WARD, JESSICA D., Ph.D. Penitentials to Poetry: The Literary Critique of Avarice in Fourteenth-Century England. (2019)
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My dissertation elucidates how three extraordinary late-fourteenth-century writers—William Langland, John Gower, and Geoffrey Chaucer—address the challenge posed to Christian ethics due to the proliferation of urban markets and increased personal wealth in medieval England. In the Middle Ages, avarice comprised a wide range of sins and disorders, including usury and miserliness, but also unexpected practices such as sacrilege and rape. Though many historians have focused on avarice in the late medieval period, their attention tends to be on its strictly economic and legal dimensions. This emphasis on the financial valance of the concept, however, occludes both the ethical philosophy that animates literary discourse on avarice *and* the literary forms that sustain and enable that philosophy. My dissertation demonstrates that these vernacular authors appropriate the various genres of penitential literature, one of the most popular forms of writing in the period, to foster their readers as moral subjects.

Tracing a connection between penitential and poetic strategies, each chapter considers how these poets deploy the rhetorical techniques of a specific penitential discourse to argue that avarice—not pride—is the most pernicious vice because it diminishes communal wellbeing and harms individuals and their relations to God. My project shows how paying attention to these authors' lengthy and imaginative analyses of avarice can enrich ongoing conversations about critical topics such as the emergence of subjectivity in the pre-modern period and the rise of proto-capitalism in England.

PENITENTIALS TO POETRY: THE LITERARY CRITIQUE OF AVARICE IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:
THE CHALLENGE OF AVARICE IN LATE MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Over the last quarter century, the United States has witnessed a drastic economic change as a small percentage of the population has amassed an excessive amount of wealth. Negative reactions to this redistribution of income upward to the 1% are articulated in popular culture through such social movements as Occupy Wall Street and in academic studies such as Thomas Piketty's best-selling analysis of increased income inequality over the last two centuries, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century.* However, greed is not a new phenomenon; this behavior has a striking kinship to what in the medieval period was represented by the term *avarice*. Religious and what we would identify today as literary texts prominently condemned avarice, at the time considered to be a mortal sin, because it was believed to be the source of the most significant threats to the community and individual. The term itself comprised a wide range of sins and disorders, including usury and miserliness, but also unexpected practices such as sacrilege and rapine. In spite of what some would claim is our more secular modern/post-modern, capitalist/post-capitalist era, the medieval discourses of avarice are not only relevant but revelatory perspectives on this transhistorical phenomenon. Quite simply, the ethical discourses on the nature of greed from 600 years ago are still pertinent in the social and political debates of today.

I first began to consider the morality of individual gain seriously as an undergraduate experiencing firsthand the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis. Though I was fortunate to be offered jobs immediately after graduating in 2010, first as a claim's consultant at a national mortgage firm and later as a legal secretary for corporate finance lawyers who represented global banks, I witnessed firsthand the detrimental effects of this financial catastrophe on not only my own friends and family but also on the greater community from the vantage point of an individual and an employee who worked on behalf of larger institutions implicated in suspect behavior.

The Great Recession of 2008 demonstrated the personal and societal devastation wrought by a capitalism which, as Laura Rediehs argues, encourages individual wealth and accumulation and replaces ethics with economics as a guide to life; as a result, this acquisitiveness has devalued the social bonds among individuals.[1] Instead of esteeming people because of their moral character, for instance, material wealth has now become the marker of virtue. Intrigued by Rediehs' claim that possessions were more valued than principles, I found myself surprised when medieval texts that at once felt so foreign in language and culture reflected the ethical questions I was deeply invested in asking given my own circumstances.

What can we learn about strategies for analyzing and engaging with the deleterious consequences of greed from texts written so long ago? Though it might at first appear strange to consider the literature of fourteenth-century England as central to

[1] Laura Rediehs, "Economics Has Replaced Ethics." *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, 2013. https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/0139.

contemporary social, political, and ethical debates, this dissertation argues the expanding urban markets of the late medieval period and the gradual transition from feudalism to capitalism that was occurring initiated a shift in the traditional hierarchy of the sins; as Lester Little has argued, avarice replaced pride as the most preeminent vice. Moreover, the Lateran Council's (1215) Canon 21, which required that Christians confess their sins at least once a year, fostered a proliferation of penitential literature that analyzed the nature and effect of the various deadly sins, articulating the period's engagement with the vice of avarice and illuminating the social and moral effects of economic change. To begin addressing these questions in a historical context, this dissertation explores how the major vernacular authors of late fourteenth-century England— William Langland, John Gower, and Geoffrey Chaucer—draw on different genres of penitential literature to argue that avarice, not pride, is the most pernicious sin as it destroys the common good and harm's one's relation to God. This notion of communal well-being, introduced by Aristotle, reiterated by Cicero, and integrated with Christianity by Thomas Aquinas is central to Langland's, Gower's, and Chaucer's condemnation of avarice. Without recognizing these authors' unique grammars of sin, we cannot fully understand the ethical, legal, and economic stakes of their texts. Many historians have addressed the subject of avarice in the later medieval period, but they have usually focused on its strictly economic and legal dimensions. This emphasis on the financial valance of the concept, however, occludes both the ethical philosophy that animates literary discourse on avarice *and* the narrative forms that sustain and enable that philosophy.

Despite the undeniable chasm between the Christian ideology of the Middle Ages and the late-capitalism of the West, contemporary thinkers, from moral philosophers to politicians, have used the language of the common good to grapple with income inequality. Granted, this classical and medieval model of social relationships is not prevalent in 21st-century discourse, and it is a strongly contested term because its meaning has changed drastically since its introduction; nonetheless, the value of this Aristotelian/Thomistic concept is recognized as a relevant response to the problem of economic inequality. Former President Barack Obama, for example, uses the language of the common good, though in a secular context and with a much more complex definition, to call attention to these very concerns his 2018 lecture in honor of Nelson Mandela.[2] After acknowledging both the progress the world has made in human rights as well as the counter-productive measures that have occurred, Obama states that the world is at "a crossroad—a moment in time at which two very different visions of humanity's future compete for the hearts and the minds of citizens around the world. Two different stories, two different narratives about who we are and who we should be." He then asks the audience who they want to be and invokes another term central to this project and medieval ethics—common good. Obama professes:

> Let me tell you what I believe. I believe in Nelson Mandela's vision. I believe in a vision shared by Gandhi and King and Abraham Lincoln. I believe in a vision of equality and justice and freedom and multi-racial democracy, built on the premise that all people are created equal, and they're endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights. And I believe that a world governed by such

[2] Barak Obama, "Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture," 18 July 2018. *Nelson Mandela Foundation*. https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/nelson-mandela-annual-lecture-2018-obamas-full-speech.

> principles is possible and that it can achieve more peace and more cooperation in pursuit of a *common good*. That's what I believe. (My italics)

Common good here is explicitly connected to the principles of equality, justice, freedom, and a multi-racial democracy. These principles, to Obama, are central to the common good of humanity.

In order to achieve this end, Obama goes on to highlight the responsibility citizens of the world have to each other, especially the responsibility the rich (and richer countries) have to the poor (and poorer countries) in this current time of vast income inequality due to unchecked capitalism. His demand regarding the responsibility of the rich to give to the poor (through a tax) bears a striking resemblance to the medieval understanding of common good, as in that theory the rich must care for the poor through charity, as there was a symbiotic relationship between the estates:

> For almost all countries progress is going to have to depend on an inclusive market-based system—one that offers education to every child; that protects collective bargaining and secures the rights of every worker; that breaks up monopolies to encourage competition in small and medium-sized businesses; and has laws that root out corruption and ensures fair dealing in business; that maintains some form of progressive taxation so that rich people are still rich but they're giving a little bit back to make sure that everybody else has something to pay for universal health care and retirement security; and invests in infrastructure and scientific research that builds platforms for innovations.

Despite the similarities, Obama's modern perspective has transformed the common good in innovative ways from Aristotle's or Aquinas's conceptions due to the technological and ideological shifts that have occurred; nevertheless, though, the reciprocal social

relations central to the classical and medieval idea of the common good inform his speech.

What is also clear is that Obama is pointing out explicitly how the unchecked pursuit of wealth destroys communal bonds, much like the medieval authors this project engages with. Instead of referring to avarice as a deadly sin, he labels it "a poverty of ambition to just want to take more and more…." He explains that too often "decisions are also made without reference to notions of human solidarity—or a ground-level understanding of the consequences that will be felt by particular people in particular communities by the decisions that are made." Again, Obama appeals to the common good and a need for those making decisions to have ties to their particular communities so that they have a personal investment in the consequences of their actions. If they do not have a personal investment, they will not see the repercussions of what otherwise seems like logical choices to, for instance, "minimise their tax bills" or take advantage of "lower-cost immigrant labour" to increase their own profits. When all they are thinking about is their profit, the effects on real humans in their communities are forgotten.

Although President Obama appears to use the term and idea of the common good without anxiety as he speaks about contemporary social and economic issues, Mary Keys reminds us that the term is understood by some to be *problematic* precisely because of its religious inheritance, and its subsequent transformation by utilitarian social theory (i.e. "greatest good for the greatest number") and the emergence of individual rights.[3] Even

[3] Mary Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6. Plato, too, had a notion of the common good in his work. Maximilian Jaede, "The Concept

still, Keys makes an argument that understanding Aquinas's thought, particularly his account of common good, is central to modern political theory because "it delves deeply into the philosophic-anthropological and ethical foundations of civic life, and so better enables us to envision the purposes of politics."[4] She thus argues that Aquinas's account of common good is more illuminating than Aristotle's in that it takes more seriously what common denotes, which allows Aquinas to expand on the earlier understanding through his consideration of the distinction between personal and common goods. Keys explains that Aquinas "understands both [kinds of goods] as anchored in the social virtues and ultimately natural law, both of which in turn are oriented toward a transpolitical happiness. Alasdair MacIntyre's *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative,* similarly finds Aquinas's description of common good compelling, though he connects it not to politics but to virtue ethicists' current pursuits.[5] Although MacIntyre finds the concept of common good useful, he contends that a change from shared communal values to focus on individual desires has undermined its significance. MacIntyre's analysis of common good descends from the ancient and medieval conversations about avarice, conversations that he integrates with Marxist theory. He argues that the Middle Ages' Aristotelian/Thomistic concept of the common good is one that was abandoned with the emphasis on individual profit in later

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of the Common Good," Working Paper Intended to Inform the British Academy Project on "Negotiating Inclusion in Times of Transition," https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Jaede.pdf, 2.

[4] Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good*, 4.

[5] *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative.* Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

market-based ethics.[6] As evidenced by the diversity of work on this concept in regards to current ethical and political debates, the complex philosophical discourses from the Middle Ages about avarice's effects on society pose questions that are not obsolete for modern readers. We are still pursuing some of the same ethical questions concerning desires, commodities, and the economic reality of contemporary capitalism.

The Classical and Medieval Concept of Common Good

Aristotle first coined the term *common good (koinon agathon)* in relation to political theory in his *Politics* III; Cicero developed a similar idea in ancient Rome, and Aquinas expanded Aristotle's definition and incorporated it into Christian discourse.[7] These pre-modern versions all share similar premises of the idea of common good: for example, humans are social animals who live in communities and the pursuit of happiness involves the cultivation of virtue in support of the community, not wealth.[8] Unsurprisingly, then, the common good is contrasted with selfish pursuits and corrupt governments. This pursuit should encourage the happiness of all in the community, though as Maximilian Jaede explains, some versions of this idea, like Aristotle's, left out some members of the community's inhabitants who were not politically represented, such as slaves and women.[9] Cicero, another classical thinker, also developed a dominant

[6] Ibid., chapter 2.

[7] For an argument that Aquinas's virtue and legal theory are "in key respects more than Aristotle's path-breaking accounts" and that Aquinas's concept of the *bonum commune* can illuminate current political-philosophic conversations, see Keys, *Aquinas, Aristotle, and the Promise of the Common Good*, 3.

[8] As Jaede points out, political theory has highlighted competing ideas of common good "in the wake of the so-called liberal-communitarian debate in the 1980s," 1.

[9] "The Concept of Common Good," 3.

political version of common good. Anne Middleton argues that his account of *res publica res populi* describes the Middle English coinage of the idea "common profit": "the public good, or commonwealth, is the people's affair, in the sense that 'people' are considered not as a herd, assembled in any sort of way, but as a people, bound by agreement as to law and rights, and associated for mutual benefit or expediency."[10]

But between ancient ideas about common good and fourteenth-century thinkers came the Christianization of the term in the early medieval period by theologians like Thomas Aquinas. Although the concept was widely invoked in the Middle Ages, it is worth noting that even conceptually the idea of common good was perhaps never stable nor fixed.[11] Both academic and literary texts explore and challenge this concept, sometimes questioning if this social ideal was even achievable given the corruption of figures in the community, including most significantly officials in the Church, the very institution that sought to educate the people about salvation. It appears that the notion of

[10] Cicero, *De Re Public*a 1.25.29, (New York: Loeb Classical Library, 1928) as translated and expanded by Anne Middleton in "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum* 53.1 (1978): 94-114, 100.

