generically minded compendium to begin with, *Guy of Warwick* was almost certainly planned for inclusion from the beginning. This would argue some degree of priority in the manuscript's structure, and indeed it does feature as the beginning of booklet 4. Why, then, are these two related texts not side by side? The division of labor between the scribes is telling. Scribe 2 copied the *Speculum Gy*, and it stands to reason that he did so because Scribe 1 was busy copying, amongst other things, the massive *Sir Guy*, which takes up the entirety of booklet 4, excluding Reinbroun.¹¹¹ So the two texts were both prioritized for inclusion. There

¹¹¹ Reinbroun was copied by another scribe (5), but there is good reason to regard it as part of *Guy*. Reinbroun tells the story of Sir Guy's son, which in the Anglo-Norman version of the poem interlaced with the larger narrative. The

can be little doubt that *Speculum Gy* was included because of its relation to the romance, as a sermon supposedly preached to Guy at some point in his career. However, it is also clear that the *Speculum* should be included for another reason: as a spiritual text, it fulfills one of the manuscript's other agendas, that of spiritual edification. In fact, it provides a necessary and appropriate bridge between the romances and the spiritual texts, and serves to bind the manuscript together generically. The fact that the *Speculum Gy* is at the beginning of a booklet argues that it too was a priority, and this suggests that a spiritually edifying manuscript that also contained romances was the plan from the beginning.

This conclusion—that the Auchinleck was planned as an intentional combination of spiritually edifying and secularly entertaining materials—is supported by the way that Scribe 1 finished off booklet 2. Once Scribe 2 finished copying the *Speculum Gy*, Scribe 1 began copying *Amis & Amiloun*, then finished off the booklet with an otherwise unattested life of Mary Magdalene and a life of Mary. This mix of romance and female saint's lives suggests a combination of thematic and practical concerns. All the texts are important to filling out the manuscript's mixed generic plans. *Amis & Amiloun* is an important romance, and, as is usual for Auchinleck romances, this is our earliest Middle English copy. Mary and Mary Magdalene, meanwhile, are very much of a piece with the contents of booklet 1, which heavily foregrounds the role of women in spiritual texts. The great majority of booklet 1's texts, *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *The King of Tars*, *The Life of*

Middle English *Guy* found in the Auchinleck follows the AN *Gy* very closely, except that it separates the two narratives. For simplicity's sake, it seems, *Reinbroun* is taken out of the *Gy* romance and made into a quasi-autonomous continuation. The copying of *Reinbroun* was done by Scribe 5, whose only other stint is the copying of the very large *Sir Beues* in the next booklet (4). So the process seems pretty clear: Scribe 1 copied *Sir Guy*, then handed off the booklet to Scribe 5 to copy *Reinbroun*. Possibly they even traded booklets if Scribe 5 had finished *Sir Beues*. The reasons for such trading are fairly clear. If Scribe 1 was the chief editor, as Schonk has convincingly argued ("A Study of the Auchinleck Manuscript: Bookmen & Bookmaking in the Early Fourteenth Century" *Speculum* 60.1, 1985), then it would fall to him to finish off booklets. Scribe 1 completed two booklets begun by other scribes (2 & 4), probably because he would make executive decisions about the smaller texts to be included, ensuring that they fit with the larger concerns of the manuscript, once the prioritized "marquee" texts were complete.

Adam & Eve, *St. Katerine*, *St. Margaret*, and even the apparent filler text *The Clerk who would see the Virgin*, fulfill this criterion. And if the manuscript was to any extent planned around women's spirituality, Mary and Mary Magdalene would be the most obvious figures to include alongside the very famous Saints Katherine and Margaret. And Scribe 1 does so as soon as he finds space to fill out a booklet.¹¹² So booklet 1, which now begins with *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, is clearly structured around women's bodies and their relationship to spirituality. That structure reaches even beyond booklet 1 into booklet 2. And if we regard the *Life of Mary* in booklet 2 as a fourth text that highlights abnormal birth—the birth of Christ certainly qualifies—then it is clear that Scribe 1 had pretty clear ideas as to the contents of the manuscript he intended to create. He arranged at least two booklets, and even a third, to collocate varying instances of the abnormal birth motif.

The narrative structure of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* conspicuously links this motif to women's agency. Since the text is not a commonly read one, first a summary.¹¹³ The Earl of Aquitaine has twin children, a girl and boy, whose mother died in childbirth. When the Earl dies of old age, he commits the girl to his son's care. Though the son is otherwise a loving one, the devil contrives to incite him to a single incestuous coupling. When his sister falls pregnant, they call a trusted advisor, who counsels the brother to leave all his lands to his sister and depart for the Holy Land. The knight-advisor takes charge of the girl, bringing only his wife into the conspiracy. At this point the Auchinleck's fragment begins. Together they conceal the old Earl's daughter at their home until she gives birth. When the old Earl's daughter gives birth, she sets the child adrift with money and ivory tablets, on which is written the story of his conception. Meanwhile, her

¹¹² He does not, in fact, find all the space he needed. The *Life of Mary* ends incomplete for some reason, despite the fact that the catchword accurately reflects the beginning of the next text, *On the Seven Deadly Sins*. Some error or unforeseen contingency apparently prevented Scribe 1 from completing it.

¹¹³ Since just under three hundred lines are missing from the Auchinleck manuscript, the first events of the narrative are taken from the Vernon and other manuscripts, as published in Carl Keller's *Die Gregorius-Legende* (Heidelberg 1914)

brother has died, and she returns to her lands in Aquitaine, having received them as inheritance from her brother as part of the knight-advisor's arrangement with them. Elsewhere, the child's sealed vessel is found by two fisherman, who commit the child to an Abbot Gregory, after whom the child is eventually named. When he is of age, the secret of his birth is revealed, and Gregory decides to search for his patrimony as a knight. Coming into his own lands without knowing it, he finds his mother besieged by a suitor greedy for her lands, and rescues her. They fall in love, unaware of their relation as mother and son, and marry. Some time later, Gregory's mother/wife discovers his ivory tablets, and the two repent of their incestuous marriage. Gregory leaves to become a hermit, and has himself chained to a rock in the sea as penance, the key to his chains being thrown into the ocean. Years later, the pope dies, and as the cardinals deliberate, an angel reveals that the next pope is chained to a rock in the sea. The cardinals go in search of this man, finding the fisherman who initially chained him to the rock. The key is found in a fish caught by the fisherman that very day, and he remembers Gregory, and leads the cardinals to him. Gregory is made pope, and eventually, his mother finds her way to him, and he grants her absolution. Both are thus absolved of their sins, their salvation assured.

This narrative's relationship to its performed genres cannot be described with a simple copula. It is and is not a spiritual text. It is and is not a romance. Despite the scholarly temptation, classification as a spiritual text would be a too easy reduction of the narrative. The text's kinship with the saint's life seems not have overridden its romantic qualities for the writer of the Vernon manuscript version, who describes his narration in generic terms:

Nou wol ich ariht bi ginne
Romauncen of þis ilke song (37-8)

Of course, the usual caveats about the term "romance" apply. But its curious use as an infinitive verb here suggests that it is being conceived generically as a narrative type, not as an indication of

the Latin/vernacular divide. The verb “To romance” appears only in a few places, and always in contexts that suggest different kinds of narrative activity:

Tho was eche burne bolde to bable what hym aylid
 And to fable ferther of fautz and of wrongz.
 And romansid of þe misse-reule þat in þe royaulme groved
 (“Mum & the Sothsegger, BL Additional 41666)

The above use of “romance” as verb also clearly indicates genre. We might note that in “Mum,” the verb is so clearly a generic usage for two reasons: 1) the “fable” verb, of which “romansid” appears as an elegant variation, is obviously mentioned as a certain kind of story-telling, and 2) it is clear that both “fable” and “romansid” are used here to suggest falseness. “Romancing” is thus mentioned here as well as in the *Legend*, not as any reference to language, but to a certain kind of story, and in “Mum” commonly known or likely to be false. It is possible but not necessary that it carries the same connotation in the *Legend*.

So in the Vernon manuscript¹¹⁴ the *Legend of Pope Gregory* is clearly thought of as having some form of kinship with the romance genre. The mostly likely reason is that it ends happily, a hallmark of the romance that contrasts strongly with the saint’s life, in which martyrdom is often the conclusion. The fact that Gregory spends time as a knight is also important. Sadly, the Auchinleck’s introduction is lost, so it is not necessarily the case that this verb would have been used for this text in the early 14th century. Nevertheless, the *Legend* has other similarities to romance texts that corroborate this view. Its close structural similarity to *Sir Degare* is telling. Both texts have an elegantly arranged envelope structure, in which the mother/protagonist begins

¹¹⁴ The Vernon manuscript (now Bodleian Library MS 3938) version was found by Keller to be most closely related to the Auchinleck *Legend of Pope Gregory*. The Auchinleck’s own beginning to the text is now lost, so the Vernon text is most likely to approximate its content. It should be noted, however, that introductions to Auchinleck texts are frequently unique, making reference to the Englishness of the manuscript, and therefore likely to have been written specifically for the Auchinleck MS. Nevertheless, the relationship between the Auchinleck and Vernon MSS is interesting, since the Vernon also shares *Pe Disputisoun Bitven þe Bodi and þe Soule*, *The Sayings of St. Bernard*, and *The King of Tars*.

with a conflict that she passes on to her son, even as she sends him away. The son's struggle is both to return to his mother and to his own identity, and in doing so, he also manages to solve *her* initial conflict. The *Legend* and *Sir Degare* are thus structured by a struggle for masculine identity that is enveloped by a feminine struggle for purity and salvation, both mundane and celestial. The collocation of these two texts suggests a recognition of this similarity, if indeed *Sir Degare*, which has no known French source, was not patterned on the *Legend of Pope Gregory*, whose French source is widespread. Structural similarity does not certainly establish direct patterning of one text on another, but the odd insistence on the possibility of incest in *Sir Degare*—without any incest actually occurring—further confirms a close relation between the romance and quasi-romance. However the compilers of the Auchinleck conceived of these narratives, their similarity suggests that they were selecting them for their resonance with the concerns of a female audience. Scribe 1 imagined female audience as interested in their own agency, but that agency was not yet readily expressible in a male-dominated textual production culture. Nevertheless, the abnormal birth motif became at this time a way for the female agency to be expressed and repressed simultaneously, the narrative byproduct of a culture's ambivalence.

That ambivalence is expressed as an agency that chooses passivity, particularly as a solution to the impossible dilemmas faced by women. The passivity of the female protagonist in *The Legend* is striking, but the degree to which that passivity is described is more striking still. In the Vernon manuscript, the moment of her acquiescence to her brother's sexual assault is described in detail:

Heo þouȝte ȝif ich loude grede
 Pen schal my broþur foule beo schent
 And ȝif I lete him don þis dede
 Vr soules schule to pyne beo dempt
 Þe beste red hire þouhte to do

Heo lay stille and no word nolde speke
 Bote soffrede him his wille do
 Pus was seint Gregori bi zete. (V 125-132)¹¹⁵

Since it is likely that the Auchinleck contained something like this when the text was complete, we might with reasonable safety transfer this moment from one manuscript context to another. This moment shows to a remarkable degree the princess' interior deliberation about the best course of action. Precisely at the moment when the princess' self-determination is most threatened, the text emphasizes her ability to choose.¹¹⁶ Of course, her choice between active resistance and passive acceptance is entirely manufactured by her brother's power over her. However, if we allow that there are in fact three courses of action deliberated on, rather than just two, we could read this moment as a victory of the princess agency. By her thoughtful interior engagement with an insoluble problem and deep violation of her agency, she finds a third way between two bad alternatives. "Yif" I lete him don Tis dede" might be reasonably distinguished from "Heo lay stille and no word nolde speke," if we conceive of *letting him* as a more active form of encouragement than merely lying still. In other words, it might be thought of as an active statement, "yes, I allow this." In this reading, absolute passivity is conceived as a middle term between active resistance (screaming for help) and active permission. The advantage of this reading is that we can regard

¹¹⁵ Text taken from: Keller, Carl. *Die Mittelenglische Gregoriuslegende*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1914.

¹¹⁶ Importantly, the French *La Vie de Saint Gregoire* contains this moment, but adds a significant judgment upon the princess:

Ne dist onc mot, anceis se tot:
 Ce fu del pis que faire pot.
 Car, veueile ou non, l'a violee
 Sir freres, e despucelee.

[She says not a word, she keeps silent: this was the worst thing she could do, for whether she wish it or not, her brother has violated and despoiled her.]

Quoted as found in Simon Gaunt's *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, "Saints, sex, and community: hagiography" p. 205. Gaunt believes that the French narrative does its best to excuse Gregory's mother, but it seems that the Middle English translation in Auchinleck goes a step further by removing the French text's comment on her decision.

the princess' deliberation as successful: she navigates this incestuous assault without harm to her brother's reputation or her own salvation. The guilt from which she must later be saved is not incurred now, but later when she accidentally marries the son conceived in this first incestuous union. Passivity thereby becomes a peculiarly feminine form of agency.

When considered as an expression of rape culture, this passivity becomes particularly troubling. All three women in the *Legend*, *King of Tars*, and *Degare*, are more or less forced into illicit sexual activity by one means or another. All three respond with a passivity that reserves a resistant interior space, and all three resulting plotlines are solved by abnormal sons at some later date. In a way, the Auchinleck promises solutions later if women respond with passivity now. This ambivalent consideration of female agency—allowing agency to women but redirecting and containing it—suggests that women were consumers of this kind of narrative, without producing them. This consideration completely rules out the Auchinleck as some kind of proto-proto-feminist collection. In the early 14th century, catering to the female audience of London clearly also meant containing it. By the end of the 14th century, this strategy of containment was ready to be made explicit. As will be seen in chapter 3, Chaucer exposes the romance genre's complicity in rape culture, at the same time that he most fully articulates women's desire for agency, in "The Wife of Bath's Tale."

The King of Tars

Like the *Legend*, *The King of Tars*' status as one of the Auchinleck's romances is ambiguous.¹¹⁷ It performs certain elements of romance: conflict with Saracens, an unnamed stock

¹¹⁷ A series of articles by Holstein provides valuable background information on this text: "New Analogues to the 'King of Tars.'" *The Modern Language Review* 36.4 (1941): 433-442, "A Folklore Theme in the 'King of Tars.'"

princess, a typically irascible Sultan, deception, marvels, and a happy ending. However, it so foregrounds the contest between Christianity and Islam with its theological conflict and pious resolution that it has also been classified as a spiritual text. The manuscript's construction further reinforces this classification. *Tars* is found in Booklet 1, a series of quires done entirely by Scribe 1 with a clear emphasis on religious texts, particularly religious texts foregrounding women's spirituality. The table below (Table 8) shows the construction of Booklet 1 in detail. A few things should be noted. First, all texts after the first begin mid-quire, and the Roman numeration is regular, showing that all texts in this booklet were collocated by Scribe 1, who copied the entire booklet himself. Second, the regularity of the booklet's damage shows that miniatures appeared at the beginning of each text. Even the seemingly irregular damage in quire 3 follows the general pattern. The inner two bifolia were pulled out because the one of these inner two contained a miniature, and pulling it out necessitated pulling out the other. See figure 1 below. Finally, all but the miniature at the beginning of *Tars* have been lost.