[11] David Aers explains that though legal petitions sought to reiterate the traditional common profit ideology, there was already the issue of "just what the 'common profit' actually was and who should define it. *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), 30 and chapter 1, Kellie Robertson has also considered the instability of the term common good, see *The Laborer's Two Bodies: Labor and the "Work" of the Text in Medieval Britain, 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), especially chapter 3. M. S. Kempshall puts the issue plainly when he explains that "any attempt to establish what exactly constituted a medieval theory of community, what this 'common unity' meant, and how it related to a notion of the individual, remains highly problematic. Too absolute an antithesis between community and individual presents the common good with too sharp a set of alternatives—either it is the same as the individual good or it is superior. Too smooth a synthesis of community and individual risks obscuring precisely the sort of dialectic which lay at the heart of the scholastic method*." The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 2.

the common good has been problematic, though for different reasons, perhaps from the start. Thoughts of the common good in general are thought to have shifted from those of an ideal political community and moral virtue "towards more pragmatic considerations of the material wellbeing of individuals."[12] This dissertation puts concepts about the issue of common good directly into conversation with those about avarice and its status in late fourteenth-century England.

Avarice's Definition and Elevated Position in the Schema of Sin

Late-medieval people no doubt practiced avarice; however, the social model of the common good or common profit rendered their evaluation of such behavior less laudatory than the contemporary ideology of capitalism does. Since both classical and medieval thinkers regarded the cultivation of virtue as the means to human happiness, either in this world or the next, achieving the common good depended on the moral action of the individual. During the Middle Ages, the Church's schema of the seven deadly sins and their elaboration in penitential manuals provided a moral guidance that exalted the common over the individual profit.

However, because of the increased rise of trade and a moneyed economy in the late Middle Ages, the attitude towards the deadly sins was not static, and the meaning and status of avarice changed. For example, Lester Little has explained how the disruption of

[12] Jaede, "The Concept of Common Good, 4. Jaede cites M.S. Kempshall (in his *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999]) as one side of the argument that identifies this shift having already taken place in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, he argues that a more common view is that this shift starts occurring in the seventeenth century, especially spurred on by Thomas Hobbes' more subjective view of common good.

feudal ideology on the road to capitalism increased avarice's rank on the spectrum of vices during this time, as it subtly replaced Pride in the hierarchy of sins.[13] This reversal, as Little argues, occurs due to a profound shift in the ideals of religious life—the shift from the Benedictine view of poverty as an absence of power (thus a remedy for Pride) and the mendicant view of poverty as a lack of material wealth (and thus a remedy for avarice). As Morton Bloomfield acknowledges, Pride's hegemony was set by this time, so a full-fledged change in the schematic never officially occurred.[14] Even though avarice's preeminence was perhaps never codified, there had been a continuing debate as to which sin is the most dangerous and the proper concatenation largely due to the Biblical passages that assert, in one instance, that Pride is the beginning of all sin (Ecclesiasticus 10:14) and another that states, "For the desire of money is the root of all evils. . . ." (1 Timothy 6:10). Much of the distinction theologians make regarding the chief vice centers on the audience a particular theologian was writing to. For instance, although Cassian wrote for ascetic monks and Gregory to a more general populace, they both agree that pride is the so-called "queen of the vices" in their hamartiologies.[15] They see avarice differently, though; Gregory regards avarice as a sign of inner-emptiness

[13] Lester Little, "Pride Goes Before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom." *The American Historical Review* 76.1 (1971), 16-49.

[14] Bloomfield explains, "In the later Middle Ages avarice gained increasing emphasis as the cause of all sin, but it did not replace pride officially because by that time the Sins had official status." *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of A Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1952), 74.

[15] Carole Straw, "Gregory, Cassian, and the Cardinal Vices" in *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005, 35-58, 51.

while Cassian understands it as an "organic extension of lust, a further aggrandizement of the self."[16]

Augustine, however, equates pride with avarice. As Richard Newhauser, and Lester Little before him, point out, Augustine's definition of avarice is purposefully broader than Cassian's as it flows out to a more psychological definition than the monk's material understanding. To Augustine, *avaritia* is understood as "a desire to possess anything which is not directed towards God, intangible qualities as well as material objects."[17] Augustine also views avarice as the sin that necessitates positive law and one that ultimately caused the need for private property. As D. J. MacQueen illuminates, for Augustine "it is the covetous for whom the positive law acts as a yoke and deterrent." In *De libro aribitrio*, Augustine clarifies that "no punishment would be inflected on men… unless they loved the things that can be taken from them against their will…through constant fear of losing earthly goods they use them with a certain moderation suitable to the continued existence a society with inhabitants like these. The law does not punish the sin of loving such things; what it punishes is the wrong done to others when their rights are usurped."[18] Augustine received this traditional way of understanding avarice from St. Ambrose, his master. St. Ambrose in his commentary on Psalm 118, as D. J. MacQueen

[16] Ibid.

[17] Richard Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Xiii. For Little's similar claim, see "Pride Goes Before Avarice," 20.

[18] *De libro arbitrio* I 15, 31, as translated by D. J. MacQueen in "St. Augustine's Concept of Property" *Recherches Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 8 (1972): 187-229, 193.

reports, "incriminates 'grasping selfishness (*avaritia*)' as the parent-vice responsible for every human ill."[19]

The tension between the inherited schematics of the vices (especially Gregory's pervasive organization) and the social and economic realities and concerns in fourteenth-century England is evident in the subtle changes in what constitutes avarice and the social ramifications of this deadly vice in the literature of this period. Avarice, in particular, became fiercely debated due to the change in the status of money that began in the thirteenth century. As Jacques Le Goff explains, before the thirteenth century, remunerated transactions were considered repulsive and belonged to mercenary categories; on the other hand, "honor and duty were defined in terms of services involving reciprocal obligations."[20] Money, too, was as morally bankrupt as remunerative activity. However, as evidenced in the confessors' manuals, these more critical views of money were upended through the urban schools of the twelfth century that deemed that masters could receive money from their students and that merchants could, though with restrictions and precautions, sell their time and thus charge interest without being condemned as usurers as long as they performed labor for their salary.[21] The money economy brought with it a central shift in the realities of life for many as personal ties

[19] Ibid., 197.

[20] Le Goff, *Time, Work, & Culture*, 120. This idea of reciprocal obligation is best understood in the idea of common good, which I will discuss later in this introduction.

[21] Ibid., 121.

gradually began to be supplanted with more impersonal ones and urban craftsmen's workshops replaced those of manor.[22]

Due to this shifting reality, ways of understanding oneself in a community were changing. The morality, then, that earlier defined relationships between people through work done in the soil was becoming superseded, even while there was a lingering anticommercial conversation occurring.[23] Barbara Rosenwein and Lester Little explain that a theory of social utility was supplied by new translations of Aristotle, mainly through the work of the Dominican scholar William of Moerbeke. They assert that "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas emancipated private property and the Christian merchant. They came to view private property as a necessary instrument of the good life and ordering society."[24] The main shift that allowed this to occur was the focus on intention: "if the merchant sought his modest and honest profit in order to perform those needed services as well as to support his family and charitable enterprises, then he was entitled to profit as a payment for his labour."[25] Thus the friars, though heavily critiqued in religious and literary texts, are responsible for "confronting and eventually de-mystifying the taboo of monetary commercial transactions, starting by outright rejection, then by incorporating elements of commercial practice into their spirituality, and finally by helping to justify worldly commerce in a modified and carefully circumscribed

[22] Little, "Pride Goes before Avarice," 29-30.

[23] Ibid., 30.

[24] Barbara H. Rosenwein and Leister Little, "Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualties," *Past & Present* 63 (1974): 4-32, 29.

[25] Ibid., 30.

form."[26] The nature of *summa*, like Raymond of Peñafort's (1220-1), that encouraged a systematic use of special cases enabled this shift in morality at the ground level that occurred to a greater degree in the *summa* of the thirteenth-century scholastic doctors like in the influential and accessible work by the Dominican John of Freiburg. The friar-intellectuals would disseminate this thinking to the laity through additional handbooks. Both of these are genres that this dissertation puts in direct conversation with works that we would now call literary texts. It is important, though, to reiterate Rosenwein and Little's point that the schoolmen did not provide a motive for profit for profit's sake—that would still be counted as a deadly sin.[27]

Though avarice is most often understood as greed (a word current capitalist societies are perhaps all too familiar with), the latter term as it is understood today does not fully capture all the nuances of meaning in the former, especially in its fourteenth-century context. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* is the earliest citation the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives for both definitions of avarice in its English form, though the concept appeared much earlier than 1386 in Latin (*avāritia*) and Anglo-Norman (*avarice*). Covetous, coming from the Anglo-Norman (*coveitus*) and Latin (*cupiditās*) to English, appears to have a slightly earlier entrance than avarice according to the *OED*, as its first use is listed as 1300 in both forms. By the last quarter of the fourteenth century, the dangers of avarice had become a dominant topic for the three major Middle English poets: from Gower's earliest Anglo-Norman *Mirour de l'Omme* to his late English

[26] Ibid., 31.

[27] Ibid., 30-31.

Confessio Amantis, to Chaucer's dramatization of the vice in several Canterbury pilgrims, and Langland's assertion that it is the sin that defiles Church and community in *Piers Plowman.*

Before I turn to a sustained engagement with the strategies of these texts, I want to shift my focus briefly to provide an outline of the penitential literature that analyzed the nature of avarice. Each of my subsequent chapters links one of these penitential genres to a literary discourse on avarice, revealing how their techniques may have influenced certain vernacular texts. Tracing the connection between penitential and poetic strategies, the rest of this chapter surveys the archive of penitential literature developed to provide moral principles to the laity so that they could successfully fulfill the Fourth Lateran Council's mandate by making a good confession before they received communion at least once each year.

The Moral Landscape of Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Church

The wealth of scholarship concerning constructions of the vices in *moralia* (or "moral literature") of the Middle Ages, and the large number of these works written during the time due to the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215-16), attests to the centrality of the penitential genres in our intellectual history.[28] The overwhelming proliferation of such texts is a result of the numerous papal synods written in the thirteenth century and the 1215 Fourth Lateral Council's mandate (*Omnis utriusque*

[28] For a critical response to this reality, see Richard Newhauser, ed. *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005.

sexus) for the laity's annual confession to their parish priest.[29] This latter process of the penitent admitting and repenting his or her spiritual ills to a parish priest was likened to a patient seeking a physician who needed to discover the cause and condition of their particular disease in order to find the right remedy.[30] This penitential literature, what Leonard Boyle refers to as "pastoralia," sought to educate both priests and the laity in their proper religious and communal roles.[31] This period established a novel approach to penance and confession that, as Boyle explains, "had been gaining ground since the days of the Gregorian reform in the second half of the eleventh century, and which owes much to, first, the pseudo-Augustinian *De vera et falsa poenitentia* and its insistence that priests in confession should take the circumstances of each sin into account, then to Peter Abelard and his teaching on the place of interior penitence in the confession of sins."[32] These new manuals were different from the *libri poentitentiales* that came before as they did more than list stock penances; now a more personalized approach took root. The priest was called to consider the penitent's role in society, and the penitent was required

[29] Leonard Boyle explains that the Fourth Lateran Council is "generally accepted as the most pastoral of all of the general church councils of the Middle Ages. When Innocent III first announced it in April 1213, he stated his aims were to 'extirpate vices and foster virtues, correct abuses and reform morals, suppress heresy and strengthen the faith, settle disorders and establish peace, encourage princes and Christian peoples to aid and maintain the Holy Land.'" "The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology" in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England Tennessee Studies in Literature* 28, edited by Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 30.

[30] Peter Biller, "Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction," in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* York: York Medieval Press, 1998, 3-33. 7.

[31] Ibid, 31.

[32] Ibid., 33.

to examine his or her conscience, orally confess to the priest, and make satisfaction.[33] This more personalized approach is a result of the concept of penance shifting, too. No longer did the manuals focus on physical satisfaction, as Boyle explains had been the tradition for centuries, but rather on an inward repentance that took contriteness of heart to be the central way to expiate sin.[34]

The greater engagement of both priest and penitent in the sacrament required the education of the clergy as well as the laity. Boyle elucidates the two different phases in the Church's effort to accomplish successfully the mandate of annual confession in *Omnis utriusque sexus.* The first is responsible for the manuals composed in the 1260s for the education of priests and might be broken down as those that relate a practical guide to administering penance (*summae poenitentiae*) and those that are more reflexive and academic (*summa confessorum*). This latter category, Boyle relates, were "directed toward the intellectual preparation for priests… providing the priest in his study with some help on how to discern souls and to evaluate their problems in the light of current theology, law, and society."[35] The second wave were those devoted to the education of the penitent and are broader in scope. These texts were written because "contrition and cleanness of heart—the personal efforts of the penitent rather than the formal role of the

[33] Ibid., 34. Boyle explains that "The numb, almost passive role of the penitent in the old penitential literature disappears too under the influence of Abelard and his school. The act of confessing becomes more personal, more aware of self."

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

confessor—were now so important in confession and penance, it was of equal importance that the individual penitent, whether cleric or lay, should have some instruction not just in how to confess properly but in how to combat sin, how to build up the self, how to develop cleanness of heart."[36] Though there is much of this second wave in Latin, there are many, too, in the vernacular throughout Europe.

These manuals interrogated the penitents by questioning if their actions violated the common good of the community and then recommended acts of penance that would restore them back into the community. The medieval confessional practice thus sought to arbitrate violations of the common good by requiring that the penitent provide satisfaction; if the sin involved a kind of appropriation of another's property, restitution was required before the penitent could be reintegrated into society. Thus, sacramental confession was a response to the moral question MacIntyre posed; the priest and penitent identified "how we are (not) to *act*," that is, sinfully, based on the details such as occupation, social class, and education and in accord with the Christian concept of the common good.[37]

Edwin Craun argues that Thomas Aquinas, other moral theologians, and canon lawyers were central to the reform of pastoral care and "its target: the reform of conduct."[38] The influences of these theologians and canon lawyers on the pastoral care

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[36] Ibid., 35.

[37] MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, 73.

[38] Edwin Craun, *Ethics and Power in Medieval English Reformist Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),18.

are sometimes forgotten, as Craun notes, but reveal that reform occurred over centuries "by multiple voices in the theological and canonical traditions."[39] This type of orthodox reform is also evident in some of the manuals for confessors like the *Memoriale Presbiterorum*, a manual similar to John of Freiburg's *Summa Confessorum* in that it is devoted to interrogating the sins of various occupational categories. These texts are products of the first wave that Boyle refers to above that were intended for priests as guides to administering penance (*summae poenitentiae*). This genre of confessors' manuals played a leading role in rehabilitating certain professions that had before been regarded as sinful, as Jacques Le Goff has argued.[40] They also revealed injustices that were occurring within professions and give us insight into orthodox reforming views. For instance, the *Memoriale Presbiterorum* is most scathing of and spends the most time on the malpractices of Justices of the Peace and other officials, which are related to avarice, revealing the detailed condemnation by an ecclesiastical lawyer and administrator of societal dysfunction.[41]

Though there were clearly many works dedicated to guiding a person out of sin through a reformation of conduct by the fourteenth century due to *Omnis utriusque sexus*, the fact that there was no easy reconciliation between the concept (secular and sacred) of good conduct in terms of the community and the individual is evident not only in the

[39] Ibid., 19.

[40] Jacques Le Goff, *Time Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*, Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 117.

[41] Michael Haren, *Sin and Society in Fourteenth-Century England: A Study of the Memoriale Presbiterorum* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2.

numerous penitential manuals that sought to absolve the penitent and restore virtue back to the community through conduct reform but also in the writing of the period.[42] These genres of writing (penitentials and poetry) reveal that what was considered good conduct at this time was connected to one's occupational role as much as an individual's nature. Jacques Le Goff asserts that confessors' manuals were one of the "principal tools in the formation of professional consciousness….from the thirteenth century on."[43] He explains that they serve as valuable evidence that reveal the Church's pressure on certain types of work, like trade, and the newfound individualized focus on spiritual life, in particular the term cases of conscience (*De casibus conscientiae*), a genre which surged in post-1215 confessors' manuals.[44]

Strikingly, the earliest confessors' manuals to be translated into the vernacular were those focused on issues of the professional conscience, such as the *Summa* of John of Freiburg.[45] The contents of these manuals were not only recited in the confessional by confessors but also made available to penitents for private contemplation. Perhaps even more significant is the transmission history of these books on the continent; they were

[42] Haren links the *Memoriale Presbiterorum* to the literary genres of estates satire complaint. *Ibid.,* 79-80. By reimaginings, I mean literary works that borrow from the genres but do not follow their stylistic demands to the letter.

[43] Le Goff, *Time Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*, 112.

[44] Ibid., 114. Cases of conscience brought up questions of professional viability as well as questions of whether one's occupational necessities trumped prescriptions of the Church. Many confessors were unable to navigate these questions without the help of the manuals. *Ibid*., 118.

[45] Le Goff reveals Freiburg's *Summa* was translated into German by the Dominican Berthold Hunlen as early as the end of the thirteenth century. *Ibid*., 112.

evidently largely acquired by merchants, those people who Le Goff refers to as having "professional activities that raised the thorniest questions of conscience."[46] This focus on the professional activities involving the temptation of avarice is also reflected in the three vernacular literary texts analyzed in this dissertation. In this dissertation, I will look at the strategies of Gower, Langland, and Chaucer's texts that engage in promoting the common profit as it was increasingly being challenged by the rise of individual profit and avarice.

In the rest of this dissertation, I consider how each poet reimagines a particular penitential discourse to argue that avarice is the most pernicious vice. My next chapter, "Avarice's Relation to Common Profit in the Prologues to Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Gower's *Confessio amantis,"* turns to a consideration of the estates-based prologues to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and Gower's *Confessio amantis* and their diverse approaches to ideas of communal and individual flourishing, occupational morality, and avarice. I start by tracking how each author treats the traditional idea of common profit and considering the social positions from which the authors are addressing their community before turning to their meditations on the avaricious nature of specific occupations. Though these prologues are not the extent of the authors' engagements with these concepts, this focus nevertheless demonstrates how poets were troubled by the issues undermining the

[46] Ibid. In the twelfth century, Le Goff argues, the Church had to negotiate changes from a tripartite schema of society (the hierarchal division of three classes of *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores*) into a more flexible one that reflected the ever-increasing diversification in trade and profession. For more on the Church's shift from a generally negative view of labor to a more positive theology of labor, see especially Ibid. 110-120. Le Goff argues that it is likely that medieval heresies between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries largely failed due to their inability to define a "spiritual and ethical system appropriate to labor" while the medieval Church "was able to fashion ideological structures suited to the spiritual needs arising out of professional activity." Ibid., 110.

principle of common profit and ultimately how their understanding of that idea shapes, or is shaped by, their conception of avarice. This argument is grounded in a comparison of the literary techniques of estates satire to those of confessors' manuals organized according to the penitent's occupation, like the *Memoriale Presbiterorum* and John of Freiburg's *Summa Confessorum*.

After focusing on avarice's disruption of the common profit ideal in estates satire and occupational penitential manuals, I turn in "Navigating 'The middel weie': The Anatomy of Avarice in John Gower's *Confessio amantis*," to a thorough explanation of John Gower's anatomy of avarice in Book 5 of the *Confessio amantis*. Gower's *Confessio* is organized like the penitential summae, such as Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis,* in that it divides each of the Deadly Sins into various species and elaborates on the differences as well as the similarities. Furthermore, it is comparable to Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* in that it illustrates each species of the sin with exempla. However, Gower's anatomy of sin is much more meticulous and thorough than Mannyng's, and avarice's scope is enlarged more in the *Confessio* than it is in works in the *summa* tradition. Through its expanded scope and politicized scheme, Gower's analysis of avarice reveals the manifold ways in which the vice may corrupt positive and natural law and the severe consequences that corruption may have on every level of society. Gower's lengthy consideration of the vice in general and in the context of love enriches the conversation taking place about the proliferation of urban markets and the fears it conjured.

I identify Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims the Pardoner, Wife of Bath, and Canon's Yeoman to as characterizations of avarice. In my fourth chapter, "Avarice Speaking: Sir Heruy in Piers Plowman and the Wife of Bath, Canon's Yeoman, and Pardoner in *The Canterbury Tales*," I argue that instead of personifying the sins and having them perform a confession, as Langland does in *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer creates confessional voices through the literary technique of *apologia* and turns them into characters. Langland's approach, though ironic, is most recognizable in the Middle English penitential genre forms of confession, a first-person monologue which taught penitents how to examine their consciences; however, Chaucer's technique of characterization draws attention to subtle ways in which aspects of avarice were becoming more morally ambiguous and creates diverse models of interiority by writing characters who elucidate their avaricious nature with no intent to repent. My final chapter, "Avarice Disguised as Mede and Nede in the C-text of *Piers Plowman*" discusses how avarice in the guise of Mede and Nede disrupts the two primary institutions, civil governance and church. Due to avarice's infiltration in the social fabric of the day, Langland loses faith in institutions and their ability to guide souls to achieve salvation.

The penitential tradition is central to the literature of the Middle Ages. Each of the major poems by John Gower, William Langland, and Geoffrey Chaucer ends with a consideration of or act of contrition. Gower's protagonist *Amans*, for instance, gives up the corporeal love he sought throughout the poem to seek a more spiritual one due to his old age. Chaucer, too, famously ends his *Canterbury Tales* with a penitential tale given

by the virtuous Parson, who is an ideal representation of his profession, along with a *Retraction* that offers contrition for his own secular work. Finally, Langland ends *Piers Plowman* with Conscience embarking on a penitential journey after the corruption of sacramental confession by the avarice of the friars. The mode of confession greatly shaped the way these authors thought of their work and arguably themselves as authors. Though Little contends that he does not see as much of a pronounced shift in the literature as he does in the institutions and ideals of religious life regarding avarice's supplanting of pride as the chief vice, this dissertation argues that the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, John Gower, and William Langland express avarice's heightened role as the pre-eminent sin of fourteenth-century England.[47]

[47] Little, "Pride Goes Before Avarice," 49.

CHAPTER II

AVARICE'S RELATION TO COMMON PROFIT IN THE PROLOGUES TO LANGLAND'S *PIERS PLOWMAN*, CHAUCER'S *CANTERBURY TALES*, AND GOWER'S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

> A fair field of folk fond Y ther bytwene
> Of alle manere men, the mene and the riche,
> Worchyng and wandryng as this world ascuth.
> —William Langland, *Piers Plowman C-Text*

Confessors' manuals that considered categories of sinners based on their profession rather than sins and the literary genre of estates satire have much in common: both of these genres seek to address issues of professional morality in fourteenth-century England through the form and content of their texts. Pastoral works, which reflected the ethical program of the Catholic Church, were the most popular form of literature in the period and appropriated by not only the cleric but also the parishioner.[48] Despite the Church's pervasive educational program, which upheld the hierarchical tenets of society, the nature of the social order in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England was being transformed. The substantial growth in professions like merchants, civil servants, and

[48] Ralph Hanna explains that "in the fourteenth century, the need to provide the most fundamental guides to salvation was perceived as considerably more important (and was more widespread) than biblical reading." *London Literature 1300-1380* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9. As Richard Newhauser argues, "the flexibility of a sanctioned moral vocabulary is… demonstrated by the way in which particular genres of representation variously weigh the discourse on vices and virtues." "Introduction: Cultural Construction and the Vices" in *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals* in *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions Series* (London: Brill, 2014), 1-17, 4. Eamon Duffy describes how the lay person appropriated the information found in pastoral handbooks in Chapter 2, "How the Plowman Learned his Paternoster" in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* Second Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 53-88.

petty gentry and their increasing political and social influence challenged the traditional order of society.[49] Poets engage with these competing realities and negotiate the tenets of professional morality in their literary works. Furthermore, they negotiate the implications of the shifting definition of profit— from one that largely denoted *caritas*, or spiritual benefit (MED 1b) to its more modern definition as profit (MED 4a)— that is arguably at the heart of the social transformation occurring at this time.

More nuanced critiques of avaricious behavior and the consequences of that conduct to the larger community came through close analysis of professional duties in not only pastoral literature but also in poetry. The different methods of critique and subsequent conclusions about avarice's effect on the individual and community may be gleaned in fourteenth-century English literature by comparing the dissimilar iterations of estates literature found in the prologues to Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and Gower's *Confessio amantis*. Considering that these three poets were all at a time London-based and share obsessions with themes centering on the urban community and pastoral care, especially the roles of the estates and specific professions, it is perhaps surprising that each yields a distinct response to avaricious behavior and their critique of it in various professions.

This chapter takes these prologues as its main subject because they demonstrate a sustained engagement with attitudes regarding avaricious practices in specific professions and estates in fourteenth-century England through their appropriation of estates satire and

[49] For more details about how this shift and the political events possibly shaped the work of Chaucer and Gower, see Paul Strohm, "Form and Social Statement in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (1979): 17-40.

pastoral literature; furthermore, they begin from diverse vantage points given their dissimilar stations in society. Though these authors were writing in roughly the same area during the same time in the English vernacular, they had different professional backgrounds and thus different social positions and professional proclivities that tend to be overlooked in studies that place them in dialogue. A reason for this may be due to the lack of solid biographical evidence scholars have had about Gower and Langland. [50] Though much is known about Geoffrey Chaucer's life due to his civil service, many details about John Gower's and William Langland's exact professional commitments remain speculative.[51]

Current work, however, is providing more insight into Gower's biography. Due to surviving historical documents, most critics agree that Gower was likely a part of a family of landowners and himself an investor in real estate. Recent studies have also illuminated Gower's probable legal training.[52] Sebastian Sobeski's recent article in *Speculum* provides more evidence of the probable income disparity and rank between the

[50] Jill Mann and Anne Middleton, for instance, have put these poets into dialogue to different ends. Mann argues that Chaucer's portraits of the pilgrims in particular are indebted to his contemporaries. Middleton finds Gower and Langland more similar; she argues that William Langland and John Gower should be considered exemplars of what she defines "public poetry," a poetic style that is plain and speaks to the community in "common speech" while offering the "common truth." Anne Middleton, "Public Poetry and Richard II," *Speculum* 53.1 (1978): 94-114. Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). Sebastian Sobecki has most recently researched the relationship between Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower. He argues that Chaucer had a Southwark audience, where the Tabard Inn is located, instead of a London one in mind when he was writing his *Canterbury Tales* despite previous critical consensus. He also draws significant attention to Gower's likely higher social position, see "A Southwark Tale: Gower, the 1381 Poll Tax, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*," *Speculum* 92.3 (July 2017): 631-660.