Table 8: Booklet 1 of the Auchinleck, in Detail

Qui	Foliation	Texts with Manuscript Numeration
1	1r-4v	VI. Legend of Pope Gregory
2	5r-6v	VI. Legend of Pope Gregory
	Stub between texts, likely removed by miniature hunters, for the <i>King of Tars</i> miniature.	
	7r-11v	VII. King of Tars
3	12r-13v	VII. King of Tars
	The middle two bifolia of the quire were removed, likely by miniature hunters, for the <i>Life of Adam and Eve</i> miniature. The middle bifolium, containing a portion of the <i>Life</i> , has been recovered and now resides at Edinburgh University Library, MS 218.	
	14r-15v	VIII. Life of Adam & Eve
4	16r	VIII. Life of Adam & Eve

Philological Quarterly 20: 82, and "The Historical Background of the 'King of Tars.'" *Speculum* 16.4 (1941): 404-414

that even when searching for a filler text, Scribe 1 could be thematically selective. We can therefore confidently assert the following: Scribe 1 actively selected for texts that foregrounded spirituality *and* women, but when searching for filler texts in his last quire, he was only able to fulfill the latter criterion in one out of three. *The King of Tars* is thus located in the center of a booklet of texts foregrounding women and spirituality, and regarding the text as a romance/female saint's life hybrid is justified by its manuscript context.

Tars is one of the texts in the Auchinleck that shows precisely why rigid classification of genres fails.¹¹⁸ It is clear that the legibility of *Tars* to Scribe 1 depended on its fulfilling conditions other than the simple category, 'romance.' And those conditions remain invisible to modern scholarship unless we take a view of the text that emphasizes the manuscript as the primary context for determining its meaning. The two female saint's lives in booklet 1 similarly describe women who are the unwilling objects of an Islamic leader's desires.¹¹⁹ Both St. Mergrete and St. Katherine adopt a posture of inflexible resistance to that desire, and their narratives end as any martyr's narrative must. The nameless princess in *The King of Tars*, however, capitulates externally to Islamic male desire while maintaining an internal resistance. All three narratives are therefore interested in women's agency in a spiritual context, but only the princess in *Tars* manages to exercise that agency according to the romance genre standards, achieving a romantic ending.

The princess' tactics mean that her body becomes a means both of collaboration and resistance. The narrative proceeds as follows: a Christian king has a beautiful daughter, with skin

¹¹⁸ The sources adapted by *Tars* are studied by Lillian Herlands Horstein in "New analogues to the *King of Tars*," *Modern Language Review*, 36 (1941), 433-42.

¹¹⁹ A. J. Bliss was of the opinion that these two texts were written by the same author, and that the versions found in the Auchinleck are therefore the original versions (See Bliss "The Auchinleck 'St Margaret' and 'St Katherine'" *Notes and Queries* 3.5, 1956). Naturally this only increases their significance as evidence for the state of London literature in the early 14th century, and for recovering the generic ambitions of the Auchinleck. These two women, as objects of male desire, will be analyzed more fully in chapter 3.

“as white as a swan.” When the sultan of Damascus hears about her, he demands her hand in marriage, and is refused—importantly, by the princess herself—because he is Muslim. Furious, he wages a bloody war against the king of Tars and slays tens of thousands of his men. Seeing the slaughter of Christian men, the princess agrees to marry the sultan to prevent further bloodshed. Publicly she converts to Islam, though in secret she continues to pray to Jesus. Three months after the sultan of Damascus marries the princess, she becomes pregnant, and eventually she gives birth to an unformed lump of flesh. The princess uses the leverage from her son's extraordinary birth to reveal her continued devotion to Christ, and to insist that only the true god can fix their child. This leads to a contest between the gods. The sultan's entreaties to his mute idols fail. But when the princess has the flesh lump baptized, it transforms into a beautiful baby boy. The sultan converts, and after his baptism, his skin turns white to signify his changed spiritual condition. Naturally, the other Islamic kingdoms react negatively. But the sultan sends for help from his father-in-law, now a Christian ally, the king of Tars, and together they slaughter or forcibly convert the attacking Muslim kings.

The narrative is thus predicated on the beauty of the princess' naturalized white body. And the unnatural quality of the sultan's body is matched only by his unnatural religious practices, which are depicted in one of the few miniatures to survive the manuscript's biblioclasm. Like all the surviving images in the Auchinleck, it reflects the specific content of the text above which it is found. In this case, the image is twofold, and progresses from left to right in chronological order. On the left, we see the Islamic sultan praying to his idol. On the right, the same figure worships before a crucifix, now joined by the princess. Unfortunately, the faces of all figures in the miniature have been nearly worn away, so it is not clear whether the Sultan was depicted with differing skin tones from panel to panel. Either way, he is depicted worshipping the wrong kind of body (an

animal) in the first panel, and worshipping the right kind of body (the human body of Christ) in the second, along with his wife the princess. The image emphasizes his conversion and the princess' role in it.

The unnamed princess effects this conversion by making her body the site of the cultural conflict between Islam and Christianity, which is also mapped onto the alterity of white and brown bodies. The impossibility of mixing these incommensurate alternatives is then made incarnate in the formless form of the fleshlump baby:

& when þe child was ybore
 Wel sori wimen were þefore,
 For lim no hadde it non.
 Bot as a rond of flesche yschore
 In chaumber it lay hem bifore
 Wiþouten blod and bon.
 For sorwe þe levedi wald dye
 For it hadde noiþer nose no eye,
 Bot lay ded as þe ston. (577-585)

The *King of Tars* thus suppresses the real-world possibility of racial mixing, equating it with the monstrous, or the formless, with uncreation. The narrative demonstrates, crassly, how undesirable such mixing is. Remarkably, it also emphasizes the princess' role in bringing about the fleshlump. It has been suggested that this 'rond of flesche' 'withouten blod and bon' results from a failure of paternity, revealing the Sultan's inability to sire a child by a Christian woman's body.¹²⁰ Jane Gilbert argues that the formlessness of the child comes from the romance's appropriation of Aristotelian theory of conception. In Aristotle's theory, the female body contributes the bare material of the fetus, while the male seed supplies its form. Gilbert reasons from this that the Sultan's seed has failed to give form to the lump of flesh. Her argument is further reinforced by

¹²⁰ See "Putting the pulp into fiction: the limp-child and its parents in *The King of Tars*." See also Gilbert's, "Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*" in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*.

the fact that previous versions of this story, appearing only in chronicles, often describe the baby as completely hairy, or half hairy, or half human half animal. This suggestion of bestiality registers concerns about religious or racial mixing, but by contrast, the Auchinleck's *King of Tars* more radically suggests that the seed of the Sultan imparts no form whatsoever. Since Aristotelian conception theory regards matter as the female contribution while form comes from the male body, the failure must be the Sultan's. But this reading does not do justice to the princess' role in his failure.

The princess, it is implied, prevents the form imparted by the Sultan's seed from taking root. Her refusal to convert inwardly finds a kind of fleshly echo in her refusal of the sultan's form, for while performing an outward conversion to Islam, the princess preserves an interior space of resistance:

For when sche was bi hirsclue on
To Ihesu sche made hir mon,
þat alle þis world haþ wrouȝt. 514-516)

By retaining an interior Christian faith, the princess is able also to govern the interior of her body, and consequently to prevent insemination. This remains implicit in the text, until the denial of the Sultan's paternity becomes explicit once the child has been granted form by his baptism. Once the princess possesses the necessary leverage, she challenges the Sultan directly:

þe soudan seyð 'leman min,
Ywis, ich am glad afin
Of þis child þat y se.'
'ȝa, sir, bi seyn Martin,
ȝif þe haluendel wer þin
Wel glad miȝt þou be.'

With those words, the princess, invokes the fundamental anxiety inherent in paternity, that while maternity is always certain, paternity never can be. It is always and forever dependent upon the word of women. The husband then responds in a way that ironically suggests unfaithfulness:

‘O dame’ he seyð ‘hou is þat?
Is it nouȝt min þat y biȝat?’

This couplet almost reads as fabliau, at the moment when the wife’s scheming is revealed, but the princess’ response reveals that this denial of paternity is not due to unfaithfulness, but to a deeper faithfulness to another Lord:

‘No sir’ þan seyð sche,
‘Bot þou were cristned so it is
Pou no hast no part þeron, ywis,
Noiþer of þe child ne of me. (805-816)

Tars thus takes paternal anxiety a step further, by making the princess’ speech a kind of performative statement. The narrative would make sense without this gesture. It would be perfectly plausible for the Saracen King to convert based purely on the Christian God’s restoration of his child. But this scene’s underlying logic implies that the princess herself has denied the form imparted by his seed, for she derives her authority to make this performative statement of denial from the denial performed by her own body. Far from being the passive recipient of defective seed, the princess actively leverages this abnormal birth to turn the tables on her husband. The birth motif, in this 14th century instance, thus functions less to establish male authority than to subvert it. Where Merlin’s birth is a fantasy of paternity that fully overshadows the female element in childbirth, the fleshlump highlights women’s agency as mothers. But that agency is imagined as a form of passivity, expressed only in a resistant interior space. And in both the *Legend* and *Tars*, interior space become necessary for the female protagonist only because she acquiesces perfectly to the masculine power structures that both demand ethical action from her and take unethical action against her. Her resulting powerlessness, her denial of any form of agency, prompts the fantasy of an extraordinary childbirth. The princess withholds procreation from her husband as her

last and only recourse.¹²¹

Sir Degare

Unlike the other two texts analyzed in this chapter, *Sir Degare* is found not in Booklet 1 but in Booklet 3 of the Auchinleck. Though apparently a generic hodgepodge, the contents of Booklet 3 are only slightly more varied than Booklet 1, when its structure is carefully noted:¹²²

Table 9: Booklet 3 of the Auchinleck, in Detail

Qui	Foliation	Texts with Manuscript Numeration
11	70r-72r	XXI? On the Seven Deadly Sins
	72r-72(a)r/72v	XXII. Paternoster
	Fol 72(a) (so dubbed by the National Library of Scotland) is a stub with some text still visible, indicating that the <i>Paternoster</i> ended on this folio, which was sliced out by miniature hunters for the <i>Assumption</i> miniature	
	72r/72v-76v	XXIII. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin
12	77r-78r	XXIII. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin
	78r-84v	XXIII. Sir Degare
13	Fol. 84(a) is a stub with some text visible. It was once the first folio of quire 13, and the final folio of Degare, but was removed for the <i>Seven Sages</i> miniature	
	84(a) r/v	VII. Sir Degare
	84(a) r/v-91v	XXV. The Seven Sages of Rome
14	92r-99vb	XXV. The Seven Sages of Rome
15a	Missing	XXV. The Seven Sages of Rome
		XXVI. Floris & Blancheflour
15	100r-104v	XXVI. Floris & Blancheflour
	105r	XXVIIa? The Four Philosophers
	105v-107r	XXVIIb? Battle Abbey Roll

¹²¹ The fantasy that women have such a power is unfortunately not confined to the fourteenth century. In 2012, Republican US senator Todd Akin claimed that women's bodies have defenses against impregnation by rape. It seems that where political anxiety exists, it will be registered in the imagined female body.

¹²² For an excellent chapter on the Auchinleck that considers the role of *Sir Degare* in bringing generic unity to booklets 1, 2, and 3, see J. Murray Evans, *Rereading Middle English Romance: Manuscript Layout, Decoration, and the Rhetoric of Composite Structure*. Amongst other things, Evans argues that *Sir Degare* is linked to the Virgin Mary, which accords well with the present argument's emphasis on abnormal birth motifs. Evans also believes that *Degare* eases a transition to more martial romances in later booklets, which is persuasive.

NOTE: Quire 15a is entirely missing, but must have existed, and contained the end of the Seven Sages as well as the beginning of Floris & Blanche flour. In Quire 15, the manuscript's numeration does not match the texts. The Battle Abbey Roll is clearly numbered XXVII, even though the *Sayings of the Four Philosophers* comes first. It seems likely that the latter text was squeezed in as filler. The numeration continues regularly in Booklet 4 with *Guy of Warwick*, which is numbered XXVIII.

The above represents the highest degree of collaboration in the manuscript. Scribe 3 copied everything until the *Sayings of the Four Philosophers*, which was copied onto a single recto by scribe 2 in a much-compressed hand. Then follows scribe 4's only contribution to the manuscript, the *Battle Abbey Roll*. All in all, booklet 3 contains the work of three different scribes, and is one of the few booklets in the Auchinleck that does not contain scribe 1's hand.¹²³ The strain of collaboration, apparently with less oversight from the manuscript's probable editor, shows itself in the comparative disorder of this section of the manuscript. Nevertheless, this strain performs useful work for us, in showing the marks of its production.

By examining this booklet carefully, we can reconstruct something of the process by which it was made. It seems that scribe 3 worked in an area remote enough from scribe 1 that he could not immediately be made aware of the manuscript's full plan, but close enough that he could be informed, in the middle of his stint, how the manuscript pages should look when complete. Alternatively, scribe 3 began the section above early in the manuscript's compilation, before the *ordinatio* was fully planned or every text had been chosen. It seems clear that Scribe 3 was not fully aware of the manuscript's eventual layout, either because he was not informed or because it had not yet been determined when he began. Nevertheless, he seems to have been told to leave space for miniatures somewhere in the middle of his stint. The first text he copies, *On the Seven*

¹²³ Only the final booklet containing the *Simonie* is similar in this respect. However, the booklet is extremely fragmentary, containing only a partial section of a single text. It is probable that if the booklet were complete, it would follow the Auchinleck's regular pattern, completion by scribe 1.