[51] For more on Chaucer's biography through historical documents, see *Chaucer's Life Records*, eds. Martin M. Cow and Clair C. Olson (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[52] Ibid., 630.

two. Gower was likely much more financially well off—his net worth arguably three times more— than Chaucer towards the end of their lives when they were both crafting their major English work.[53] Chaucer, though at a time a successful controller of customs and from a family of successful vintners, had many debts in later life and was never as wealthy as Gower, even in his two-year position as clerk of the king's works.[54]

There is even less certainty about William Langland's life than John Gower's; however, from his poetry, it is clear that his position in English society was quite different from those of his two contemporaries. As Derek Pearsall admits in his Introduction to the C-text, what we know about the author of *Piers Plowman* comes from deductions about the protagonist of the poem, Wille, and is largely based on the apparent auto-biographical lines in the poem. If critics are right to align Wille with William Langland, the author was likely a university educated, "half-trained" cleric who had a wife and daughter. As Pearsall notes, Langland's family's contribution to his university education made him like Chaucer's Clerk, but the fact that he married kept him from achieving any high clerical position, which puts him in a slightly different occupational milieu.[55]

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[53] Ibid, 647.

[54] Ibid. For more on Geoffrey Chaucer's life, see Paul Strohm, *The Poet's Tale: Chaucer and the Year that Made the "Canterbury Tales"* (London: Penguin, 2015); and Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992). Paul Stohm has argued compellingly for the different stakes Gower and Chaucer had in Ricardian politics, explaining that Chaucer was more dependent on the royal faction's success while Gower could afford to not align himself with factions. Strohm relates their different political stances to the form of their final work. See, Strohm, "Form and Social Statement."

[55] Ibid, 20. For more on what is known about William Langland's life from historical documents, see Ralph Hanna, *William Langland* (Aldershot, Variorium: 1993). For the argument that Wille (and thus perhaps Langland himself) was in minor orders due to the apologia in the C-text (Passus V.1-108), see Fiona

Despite their likely disparate positions in the English social order, all three Christian poets are deeply invested in questioning how their community is shaped by the individual and vice versa. As evidenced in the penitential literature, salvation is bound up with one's profession at this time in that the Church maintained that certain professional habits could keep one from achieving redemption and thus this issue is directly tied to salvation.[56]

The Estates Form of the Prologues

Like confessors' manuals that focus on the profession of the penitent, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and John Gower's *Confessio amantis* all engage with the tradition of common profit in their evaluations of each estate, though they do so in diverse manners and, accordingly, achieve different conclusions as to its definition and sustainability. John Gower's *Confessio amantis* is not the work most critics consider when they study his employment of estates satire because the *Vox clamantis* and *Mirour de l'Omme* offer a more direct engagement with the genre. But the estates material in the *Prologue* to the *Confessio amantis* is just as rich and

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Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter 2; and Robert Adams, *Langland and the Rokele Family. The Gentry Background to Piers Plowman* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2013).

[56] As Le Goff explains, merchants are one of the professions that saw from the twelfth century to the fourteenth a drastic change in the Church's teaching on whether their occupations would ensure eternal damnation or not. Indeed, the occupations that saw these shifts were ones that surrounded trade and thus financial profit. LeGoff muses, "How often the Middle Ages must have witnessed the inner drama of men anxiously wondering whether they were really hastening toward damnation because they were engaging in a trade suspect in the eyes of the Church. The merchant naturally comes to mind." *Time, Work, & Culture*, 111. David Aers helpfully explains that the salvation of a Christian cannot be understood in abstraction from the webs of relationships, narratives, and sacraments that constitute the Church. *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England, 1360-1409* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), viii.

perhaps gives us insight into Gower's final thoughts on the topic. Like Langland, Gower revises his final major work multiple times.[57] Jill Mann has argued that Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims' portraits are influenced by Langland's and Gower's texts.[58] If we consider Gower and Langland to be voicing a "'common voice' to serve a 'common good,'" as Anne Middleton argues in her definition of Ricardian public poetry, we must consider how these poets in their prologues situate what Middleton refers to as "common love" in alignment with the idea of common profit being circulated in confessors' manuals or as something entirely different, and their different social interests and thus perceptions of avaricious behavior will be my lens to adding to this conversation.[59]

Despite their similarities, these poets undeniably come to different conclusions about what a common love works to do and, as mentioned earlier, have different communal stakes that shape their idea of what common love would mean and what worldly factors get in the way of it. I will discuss below how Gower arguably finds more hope in the traditional estates administration and the role of the poet in it while Langland and Chaucer both find that, ultimately, common profit in its current form is not attainable. I want to build on Middleton's claims about Gower's and Langland's public

[57] John H. Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 27-29. 115, 135.

[58] Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 207.

[59] Anne Middleton argues that common love is "an ideal of communal responsibility founded not in an estates conception of one's duties, but in an altruistic and outward turning form of love that might be called 'common love' to emphasize its symmetry and contrast with that singular passion which expresses itself in literature in the inward self-cultivation sometimes called 'courtly love,'" *Public Poetry and Richard II*, 96. However, I would argue that this definition is quite close to common profit and that professional duties cannot be as divorced from communal love.

poetry as speaking towards the "common" in light of the well-documented challenges to ideas of common profit during this century, which I discussed in the first chapter.[60] Furthermore, I will focus on how these authors', along with Chaucer's, diverse approaches to ideas of professional morality and avarice distinguish or connect them to a particular shared poetic voice.

Why the prologues to these works? Though these works engage with many diverse genres, their prologues are all participating in the form and content of estates literature. When I define estates satire, I take Jill Mann's delineation of the genre as "any literary treatments of social class which allow or encourage a generalised application."[61] This genre is deeply engaged with questions about common profit and each profession's role in it. So it makes sense to consider parts of their texts to draw out significant similarities and differences in their final approaches to these topics in their use of the estates satire form. This method will disclose how poets were engaging in the issues surrounding the definition of common profit and ultimately how their understanding of that idea shapes, or is shaped by, their conception of avarice, especially in regards to professional morality. To begin this inquiry, I consider the author's social position before turning to their meditations on the avaricious nature of specific occupations.

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[60] Ibid. Middleton explains that the common "can denote the commonwealth as a whole, a community or fellowship, the populace or citizenry, as well as the 'common people,' distinguished from either nobility or Clergy or both as the 'third estate.'"

[61] Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 3. Mann takes her definition from Ruth Mohl's, who argued that the genre is composed four characteristics: 1) "an enumeration of the 'estates' or social and occupational classes, whose aims seem to be completeness"; 2) a "lament over the shortcomings of the estates"; 3) "the philosophy of the divine ordination of the three principal estates, the dependence of the state on all three, and the necessity of being content with one's station"; and 4) "an attempt to find remedies, religious or political, for the defects of estates."

The Poet's Role in the Common Good and Against Avarice in the *Confessio amantis*

John Gower's prologue to his *Confessio amantis* seems to be the best place to start such an inquiry. Of the writers I am discussing, he is the most dedicated to the traditional idea of common profit, and thus the immutability of the three traditional classes, throughout his three major works despite his unrelenting critique of the corruptions within each estate. Eric Stockton argues that Gower's attachment to this traditional view is ironic because it "to some extent slights his own group," which Stockton argues is the middle class.[62] However, if Sobecki is correct that Gower "could have taken the knighthood during any year of his later life had he so wished," then Gower might have not really been invested in the middle class, as he himself could (or did) identify as a member of the gentry.[63] Gower is the wealthiest among those I consider in this chapter, and it is perhaps not surprising that he is the most invested in and hopeful about the traditional social organization and common good.

Gower chose to write his last major work in the vernacular, "the comune vois which mai noght lie" (Prol. 124). A similar sentiment is found in his Latin tract *Vox clamantis,* where he explains that he speaks in the voice of the people: "I am not speaking of these things on my own part; rather, the voice of the people has reported them to me, and it complains of their adverse fate at every hand. / I speak as the masses speak, and

[62] Eric W. Stockton, ed. and trans., *The Major Latin Works of John Gower* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), 17.

[63] Sobecki, "A Southwark Tale: Gower, the 1381 Poll Tax, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*," 644. Paul Strohm, too, distinguished Gower from Chaucer by explaining that the former's poetics are shaped by his wealth, which enables him to have concerns that were not bound to political factions. "Form and Social Statement."

even as I write I lament over what I say, namely, that no estate is pious as in days gone by" (III. Prol. 11-12).[64] Stockton claims against Middleton, that Gower writes in the voice of the people to protect himself and not because he "democratically holds the view of the populace at large in high esteem."[65] Rather, he is engaging with the formula of *vox populi, vox dei* that the voice of the people is related to the divine and thus can instruct even the prince.[66] Both readings are helpful, as Gower's defense of the common people's state becomes more evident in the *Confessio amantis*. Gower continues this rhetorical strategy of evoking the commons in his critique in the prologue to the *Confessio amantis*.[67] Along with Langland and Chaucer, Gower participated in the vernacular movement that sought to find the truth.[68] There are two dedications to Gower's *Prologue*—one praising Richard II and a revised version solely dedicated to Henry IV. Though written under two different regimes, these versions share much in common, and the final dedication reveals most explicitly that those in some form of power are being addressed: "towards hem that now be grete" (Prol. 78).

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[64] Every instance of the English from Gower's *Vox clamantis* is from Stockton, *The Major Latin Works*, 113.

[65] Ibid., 19.

[66] Ibid. Stockton references Gower's explanation of this voice in Book 7 of the *Vox clamantis*: "What I have set down is the voice of the people, but you will also see that where the people call out, God is often there" (7.1469-70).

[67] As Jean E. Howard and Paul Strohm argue, the rise of Commons in Parliament, and the subsequent institution of the "commons petition" made the king answerable to the voice of the people. Therefore, it would have been a safe and common method through which to engage with the king's policies, and one that the genre Mirror for Princes employs. "The Imaginary 'Commons,'" *JMEMS* 37.3 (2007): 449-577, 449.

[68] Hanna, *London Literature*.

While the duties of the second estate, especially the king, is a chief concern of the text, especially given Book 7's meditation on the education of Alexander, I would also argue that those in any sort of power position (in all of the estates) are implicated and that the corruption of the Church is the main focus of the prologue, which, along with the sheer size of Book 5 that treats the vice, reiterates avarice's central status in the work. While Gower considers the corruptions of the aristocracy, for 111 lines (including the Latin incipit) and those of the commons for 91, he writes about the clergy for 315 lines, almost three times longer than the other estates. The quantity of material critiquing the current church's avaricious pursuits reveals that Gower sees it as the chief vice of the Church, and thus the chief vice that stands in the way of common profit. Avarice is a love of "singuler profit" (8.3038). This vice is central to the corruption of the common good that peace and love promote, a sentiment that is shared most explicitly by Langland.

Gower alludes to current events in the prologue, notably the papal schism and the recurrent wars between England, Spain, and France, and his approach to societal critique is not only abstracted by analogy, biblical and classical exempla, but also his sustained engagement with the convention of the Golden Age (or the idea that the past was ideal instead of corrupt like the present). Gower's early use of the word "good" in his *Prologue* reveals that he sees his writing as an act of history making that is in line with a poet's proper professional duty. He explains that

> Forthi good is that we also
> In oure tyme among ous hiere
> Do wryte of newe som matiere,
> Ensampled of these olde wyse,

So that it myhte in such a wyse,
Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,
Beleve to the worldes eere
In tyme comende after this. (Prol. 4-11)

To Gower writing about his society's corruption, even in ambiguous terms, is a way of guiding later societies, which reveals the communal responsibility of a poet and the particular way a poet can participate in pastoral care. Like the priest, whose obligation is to teach charity, poets, it would appear, must record the current situation so that others may hear of it and thus learn from it.[69]

Gower's idea of the professional duty of the poet aligns him with earlier authorities, both secular and sacred. James Simpson argues that Gower highlights "discrepancies and contradictions between the different traditions he is using."[70] Though Simpson does not offer an explanation as to why Gower would choose to make this rhetorical move, I want to suggest that Gower does so in his *Confessio amantis* because he is participating, as Zeeman argues of *Piers Plowman* and *Dives and pauper,* in a tradition of debate literature that is responding to the challenges confronted by those engaging in pastoral care.[71] After all, the rest of the *Confessio amantis* following the

[69] Perhaps it is not surprising then that Gower is recorded to have used the English neologism history in place of *historia*. As Peck explains, five out of the six times he uses "history," it rhymes with memory. Chaucer uses story instead for a similar idea. Peck, *Confessio Amantis Volume III*, 6.

[70] James Simpson, "Ironic Incongruence in the Prologue and Book I of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Neophilologus* 72 (1988): 617-632.

[71] Zeeman, "Pastoral Care by Debate: The Challenge of Lay Multiplicity," *JMEMS* 48.3 (2018): 435-459. Russell Peck provides another answer to this question when he explains that Gower should be read as a folklorist. He argues that the poetic voice of the *Confessio Amantis* "differs from the private, more individual voicing of characters of Chaucerian characters, but rather, like a figure of the folk, is a voicing of diverse cultural strands as if they were components of a communal psyche" (*Confessio Amantis, Volume*

prologue is a debate between Genius and Amans unfolding as it were in an imagined confessional space. Though Simpson is right to point out that Gower allegedly leaves the more philosophical estates satire to pursue instead the amatory in Book 1, his reengagement with the first theme, and indeed a moral investigation of love, is apparent in the demi-prologue to Book 5 and in the content that proceeds it.

Though Gower spends much time cataloguing the vices of the institutions of his day, he does not see the world as beyond repair. Rather he sees it as being renewed every day:

> I thence for to touche also
> The world which neweth every dai,
> So as I can, so as I mai. (Prol. 58-60)

He writes that during this previous time, "Tho was the vertu sett above / And vice was put under fote" (Prol. 116-7). This repetitive recalling of a distant, though still comprehensible, past when society flourished not only places Gower in a legible literary tradition but also ends up making his take on common profit ultimately more optimistic than his contemporaries Langland and Chaucer despite his bleak commentary on London society.

Gower's three major works are aimed at criticizing avaricious practices with a particular emphasis on the prelates' (or the clergy's) role in disseminating this vice, but, as mentioned above, all works also have a profound hope in the idea of common profit.

III, 7). He further responds, "Perhaps more than any single rhetorical ploy in Gower, it is the folkloric instinct that makes his tales so different from their sources. It is this same instinct that sets him apart from Chaucer, Langland, and the Gawain/Pearl-poet," 9.

The mounting importance of avarice in Gower's oeuvre and during the time he was writing is underlined in his final work. Though Gower most exhaustively critiques the avaricious proclivity of the clergy, he begins his *Prologue* with a consideration of the ruling elite and explains that misuse of the law and thus a promotion of disorder was central in allowing the current culture's corruption to creep in. His choice to start with the ruling elite reiterates his aristocratic audience. What caused vice to penetrate the current society, according to Gower, was a lack of transparency, which is evidenced in the Latin incipit to the section that treats the aristocracy:

> *…Progenuit veterem concors dileccio pacem,*
> *Dum facies hominis nuncio mentis erat:*
> *Legibus vnicolor tunc temporis aura refulsit,*
> *Iusticie plane tuncque fuere vie.*
> *Nuncque latens odium vultum depingit amoris,*
> *Paceque sub ficta tempus ad arma tegit;*
> *Instar et ex varisis mutabile Camelíontis…*[72]

His explanation of the ideal time being "*dum facies hominis nuncio mentis erat*" or "when the face was the messenger of a person's thought" is one that reiterates his conventional physiognomic understanding of good conduct; a person's moral state may be discerned by their outward appearance. A well-ordered society, in Gower's idiom, is one in which participants' duties are recognizable and transparent according to their profession, an argument that is reiterated in penitential manuals like the *Memoriale*

[72] "…Harmonious love engendered the old-time peace, when the face was the messenger of a person's thought: then the unicolored air of times was aglow with laws, and then the paths of justice were broad and even. But now hidden hatred presents a painted face of love, and clothes under false peace an age at arms. The law carries itself like the chameleon, changeable with every varied thing..." As translated by Andrew Galloway, *Confessio Amantis Volume I,* ed. Peck., note 1, 47.

presbiterorum as well as in estates literature. Gower's critique of the ruling elite is linked to avarice as it is subtly implicated in their misuse of justice: the fact that leaders are using the rhetoric of peace as a disguise to promote war for their own profit. Peck considers Gower's focus on the ruling elite's deception to be alluding to England's recurrent wars with France, Spain, and Scotland. As he notes, the three-year truce of 1389 with France and Scotland failed due to profiteering.[73] Like the Church, the aristocracy's corruption is rooted in avarice, or the pursuit of individual gain at the expense of peace and thus the common profit.

Though the ruling elite is implicated in this vice, the first explicit use of avarice in the *Confessio* is in its Latin form "*auvaricia*" found in the Latin incipit that introduces the clergy in the prologue (Prol. iii). In this section, practices of avarice, like simony, are expounded on and deemed as opposing the virtue of "th'estat of clerks" (Prol. 202). Indeed, Gower makes clear that the clergy should have no jurisdiction over the world as worldly aims put their profession in turmoil; there is a direct opposition between giving to the community (charity) and worldly, personal gain (avarice). For Gower, the clerks must

> make pes between the kynges
> After the lawe of charite,
> Which is the proper duete
> Belongende unto the presthode. (Prol. 257-9)

[73] Peck, *Confessio Amantis Volume I*, note 167, 245.

Gower is explicit that if the clergy are not able to submit themselves to the law of charity, society will fail. Indeed, the clergy are to blame for the monarchy's profiteering ambitions, as they were unable to preach charity and instead promoted avarice, creating a chain reaction in the other estates.

The concern over peace, which is created through common profit, is central to the *Confessio amantis* and to Gower's two other works that seek to create stability in the estates by reasserting the traditional order of society. Common profit is linked directly to charity in the clerical duties, which is tied to Christ's love. The individual ambitions of the clergy, however, especially their desire for worldly gain (avarice), has caused them to devour

> Under the keye of avarice
> The tresor of the benefice,
> Whereof the povere schulden clothe
> And ete and drinke and house bothe… (Prol. 315-318)

The poor are those that are "devoured" when they are misled and "withoute guide" due to avarice's hold on the first estate (Prol. 390-92). Gower repeatedly reminds the reader that "every clerk his herte leith / to kepe his world in special" instead of having desires to benefit his community, which, again, is the true "estate of clerkes" (Prol. 382-3, 202).

Due to their covetousness, the clergy have no desire to amend and serve justice to those who can pay them off with worldly goods. Gower remarks that the consequence of the clergy's avarice falls on the poor of the community because those who do them injustice are left unpunished. Indeed,

The strokes falle upon the smale,
And upon othre that ben grete
[The clergy] lacketh herte for to bete. (Prol. 426-8)

Instead of caring about their community's welfare, they do not deliver true justice because they want to profit. Again, Gower reminds his reader that the clergy are those responsible for maintaining the peace between the estates. The *Fasciculus morum* shares a similar lament on how both secular and sacred authorities no longer judge based on wisdom due to their covetousness: "*Patet ergo quodmodo speculum, hoc est bona seculi, abstulit sapienciam*" (IV.110).[74] Thus due to their avarice, "*pax patrie perditur*," or the country's peace is lost (IV.111).[75]

Gower further complains about how his current society is in disorder when he describes how this deceitful act of "desguise" relates to the papal schism, an event that has concealed the truth due to an overwhelming desire for individual gain (Prol. 364). The narrator explains that the religious all argue about the Pope and his true "astat," but they cannot reach an agreement, or find truth, about the matter due to the fact that

… ech of hem himself amendeth
Of worldes good, bot non entendedth
To that which comun profit were. (Prol. 375-377)

[74] "Thus it is evident how the world, that is, the goods of the world, has taken away wisdom."

[75] Wenzel, Siegfried, ed. *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*. University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, 319.

Like the main critique in the incipit about the ruling elite, the clergy focus on their avaricious, worldly pursuits and in doing so forget their true occupational duties and role in common profit. Both Langland and Chaucer will both go into greater detail about the collusion between the occupations in the first estate to show in more specific ways how this avarice is being carried out, but Gower's direct implication of the country's peace is most similar to the sentiments found in the *Fasciculus morum.*

Though lower on the social scale, laborers are better off spiritually than the clerks who know better yet still sin, but Gower does not identify the plowman, for instance, as an occupation that could guide the community to salvation. Gower finds that

> It were betre dike and delve
> And stonde upon the ryhte feith,
> Than knowe al that the Bible seith
> And erre as somme clerkes do. (Prol. 352-355)

Here, though, Gower carefully distinguishes between the priest who exemplifies the true duties of the profession and those who do not through the biblical example of Simon and Aaron. Gower is also concurrently attacking Wycliffites. Simon, who chose himself for the priesthood for worldly gain is contrasted with Aaron, whom God chose for the position. Simon, the figure that lends his name to the practice of simony, offers spiritual preference for gold and is rebuked by Peter in Acts 8:21. As Peck notes, Simon's name became synonymous with ecclesiastical corruption in the Middle Ages.[76] Gower uses this example to contrast the virtue of the clerical profession personified through Aaron and

[76] Peck, *Confessio Amantis* Vol. 1, 245.

his charity with Simon and his vicious practice of selling the church for his own worldly gain.

Gower later uses another Biblical example, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, when he offers the first exemplum of the work, to comment further on how the division and misgovernance of men are the reasons for the corruptions of the society and to implicate further the avaricious clergy. Peck notes that Gower makes this similar biblical device to tie anachronistically Daniel's commentary on the dream to the current corruptions in society in the seventh book of his *Vox clamantis*.[77] Gower explains that division is at the heart of idolatry (the worship of "worldes good" (Prol. 847), and this is proved "Thurgh venym which that medled is / In holy cherche of erthly thing" (Prol. 858-859). He reiterates that the Church should not be involved with worldly pursuits, as Christ explains "That no man may togedre serve / God and the world" (Prol. 861-2).

Though the clergy have set the wrong example for the other estates, Gower reassures his readers that God will punish those corrupt members and not those who are good. Like Langland, Gower employs an apocalyptic warning at the end of his discussion of the clerical estate to explain that those who are evil will be judged. He warns,

> The vice of hem that ben ungoode,
> Is no reproef unto the goode,
> For every man hise oghne werkes
> Schal bere, and thus as of the clerkes
> The goode men ben to comende,
> And alle these othre God amende.
> For thei ben to the worldes ÿe
> The mirour of ensamplerie,

[77] Ibid., 248, Latin marginalia Vn.

To reulen and to taken hiede
Between the men and the Godhiede. (Prol. 489-498)

Gower ends his section on the clergy by reiterating that their true duty is to be the mirror and example to people. He repeats versions of the word "good" in this quotation to highlight that individuals in society are not automatically damned due to the vicious and further reiterates that every person will bear their own deeds. Throughout the prologue, Gower continues to remind his reader that "every worldes thing is vein" (560), repeating avarice's chief position as an opponent of divine love, and thus common good:

The world stant ever upon debat,
So may be seker non astat:
Now hier now ther, now to now fro,
Now up now doun, this world goth so,
And evere hath don and evere schal… (Prol. 567-572)

The one constant in life is God's love that enables peace, and the clergy should share this message with the people. If every worldly pursuit is in vain, how then does Gower consider his role as a poet?

Gower returns to the themes of earnest and game, the area between them being his poetic *modus operandi* (Prol. 17-19), to explain how the clergy mislead their followers by telling them fictions that are not to uphold common profit, but to benefit themselves in the world:

Bot yet between ernest and game
Ful ofte it torneth otherwise.
With holy tales thei devise
How meritoire is thilke dede

> Of charité, to clothe and fede
> The povre folk and for to parte
> The worldes good, bot thei departe
> Ne thenken noght fro that thei have. (Prol. 462-469)

Here his focus again is on the clergy's desire for singular profit ("the worldes good") rather than communal profit. Though they should be telling exempla in line with God's divine wisdom, they instead use them to deceive the people for worldly gain. This critique is leveled against the clergy and their fictions is similar to Langland's critique of pilgrims and minstrels and is the practice of Chaucer's Friar and Pardoner. In the *Prologue* to *Piers Plowman*, Wille explains that the pilgrims, "Wenten forth on here way with many wyse tales / And hadde leue to lye aftir, al here lyf-tyme" (Prol. 49-50).[78] Chaucer's Pardoner in his *apologia*, explains that through telling "tales" he conducts his "bisinesse" but that his "entente is nat but for to winne, / And nothing for the correccioun of sinne" (*Pardoner's Prologue*, 341, 399, and 403-4).[79] Though these authors all employ their critiques of professions that use fiction to deceive, it is important to note that they are all themselves fiction writers and have a stake in the morality of the role. Gower, who spends the most time offering an explanation of his approach in the *Confessio amantis*, promotes the view that the role of the poet is to write in the "middel weie… / … a bok between the tweie, / Somewhat of lust, somwhat of lore" (Prol. 17-19).

[78] Although Langland's *Piers Plowman* exists in three versions, I look specifically at the final version, the C-text, in *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008). References in the text are to passus and line numbers.