Deadly Sins, has a large capital letter, but no space for a miniature. The next, *The Paternoster*, has an irregular miniature, squeezed in where the space left by the text allowed. The third, *The Assumption of a Blessed Virgin*, quite probably had a miniature, since the pages have been removed. Where the biblioclasts cut out miniatures, it is usually at the beginning or end of a quire, where it would be difficult to tear out pages. *The Assumption*, however, begins in the middle of a quire, where the quire's structure would make the pages easier to remove. Of course, chance can remove a page as well as a thief, but the pattern is conspicuous. It is therefore a fairly safe inference that there was once a miniature at the beginning of *The Assumption*. The first surviving space he leaves for a miniature is at the beginning of *Sir Degare*, though sadly the miniature itself has been lost. Nevertheless, it is clear that Scribe 3 began his work early in the process of the Auchinleck's compilation, either before the *ordinatio* was fully determined or before he could be informed of it. All major texts remaining in this booklet are missing their openings, which argues the presence of miniatures.

The upshot of these accidents of production is that we can make a few inferences about the texts copied by Scribe 3. If he did indeed begin his stint early in the Auchinleck's production, then the texts he copied had some degree of priority. Using this information, a partial reconstruction of booklet 3's production process can be attempted:

- S3 begins copying the texts S1 has selected for this booklet
- S3 copies *On the Seven Deadly Sins*, *The Paternoster*
- S1 either determines *ordinatio*, or discovers that S3 is not following *ordinatio*
- S1 informs S3 of manuscript's *ordinatio*
- S3 copies *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, probably leaving space for a miniature
- S3 copies *Sir Degare*, definitely leaving space for a miniature
- S3 finishes the rest of his stint
- Miniatures added
- S4 copies *The Battle Abbey Roll*, leaves space at beginning and end
- Textual numeration added
- S2 copies *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers*, makes paraph marks

This order of events makes sense of the manuscript, as it has been handed down to us. The alternate story, that the texts were copied roughly in the order in which they are contained in the manuscript, does not make sense of Scribe 3's ignorance of the *ordinatio*. Considering the care with which Scribe 1 left space for miniatures, this seems unlikely unless they were separated by some distance, or if the booklet was begun so early that its *ordinatio* had not yet been determined.¹²⁴ So the order above is most probably the simplest one that fits the data, and that means that *Sir Degare* was intentionally placed after texts that very clearly resonate with Booklet 1. *The Seven Deadly Sins* and the *Paternoster* are clearly written precisely for this manuscript, and they match very closely with the spiritual agenda of booklet 1. *The Assumption*, furthermore, fits both with booklet 1 and the texts that Scribe 1 will copy into booklet 2; it completes the story of Mary begun in *The Nativity and Early Life*. It can therefore be inferred that *Sir Degare* was slated for inclusion rather early, as a text fully in line with the manuscript's ambitions. Until now, it has been regarded as appropriate to the manuscript only because it performs the romance genre, but since the codicological data agrees, it can now be examined for being thematically resonant with Booklet 1, as a text containing an extraordinary birth. *Sir Degare* was highly prioritized for inclusion not just because it was a romance, but because it fit so beautifully with the intended contents of Booklet 1, and it richly rewards reading next to the two items from Booklet 1 covered in this chapter.

Since the text is not a commonly read one, a summary: *Sir Degare* begins with a king whose wife has died, leaving him with a single daughter. In order to find her a husband, the king declares that he will allow any man to marry her who can defeat him in a joust. Unfortunately for her, the king is so accomplished at arms, and so violent in competition, that he beats every opponent

¹²⁴ There is only one place in which Scribe 1 leaves no space for a miniature: at the beginning of the *Liber Regum Anglie*. It is possible that this was the first text he copied, before being informed of the total budget and ambitions for the project.

and kills several. This understandably discourages people from accepting the challenge. One year, the king and his daughter make their annual trip to the tomb of the deceased queen, and on the way, the princess stops for a break. Taking too long, she and her attending maids are left behind. The princess wanders off from the others, and she is approached by an elf knight, who claims to be in love with her, and then either rapes her, or has sex with her after the protestations expected of a maiden protagonist.¹²⁵ He prophetically announces that she is pregnant, and gives her half of a broken sword by which he can be identified should her son ever seek him out. The princess returns home, confides in one of her maids, and together they conceal the pregnancy until she gives birth. The maid then takes the infant Degare to a monk, giving him a pair of magic gloves from the elvish knight, which only the princess can wear. When Degare is twenty, the monk sends him on his way. After an encounter with a dragon, Degare challenges the king, wins the joust despite his inexperience, and accidentally marries his mother. At the reception, before the marriage is consummated, he remembers to test her with the gloves, and his story identifies him as the princess' son. The princess confesses to her father that she is not a maid. Degare leaves on a quest to find his elfish father. After he saves another princess from yet another violent would-be rapist, Degare finally encounters the elf knight. After fighting him for a while, Degare identifies him by means of the broken sword, and persuades him to return and marry the princess. Thus endeth the tale.

Critics who regard this narrative as lacking unity or sophistication generally also ignore its manuscript context,¹²⁶ whereas this study emphasizes the suggestive possibilities afforded by it.

¹²⁵ By modern standards, this is certainly a rape, but it is not clear that the audience would have understood it thus. Especially considering the conclusion of the tale, the princess' wandering might be a repressed way of implying consent. Wandering off in the woods implicitly welcomes whatever might follow.

¹²⁶ See, for example, the very old article, typical for its time, by Clark Harris Slover, "'Sire Degarre': A Study of a Medieval Hack Writer's Methods" (*Studies in English* 11, 1931). Slover's article is typical in that it assumes that identification of motifs and tracing their origins is the sum of scholarly effort. He never considers the text next to any of the others in the Auchinleck, not even those that contain the same or similar motifs. For a refreshingly positive reading of *Sir Degare*, see a Cornell dissertation by William Stokoe, *The Work of the Redactors of Sir*

The simplest reading categorizes *Sir Degare* as a fairly straight-forward narrative knightly formation, with a little Freud in the mix for spice. And read in isolation, the narrative seems to submit quite willingly to this reading; all the central episodes concern Degare's development into a fully-fledged knight. Within the context of Auchinleck's booklet, however, one must take into account that Degare's development also serves the princess' agenda. During the course of his development, Degare unseats his grandfather the king, making the princess available for marriage and effectively loosening the king's overbearing grasp on her, freeing her from his sexual control. Degare also successfully quests to find her absent lover, the elf knight.¹²⁷ Alongside the *Legend of Pope Gregory* and *The King of Tars*, this emphasis on extraordinary births that serve women's agency is striking, as if the various permutations of this motif were being collected deliberately. Furthermore, this group of texts' insistence on incest and/or the violation of women's agency invites a reading of the motif as being precisely about a kind of alienated agency achieved through childbirth.

Read this way, *Sir Degare* reveals an implicit interest in the eventual expression of the princess' agency, as well as the various forces that collude to repress it. Against her own will, she takes part in a system of royal self-reproduction that greatly impedes her own fulfillment. And the princess' father is clearly guilty of rigging that system to satisfy his own desires at her expense:

And þo þe maiden of age wes,
 Kynges sones to him speke,
 Emperours and dukes eke,
 To hauen his doughter in marriage
 For loue of here heritage.
 Ac þe kyng answered euer,

Launfal, Richard Coeur de Lion and Sir Degare (1946). Stokoe mentions Slover "and his followers," showing that even at this time dismissive attitudes towards Middle English romance could be recognized as a type.

¹²⁷ This too should be seen as serving her agenda. While it must be admitted that the elf knights' relationship to the princess seems ill-defined throughout the story, it is also clear that Degare serves to define and stabilize the relationship. Presumably, the princess is happy to have the elf-knight, despite her feelings about her violation. She now, at least, has a husband, and in fourteenth century England, that counts as a happy ending.

Pat no man sschal here halden euer,
 But 3if he mai in turneyng
 Him out of his sadel bring
 And maken him lessen hise stiropes bayne. (26-35)

It having already been established that no man can bring him out of the saddle, the requirement that the princess' suitor do so is tantamount to a universal refusal. The standard reading is that this refusal stems from a repressed incestuous sexual desire,¹²⁸ but even more than this, it speaks to a basic narcissism. The king's body is so strong "of bon and blod" (18) that no other body, a literalized "nobody," is worthy to produce his body's heir. The clear but forbidden solution is for him to sire a son by his daughter, and this is the source of the incest anxiety in *Degare*. The text repeatedly gestures toward the danger of the king sleeping with his daughter. This possibility comes not only from a Freudian fantasy of illicit sex, but from a desire for the continuance of a certain kind of social order. The incestuous desire is due to a more basic desire for social self-reproduction. Yet the very ideology of hypermasculinity that undergirds his authority also undermines his ability to reproduce. Remarriage also seems not to be an option because of an excessive courtly devotion to his late wife. The two ideologies of chivalry, then, courtly *fin amour* and martial *proesse*, which are meant together to ensure the reproduction of a knightly class, actually conspire to prevent this reproduction when taken to their logical extremes. The resulting insoluble contradiction stems from the internal logic of monarchy. Only the king is worthy to be king, and no man is worthy to be king but the man who can unhorse the king, but no man can unhorse the king because the king is worthy to be king. Hence the futility of the tournament, a device ostensibly designed to find a younger version of himself, a man who is hypermasculine and

¹²⁸ See for instance Cheryl Colopy, "Sir Degare: A Fairy Tale Oedipus," (*Pacific Coast Philology* 17.1, 1982). Colopy notes tangentially that the princess makes attempts at self-liberation, but proceeds no further. Her reading of *Sir Degare* nicely articulates the Freudian subtext. However, it is hampered by reading *Sir Degare* in isolation. She never notes that the romance appears next to the *Legend*, in which an incestuous mother/son relationship is consummated.

hyperviolent, who can reproduce the social order that the king represents, but in fact a pointless gesture, given the ideologies whose continuance it is meant to ensure.

The result is a princess in paralysis, who gradually frees herself from the social forces keeping her in place. Initially, the princess does nothing, and the possibility of her acting on her own behalf is never mentioned. Even the plot to place Degare in someone else's care is not her own, and she barely lifts a finger to accomplish it. In every respect, the Princess models feminine passivity, saving only that she demands space for her physical needs. On the way to repeat her annual obeisance to her deceased mother, she requests a break for her and her ladies “to don here nedes and hir rizte,” a polite euphemism for a bathroom break. The beginning of her story thus stems from the need to make provision for the flesh, in the most innocent way possible. This being granted, things follow logically from there. The ladies becomes lost, and take a nap due to the heat, while the princess herself “gaderede floures/And herknede song of wilde foules” (77-8). If ever there were lines containing repressed desire—the flowers and birds are on the surface innocent, but qualitatively different from the bare need with which the episode began, and the comparison between the “wilde” birdsong and her own metaphorically caged condition adds bittersweet poignancy. And with the initial admittance of desire, the floodgates open. She has lost her way in the forest, the natural abode of the supernatural, and her ladies have fallen asleep beneath a tree, which practically constitutes an invitation. Furthermore, she wanders off on her own, away even from her ladies in waiting. Aware of the risks she has taken but unable to find her way back, she exclaims the following:

'Allas' hi seide 'pat I was boren
 Nou ich wot ich am forloren:
 Wilde bestes me willez to grinde
 Or ani man me schulle finde.

Clearly, she knows implications of her wandering, and though outwardly deploring her situation,

her lamentation seems almost to summon the elf-knight to herself. The irony is clear: she expects either man, who will save her, or beast, who will rend her, but she receives a combination, an elf-knight hybrid whose desirability is clear and yet who, beast-like, forces himself upon her.

The romance thus makes every effort to imply the princess' agency in bringing the elf-knight to her, but denies any explicit desire on her part. It inches toward the possibility of self-determination, while excusing her from any wrongdoing. She clearly desires freedom from her father's sexual control, and unconsciously she wishes for a lover, but in the lover's arrival, she definitely gets more than she bargained for. This leads to her pregnancy, and through her half-elf son, to her eventual liberation. So, even though her unconscious wish leads to a further denial of agency, this disaster leads ultimately to her agency being returned. Or rather, there is an ideologically charged guarantee of a fulfilled agenda, if only she remain passive in relation to any and all challenges to that agenda.

The Return to Merlin

As a coda to this meditation on extraordinary birth, we might return to the point of origin for this motif. Merlin's story, with some important changes, finds its way into the Auchinleck in a widespread text called the *Seven Sages of Rome*.¹²⁹ The Auchinleck version of the *Seven Sages* is the earliest known Middle English text. Of course, the French version of the *Seven Sages* preceded it, which limits the ways in which we take the Middle English version as being part of or "for" the Auchinleck. Though conceivably translated in some temporal/geographical proximity to it,¹³⁰ the

¹²⁹ Nicole Clifton argues in "*The Seven Sages of Rome, Children's Literature, and the Auchinleck Manuscript*," that *The Seven Sages of Rome* was translated into English specifically for the enjoyment of families. She believes that young girls, in particular, would be in need of English translations. Her arguments support what has been said already about a focus on women and children in the Auchinleck.

¹³⁰ The *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* places scribe 3 as linguistic profile (LP) 6500, of London provenance. Scribe 1 is on the London/Middlesex border, LP 6510.

task of proving any kind of textual intentionality is as fraught as it ever is. Nevertheless, the Merlin narrative in the *Seven Sages*, as well as the text more generally, further corroborates the manuscript's interest in a complexly interrelated textual scheme. In this retelling, however, Merlin's story is told within a frame tale. *The Seven Sages of Rome* concerns a story-telling contest, played out for the life of the Emperor's son. On the one side, the Emperor's wife, step-mother to his son, tells seven stories inciting the Emperor to execute his son for a falsely alleged sexual assault, in a reiteration of the conflict between Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Each of her tales is countered in turn by a tale from one of the seven sages. The antifeminist tendency of this structure is obvious. Not only does the Emperor's wife conceive this unnatural hatred of her step-son, but her wicked craftiness in executing her plot is equaled only by the efforts of seven great men of learning—the clear implication being that poisonous and manipulative speech comes naturally to women, less naturally to men.

In one of the tales, the Emperor's wife twists the story of Merlin to her own ends, creating a complex conceptual intersection between speech, unnatural birth, and women's agency. She retains the extraordinary elements of Merlin's origin. He is a child without a father, and he is gifted with particularly persuasive speech. Using these powers, he overturns the alliance between king and councilors in his tale, which mirror the Emperor and seven sages in the frame. Thus though the Emperor's wife cannot, in short order, produce a son who will execute her agenda, she does, through her own unnatural and persuasive speech, produce an unnatural son in Merlin. In doing so, she joins the women discussed above, as a woman giving birth to an unnatural child to accomplish her ends, while adding the antifeminist standards about women's manipulative speech to the motif. She also reverses the laudatory passivity of these women by aggressively pursuing her own goals. On every level, then, the Emperor's wife in *Seven Sages* represents the obverse of

the ideal women in booklets 1-3.