[79] All references to Geoffrey Chaucer's works are from Larry D. Benson, ed. *The Wadsworth Chaucer* (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 1987).

He goes on to explain that he will write of love and the virtues and vices in particular that surround it in the rest of the work.

Love, to Gower, is the remedy to division, the ultimate evil, and is the vehicle of peace. Common profit, then, exemplifies a well-ordered society. Gower explains that history shows that strife occurs in societies, not due to God or blind fortune, but due to men's "misgovernance" and their own vices and stakes in worldly goods rather than the higher good. Gower returns to the definition of good, which he first used to explain the true duty of the poet at the beginning of the *Prologue* to record current events, but this time he directly engages with a Christian understanding of good—in other words, love between people as a way to achieve both worldly and spiritual flourishing. He explains,

> Forthi good is, whil a man may,
> Echon to sette pes with other
> And loven as his oghne brother;
> So may he winne worldes welthe
> And afterward his soule helthe. (Prol. 1048-1052)

Through his amplification of instances of the concept of good, Gower reveals his engagement with the matter of pastoral care and especially the role of the poet in it. Though language can be completely unreliable and further create division, as seen in his reference to the Tower of Babel and his comments on the avaricious clergy who craft tales to deceive, Gower at least entertains poetry's, thus language's, ability to work to share truth and thus love and heal division.

Evidence of this claim is seen in his final, classical exemplum in the prologue, the example of Arion, the Ovidian harpist who is a peacemaker and also a metaphor for how Gower perceives himself as poet.[80] Arion played his harp in such a measured fashion that

> the comun with the lord,
> And the lord with the comun also,
> He sette in love bothe tuo
> And putte awey malencolie. (Prol. 1066-9)

Therefore, the poet's role is similar to those crafting the confessors' manuals based on professions. Each profession has a particular role in society and has vices to avoid. At the end of the *Prologue*, poetry participates in the pastoral care in that it appears provide answers as to how to create harmony and shift desires away from the disorder created by the sins, especially avarice, and thus acts as a means for renewing the desire for common profit. This role appears, to Gower, to be the duty of the poet and a method in which to combat the consequences of avarice in other occupations.

The Corrosion of the Common Good in the *Prologue* to the C-Text of *Piers Plowman*

Langland's allegorical poem *Piers Plowman* also engages in the pastoral care debate in fourteenth-century English society. I will turn now to interrogating the grammar and strategy of Langland's engagement with avarice and its effect on common profit in the C-text's prologue. This prologue, like Gower's, reveals the types of tensions

[80] Peck notes this in Vol. 1 of his critical edition, 253, n. 1053-54 and cites R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990) for an extended analysis; along with James Simpson's *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 289; and his own *Kingship and Common Profit*, 22-23.

Langland is interested in exploring through avarice in relation to the common profit and the implications of the estates in that concept. But this relationship is complicated, as Aers points out, because the poem unfolds through processes of dialectical exploration. Answers are subjected to critical reflection and supersession.[81] Zeeman, too, finds this poem challenging in that she reads it as a response in the form of debate to the complexity of the Christian and moral life.[82] Langland's presentation, then, of common profit in the *Prologue*, like in the rest of the poem, is multifaceted and elusive due to this dialectical process and the presence of numerous allegorical debaters. The collection of multiple voices, especially apparent in later passus, makes the poem have an almost dizzying effect on any reader that seeks, like Wille (the dreamer), to learn how to Dowel, that is, how to live virtuously. Indeed, the narrator wonders if that is even achievable in the current social world. Like Gower's *Confessio amantis*, *Piers Plowman*'s prologue is a meditation on medieval society and the corruption therein. The tone is even more scathing than Gower's and, though Langland remains dedicated to preserving the traditional social estates model in the *Visio*, finds that it fails at the end of the poem due to covetousness.

Much of Langland's ire is focused on the clergy and how their avaricious nature punishes the people whom they should be guiding to salvation. His first use of the word covetousness in the prologue (and thus the work) occurs when he describes the friars who

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[81] See David Aers, *Beyond Reformation?: An Essay on William Langland's Piers Plowman and the End of Constantinian Christianity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015) for more on Langland's dialectical mode.

[82] Zeeman, "Pastoral Care by Debate."

preach to the people "for profit of the wombe" and for "coueytise" (Prol. 57, 59). Instead of speaking to the estate as a whole, Langland takes the time to implicate specific professions in the estate. Like the writer of the confession manual *Memoriale presbiterorum* and traditional estates satirists, Langland and Chaucer both catalogue the distinct professions within the estates, and their specific corruptions, in more detail than Gower does in his *Prologue*. This more comprehensive critique discloses more specific professional corruptions that plagued London in the fourteenth century.

Though the author of the *Fasciculus morum* reiterates the more traditional view that "*contemptus mundi et voluntaria paupertate*" (IV.5), or contempt of the world and voluntary poverty are the opposite virtues to avarice and cupidity, Langland's poem is more reflective about the potential avaricious corruptions of those who appear to give up the world, like the wasters and the mendicant friars than the preacher's handbook.[83] Since the mendicants are a group that Langland focuses the most on throughout the work, I will consider their presence in the poem at length in the final chapter. For now, I will focus on their entrance to the poem in the *Prologue* because it is the first time, as mentioned above, that covetousness is used and directly implicated in the world's misfortune.

Langland chooses to start, following the traditional estates order, with the clergy. Langland's critique of friars as figures who should be examples of clerical piety is scathing. Like lawyers who only open "here mouth ar moneye were hem shewed," Wille observes that many friars in all four orders have "here moneye and merchandise marchen

[83] *Fasciculus Morum*, 313.

togyderes" (Prol. 165, 61). Instead of focusing on leading the people to salvation through charity, they approach confession as a business, transforming their spiritual profession into that of a secular merchant who cares only for his or her own worldly gain. Langland provides an apocalyptic warning, which highlights the consequences of friars who undermine confession in this way and makes the stakes of their covetous behavior even more dangerous to common profit than Gower's assessment of this issue. As their role is crucial to the spiritual health of the world, he forewarns, "And but holi chirche and charite choppe adoun suche shryuars / The moste mischief on molde mounteth vp faste" (Prol. 64-5). As mentioned above, the friars are not the only religious group that has been poisoned by covetousness, and thus the future of the world of the poem seems quite dim.

As Langland goes through each of the religious professions from friar to pardoner, he focuses on the corrupt collusion between them and how they benefit each other due to their own selfish worldly ambitions.[84] For instance, the parish priests and the pardoners are allowed to run amuck due to the Bishop's negligence: "For the parsche prest and the pardoner parten the seluer / That the pore peple in parsches sholde haue yf thei ne were" (Prol. 79-80). Similar to Gower's thoughts on the vicious effects of avaricious clerics, especially on the poor, Langland also explains that their covetousness takes necessary goods from the poor, who desperately need them, which throws off the balance of society. Further the mobility of priests who went to London after the plague to make more money is repudiated by Langland as a practice of "symonye" (Prol. 84). Aers

[84] It should be noted that Langland's is a more collective critique of the profession rather than Chaucer's more individualized characters, which I will discuss in the next section.

explains that corrupt members of the third estate, like the "wasters" have their "analogues in the clerical estate: equally mobile people, totally bound into the market and the quest for self-interest, they are religious mendicants, friars bound to the life of evangelical poverty (Prol. 58-65)."[85]

Aers asserts that this kind of newfound mobility of priests moving from smaller parishes to London "threatened community solidarities and the traditional social model [Langland] cherished almost as much as the market which he represents as transforming all relationships and sweeping away venerable human bonds."[86] London, in the C-text prologue, is the site of much corruption as it is there where these avaricious parish priests and parsons have penetrated the administration. Will explains that some of these false priests

> Leyen in Londoun in lenton and elles.
> Summe seruen the kynge and his siluer tellen,
> In the Checker and in the Chancerye chalengen his dettes. (Prol. 89-91)

Others "aren as seneschalles and seruen other lords / And ben in stede of stewardus and sitten and demen" (Prol. 91-94). Therefore, Langland also implies that there is a need to reform those in the highest estate as these avaricious clerical figures are shaping laws and justice. At this dire point in the C-text *Prologue*, the first allegorical figure of the poem Conscience shows up. The abrupt biblical exemplum he delivers on false priests is unique

[85] Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, 38.

[86] Ibid.

to the C-text and anticipates the later parable over rule in the *Prologue* and thus is directly related to common profit.

Conscience's abrupt interruption of the estates material is a direct response to the penetration of covetous clerics in the monarchy, which is a concern for the "comune" (Prol. 96). Using legal language, like the word "herde," Conscience accuses these false priests of "Ydolatrie" and expounds on the communal consequences of their failure to preach charity (Prol. 95-96). He rebukes,

> In menynge of myracles muche wex hangeth there:
> Al the world wot wel hit myghte nought be trewe
> Ac for it profiteth yow into pursward ye prelates soffren
> That lewed men in mysbileue lyuen and dyen. (Prol. 99-103)

The consequences of the "prelates" desire to "profiteth" in worldly fare enacts the grimmest of consequences to the community: those that do not know any better potentially die in misbelief. Conscience quickly goes on to implicate covetousness directly. He explains that he believes that "for loue of [the prelates'] coueytise / That al the world is be the wors, as holy writ telleth (103-104). The exemplum that Conscience tells is one based on the Book of Samuel and reiterates the common pastoral negligence theme on a domestic and national level. Due to the perversion of the people's offerings to them, Heli's sons "Offines" and "Fines" lose Israel the Ark of the Covenant. Here Conscience highlights that their downfall, and thus Israel's, is due to their father's lack of discipline, which ties back to Wille's declaration earlier in the *Prologue* that unless "holi chirche and charite choppe adoun suche shryuars" then the common will be afflicted with

mischief (Prol. 64).[87] The Church's duty is to discipline its parishioners so that they may not cause sin to corrupt society.

Before turning to the ruling elite, Langland quickly references the papal schism that was occurring to highlight how the clergy were further misleading their congregations away from salvation due to their desire for worldly profit:

> …Parsceyued of the power that Peter hadde to kepe,
> To bynde and to unbynde as the boke telleth,
> Hou he it lefte with loue as oure lord wolde
> Amonge foure virtues, most vertuous of vertues,
> That cardinals ben cald and closing-yates
> Thare Crist is in kynedom to close with heuene. (Prol. 128-133)

Cardinals here refer to the cardinal virtues that lead people to Christ's kingdom. Langland returns to the importance of the virtues in the final two passuses, and their eventual loss in this society is foreshadowed here as Langland makes a pun out of "cardinals." The first instance, as mentioned, refers to the cardinal virtues, but its meaning shifts instead to refer to avaricious cardinals who Conscience accuses of having "caught… such a name" (Prol. 134). Simony is implicated in the cardinals' actions as Langland alludes to it through the word "caught," highlighting that these cardinals are in some way false as they did not earn their name.

Langland turns from Conscience's brief thoughts on the papal schism, to a consideration of the order of society that is led by a "kyng" and his knights, which

[87] As Pearsall remarks in his edition of the C-text, the theme of the necessity for fathers to discipline their children is popular in sermons and literature about pastoral negligence. It is one that homilies and Langland himself repeats many times (IV 112 and V 136-39). Pearsall, *Piers Plowman C-text*, 49, n. 115.

reflects the traditional societal order (139). In this part of the *Prologue*, the reader is introduced to the next allegorical figure Kynde Wit, who Pearsall explains is practical reason unillumined by divine revelation. This figure is the one who makes unordained clerics who "conseillen the kyng and the commune saue" (Prol. 142). Conscience and Kynde Wit "knyghthed togedres" determine the social order from here and "Case that the comune sholde her communes fynde" (Prol. 143-144). These two faculties, then, are responsible for keeping the common profit thriving at the second and third estate levels. In the next stanza, we find that "for most profit to the peple a plogh" was made that is a figure for "lele labour," or true work (146-147). The traditional idea of common profit is fully elaborated on here in Kynde Wit's advice to the king and common:

> Crist kepe the, sire kynge, and thy kyneriche
> And lene the lede so thy londe that Lewte the louye
> And for thy rightful ruylynge be rewarded in heuene. (Prol. 149-152)

Here the main tenet of common profit, the mutual obligations between the king and his citizens, is invoked.[88] When Conscience addresses both the secular "clergie" and the King, he echoes the same idea in Latin and explicitly invokes the necessity of mercy with justice, a common theme throughout the poem.[89]

[88] Pearsall notes that "Lewte" has many valences, both political and legal, of the term fealty. *Piers Plowman* C-text, Prol.51-52, Prol.150n.

[89] The pairing of the law and love for the commons is represented later in the figure of Piers and Christ. Though at this point in the poem it appears to be a pairing that is lost due to avarice as the reader observes in the next stanza on the king's court.

Those who should be practicing law with the intent for mercy and love are found instead to be "plededen for penyes and pounded the lawe / And nat for loue of oure lord vnlose here lyppes ones" (Prol.163-164). These are the lawyers who, like the clergy, "gete a mum of here mouth ar moneye were hem shewed" (Prol. 166). Langland reveals that those who are unable to purchase justice (spiritual or secular) do not receive it. This thorough avaricious corruption of both spiritual and secular administration gets taken up in the rat-parliament parable that follows directly after Wille's thoughts on the lawyers. That men of law are slaves to avarice is not unique to Langland. Indeed, as Michael Haren explains, lawyers' avaricious nature was "an axiom of the literature of complaint."[90] Sermons, too, dealt with the topic of unjust gain; for instance, Richard FitzRalph gave a sermon on the Lord's Prayer using the petition "Give us this day our daily bread" into an argument against unjust gain in war, in the market, or in court.[91] The traditional line was that "nothing ought to be given in return for justice."[92] Though as is already apparent in the prologue, justice was something that could be bought and sold.

Even more than Gower, Langland is dedicated to meditating on and revealing the plight of the poor in light of a society that appears to value individual gain above communal charity and that determines justice by profit. How then could the poor receive justice? David Aers explains that "the duty to work was the harbinger of a new ethic: the

[90] Haren, *Sin and Society*, 84.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

exaltation of self-employment directed towards the production of material goods."[93] He elucidates that this "new ethic" brought up critical questions about almsgiving, and thus about aiding the poor. Instead of following Jesus's commandment to give indiscriminately, new teachings on the topic raised questions on how one should in fact discriminate.[94] These new teachings were perhaps a reaction to an increase in avaricious "voluntary" beggars, as Archbishop FitzRalph explains in his London sermon *Nemo vos seducat inanibus verbis*, who "injure those that must beg."[95] Therefore, manuals like the *Memoriale presbiterorum* dedicate a lot of space to the malpractices in almsgiving. The *Memoriale presbiterorum* explicitly invokes avarice as a "poison" because people "believe that it is no sin, more than that, that it is a virtue to despoil the property of others and then give alms from the spoils." Here the *Memoriale presbiterorum* invokes the figure of Lady Mede or "*domina pecunia*" and claims she is the product of unjust alms.[96] Mede is a topic Langland will engage with further in the *Visio* of the C-text, but from this small glance, the concern over false alms is apparent, as well as the practices that those that produce them participate in due to their covetous desires. Already in the prologue to *Piers Plowman*, then, the reader observes that the world of the poem is entrenched in corruption due to the avariciousness of the administrative figures.

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[93] Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, 33.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Haren, *Sin and Society in Fourteenth Century England*, 173. All translations from the *Memoriale presbiterorum* are done by Michael Haren.

[96] Ibid., 171.

In the belling of the cat exemplum, which allegorizes the relationship between the king and Parliament, Langland engages in a popular fable that held topical significance. Elizaveta Strakhov maintains that this fable is a comment on the debates surrounding the Hundred Years War in the Good Parliament of 1376; however, as Pearsall explains in his C-text edition, the reference would not be as important in the C-text as it was in the B-text due to the late dating of the former.[97] Like Gower, Langland turns to current events that challenged morality and produced many different responses in his work. Langland uses the term "comune profyt" for the first time in the work here. The crowd of rats and the small mouse come to king's council for "here comune profyt" (Prol. 169). Already the word common profit appears to be problematic. Instead of common profit being something that is in common it becomes attached to a specific group's benefit, which is implied in the pronoun "here," which is a possessive pronoun that highlights the exclusive desires of the mice and rats. Their desires do not have the commons or the king in mind. The cat, or king, is tyrannical and makes them play a "game" (Prol. 173). Due to this misrule, the rats want to find a way to "his wille withsytte" so that they might be "lords alofte and lyue as [they] luste" (Prol. 177-178). Though Langland does not encourage the tyrannical nature of the king, he does not appear to support the rats who desire to defy common profit, and the traditional estates duties, for their own lusts. After

[97] Pearsall, *C-text Piers Plowman*, 53n,178. Elizaveta Strakhov, "'But Who Will Bell the Cat?:': Deschamps, Brinton, Langland, and the Hundred Years' War," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 30 (2016): 253-276. A. C. Schmidt argues that this is best regarded as a "general allegory on the problems of balancing power within the body politic." *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions, Vol. II, Part 2*, Medieval Institute Publications (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2008), commentary on lines 165-218, 480.

all, he introduces the mouse that encourages the others to stick with the *status quo* as "A mous that moche good couthe" (Prol. 199). Langland does not make much more of a point to explicate this "meteles," or dream. Instead, he encourages his reader to "Deuyne ye, for Y ne dar, by dere god almythen" (Prol. 221). Langland's refusal to interpret his many examples is a key feature of the text and one that makes it challenging to comprehend exactly what the critique is at this point.

Due to his refusal here to speak more about common profit in light of those who privilege individual desires, I want to turn to the pardon scene in Passus 9, a scene where the narrator will attempt to interpret a similar conflict, before engaging with Chaucer's *General Prologue*. This passus further emphasizes Langland's initial dedication to the traditional idea of common profit in the *Visio* section of the poem as well as the problems that impede it due to avarice's hold on society. In this scene, Langland engages again with the form of estates satire and further comments on professions and their duty to common profit. This point in the poem, the reader has observed Mede's penetration into all aspects of society and Piers the ploughman's failed attempt at plowing the half acre and leading the repentant deadly sins on a pilgrimage to Truth. Indeed, Langland leaves the reader at the end of Passus 8 with another apocalyptic warning: "Ac Y warne yow workmen, wynneth whiles ye mowe" (8.341). Otherwise, Hunger will come and "brynge bane and batayle on bothe half the mone; / And thenne shal deth withdrawe and derthe be justice" (8.349-350).[98] The prophetic voice does not render the reader completely

[98] For a study that argues that Langland is more in favor of a free-market ideology than feudalist supporters of labor statutes were, see Robert Epstein, "Summoning Hunger: Polanyi, *Piers Plowman*, and the Labor

hopeless, though, as this will not happen "yf god of his goodnesse graunte vs a trewe" (8.352). From this slight promise of hope, the reader enters Passus 9 and the problematic pardon sent from Truth.

In Passus 9, Langland returns to the estates model he begins the *Prologue* with but further reveals the instability of the term "common profit" due to avarice and the high stakes of professional morality and the conflicts therein. Critics have long puzzled over the pardon scene and its recasting in the C-text.[99] Though the ambiguous text of the pardon is the same from A to B to C, the reaction to it changes. For instance, in the A- and B-text, Piers dramatically tears the pardon when he reads it. Critics have given many compelling reasons for this change, so I would like to focus less here on that shift and more on avarice and common profit.

The terms of the pardon, and how easily it is granted to those who are virtuous, reveals Langland's attempt to think through professions, such as lawyers and merchants, who are prone to avarice and engage in a debate as to how they might achieve salvation regardless. David Aers argues of the pardon in the B version, ". . . If the first 8 lines [of the pardon passus] are ambiguous, those up to line 106 are not so. . ." The pardon's "gloss seeks to conjure up the kind of social and moral order the poet longs for,

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Market" in *Money, Commerce, and Economics in Late Medieval English Literature* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 59-76.

[99] For arguments about this scene, see Denise Baker's two considerations of the debate surrounding the pardon and the change in Piers's reaction to it from the A and B version to C: "Pre-empting Piers's Tearing of the Pardon: Langland's Revisions of the C *Visio*," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 31 (2017): 43-72, and her earlier article "From Plowing to Penitence: *Piers Plowman* and Fourteenth-Century Theology," *Speculum* 55.4 (1980): 715-725.

predictably seeking to reimpose the traditional estates model. The first and second estates are addressed in lines 9-17, the third in lines 18-106. The disproportionate length is a fair indication of the domain most troublesome to the poet's ideology."[100]As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the Church was undergoing shifts as to what occupations were considered sanctified and merchants were a group most fiercely contested. Langland engages with this group as he discusses their relation to Truth's pardon. "Marchauntes," he explains, "in the margine hadde many yeres, / Ac no *a pena et a culpa* no Treuthe wolde hem graunte" (9. 22-23). They would receive no pardon, we find, because they worked on church holidays and "were by here soule and so god mote hem hoteth / Ayen clene conscience for couetyse of wynnynge" (9. 25-26). Merchants are left out of the main text of absolute pardon because of their desire for financial profit, or their covetousness. The *Memoriale presbiterorum* shares a similar critique of merchants and their decisions to work on feast days, but takes a more tithe-based approach to the critique of their profit earnings.[101]

Langland here, however, must, like the Church, come to terms with the fact that trade was becoming a more essential feature of the economy; therefore, the merchants under a private seal receive a way to achieve pardon. In order to guide them back into the idea of common profit, and thus grant them pardon, Truth sends them a letter that asks them to

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[100] Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity*, 49.

[101] Haren, *Sin and Society*, 147, 145. Haren explains that merchants were usually suspected of withholding money that should go to tithes or waiting to pay their tithes until the end of the year when they might have no profits to show due to some losses.

bugge boldly what hem best likede
And seethe sullen hit ayeyn and saue the wynnynges,
Amende meson-dewes therwith and myseyse men fynde… (Prol. 28-30)

He continues to explain that they should use their profits for the betterment of society instead of for their own gain, the latter has already been proven to be in direct opposition to spiritual flourishing.

Another class that has already been implicated in similar sinful profit practices are lawyers, and they are the next group that Langland engages with. Langland distinguishes lawyers from the rest of the people who had pardons in plenty: "Alle the peple hadde pardon ynow that parfitliche lyuede. / Men of lawe hadde lest" (9. 43-44). Those men of law who "loth were to plede / But they *pre minibus* were payed for pledynge at the barre" had the least pardon (44-45). As mentioned earlier, lawyers who needed to receive payment before they performed their duty were an issue in medieval society. Indeed, the "mede" versus "mercede" debate in Passus 3 of the C-text revolves around the sinfulness of receiving money before work is done.[102] As with the other occupations, Langland distinguishes those lawyers who work to promote common profit and voluntarily "speketh for the pore / That innocent and nedy is and no man harm wolde" (9. 47-48). Those, though, who do not love the lord and declare the law for his love but practice law for individual gain, will not have grace. Langland warns that those men of law who take indulgences are committing simony, as it is "symonye to sulle that sent is of grace" (9. 55). Another group that is left out of the pardon due to covetousness, unless they are truly

[102] For a sustained argument of the differences between this debate and the grammar therein in B and C, see Denise Baker, "Pre-empting Piers's Tearing of the Pardon."

needy and endure poverty patiently, are the "Beggars and biddares" (9. 61). Since another chapter is dedicated to taking them up in full, I will leave them here and finish this section with Wille's reflection on the pardon.

Unlike his unwillingness to interpret the rat parliament fable, Wille tries to decipher what he saw and what the pardon could mean in this dream, which leads him directly into the question of how one may work to uphold common profit in a society that is thoroughly corrupted by avarice. He contemplates this question for the rest of the work. Covetousness is implicated again at the very end of this passus and is aligned with the practice of purchasing pardons. Wille warns those "renkes that riche ben on this erthe / Vp truste of youre tresor trionales to haue" (9. 331-332). No matter how rich or how esteemed the person is, Wille explains that they will suffer when Christ takes account of all of their wrongdoings at Judgment Day. There is an emphasis here to be obedient and to keep Christ's laws, as these actions will better serve one than a purchased pardon. Though Truth's pardon is elusive and the Priest who tries to parse it can find no pardon, it reveals that work is tied up in questions about not only about virtue and vice but also professional morality.

"How shal the world be served?": Chaucer's (Re)Vision of Professional Virtues in the *General Prologue*

I would like to close this chapter with a consideration of Chaucer's engagement with avarice's manifestation in the different estates in his *General Prologue*. Chaucer's method in the *Canterbury Tales* is suffused with irony, making it complicated to pin Chaucer's view of avarice down at any point in the work and signaling that his

presentation of avaricious practices in the *General Prologue* is not his final word on the topic.[103] Nevertheless, Chaucer's take on the genre of estates satire and his understanding of the role of the poet in the pastoral care in the *General Prologue* is quite different from his contemporaries.[104] In Appendix B to her seminal book on the form and content of the *General Prologue*, Jill Mann briefly considers Chaucer's relationship to Gower and Langland. Her driving question is whether these poets wrote about estates satire independently or if they were aware, even inspired, by each other's works. When considering Chaucer's relationship to Gower and Langland, Mann highlights Langland's influence on the *General Prologue* as being more than Gower's, though she considers Gower's more estates-driven works (*Mirour de l'omme* and *Vox clamantis*) as distinct from the *Prologue* to the *Confessio amantis*.[105] Despite all of their similarities, though, there is no denying that Chaucer is more interested in manipulating features of estates satire in his *General Prologue*, and his decision to disrupt the form of the estates satire genre is also in part a direct reaction to the shifting economic realities of fourteenth-century London and the precarious role of avarice as a result.