The collocation of all the texts described in this chapter suggests that abnormal birth was a motif either established or being developed in the first quarter of 14th century London literary culture. The importance of *Seven Sages* in particular, however, is that it contrasts the Empress' wicked and active speech with the model passivity normally found in the abnormal birth motif. Within the context of the manuscript, it functions as a *mise-en-abyme*, reiterating the discursive dialectic performed by the manuscript as a whole. Merlin is not just an abnormally born fatherless child, but the pernicious product of a woman's manipulative speech. As such, he embodies both the power of women's speech and its dangers. That embodiment, that incarnation of a woman's manipulation, powerfully links the antifeminist standards about women's speech with their powers of procreation, making pregnancy, natural or otherwise, a form of speaking, childbirth a form of doing.

The Auchinleck therefore presents a set of alternatives for women. Where women remain passive, abnormal birth attains redemptive force that accomplishes their own goals too. As active doers and speakers, however, their speech becomes a destructive abnormality, an abnormal child that threatens to destroy the rightful and normal. That, at least, is how we might read the collocation of these texts if we allow that their compilation into a single manuscript is intentional. Traditional genre theory, which divides texts according to scholarly categories, will allow intentionality only in the collection of romances, and in the collection of spiritual texts. Reading across these boundaries, boundaries which the compilers of the Auchinleck would not recognize, we find that texts reorganize themselves around the construction of gender, and particularly around an ambivalent relationship to the agency of women.

Chapter 4: Chaucer and the London Metatext

Do wey, thou clerke! Thou art a fol! With the bydde Y noht chyde.
Shalt thou never lyve that day mi love that thou shalt byde.

—Item 64, Harley MS 2253
“My deth Y love, my lyf Ich hate”

This final chapter argues that London women’s market share for a variety of texts in the 1330s resulted in a growing rivalry between clerks and women particularly. This rivalry lasted well into the next century, influencing Ricardian literary culture and leaving traces in Chaucer’s writing.¹³¹ Thus, though Chaucer never held the Auchinleck in his hands, the manuscript and the man are nevertheless mutually linked to a literary culture of rivalry. The Auchinleck thus informs the way that we must read Chaucer, especially where he portrays interactions between clerks and women. Chaucer’s Alceste, Alison, and Prudence engage in a strikingly similar reading practice: women taking control of literary production and interpretation, and using this control to resist antifeminist literary representations. Chaucer the clerk finds himself an awkward conduit of antifeminism in an increasingly female literary scene. He must respond to this conflict with ironic

¹³¹ See Vaughan “Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and the Auchinleck MS: Analogous Collections?” for a discussion of why we might consider other models of influence on Chaucer besides his holding the manuscript in his hands, as Loomis suggested.

detachment from his own materials, or risk the wrath of his customers and clients. Alternatively, he might double-cross his female clients by maintaining a clandestine loyalty to the misogynist traditions with which he was raised.

Scribe 1 follows the latter route, as will be seen from this chapter's analysis of his editorial decisions. In filler texts, where he arguably has the most control over the manuscript's content, he repeatedly chooses texts that pit clerks against the Virgin Mary, who as the summit of female spirituality embodies women's relationship to textual tradition. The clerks who cynically get the better of her engage in a power play predicated on their monopoly of that tradition. Mary's body is only available through sacred texts, and clerks thus hold the power to give or withhold access to it. Clerks thus hold the keys to the kingdom: an exclusive prerogative figured in Scribe 1's fillers as the ability to clothe or unclothe Mary at will. Their power over texts is power over sex, and textual access is sexual access. Women must literally and figuratively come through them to gain access to the truth of their own bodies. The two texts that show this pattern are "The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin" and "How Our Lady's Sauter Was First Founde."

As has been shown in the preceding chapters, the Auchinleck collects a genre of literature associated with women, and it targets romances in which women's agency operates complexly within a male-circumscribed narrative. It also rewrites British history as a struggle against a similarly fraught female agency. The organization of a manuscript around these gendered generic strategies presupposes a literary culture responding to a market in which women had some say. Moreover, other sources verify that such tensions were part of clerkly upbringing. In the *Auctores Octo*, widely used as a school text, most of the eight set texts include some element of misogyny. Several proverbs in the *Facetus* either forbid or condone antifeminist attitudes and statements:

Never say bad things about the female sex, but respect whatever woman you see as much as you can. If you have a wife ready to obey always, let your grateful goodwill honor,

respect, and love her. One who says shameful things about a woman is truly a boor, for truly we are all from a woman. If you have a wife who is rebellious in word and deed, you should reject her according to the law lest you be condemned with her. (46-7)

Remove yourself from smoke, a dripping house, a wicked woman; these are three things which can do much harm (48)

The above proverbs evince a comfort with contradiction, endemic to proverb collections, which tend to embody tension because individual proverbs are suited to occasions. So the proverb, “never say bad things about the female sex,” inscribes a situation that must have recurred, men rehearsing antifeminist lines, such that both the positive and negative proverbs remain comprehensible. Into this contradiction every schoolboy was introduced, and clerks especially would therefore be familiar with this tension from an early age.

Much later in the 14th century, Chaucer reflects on the literary culture that produced the *Auchinleck*, and seems more sympathetic to the plight of women who supply a bulk of the subject matter for literary activity without being able to exert direct control over it. He refigures the rivalry between women and clerks, using their traditionally fraught interactions to examine the misogyny endemic to clerkly activity, and to suggest a strategy of appropriation for women who want a voice. This is not to suggest that Chaucer was a fully blown or even a budding feminist, but he did recognize misogyny in the literary practices of his day, and was sensitive to the problems of female agency only half-articulated in the *Auchinleck*. Jankyn's possession, indeed the very fictional conception, of a book of wicked wives, indicates Chaucer's generic awareness about 14th century women's literary practice. In putting this book in Jankin's hands, Chaucer clearly assumed that his audience would comprehend the ready-made function of such a book. It would be immediately apparent to them why Jankin would have it, and why such a collection would be produced in the first place. This does not necessarily mean that such books existed, but it does mean that they

were—at the very least—a fiction made legible to Chaucer's audience by established social realities, and the existing demands of reading culture. Even if Jankyn's collection were perceived as quixotic personal side project in his profession as a clerk, and a wholly fictional one at that, there were still clearly enough such texts circulating to make Jankin's book plausible to Chaucer's audience.

The surviving manuscripts of the texts mentioned by Chaucer confirm that Jankyn's book would have been a plausible fiction to a literate 14th century audience. There are over 140 manuscripts containing at least one of the first three texts on Jankyn's list: Walter Map's *Dissuasio Valerii*, Theophrastus' *Liber de Nuptiis*, and Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*.¹³² They were frequently copied, and often bound together. There are at least 8 manuscripts produced in the thirteenth century that contain at least two of the texts Chaucer mentions, which means that something similar to Jankyn's book had been produced in England for perhaps 100 years when the Auchinleck was assembled, and for 150 years by the time Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales*. So it is clear that the general idea of an antifeminist collection existed in literate culture in the 14th century. At the very least, these manuscripts offer a proof of concept: it is certain that collections organized at least partially around antifeminism existed in time for them to influence the makers of the Auchinleck.

Scribe 1, or whoever hired him, simply translated the same concept to English. Within the context of this argument, that translation signifies a desire for broader access. The groups most in need of English-language texts would be those with less access to Latin and French, which,

¹³² Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler have collected a list of these manuscripts in *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*. While there are many manuscripts that contain one of the three main texts mentioned in the list, and several that contain more than one, there exists no evidence that a collection as encyclopedic as Jankyn's was ever compiled. Nevertheless, the generic awareness to begin gathering antifeminist texts into single manuscripts was certainly in place well before Chaucer's time.

needless to say, included women and children, especially those whose family class or business did not require more than one language. To a Londoner of the early 14th century, the manuscript would therefore have at least as much to do with gender, class, and age as with nation. Scribe 1's inclusion of filler texts with pointedly gendered content supports this claim. In fact, filler texts in the manuscript are divided between political and gender satire, the majority being of the latter category. As has been stated, two filler texts in particular, "The Clerk who would See the Virgin" and "How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found," show Scribe 1's pointed interest in texts that satirize the relationship between clerks and women. As the broader context for Scribe 1's editorial decisions, this informs the readings that follow.

The Clerk's Controlling Gaze

A little-known and little-studied text unique to the Auchinleck manuscript, "The Clerk who would see the Virgin," appears at the end of the first surviving section of the manuscript.¹³³ Copied by Scribe 1 at the end of this stint, it should clearly be classified as a filler text. This largely explains its critical neglect. Since filler texts are short texts appearing at the end of a grouping of quires, inserted by scribes to fill the remaining space, it has been believed that they are therefore less likely to be mindfully or intentionally included in a manuscript's design. This presumption does a disservice to "The Clerk" by excluding it from any degree of intentionality, relegating it to a class of texts that are rarely examined carefully. Its obscurity continues despite reasons to believe that Scribe 1 chose this text for complex reasons, which will be explored in this section.

¹³³ See Pearsall's introduction to the facsimile edition for a full description of these sections. Chapter 3 contains a table showing the structure of this booklet, which shows why "The Clerk" should be classified as a filler. Most importantly, it appears just before a change in scribal hands, and takes up only a few folios.

It seems wise at this point in manuscript studies, and in the present argument, to readdress the way in which scholars think about filler texts. Scribes have been the sometime enemies of medieval textual critics, comprising as they do the primary source of all error and variation in medieval manuscripts. The somewhat mythical belief in a pure text, extant in no manuscript but accessible through textual criticism, underpins the entire enterprise of the critical edition, and in a striking example of the perfect becoming the enemy of the good, has largely disqualified scribes from making significant literary, codicologically interesting decisions. However, the fetishization of the pure text by scholars was wholly alien to the middle ages. The changes made by scribes, though sometimes resulting from error or even carelessness, could also arise from executive decisions made by them in the process of copying. This reconceives the manuscript as a site for personal creativity and expression for persons involved at every level of its production. Scribes could very well have seen themselves as participants in a creative act, rather than the mechanical recopying of an inviolate text, which is a mindset endemic to the age of print, now quite possibly coming to an end in the age of hypertext and crowdsourcing. This possibility gives scholarship room to interpret texts which otherwise have been regarded as meaningless, and the present argument presupposes some level of intent behind “The Clerk” and other fillers.

Of course, intent cannot be proved beyond all doubt, especially since the historical conditions that made the text fully legible to its audience are lost to us. Nevertheless, careful reading and codicological study allow a partial recovery of those conditions. Particularly where texts with repeated content are found in the same manuscript, a kind of metatextual data results: someone read these texts and paired them. Using collocation within the manuscript as a guide enables a reading of “The Clerk who would see the Virgin” within the context of the rest of this gathering of quires, and even in the larger context of the entire manuscript. From the manuscript’s

structure, it is clear that when Scribe 1 copied out “The Clerk” he was most definitely making up space, and aware of the fact. However, he was not operating with such a paucity of exemplars that he could not include something appropriate to the gathering. It is a spiritual text, classifiable as a miracle of the virgin, and therefore suits the rest of the grouping’s contents, both in its religious content, and its emphasis on female spirituality. Nothing could be more appropriate. But a careful reading of the text, and a less self-satisfied classification of “The Clerk” as a Marian miracle, troubles the inference of simplistic apposition. “The Clerk” does not merely conclude its section of the manuscript, but comments upon it, even to the point of subverting it. What follows will make its subversive potential clear.

First, a summary. The first few lines having fallen victim to the manuscript’s regular looting by miniature hunters, the narrative begins *in medias res*, with an angel offering a nameless clerk a glimpse of Mary, whom he has venerated especially. This beatific vision of Virgin, however, will cost him his eyesight, a loss especially lamentable because of his profession. The clever clerk arrives at a tricky solution: he will keep one eye closed while observing Mary with the other, losing sight in only one eye as a result. Mary arrives, and the clerk sees the beautiful maiden, whose body is described as exceedingly beautiful. Waking the next day with half his vision intact, he is racked with guilt over his beguilement of Mary. He prays to her, therefore, that she will visit him again, so that he might see her with the other eye and spend the rest of his days in poverty as penance. She agrees to this, and though warning him of the suffering his blindness will bring, Mary restores his vision the next day in an act of extraordinary mercy.

This odd little narrative invites a simple classification as a miracle of the Virgin, but its suggestion of a naked Virgin Mary visiting a young man in his chambers does not fit easily within that genre. Normally understood as a narrative that expresses particularly female piety, the Marian

miracle should not condone actions so obviously resonant with sexual promiscuity. Moreover, miracles of the Virgin do not normally involve the hoodwinking of the Virgin Mary, and this element alone is enough to make the text a considerable outlier. Its treatment of Mary is impious, at the very least, and this has perhaps also contributed to its neglect, even amongst medieval scholars. It is not clear what to do with such a text. Combining Christian visionary tradition with bawdy bedroom tales, “The Clerk” borrows legitimacy from the Virgin miracle genre and a kind of plausible deniability. It simultaneously resists this classification by incorporating aspects of a fabliau: a contest between the sexes, a dishonest ploy with sexual undertones, and an urban mercantile practicality to the point cynicism.

The elements of fabliau in this text are worth considering in more detail. The following partially reconstructed quotation recounts the clerk’s inception of the plot, and shows the cynicism with which he conceives his stratagem:

[Pe cler]k anon gan him biþink:
 [3et y] can anoþer croke:
 [Wiþ] min on ei3e y schal wink,
 [& wiþ] mi noþer y schal loke;

The first few characters of each line have been sliced out of the manuscript, but the above reconstructions are close to the lines’ original contents. Clearly the clerk here devises a way to avoid the consequence of viewing the Virgin’s body. His reflection that he “can anoþer croke” seems lifted directly from a fabliau, more appropriate to the sly machinations of sexual scheming. Though a vision of Mary should be purely spiritual, this borrowing from the fabliau genre lowers the experience to that of a peeping Tom. The clerk is engaged, not in a spiritual exaltation, but a cold calculation how to get what he wants from a female adversary.

This sense of sexual undertone and gendered competition is enhanced by the text's treatment of Mary's body. The Virgin of this text is indeed an embodied Mary, one whose physical nature, though normally removed from regular human sight, is nevertheless in principle a thing to-be-looked-at, and the object of prurient speculation. "The Clerk" underlines her physicality by referring in precise terms to her body, even to its various parts. When the angel describes the terms of the visitation, he says, "[If þou] wilt hir bodi sen," referring to her physical "bodi" rather than to her exalted status as Mother of God. When she actually appears, Mary herself participates. She removes some amount of clothing and itemizes her own body for the clerk as a poet normally would for an earthly lover:

A mantel our leuedy vnfeld,
 Briȝter þan sonne þat schineþ schire.
 'Clerk, drede þe nouȝt, bot be nov beld,
 For þou schalt haue þi desire;
 Perwhiles þou hast þine eizen in weld,
 Advise þe wele of min atire,
 Apertliche þou me biheld,
 Bodi & face, brest & swire.' (69-76)

The above description dances a line between provocative and circumspect. Mary begins the encounter with the removal of a mantel, some outer garment. We are left to infer either that there is something or nothing underneath it, as no other garment is described. Her state of dress or undress remains in view when she calls on him to "advise þe wele of min atire," which could imply rather her lack of attire, i.e. look at *how I am (un)dressed*, especially when followed with "apertliche þou me biheld," which stresses the openness of her appearance.

Modern editing might even be doing us a disservice by determining the line's meaning through punctuation. The lines hold an entirely more explicit meaning if punctuated as follows:

Advise þe wele: of min atire
 Apertliche þou me biheld,

Using “of” to mean “out of” as it is sometimes used even in this text,¹³⁴ the Virgin Mary invites the clerk to look at her openly without attire. Finally, she lists her parts, “bodi & face, brest & swire,” leaving us to imagine just how much of her body, breast, and neck are visible. The next line reinforces the implication of her nudity, “Swire & al hire bodi he seiȝe.” By reinforcing the visibility of the neck, it suggests that a particularly sexualized body part can be seen, and the meaning of “al hire bodi” taken literally, means just that. In order to keep the line decent, the reader must mentally adjust: this can’t mean *all* of her body. Upon this ambiguity “The Clerk” depends, for a more explicit description of Mary would thoroughly offend. Nevertheless, it creeps as close as it can to a striptease.

Whether or not one accepts every degree of innuendo suggested above, it is certain that the text contains a scopophilic transgression against the Virgin Mary. Regardless of the degree of exposure, her body is the source of a stolen pleasure, and this transgression immediately leads to a particularly embodied form of penance:

‘Þis niȝt y saued on of mi fos;
 Mi fo y spard, allas þat while!
 Sori icham & wele ich owe:
 Min eiȝe doþ mi soule gile,
 & often bringeþ it ful lowe.’ (88-92)

The clerk refers to the eye he spared as his “foe” and laments that it beguiles his soul. It is difficult to imagine what this might mean beside the lust of the eyes, especially since this narrative is about illicitly catching sight of a perfect female body. This would be enough to suggest that this text is a hybrid: miracle of the Virgin mixed with fabliaux, but there is a further point.

¹³⁴ See line 196, “When we schul of þis warld wende.”

The clerk's reasons for beguiling the Virgin Mary are made specific to his profession and livelihood. Immediately upon conceiving his winking plot, he reflects:

[Mi wa]risoun y schal biswink
 [Til y] may sen opon a boke,
 [& haue] anowe mete & drink.
 [Gode] comfort to him he tok.
 [He tok] to him anon gode hede:
 [Iwis, m]in on eize may me seruen
 [Per to] do wiþ al mi dede;
 [It is] ynou3 til y schal steruen. (25-32)

The clerk beguiles Mary so as to retain the use of one eye, a professional necessity for most occupations, but particularly associated with clerks. His interpretation of his situation is thus that of an urban professional, unable to imagine another form of subsistence, and venial enough to dishonor the Virgin Mary to retain his mode of life. This cynicism, again, is more appropriate to the fabliau genre than the Marian miracle.

The narrative ends with an extraordinary act of grace on Mary's part, and a dubious lesson learned by the clerk. Whether or not one reads his repentance as sincere, the upshot is that he gets to view Mary's body a second time. His act of "penance," his offer to view her with the other eye so that he might be properly blind, seems as much like a reward as a punishment, and in any case, Mary is so merciful that she restores both eyes at the end. One is reminded of the *Shipman's Tale*, in which the wily monk has had the merchant's wife at the merchant's expense. Whether sincere or strategic, through performance of contrition the clerk has managed to catch sight of Mary not once but twice, and kept his eyesight and livelihood. Oddly, this text suggests that the best way to get what one wants from a woman is by transgressing and begging forgiveness, even when the woman in question is the Virgin Mary.

Scribe 1, who likely included this text at his own discretion, was certainly aware of this hybrid text's capacity to comment on the manuscript section he was completing. As a coda to its section of the Auchinleck manuscript, it casts an ironic look backward at the tales of female spirituality that precede it. Knowing, furthermore, that filler texts were where a scribe had most executive control about what to include, we can infer that Scribe 1 selected this text as a parodic comment on the female saints' lives he had copied. Precisely what that parody entailed to him is not clear. What seems clear, however, is his deliberate collocation of a text that inverts the precise import of the texts that precede it. St. Katherine and St. Margaret spend the entirety of their stories avoiding the prying eyes of unwanted suitors, whereas the unnamed clerk successfully peeks at Mary not once but twice. As a self-consciously scribal work, "The Clerk" suggests that the sexual conquests attempted by pagan kings are more successfully achieved by the clerks who copied their narratives. Its inclusion as filler to this section of the manuscript does not appear accidental.

Most likely a clerk of the kind that appears in the text was the author of "The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin." It is difficult to imagine who else would be cynical enough to write such a narrative, considering the type and degree of transgression against the Virgin Mary, and the text flatters no one except the professional clerk. It was not necessarily written by Scribe 1 himself, but "The Clerk" would appeal to him personally and professionally. Yet it so clearly conflicts with its section of the manuscript, i.e. those texts most likely included at the client's request. Its inclusion makes the most sense if read as an ironic comment by Scribe 1, a way of trumping the feminine focus imposed upon him in this booklet. Furthermore, Scribe 1 found space elsewhere in the manuscript to include a second bawdy Virgin miracle/fabliau, which will be examined in the next section.

A Second Bawdy Virgin Tale

If “The Clerk” were the only text in the Auchinleck that suggested a naked Virgin Mary, it could perhaps be more easily ignored. However, in addition to “The Clerk who would see the Virgin,” the manuscript contains a short text called “How Our Lady’s Sauter was First Found,” also copied out by the ubiquitous Scribe 1. This text, numbered XXXVIII in the manuscript’s numbering system, is clearly another filler text, as can be seen from the structure of the manuscript in the table below.

Table 11: Short Texts Completing Booklet 5

Scribe	Manuscript Number	Text	Quires	Folios
5	XXX	Sir Beues of Hamtoun	26-29	176ra-201ra
1	XXXI	Of Arthour & of Merlin	29-36	201rb-256vb
1	XXXII	þe Wenche þat Loved þe King	36	256vb-256stub
1	XXXIII	A Peniworþ of Witt	36	256stub-259rb
1	XXXVIII	How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found	36	259rb-260vb

The manuscript section above, which concludes with “Our Lady’s Sauter,” begins with what appears to be Scribe 5’s second stint. Probably at Scribe 1’s request, he copied “Sir Beues of Hamtoun,” and then handed over this section of the manuscript, so that Scribe 1 could complete it with “Of Arthour & of Merlin.” These two texts, which make up the bulk of this section, are both romances, though the latter reads more like a *chanson de geste* in its emphasis on knightly duels and battle, since it lacks the feminine aspects of the other romances in the manuscript. The production method of Scribe 5 and 1 follows the general structure of the manuscript; romances come first and other kinds of text later within its sections, which has earned the Auchinleck its reputation as a collection of romances. The end of this manuscript section is also typical, in that shorter filler texts follow the romances, taking up space in the remaining folios before another

large texts begins a new quire, in this case an unique and sadly incomplete translation of Marie de France's lai "Le Fresne."

After "Beues" and "Of Arthour" were copied, however, Scribe 1 filled the remaining folios with a series of short bawdy tales, each featuring women. These show a consistent plan on the part of Scribe 1 to choose filler texts that sustained the manuscript's interest in women. To Scribe 1, in other words, these texts were generically grouped as much as the romances. The first, which has been titled "þe Wenche þat Loved þe King,"¹³⁵ is now almost completely lost, apparently having been excised from the manuscript even before it was raided for miniatures. Someone appears to have scraped off the text's one column on f. 256vb, along with its title and miniature, and cut away the folio that contained the text's remainder. Whatever it contained likely offended someone's sensibilities at some point, as the folio's surface shows a concerted effort to erase every trace from the manuscript. As can be seen in the images below, the miniature appears to have contained a bed, but the bodies that likely were on it have been scraped away.

¹³⁵ This title comes from Kölbing, "Vier romanzen-handschriften," *Englische Studien* vii (1884). A more recent article by Furrow, "' þe Wenche', the Fabliau, and the Auchinleck Manuscript." *Notes and Queries* 41.4 (1994), takes issue with this title. She also speculates as to the reasons for its removal, but there can be no solid answers to this question. It would be so convenient, too, if it could be shown that someone removed the fabliau for containing material inappropriate for children.

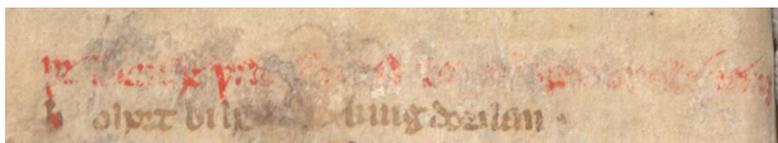
Image 1: Miniature MS Adv. 19.2.1 fol. 256vb



The image to the left shows blue linens that likely formed part of a bed. On the right side of the area that has been scraped away, some outlines of one or two bodies remain. This differs greatly from the usual damage done to miniatures in the Auchinleck; usually they are cut out, page and all, or around their outlines. In this

case, the remnants of this miniature likely survived precisely because it had already been mostly effaced. This makes it highly likely that something rather bawdy once filled the empty space.

Image 2: Title of the Text beginning on fol. 245vb



The title to the left appears at the top of the same column as the

miniature. “þe Wenche þat” is still fairly clear, but the remainder of the line is too long to be “Loved þe King.” The title of this text is thus almost wholly an invention of scholarship. More likely it was something else more bawdy, as “king” (the supposed remnants of which appear at the end of the line) could just as easily be “swyving.” The title’s near entire effacement is significant because someone appears to have wanted every trace of this text illegible. No other text shows this

degree of damage, and this makes it likely that the reasons for its removal were related to its content.

Continuing on, the second filler text, “A Peniworþ of Witt,” is the manuscript’s only surviving true fabliau, a tale in which a faithful wife manages to make her philandering husband keep his vows. The narrative makes faithfulness a function of material exchange. The setting of this fabliau is urban and international, though city and lands are not specified. The merchant keeps a lover and gives her the better portion of his material goods. When he travels across the sea on his business venture, his wife gives him a penny to buy himself a penny’s worth of wit. In exchange for the penny, an old man advises him to test his lover and wife by faking great misfortune on his business trip. The lover abandons him, but his wife remains faithful, and he henceforth does as well. The text is unique, though parallel texts appear in a few 15th century manuscripts. In the context of the Auchinleck, however, “A Peniworth of Witt” suggests an urban, mercantile, mixed-gender audience.

The final text, “How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found,” is another hybrid between fabliau and spiritual text. Together, these three texts suggest a concerted effort on the part of Scribe 1 to fill out the remainder of this section of the manuscript with a series of bawdy tales. This shows once again, just as in Booklet 1, that he was not limited by exemplar poverty, and was moreover able to select even filler texts according to thematic material, subject, and genre. “Our Lady’s Sauter,” furthermore, is the most specifically targeted of these, as can be seen from the ways in which it interacts with “The Clerk.” This argues that Scribe 1 was able to sustain an interest in hybrid fabliau/women’s spiritual texts even across sections of the manuscript. Even more specifically, it provides another example of his interest in rivalries between women and clerks or clerical figures. The following will examine this text more closely.

The narrative of “Our Lady’s Sauter” is short. The son of a rich man becomes a monk. The young cleric sings so well, and so often, that Mary appears to him. The one hundred Aves he says each merit the visitation, but when the Virgin appears, she is only half-clothed:

Ac so wele he playd,
 Ri3t soþe for to say,
 Þat he sei3e wel bri3t
 Our leuedi ful of mi3t
 On a Saterdag, ywis,
 Where sche sat vpri3t
 Half-cloþed bi si3t,
 & seyð to him þis: (83-90)

When the cleric asks her why she is incompletely attired, she answers that he gives her clothing through his Aves. He must say one hundred and fifty in order to clothe her completely.

‘Þis cloþe þou me 3eue
 Of Friday at eue,
 Þurth aue maries,
 Þo þou me gun grete
 & no day nold lete
 Ac seydest fifti tviis.
 For þou most say more
 Þries fifti bi score.
 Also y told þe.
 Today a seueni3t
 Ycloþed al ari3t
 Þou schalt me fair yse. (157-68)

Clothing Mary requires one hundred and fifty prayers, and the one hundred prayers from the cleric has only clothed her very incompletely.

3if y durst & couþe,
 Ich wald wite nouþe,
 Leuedi, here of þe,
 Whi þe failes gore,
 Sleuen & no more
 Of cloþ ich on þe se?’ (151-56)

The cleric's question describes Mary scandalously. She lacks "gore," which is the lower part of her gown, and is apparently wearing sleeves only. Her entire lower half, then, is exposed to the cleric because of his inadequate prayers. The bawdiness of the Virgin's nudity alone is shocking, but the double bind it involves the cleric in is worse. The cleric can pray as Mary requests, providing her with the appropriate clothing, but that would mean missing a second sight of her when she returns. Of course, the text does not explicitly admit that such a thing is licit or an admissible desire, but the narrative seems deeply invested in the sight of Mary's body, and links performance of spiritual labors with a prurient carnality.

Scribe 1 includes "Our Lady's Sauter" and "The Clerk" under similar conditions, as a concluding filler to a section of the manuscript. Where he has some executive control of the manuscript's contents, then, he consistently includes bawdy tales, and two of them pair Mary in a lurid situation with a clerical figure, a person whose livelihood depends on literacy. Furthermore, his livelihood is specifically juxtaposed with Mary's body. In one case, spoken prayers weave together the underlying metaphor of text and textile. The cleric's words cover Mary's body, and the intimacy of this relationship gives him a curious power over Mary's sexuality. He determines whether she is clothed or naked, and though outwardly invested in her purity, the cleric—and by extension Scribe 1—is titillated by the possibility of a nude Virgin. In "The Clerk," sight of Mary's naked body is a temptation so strong that a clerk is willing to give up his livelihood for it. By a miracle of the Virgin's mercy, the two irreconcilable goods are reconciled. Together, these texts suggest a special relationship between literate scribes and spiritual women. This relationship is figured as a kind of rivalry, however, strained by internal tensions.

Chaucer makes use of the strained relationship between clerks women much later in the 14th century, in the prologues to the *Legend of Good Women* and *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. His

representation of clerkly transgression women as an occasion for literary production that we find in evidence in the Auchinleck. When Clerk 1 intercalates “The Clerk” and “Our Lady’s Sauter,” he transgresses, in a sense, against the design of the manuscript. He provides two texts particularly galling to a female reader, in which the Virgin Mary herself is hoodwinked and embarrassed. As the paragon of all female spirituality, Mary would be the most exalted figure with which a female reader could identify, and that identification was assisted by descriptions of Mary that matched ideal femininity. One contained in the Auchinleck’s “Early Life of Mary” reads as follows:

So reynable & queint sche was
of witt & of dede
þat ich man hadde of so ʒong a þing
wonder & eke drede.
Sche nas neuer sen ones wroþ
no leiʒeand ones gon
No missigge to no man
bot euer more in on.
Sche sued & span & kembede also
boþe wollen & linne; (111-115)

In her daily activities and the vices she avoids, Mary sounds more like a well-behaved 14th century girl than the mother of Christ. Clearly this description of her was meant to produce the same behaviors through identification and imitation. The exemplariness of Mary, and particularly of her speech (she “no missigge to no man”), should also hearken back to the representation of Eve in the Auchinleck’s “Life of Adam and Eve,” a text that will be further commented on in the coda. The Eve-like figures of Albin and Inge in the *Liber*, and the empress in the *The Seven Sages*, all abusers of speech, should also come to mind. The Auchinleck’s inclusion of the polarized female figures is not likely accidental, stemming from the predominantly binary representation of woman in the middle ages, especially in clerkly, literate culture.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, and Fries, “*Feminae Populi*: Popular Images of Medieval

Simultaneously, this makes the presence of “The Clerk” and “Our Lady’s Sauter,” both texts in which clerks catch illicit sights of Mary’s body, doubly transgressive. The clerks in these texts transgress against Mary and the women who identify with her. Indeed, since transgression against Mary, especially one of the nature described in these two “filler” texts, is particularly irreligious, “The Clerk” and “Our Lady’s Sauter” are readily legible as affronts against a female reading public, rather than as fantasies of prurient peeping at the Mother of God. On the surface, they are indeed the latter, but they seem far more comprehensible if a female reading public is in view. Scribe 1 appears to be taking liberties with his filler text, precisely where he has the most leverage to do so. Surrounded on all sides by pious representations of Mary and texts more flattering to female spirituality, “The Clerk” and “Our Lady’s Sauter” can be excused precisely because “penance” for them has already been paid. Whatever was contained in “The Wenche that Loved the King,” however, seems to have sinned too greatly to escape judgment.

To Collect is to Transgress: Rivalry between Clerks and Women

A fate similar to that of “The Wenche” also befalls Jankin’s book of wicked wives, which suggests that deliberate offenses against women were an accepted clerky behavior in the later 14th century too. In the Wife of Bath’s prologue, Alison lists a set of texts familiar to those who study medieval antifeminism:

He cleped it Valerie and Theofraste,
 At which book he lough alwey ful faste.
 And eek ther was somtyme a clerk at Rome,
 A cardinal that highte Seint Jerome,
 That made a book agayn Jovinian;
 In which book eek there was Tertulan,

Women.”

Crissipus, Trotula, and Helowys,
 That was abbesse nat fer fro Parys,
 And eek the Parables of Salomon,
 Ovides Art, and bookes many on,
 And alle these were bounden in o volume.

In this list, we see Chaucer acknowledging the prologue's sources more or less explicitly, and fabricating a few more, even if he distances himself from them by making them Jankyn's. Chaucer's undoubtedly selected these texts guided not from an encounter with such a complete collection, but from his extensive knowledge of texts commonly associated with misogamy and antifeminism. The book of wicked wives is thus more like one of the genre lists common to several tales than anything else.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, Jankyn's book of wicked wives might have been more an extrapolation than pure invention. As has been shown, the Auchinleck's Scribe 1 could include antifeminist works when he wished to, and the self-consciousness with which he does so indicates that an antifeminist collection was potentially conceivable and executable from an early time in the 14th century.¹³⁸ The only thing lacking was the will to put one together, but instead we find manuscripts like the Auchinleck, in which positive and negative appear side by side

The Wife of Bath's prologue, like many other portions of the Canterbury Tales, is thus structured by the medieval completionist desire to gather a certain genre of source. In this case, Chaucer brought most of antifeminism's sources and many of its tropes into one place, in a more thorough way than had yet been attempted. One of his most psychologically developed pilgrims is thus legible merely as a function: as complete a list of antifeminist texts and topoi as could be encountered in 14th century England. In fact, the success with which critics have psychologized

¹³⁷ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of lists in "Sir Thopas."

¹³⁸ See Hanna III, Ralph & Traugott Lawler. *Jankyn's Book of Wikked Wyves*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997.

Alison, making her a realistic character with ambitions and motivations, overshadows the degree to which she is an amalgamated construct of antifeminist clichés. While extraneous detail tempts us to see Chaucer as a consummate observer, a portrait painter of true-to-life characters drawn directly from 14th century England, we should not so quickly suppose that Alison is a fully realized human being simply because she is “gat-tothed” and “reed of hewe.”

Since it would take more space and time than is available to discuss what realism in literary representation is and how it might be achieved, it is best simply to concede one point: there is realism in Alison's portrait and prologue. But it would be unproductive here to determine what it consists in, and even less so to discuss what it might mean. Because whatever Alison was before she became a psychologized literary character, she was a type and a construct first. Remarkably, Chaucer's detailed description of Alison simultaneously manages both intertextual and realistic gestures. Unlike formulaic description in prior Middle English literature, Chaucer manages to fuse stereotype with reality, but to neglect the stereotype is to miss what he is really doing. The “realism” inherent to the prologue borders less on human behavior, and is rather more a neighbor to 14th century literary practice.

Jankyn's antifeminist codex, like Alison herself, is a construct of literary culture, its contents determined not by reality but by genre. Yet Jankyn's use of these texts against his wife can hardly be a completely fictional bit of married kink. His somewhat sadistic out-loud reading of these antifeminist exempla might have struck Chaucer's audience as egregious, but not as impossible. If he is outside of accepted norms, he is not far outside them, and the interactions between Jankyn and Alison suggest that the reading of antifeminist texts for the purpose of provoking a response was not unheard of in the 14th century, if we allow that Chaucer's depiction of marital strife had some antecedent in the real world.

Similarly, in his prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer models literary production upon women and clerks in tense conflict over the portrayal of women. When Alceste persuades the god of love to impose the *Legend* project as penance for *Troilus and Criseyde*, she makes use of an imbalanced power dynamic created by Chaucer the clerk's antifeminist trespass. This imbalance creates the need for some redress, a penance in the form of a new text. Her defense of Chaucer in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* indicates an awareness of the strategic value of being transgressed against.

I, your Alceste, whilom quene of Trace,
 Y aske yow this man, ryght of your grace,
 That ye him never hurte in al his lyve;
 And he shal swere to yow, and that as blyve,
 But he shal maken, as ye wold devyse,
 Of wommen trewe in lovyng al hire lyve,
 Wherso ye wol, of mayden or of wyve,
 And forthren yow as much as he mysseyde
 Or in the Rose or elles in Creseyde. (F 432-441)

This is the noble woman in a very familiar role, as intercessor on behalf of the guilty.¹³⁹ She speaks here as if Chaucer were guilty of a capital offense, in danger of losing his life to the god Love, whom she addresses as a monarch in his judgment seat. Alceste argues that he must not put Chaucer to death “syth no cause of deth lyeth in this caas” (F 409), a humorously exaggerated defense. This makes the whole arraignment seem absurdly overblown, and perhaps this is part of her strategy. The alternate penalty she suggests is more commensurate with the crime. The production of a text praising women balances the negative portrayals he has already produced. The punishment is appropriate from a literary perspective too, since clerks were known and expected to produce work that both praised and blamed women: it was one of the ways that they sharpened

¹³⁹ Caroline D. Eckhardt, in “Woman as Mediator in the Middle English Romances,” calls it “so widespread as to be a convention,” and of course links woman’s role as mediator to Mary the Mediatrix.

their rhetorical skills. The extent to which any clerks believed what they wrote was probably a matter of individual disposition and situational expedience. As Alceste herself suggests: “Hym rekketh noight of what matere he take” (F 365) Chaucer here makes use of that expectation, and the convenience of his ambivalence is clear from his acquittal: impunity goes to the clerk who can flexibly switch between positive and negative portrayals of women.

He likely modeled this behavior upon the real reading practices of his day, in which clerks retained an effective monopoly over the production and copying of texts, even as women exercised growing influence over the kinds of texts that clerks produced. If, as this argument has attempted to establish, women were indeed increasingly influential customers to clerks in the 1330s, when the Auchinleck was compiled, then Chaucer wrote the *Legend* in a period when women had influenced literary production for some time. His readers consequently would have recognized Alceste as a stand-in for real women. Their ever more solidly attested status as readers and consumers over the course of the 14th and 15th centuries means that scenes like the one in the *Legend*'s prologue would have been increasingly common, such that Chaucer himself was likely reproached by a dissatisfied reader for his portrayal of Criseyde.

Chaucer's prologue to the *Legend* should therefore be read as a complex response to a long-established dynamic.¹⁴⁰ The triangle between himself, Alceste, and the god of love adds a third party to the conflict, which displaces the tension between women and clerks, and allows the lady Alceste to act as intercessor on the clerk's behalf. This diplomatic move on Chaucer's part smooths over the offense against by making the god of love the aggrieved party. Eros anthropomorphizes

¹⁴⁰ In Lynn Arner's words, “The poem examines the conundrum of where culpability for suspicious gendered practices in and surrounding the field of cultural production lies.” *Chaucer, Gower, and the Vernacular Rising* (2013). The present argument only seeks to add a consideration of the history of such practices, and to establish that they were operative in the compilation of the Auchinleck too.

gender relations, which have been troubled by Chaucer's clerkly activity. The displacement of the grievance also flatters women by giving them the opportunity for magnanimity. Of course, viewed another way, it provides an idealized model for female reactions to literary transgressions that is clearly to Chaucer's advantage. Chaucer simultaneously evades charges of misogyny and gains another patron. If real women behave according to Alceste's model, Chaucer can drum up new business with antifeminist text, and channel women's sense of grievance against him into patronage for further poetic projects.

As an idealized woman, Alceste is perhaps rather an obverse of Alison than an inverse: the corollary of an excessively negative portrayal is an excessively positive one.¹⁴¹ If there were in fact a reading practice of trespassing against women with misogynist texts in order to provoke a response, both Alison and Alceste might have an antecedent in this practice. Chaucer portrays Alisoun as perfectly aware that making antifeminist statements is a form of transgression against her, and that by accusing her husband, she can force him into a position of penance, gaining power over him in the process. This might not have been far off from actual medieval uses of antifeminism, not by men but by women. If the reading of antifeminist passages was in mixed company was not just a quirk of the fictional Jankin, but a common occurrence, then women might very well have developed a variety of strategies for coping with such sadistic practices. Masochism, in this case taking the form of enjoyment of such texts, might be one such response, or a secondary derivative form of it: the enjoyment of resisting, or making use of, such texts.¹⁴²

141 This viewpoint is developed fully in R. Howard Bloch's *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*.

142 Marilyn Desmond's chapter on the Wife of Bath in *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence* discusses the erotic charge carried by violent behaviors, both physical and textual. She even argues that Jankyn's ability to 'glose,' which she reads as glossing of his Latin book of wykked wyves, is what attracts the Wife of Bath to him. She also associates Jankyn's sadistic reading practices with a larger erotics of violence, which includes Aristotle mounted by Phyllis, expanding the archive of violent erotics beyond the Wife of Bath's prologue. Desmonds book thus provides a larger historical and codicological contexts for the present argument as well.

So even though Alison inverts Alceste, they may in fact both result from the same misogyny. And the correlative of the Wife of Bath, who blames, is Alceste, who forgives. Both manipulated situational imbalances in power created by textual tradition to their own advantage. This would go further in explaining their relationship than the supposition of a purely literary scheme on Chaucer's part. Why, after all, would Chaucer create such a structural similarity between two otherwise diametrically opposed women, unless there were some practice familiar to 14th century, in which his readers might recognize some aspect of themselves?

Chaucer shows a particular awareness of the resistances provoked by collection and collocation, by making sites of collection also sites of resistance to gendering influence. In three places, the Wife of Bath's Prologue, the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, and the "Tale of Melibee," Chaucer turns the occasion of a list into an occasion for dissent. The Wife of Bath's Prologue functions as a collection of antifeminist topoi, and it is there that dissent is most clear. "The Tale of Melibee" functions as a collection of proverbs, and Chaucer transforms this already popular text into a more prudent echo of Alison's resistance.¹⁴³ And finally, the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, which recounts the reasons for Chaucer's collection of women's stories, simultaneously performs a kind of resistance implicit in the Auchinleck: where a story deleterious to women's reputation has been told, restitution must be made. These three together show that Chaucer was aware of compilation and collection as a paradigmatically male prerogative.¹⁴⁴ Collection of texts amplifies the force of masculine authority—what is collected is so manifestly

¹⁴³ See Bowden, "Ubiquitous Format? What Ubiquitous Format? Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* as a Proverb Collection" in *Oral Tradition* 17.2 (2002): 169-207, which takes seriously the role of *Melibee* as an educational text, as well as a literary translation that Chaucer consciously adjusted for his own designs in the larger scheme of the *Tales*. See also Foster, Michael. "Echoes of Communal Response in the Tale of Melibee." *The Chaucer Review* 42.4 (2008)

¹⁴⁴ For more on this, see Walling, who argues that "Melibee" examines the gendered differences endemic to collection and interpretation of texts in "'In Hir Tellyng Difference": Gender, Authority, in the Tale of Melibee. *The Chaucer Review* 40.2 (2005).

male in origin—so collections must necessarily be a space in which men have amplified power over the representation of gender. Whereas a woman might best a man in argument one on one, she can never argue with the gathered gravity of a collection, so it is most interesting that Chaucer represents women as doing just that. His reasons for doing so were based in literate practice. The Auchinleck shows that the literate Londoners in the generation just prior to Chaucer's were aware of the collection as a place of particular male power, and thus also particularly the object of female assault. Chaucer echoes this established practice.

That am nat I: Women's Resistance to Male Textuality

The Auchinleck scribes imagined women much as Chaucer did, though earlier in the 14th century, and both were drawing from independently existing London reading practices. More specifically, women London women encouraged the production and reading of profeminist texts, even as clerks copied and disseminated them alongside antifeminist ones. The resulting tension was, by Chaucer's time, already old, and was recognizable to his audience. Alison, Alceste, and Dame Prudence were variations on longstanding reading practices, of which Auchinleck also a powerful piece of evidence. Where it makes negative statements about women, it excuses itself with a flurry of positive ones, but these too operate as a form of control by assigning certain virtues and perfections to women. The discussion of Mary above is an excellent example of this. Chaucer differs from the Auchinleck by writing female characters who actively take hold of the literary tradition for their own ends, and assigning this grasping of male tradition an ambivalent status. The only example of this act in the Auchinleck is the wicked empress of "The Seven Sages," whose

storytelling manipulatively furthers her murderous agenda.¹⁴⁵ Chaucer's women, on the other hand, occasionally save the men themselves from being subject to the textual tradition, and their literary agency is exercised both on their own behalf and on the men's.

Alison, of course, is the paradigmatic example of a woman who takes hold of the literary tradition for her own ends. Her treatment of authorities is manifestly self-serving. Whether or not Chaucer meant his audience to sympathize with her attempts at self-authorization and self-liberation is not ultimately answerable (at least, not here), but it is certain that he recognized that women particularly were subject to textual discourses that circumscribed and defined them, and that they could resist those discourses for various reasons. Most important for the present argument, he represents them doing so by consciously taking hold of traditionally a male demesne. He registers this conscious act by repeating the phrase "That am nat I:"

Virginitee is greet pefeccion,
 And continence eek with devocion,
 But Crist, that of pefeccion is welle,
 Bad nat every wight he sholde go selle
 Al that he hadde, and gyve it to the poore,
 And in swich wise folwe hym and his foore.
 He spak to hem that wolde lyve parfitly;
 And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.

WoB Prologue 105-112

In the above passage, Alison resists the imposition of a sexual identity foreign to her sense of self. The concluding line, "that am nat I," designates a socially constructed identity "that" and distinguishes it from "I." In doing so, her statement implicitly reappropriates the right to define her self, reclaiming it from the social forces that manufacture the sexual identities she is resisting.

¹⁴⁵ See the conclusion of Chapter 2 for a discussion of "The Seven Sages."

These forces, importantly, are manifested in the textual tradition, in this case from the highest textual authority all, Scripture.

This line would perhaps be unremarkable, just one amongst many such resistances in the wife of Bath's prologue, were it not repeated elsewhere in the *Tales*.¹⁴⁶ In the "Tale of Melibee," Prudence repeats Alison's declaration almost verbatim:

Sire, thise words been understonde of women that been janglereses and wikked;/ of whiche women men seyn that thre thynges dryven a man out of his hous—that is to seyn, smoke, droppying of reyn, and wikked wyves;/ and of swiche wommen Salomon that 'it were better dwelle in desert than with a womman that is riotous.'/ And sire, by youre leve, that am nat I. (1084-7)

Normally one might not be able to take a quotation from "Melibee" as reflective of Chaucer's authorial intent, but this line is exceptional. Chaucer follows his French source very closely, altering the *Livre de Melibée et de Dame Prudence* very little. Those alterations he does make tend to be meaningful, as when he deletes the negative proverb about nations governed by a child king. During the reign of the young Richard II, repeating such a proverb would be inadvisable. The line echoing the Wife of Bath above is also an addition, and an odd one, considering that it invites comparison between Alison and Prudence, who are at least superficially different from one another, representing nearly opposite poles as women.¹⁴⁷

Looking more closely, however, the structural similarities between Alison and Prudence make them perfectly appropriate as comparisons. They both repurpose a decidedly masculine tradition in attempts to govern their husbands, dissuading them from repeating the antifeminist

¹⁴⁶ This juxtaposition of Alison and Prudence was noticed by Daileader in "The 'Thopas-Melibee' Sequence and the Defeat of Antifeminism." *The Chaucer Review* 29.1 (1994). She claims the presence of this repeated line in a more triumphant argument for a feminist Chaucer, which in the present argument seems optimistic, if aspirational.

¹⁴⁷ Edward Foster suggests that no one was ever meant to read "Melibee," even by Chaucer in Chaucer's time. His title asks "Has Anyone Here Read 'Melibee'?" To which the present argument would answer, yes. *The Chaucer Review* 34.4 (2000)

standards that deafen them to their counsel. Their reinterpretation of textual authorities successfully shifts the situation to their advantage, though of course Prudence's motivation is a less self-serving desire to keep peace. Chaucer must have realized the structural similarities between his own creation Alison and the traditional Dame Prudence from his source material. Their mutually echoing lines invite comparison, and suggest that despite their differences, Alison and Dame Prudence are engaged in the same struggle, one framed by a textual tradition that precedes them and attempts to speak their identity for them. Their resistant speech is the only way to reclaim an identity from this tradition. So much, at least, has already been noted about Chaucer's Wife of Bath, though Dame Prudence has had the misfortune of being located in a narrative that is less a narrative, and more a collection of the very authoritative tradition that she must at least partially resist. This has led to her relative critical neglect, despite the parallels between the two women, and the fairly demonstrable fact that Chaucer saw these parallels himself.

So the present argument reads Alisoun's willingness to take hold of the traditionally male textual world as the representation in literature of a reading practice that women had been engaging in for some time.¹⁴⁸ The Auchinleck does not articulate this resistant reading practice, but it does embody the resistance by answering the demand for both positive and negative representations of women. The compilers of the Auchinleck show a similar ability to vacillate between positive and negative portrayals of women. The structure of the Auchinleck implies a longstanding rivalry between women and clerks, and by Chaucer's time, this was ready to be made explicit. Chaucer articulated it, but he did not invent it; he was less an innovator than a reframer of literary gender

¹⁴⁸ See Ladd, Roger A. "Selling Alys: Reading (with) the Wife Bath." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34.2 (2012). A study very suggestive for the present argument, it shows that Alison's economic situation reflects contemporary concerns over the economic power of guild-level widows. Would it not be wonder if we could imagine Alison as a model for female literary patrons, resented by clerks for their crassness, and unavoidable because of their influence as patrons. Therefore, of course, doubly resented. If only Alison could have commissioned the Auchinleck!

constructions. The Wife of Bath responds critically to an existing set of reading and writing practices, inverting the stratagem of the Auchinleck's Clerk 1. Where Clerk 1 found ways to transgress, having performed his penance in advance, in Alisoun's case the trespass is entirely fabricated, and she uses the imbalance to gain control over her husband. Subsequently in her marriage to Jankin the clerk, she uses his very real trespasses to demand the destruction of Jankin's antifeminist collection. In the former case, creative tension between transgression and penance dialectically produces a manuscript's structure, while in the latter, the same dialectic combusts a too-transgressive collection. There is, then, a perfect complementarity between the two.

This being the case, Chaucer's representation of clerks and women might be read within a broader context. Jankin behaves in a manner perfectly consonant with preceding representations of clerks. They were notoriously misogynist, and this misogyny was thoroughly imbricated in the textual world they inhabited.¹⁴⁹ Alison is a more complicated creature. Her enjoyment of and seemingly insatiable appetite for sex is certainly a typical representation of women at this time, the problematic sexuality of women having been a favorite topic of antifeminism since Jerome. Her handling of scriptural and other textual materials, however, is for its time, only a fiction. Not until Christine de Pizan does a woman have the temerity to reinterpret the canon in her own favor. And compared with Christine, we can see how parodic and negative Chaucer's representation of female exegesis is. Her partial destruction of Jankin's book, ostensibly a singular act, is in fact continually rehearsed in her bad exegesis, and any reading that wants to make Alison a positive figure of female empowerment has to reckon with her egregious mishandling of texts, as a distinctly feminine form of violence. Though the shameless nature of her manipulative

¹⁴⁹ See Blamires, *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended*.

hermeneutic appeals to post-moderns in refusing closure, it likely had a simpler reading in the 14th century as mockery of a female exegete.

Alison is in many ways a direct product of a culture in which men control texts and textual production, as well as interpretation. Where the Wife of Bath appears to be speaking with her own voice, accusing her husband of an antifeminist harangue, she is in fact quoting the *Miroir de Mariage*, which is based upon Theophrastus, which might have been invented entirely by Jerome for *Adversus Jovinian*. The levels of ventriloquism are nearly impossible to perceive without a graph: Theophrastus supposedly quoted by Jerome, the source of *Miroir de Mariage*, quoted by Alison, who is supposedly quoting her husband, all being reported by Chaucer. It is hard to imagine that the Wife of Bath has any self-possession or identity of her own, as she finds herself a middle term in this long series of mutually imbricated male speakers. And while it is clear that Alisoun does not emerge from her own prologue unscathed—she is too exposed by her own self-seeking manipulations—it is nevertheless also clear that Jankin is not wholly admirable. Jankin's wielding of the canon against her clearly puts the representation of women in his power. In pursuing his own power to represent women badly, and with a misogynist and sadistic agenda, he becomes as much victim of the antifeminist tradition as Alisoun. His ostensibly educated misogyny looks self-serving, provincial, and foolish.

It would be too simple to suppose that Alisoun and Jankin achieve the same untroubled gender relations that the unnamed knight and the transformed lady manage in the Wife of Bath's Tale. And the two couples do clearly mirror one another in finding a lasting and workable balance after a period of *sturm und drang*. But elided from this account is the fallout radiating as a byproduct of this equilibrium. In trading blows, it seems that the two reach a kind of *rapprochement*, but it is only Alisoun who suffers grievous and permanent bodily harm. The

deafening of one ear is perfectly emblematic of the ways that her education, such as it has been, has maimed her interpretation of the world around her, and more particularly, of the textual world. The fantasy of equality that she then offers up as her tale disguises fact that only she, as a woman, has received permanent harm, for if there were a parallel to her damaged ear within the tale, it would be the disappearing victim of the knight's sexual assault, whose permanently ruined life simply vanishes from the tale's economy of equal exchanges. It seems clear, then, that Chaucer expected us to perceive the differences between the Wife of Bath's fantastic tale, and her more grounded autobiography of gender trouble. And if there is a critique of the sadomasochism of misogynist representations latent in that difference, it is that women alone receive lasting harm—a lasting harm that they themselves might only half-perceive, the other ear being, as it were, permanently deaf.¹⁵⁰

Chaucer, in writing the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, was consciously perpetuating the classical antifeminist writings that formed the underpinning of medieval misogyny. Alisoun's speech is richly furnished with the proverbs and exempla of Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, and Chaucer knew that anyone familiar with the antifeminist tradition (i.e. any clerk worth the name) would be in on the joke. He was therefore most assuredly participating in the misogyny of his day and adding another layer of irony, to the delight of his clerkly readers. And he continued to participate in it, with reference to this irony in his *Envoy to Bukton*, his own entry in the misogamy tradition. But as with most Chaucerian irony, there tends to be an irreducible snag, a remainder that does not quite fit the joke and makes a form of protest, not insisted upon but undeniably there. It is the tragedy that cannot be glossed over by authority in the *Knight's Tale*, or the unthinkable cruelty of

¹⁵⁰ For more on the domestic abuse occasioned by gender roles in the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* and *Tale*, see Biebel, "A Wife, a Batterer, a Rapist: Representations 'Masculinity' in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *Tale*" in *Masculinities in Chaucer*.

Walter in the *Clerk's*. Thus, while not wishing to deny that the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is an extended misogynist joke at Alisoun's expense, it is possible to assert this one holdout: Chaucer recognizes the imbalance of consequences that inhere in the sadomasochistic pleasures of misogyny.

There is a maturity in Chaucer's reflection on misogyny, an understanding that the fun of antifeminism has a harmful side. Whereas we could attribute this to a profound and innovative new viewpoint on medieval antifeminism, emphasizing Chaucer's genius, we might also—as a cautionary balance—suggest that he was drawing on established practice. That established practice, before it received its literary instantiation from Chaucer, was implicitly reified in the Auchinleck. The manuscript's misogynist ambivalence makes it a nexus of reading strategies, enabling a series of strategic displacements. The Chronicle's Albin episode is predicated upon a gendered pleasure of transgression, in which women, framed as the transgressors, are displaced as victims of male desire and made to transgress against them. She is not the victim; she is the transgressor. Male readers, on the other hand are allowed to displace their transgressive tendencies against women onto the manuscript. Though undoubtedly a man conceived of, recorded, and read the text that contains the misogyny, when a man is permitted to switch instantaneously to a text that praises women, his participation in misogyny is obscured, displaced onto the manuscript, while his new textual selection reconceives him as a lover of women, his real self. He is not the misogyny; he is the act of switching away from it.¹⁵¹ The manuscript is thus a complicated technology for obscuring the real transgressions taking place. Like a street hustler playing three-card monte, the Auchinleck defies us to “find the lady,” an impossible task when the complex

¹⁵¹ Minnis argues in *Medieval Theory of Authorship* that the invitation to “turne over the leef and chese another tale” is a way of nodding to established reading practices that emphasized the reader's choice (198-200). The Auchinleck's numbered texts would have facilitated such a practice.

interrelations of its texts keep us from ever asking the real question, not where's the lady, or what do women want, but who is transgressing against whom?

Conclusion: Eve the Source of the Text

Alle þis loke þat þou write,
As wele as þou kanst it dite,
þat þo þat be now 3ong childre
Mai it see, & her elder... (625-29)
The Life of Adam and Eve

These are Eve's instructions to Seth at the end of the Auchinleck's *Life of Adam & Eve*. Adam has died, his soul in torment, and Eve desires a written record of their lives to be passed to their children. Thus at her request Seth produces a text very like the one found in the Auchinleck itself. He writes, in effect, the text in which he is written. Importantly, Eve does not write the account of her own life, nor of Adam's, but commissions it from Seth. The authoritative story of Adam and Eve must not come from a woman, even despite the fact that Eve is now the only living person who can remember. Her speech, of course, has been a contentious issue throughout the *Life*. By siding with Satan, she tempts Adam into rebellion, and she also prematurely ends the first fast, intended to win food from a mollified God. She is thus twice linked to deceptive speech. For this reason, she cannot be the source of the *Life*, but must receive it from her son, whose maleness is essential to the task entrusted to him.

The Auchinleck's *Life* shows evidence of intense interest in gendering textual production in other ways. The final lines of the *Life* are concerned with how this text comes to be in 14th

century hands. It is written in stone, and thus survives the flood, but the vicissitudes of its fate do not end there. Solomon rediscovers the text but cannot read it, and must pray for an angelic interpreter. The problems of commission, transmission, and translation are thus foregrounded. The closing narrative of the life seems particularly apt. It tells the story of the Auchinleck manuscript itself, of how it came to be, and how its texts were passed to us. The processes of composition, transmission, and translation are uniformly male. Seth must write the text, Solomon discover it, and God Himself translate it. But the commission of the *Life* comes from a woman.

Throughout this dissertation, it has been argued that the Auchinleck manuscript was imagined by its compilers as having a special relationship to women. The nature of that relationship has deliberately been framed as one of imagination, the scribes, most especially Scribe 1, revealing the ways they thought about women by the texts that they gather together (collocation), and the texts they change (emendation). In framing the relationship between the Auchinleck and women in this way, this dissertation has deliberately avoided making too strong a statement about the precise audience for which the Auchinleck was destined, or how it was read. No incontrovertible proof is really imaginable, for though the material object has come to use relatively unscathed, the original use of the codex must remain perennially inaccessible to us.

Nevertheless, the present argument has demonstrated a few things. In Chapter 1, it was shown that Chaucer had remarkably complex yet consistent ways of imagining women's relationship to the romance genre. The self-consciousness with which he expresses that relationship is typically Chaucerian, but at the very least, he shares with the manuscript an interest in generically sensitive collocations. Chapter 1 thus seeks to establish that the gendered expectations Chaucer associates with romance could have operated (with similar, if slightly less sophisticated self-consciousness, in the minds of the Auchinleck compilers.

Chapter 2 shows that the Auchinleck contains a customized London chronicle that responds to the fraught political fallout of the 1320s by effacing the contentious figure of Isabella from English history. In doing so, it displaces her transgressions against the English political order to a mythical time, making her dangerous self-determination and agency less threatening to the chronicle's 1330s London audience. It links Eve, Albin, Inge, and Isabella, in a continuity of feminine transgression. In a counterpoint to this move, the Auchinleck suggests both to women and to men in its audience that passivity, rather than self-determination and agency, is the safest course for women, as discussed in Chapter 3 above.

Finally, Chapter 4 shows that Scribe 1 uses his editorial power to include antifeminist texts in the Auchinleck. He particularly favors spiritually inflected fabliaux that show Mary in compromising positions *vis à vis* her clerkly adherents. Scribe 1 thus seems to delight in the power that writing professionals have over access to Mary, his way, perhaps, of compensating for a perceived threat: women who exercise control over their own reading. Chaucer, similarly, shows clerks in perennial rivalry with women, especially those who seek to gain control over textual interpretation and production. Chapter 4 thus returns the argument to the late 14th century context in which it began, seeking to show that both Scribe 1 and Chaucer shared a common set of expectations around the clerk/woman rivalry.

In its most imaginative mode, the present argument would dream that the *Life of Adam and Eve* tells the story of the manuscript itself. Eve commissions the text firstly for children, for basic instruction that gives them a sense of their origin and place in the world. The nationalistic focus previously argued for turns out to be both too large and too small. Too large because the manuscript is more concerned with providing a sense of locale not to nation-builders and cultural elites, but to those who needed access to basic religious instruction, and the sense of social structure that comes

from romance tradition. Women and children particularly were in need of such access, and men, the *Life* seems to say, were the only ones capable of providing it to them. Nevertheless, the *Life* seems to reflect a market in which women stood behind the commissioning of texts, if not their actual production. But the nation is too small a frame for the manuscript because as a material object, the Auchinleck seeks to reinforce the reality of its imagined world. To accomplish its task, the Auchinleck had to reach back to an originary moment at which the world and its various interrelations made sense, to the Garden of Eden, where male and female were the only principles that structured human existence. In order to construct Britain, it had to do the same, as it locates the beginning of British history in conflict between the sexes. The ambitions of the manuscript thus go well beyond a national frame. Its insistence both on Eve and Mary, and all their varietal empresses, virgins, victims, and mothers, seeks rather to construct a gendered cosmos, in which men speak and write, but women listen. They are therefore imagined as audience only, but the ideal audience, for whom speaking happens, by whom it is motivated. They are a source and cause of speech, if not speakers themselves. Consider, then, as a close to this dissertation, the appropriateness of *Alphabetical Praise of Women*, which ends as follows:

Leuedi, þat ert flour of al þing,
 Þat al godenes haþ in wold,
 For þe loue of þat tiding,
 Þat Gabriel wiþ mouþe þe told,
 Þat Jesu, þat is heuen-king,
 In þi bodi liȝten he wold,
 ȝif hem al gode ending,
 Þat honour wiman ȝing & old
 In word & dede:
 Þe child, þat our leuedi bare,
 Graunt hem heuen to mede. Amen.

Explicit

APPENDIX: CODICOLOGY OF ADV MS 19.2.1 (AUCHINLECK)

The construction of the manuscript is fully described, down to the folio, in Pearsall's introduction to the facsimile edition. The highly technical aspects of describing the manuscript having been well covered, this appendix processes that data into usable information for the present argument. The manuscript has traditionally been divided into twelve fascicles or booklets. Texts within these twelve booklets start mid-quire. Most often, Scribe 1 is the exclusive copier of a booklet, as in 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11. In some cases, Scribe 1 finishes the booklet after the first (often very long) text has been copied by another scribe, as in booklets 2 and 5. The reverse also happens, where another scribe finishes a booklet begun by Scribe 1, as in 4. Booklets 3 and 12 have no texts copied by Scribe 1, but booklet 3 shows his influence. Scribe 3 copied most texts in booklet 3, and he follows patterns established by Scribe 1 in booklets 1 and 2, as will be shown. Scribe 2 is the only scribe of booklet 12, and as in booklet 3, he copies a political critique: *The Four Philosophers* in 3, *The Simonie* in 12.

There are reasons to question the division of booklets traditionally established. Should a booklet be considered to begin whenever a text begins in a fresh quire? Booklets 4 & 5 might have been continuously copied by Scribe 5, though this seems less likely due to the cumbersomeness of having Scribe 1 copy *Guy of Warwick*, only to hand the booklet to Scribe 5 for *Reinbroun* and *Beues*, and then retrieve the booklet for *Of Arthour and Merlin* and the filler texts.¹⁵² Nevertheless, exigencies of production are usually invisible to us, and some undetectable circumstance might have necessitated this. Perhaps necessitating another change to our thinking about the Auchinleck booklets, booklet pairs 7/8 and 11/12 might have been single booklets at one time, but large losses

¹⁵² For more on *Guy of Warwick* and the compilation of the Auchinleck, see Wiggins, "Imagining the Compiler: *Guy of Warwick* and the Compilation of the Auchinleck Manuscript."

to these sections of manuscript make this impossible to determine. There is no evidence against this, however, and one consideration in its favor: it would mean that only booklet 3 contains nothing in Scribe 1's hand, since 8 and 12 would be subsumed into 7 and 11.

There are also reasons to question the term “booklet,” which implies a production model in which booklets are produced on speculation, before a client has specified which texts she would like to purchase. This in turn implies a more developed market with a relatively predictable demand for texts, in which such speculation is less risky. “Fascicle” implies no such market, since it is generally used to denote a section of a manuscript that is distinct but not intended for independent circulation. “Booklet” and “fascicle” both imply that a certain kind of forethought was occurring: which texts would likely be desirable together. But “booklet” alone implies that texts across sections of a manuscript should not be read together, or should be considered collocated only in an attenuated way, if they do not appear in the same booklet. Since many of the readings in this dissertation span several booklets, this is not a welcome implication. The present argument sides with those who consider the Auchinleck a bespoke project, ordered by a client with decided ideas about what would appear in it, ideas which were supplemented by Scribe 1 in selecting filler texts. “Booklet” would thus not be the preferred term, but it seems relatively indifferent as long as the above considerations are kept in mind.

The following table shows the traditional division of booklets:

Table 10: The Traditional Auchinleck Booklets

BOOKLET 1				
R.Num	Text	Scr	Qui	Folios
VI	The Legend of Pope Gregory	1	1-2	1r-6v
VII	The King of Tars	1	2-3	7r-13v
VIII	The Life of Adam & Eve	1	3-4	14r-16r
IX	Seynt Mergrete	1	4	16r-21r

X	Seynt Katerine	1	4-5	21r-24v
XI	St. Patrick's Purgatory	1	5-6	25r-31v
XII	The Disputisoun Bitven the Bodi and the Soule	1	6	31v-35r stub
XIII	The Harrowing of Hell	1	6	35r-37r/37v
XIII	The Clerk who would see the Virgin	1	6	37r/37v-38v
BOOKLET 2				
XV	Speculum Gy de Wareyke	2	7-8	39r-48r
XVI	Amis and Amiloun	1	8-9	48r stub-61v stub
XVII?	The Life of St. Mary Magdalen	1	9-10	61v stub-65v
XVIII	The Nativity and Early Life of Mary	1	11	65v-69v
BOOKLET 3				
XXI?	On the Seven Deadly Sins	3	11	70r-72r
XXII	Paternoster	3	11	72r-72(a)r/72(a)v
XXIII	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin	3	11-12	72r(a)/72v(a)-78r
XXIII	Sir Degare	3	12-13	78r-84(a)r stub
XXV	The Seven Sages of Rome	3	13-15	84(a)r stub-99v
XXVI	Floris & Blanche flour	3	15-16	100r-104v
XXVII	The Four Philosophers	2	16	105r
XXVII	Battle Abbey Roll	4	16	105v-107r
BOOKLET 4				
XXVIII	Sir Guy of Warwick	1	17-24	108r-167r
XXIX	Reinbroun	5	24-25	167r-175v
One leaf missing, which contained the end of Reinbroun.				
BOOKLET 5				
XXX	Sir Beues of Hamtoun	5	26-29	176r-201r
XXI	Of Arthour & Merline	1	29-36	201r-256v
XXXII	þe Wenche þat Loved þe King	1	36	256v-stub
XXXIII	A Peniworþ of Witt	1	36	stub-259r
XXXIII	How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found	1	36	259r-260v
BOOKLET 6				
XXXV	Lai le Fresne	1	37	261r-262 stub
XXVI	Roland & Vernagu	1	37	262v stub-267v

BOOKLET 7				
XXXVII	Otuel a Knight	6	38	268r-277v
<p>The end of Otuel and many leaves of King Alisaunder have been lost. A few leaves of Alisaunder have been located: London University Library MS 593, St. Andrew's University Library MS PR 2065. These confirm that King Alisaunder is XLVIII, which means that one text is missing. It is possible that booklets 7 and 8 were one booklet. This would follow the pattern, for instance, of booklet 5, in which a scribe other than Scribe 1 begins the booklet, then hands it over to Scribe 1 for completion. This would mean, however, the 7/8 booklet returned to Scribe 6 so that he could copy David the King.</p>				
BOOKLET 8				
XLVIII	King Alisaunder	1	39	278-279r
XLV	The Thrush and the Nightingale	1	39	279v
<p>A great deal appears to be missings from booklet 8. The roman numerals of King Alisaunder and Sir Tristrem (in booklet 9) are certain. Therefore, The Thrush and the Nightingale must be XLV, since it begins on the verso of f. 279. Furthermore, The Sayings of St. Bernard and David the King must be IL and L, respectively, since the catchword at the end of David accurately states the first line of Sir Tristrem. This means that at least four texts are missing from the manuscript. It has been suggested, furthermore that Booklet 8 is organized around the Nine Worthies,¹⁵³ containing both David and King Alexander. This would support the 7/8 amalgam, which would add Charlemagne, as well as hearken back to Booklet 6, which has Arthur. This adds another possible organizational scheme for the manuscript.</p>				
IL	The Sayings of St. Bernard	1	39	280r
L	David the King	1	39	280r-280v
BOOKLET 9				
LI	Sir Tristrem	1	40-42	281r-299 stub
LII	Sir Orfeo	1	42	299 stub-303r
n/a	Four Foes of Mankind	1	42	303r-303v
BOOKLET 10				
LIII	Liber Regum Anglie	1	43-44	304r-317r

¹⁵³ See Marianne Ailes and Phillipa Hardman. "How English are the English Charlemagne Romances," in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance*. See also Arthur Bahr, "Miscellaneity and variance in the medieval book," in *The Medieval Manuscript Book: Cultural Approaches*. In addition to identifying the same emphasis, on the Nine Worthies, Bahr argues for increased attention to filler texts. Chapter 4 will focus on several fillers in examining the rivalry between clerks and women.

LIII	Horne Childe & Maiden Rimnilde	1	44-45	317v-323v
One leaf missing between these two texts. Likely removed for a miniature.				
LV	Alphabetical Praise of Women	1	45	324r-325v
BOOKLET 11				
LVI	King Richard	1	46	326-327
Booklets 11 and 12 could be the same booklet, but this cannot be determined because many folios of booklet 11 are lost. We do not have the conclusion of King Richard, but it seems likely that after it concluded, at least two texts appeared before the Simonie. See the note below.				
BOOKLET 12 ¹⁵⁴				
LIX?	The Simonie	2	47	328r-334v
The Roman numeral for the Simonie did not survive the cropping of the manuscript. However, a diagonal mark consistently appears at the top of rectos throughout. This suggests that the numeral contained an X. Since the next numeral to contain an X would be LIX, this has been suggested as the Simonie's numeral. It could equally have been LX (less likely one of the following numerals, since concluding I numerals consistently descend and would therefore likely have left a trace).				

The importance of the booklets to the present argument comes from the ways in which they show evidence of complex literary activity that crosses both generic and booklet borders. Instead of following Pamela Robinson, whose booklet theory requires that not much planning could take place to unify from booklet to booklet, the present argument follows Schonk, whose bespoke model allows for a unifying plan for the whole manuscript. Nevertheless, the booklet model has one advantage: it implies that the Scribes were gathering texts together based on literary categories,

¹⁵⁴ A wonderfully detailed study of the Auchinleck's paraps and other decorative details has led Helen Marshall to conclude that Scribe 2 completed two of his stints in the absence of Scribe 1's instructions (in Booklets 2 & 12). He does his own paraph marks in these two booklets, whereas in his short stint in Booklet 3, he makes paraph marks, apparently now aware that these will be done for him. "What's In A Paraph? A New Methodology And Its Implications For The Auchinleck Manuscript." *Journal Of The Early Book Society For The Study Of Manuscripts And Printing History* 13.(2010): 39-62

reading practices, and market demands, and this necessitates a developed literary scene. This dissertation proposes that the client who ordered the Auchinleck on a bespoke basis, was nevertheless responding to just such a London literary scene. Though a developed literary market like the one evinced in these manuscripts would not of necessity be focused on women, it does at least show a market capable of sustaining complexly gendered chains of supply and demand. As discussed above, the evidence for this kind of scene exists not in English manuscripts, but in multilingual ones like Harley 2253 and CUL MS Gg 1.1, both of which evince intentional collocation of the genres and textual categories explored in the present argument. Particularly texts both pro- and anti-woman are found in all three manuscripts.

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