One of the most striking differences between Chaucer's take on estates satire and Gower's and Langland's is the tone; the *General Prologue* is more ironic and not apocalyptic like the prologues to *Piers Plowman* and the *Confessio amantis*. Further, Chaucer's narrator is not overtly scathing of commonly deemed professional vices, and,

[103] Jill Mann also finds the *Canterbury Tales* to be dialectic. *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 190.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 207-212.

as Jill Mann has argued, the victim of those vices is noticeably absent from the *General Prologue*. This "omission of the victim," as Mann refers to it, distinguishes Chaucer's take on the estates satire genre.[106] It also, I argue, treats the relationship between profession and professional outside of the ideal of common profit and the tripartite schema of society, though in the final tale of the work, the *Parson's Tale,* Chaucer will reaffirm the traditional notion of common profit, tellingly in his section on avarice.[107] I will not focus on the trajectory of the term "common profit" in Chaucer's work here. Instead, I will concentrate on what this lack of invoking the concept in estates satire and the omission of the victim of avaricious acts and the poor (those most direly hurt by avarice) does, and what questions and responses it makes possible regarding avarice.

Unlike the theologian John of Salisbury, who demonstrates that an avaricious judge is one who sells what he has no right to dispose of, Chaucer's narrator describes avaricious acts as if the pilgrims committing them are at least on some level justified in doing so given their professional duties, which I will explore later in this section.[108] Mann, responding to Hoffman's early claim that limited the *General Prologue*'s interest

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[106] Ibid., 191.

[107] "But for-as-muche as the estaat of hooly chirche ne myghte nat han be, ne the commune profit myghte nat han be kept, ne pees and reste in erthe, but if God hadde ordeyned that som men hadde hyer degree and som men lower, therfore was sovereyntee ordeyned to kepe and mayntene and defended hire underlynges or hire subgetz, in resound, as ferforth as it lith in hire power, and nat to destroyen hem ne confounde."*Parson's Tale*, 773ff.

[108] As quoted by Richard Newhauser, John of Salisbury, *Policratius* 5.11, 1:332-33: "*Potest tamen uideri nequior qui officii sui principem et reginam, cui fides famulatur, quasi mercem in foro distrahit ac si seruus infidelis dominum uendat. Omnis etenim magistratus iustitiae famulus est*." "Justice and Liberality: Opposition to Avarice in the Twelfth Century," in *Virtue and Ethics in the Twelfth Century*, eds. Istvan P. Bejczy and Richard G. Newhauser (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 295-316, 315.

to that of the sphere of love, insists that the relationship between the *Parson's Tale* and the *General Prologue* is "more subtle than a simple opposition between *cupiditas* and *caritas*." Though his method is not simple, the opposition between *cupiditas* and *caritas* is one Chaucer is exploring, and he does so by playing with the word "profit" and associated polysemous economic terms (e.g., "pris," "worthy," "cost"). By beginning his poem with a prologue that at once invokes a spiritual journey (a pilgrimage) and a secular battle of wits (the tale-telling competition), Chaucer, though less directly than Langland and Gower, also asks whether there can be *caritas* in a society that values those who attain a surplus of profit for themselves alone. Donald Howard provides more insight into the mode of the *Canterbury Tales* and the irony that Chaucer employs. He acknowledges that Chaucer's irony is the central feature to his style and most elusive; Howard explains that

> irony is a frame of mind which lets us accommodate to disappointment and change, which lets us view with equanimity the gap between expectation and actuality, between 'old things' and the 'new world.' If irony is a sensibility which we can cultivate, one of its uses is to make us adopt to change even when it is for the worse. Hence revolutionaries never use irony. Much of the spirit of Chaucer which we admire as ironic, and consider part of his style, springs form the open-minded, dispassionate attitude which charity requires. That Christianity taught believers to 'love the man but hate his vice,' to love those we don't like, might be thought irony of the highest order. Loving one's neighbor, or doing to others as we would have them do to us, calls for an ironic frame of mind unless—like the narrator—we do not see anything wrong with our neighbor and cannot guess what others would do to us.[109]

[109] Donald Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 125.

The frame of the work is famously a pilgrimage to the shrine of "the holy bilsful martir," Saint Thomas Becket (16), and Chaucer's narrator begins by relaying that the pilgrims on this trip are "from every shires ende / Of Engelond" (14). The pilgrims are not only from diverse areas but also, as the reader soon finds out, make up all three estates, paralleling Langland's fair field of folk. Unlike the prologues to the *Confessio amantis* and *Piers Plowman*, the *General Prologue* engages with even more diverse professions in the separate estates and does not depict the narrator as a moral arbiter, at least not overtly; there is also no discrepancy between the narrator's voice in the *General Prologue* and the rest of the *Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, Chaucer's narrator is very much a fellow traveler from the start who appears to be chiefly interested in worldly ideas of success, rather than the moralist narrative voices found in Langland's and Gower's prologues. Chaucer's use of estates literature, then, is distinct in that the voice that rehearses the estates and its duties is not one that is established with any apparent authority or one that is set up to dictate the work's morality. Rather, the narrator develops a conversational tone, expressing that he is reporting details about his fellow travelers from his observations so that the reader might understand not only the profession further but also a pilgrim's unique skills in their profession. By avoiding a moral stance, Chaucer's narrator invites his reader to admire the profiteering aspects of the morally corrupted pilgrims as much as those of the exemplar pilgrims.[110]

[110] Mann refers to this equal treatment as a product of the *General Prologue*'s "ethic of this world." By this, she explains that she means Chaucer represents the way in which people get along with their neighbors "by tacit approval of things we really consider wrong, by admiring techniques more than the ends they work towards, by regarding unethical behaviour as amusing as long as the results are not directly unpleasant for

The obligations the pilgrims agree to in their community are structured differently than that of the traditional tripartite one that exists, though the latter is subtly referenced throughout given the emphasis on the pilgrims' professions. Instead of promoting mutual obligation and the ranking of professions given the estate they belong to, these pilgrims decide to enter into a social contract that is more focused on the individual's skills and agree to be judged not by the pilgrim of the highest rank, but by the Host. The narrator emphasizes that the pilgrims all decide to enter this new agreement:

> Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche.
> Us thought it was noght worth to make it wys,
> And graunted hym withouten moore avys,
> And bad him seye his voirdit as hym leste. (784-787)

Here the pilgrims are all represented as having one voice, as shown in the possessive pronouns "oure" and "us." The language the narrator uses when explaining the agreement to this new set of relationships is also legal—"conseil," "graunted," "avys," and "voirdit." Instead of the highest ranked pilgrim judging the tales by default, a competition ensues that places the pilgrims on more or less equal terms.

The focus of the work as set up in the *General Prologue* turns out not to be the pilgrimage, but the tale-telling competition. Chaucer's work is incomplete, but the expectations he sets up in the *General Prologue* imply that the *Canterbury Tales* will end in the same location it started in—The Tabard Inn. Instead of a promised spiritual reward, the Host offers the winner "a soper at oure aller cost" (799). The stakes are set up as

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us, by adopting, for social reasons, the viewpoint of the person with whom we are associating, and at the same time feeling that his way of life is 'not our business.'" *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, 200.

financial and legal. Indeed, the narrator relays the exact terms of their new social arrangement and continues to state it in legal terms:

> This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore
> With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
> That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so,
> And that he wolde been oure governour,
> And of our tales juge and reportour,
> And sette soper at a certeyn pris,
> And we wol reuled been at his devys
> In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent
> We been acorded to his juggement. (810-818)

Therefore, Chaucer begins the work imagining the society of the Canterbury pilgrims to be one that is self-governing in that they all agree on their leader and judge (the Host) and on the terms of their relationship ("by oon assent"). Again, distinguishing the social relationships established in the *General Prologue* from the more traditional social order presented in the prologues to the *Confessio amantis* and *Piers Plowman*.

Some of the figures that have fallen short of their professional duties in other medieval texts appear here in this new social model to be ideal representations of their professions, like the Parson and the Knight. Indeed, even though he does not directly invoke the tradition of common profit, Chaucer offers idealized versions from the three estates that "form the skeletal structure of society"—the Parson, Knight, and Plowman.[111] Though Chaucer connects the Parson to the Plowman by stating that the Parson is the Plowman's "brother," their link, as Mann explains, does not solely "endorse the idea that

[111] Mann remarks that "the guildsmen have none of the traditional mercantile vices, such as fraud, usury, and avarice." Ibid., 55.

society coheres through the mutual benefits arising from the interchange of services" (529).[112] Chaucer appears from the start to be interested in what role profit has in society at that moment in regards to the prospering of the earthly community. Despite adhering loosely to the form of estates satire and offering idealized versions from the separate estates, he does not appear to have the same attachment to the traditional principle of common profit, which is conveyed in his descriptions of both the traditionally ideal and seemingly corrupt pilgrims. I want to build on Mann's assertion that the *General Prologue* is a poem about work that was inspired by Langland's engagement with the "topic of human work, the 'worship of this worlde,'" by proposing that Chaucer gives voice to an alternate means of understanding professional formation that would eventually become dominant; in other words, the focus on the cultivating of individual financial profit as something that was necessary to a flourishing community rather than detrimental.[113] This view would be reiterated in the ethics of Hume centuries later, but, as shown in the *General Prologue*, was already revealingly making itself present in the late Middle Ages. Avarice, then, in this view could be associated with professional virtue, even if Chaucer presents it ironically.

How, then, does this ironic mode change how avarice is constructed? Like in the other prologues, avaricious practices are illustrated in all three estates, though, as Jill Mann points out, they are glaringly absent from the guildsmen.[114] Though these practices

[112] Ibid., 73.

[113] Ibid, 212.

[114] Ibid., 104.

are absent, the amount of wealth the guildsmen have is not, recalling, though subtly, the practices that very well might have made that wealth a reality—"Ful fressh and newe hir geere apiked" and "Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys" (365, 369). However, the idea of avarice as a mortal sin is notably missing, given that there are no criticisms leveled at those avaricious pilgrims and their harm to society is left uncommented on. More so than Gower and Langland, Chaucer spends time on the minutiae of a figure and their professional duties, which, as Jill Mann argues, "increases our awareness of the estate, rather than the individual—but this sort of enumeration is rarely found in estates literature."[115] Even though there is a lack of overt moralizing in the *General Prologue*, Chaucer's description of his fellow pilgrims' "condicioun," "degree," and "array" highlights the pervasiveness of avarice, as it is normally depicted in confessors' manuals, in many of the travelers of all estates (38, 40-41). Many of the clerical pilgrims are suspect of this vice, as their "conditioun" and "array" disclose more interest in worldly goods than heavenly, and I will focus especially on them for the rest of this section to show their role in the shifting definition of profit from *caritas* to financial gain. We find that most of the pilgrims featured have little to no regard for *caritas*; take for instance the Prioress who acts too much like a courtly lady and the Monk who disregards his religious duties to hunt, not to mention the corrupt Friar, Summoner, and Pardoner.

Rather than asking "How shall I save my soul?", Chaucer asks his readers through the narrator the question the narrator poses as he is describing the Monk; or, "How shal

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[115] Ibid., 15.

the world be served?" (187). This is a central question to the work, though some have considered this Chaucerian irony. The narrator never overtly denounces avarice, even in his clerical pilgrims. In the instance of the Monk, the narrator not only asks his reader to think critically about the traditional ideal qualities of a Monk but also responds with approval that the Monk thinks the Benedictine Rule is worth nothing; he proclaims that the Monk's "opinion was good" (183). What a "good" Monk means to Chaucer's narrator here is at once pitted against the dictates espoused in penitential manuals, the other prologues, and those found in what is believed to be the final tale of the work, *The Parson's Tale*. However, traditional professional practices of giving up the world and thus worldly goods is discarded here. Indeed, Chaucer's narrator implies with the word "opinion" that there were probably many different ideas regarding professional flourishing. Chaucer's narrator goes as far as to remark in his portrait of the Monk, "Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!" (188). Chaucer's less didactic and ironic approach does not mean he is uninterested in professional morality; rather, this method allows him to bring up questions, especially about avarice, that are unique from his peers and the traditional social order invoked by the common good that he inherited.[116] Furthermore, it highlights the reality of a shifting understanding of profit and the effect this shift had on conceptions of social order. Instead of out rightly answering how the world may be served, Chaucer answers it in different ways through different pilgrims. The changing nature of the word *profit* and the way Chaucer employs it, I argue, is at the

[116] I agree with Jill Mann's assertion that "Chaucer's word-play has a more important role than to serve as a comic cloak for moral criticism." I find, like Mann, that Chaucer's method allows him to question varying values in society in addition to the pilgrim's role. Ibid., 196-7.

heart of his method for answering this question, and his resistance to siding with one over the other proposes a view of society far different from Langland's or Gower's. Through his irony, Chaucer is arguably calling the concept of common good into question.

Chaucer presents his pilgrims in an atypical order, mixing different estates seemingly due to their professional relationships rather than based on their profession alone. His prologue's form, then, at once disrupts the traditional order. The first religious pilgrim Chaucer introduces the reader is the Prioress, and it is no surprise that her introduction follows that of the Knight, the Squire, and the Yeoman. Both her portrait and the Monk's that follow are more in line with the noble pilgrims introduced before them than they are to the idealized Parson that appears later. From the narrator's description, the reader at once understands that these pilgrims are dressed as courtly figures and are also interested in courtly behavior more than *caritas*. For instance, the Prioress is described as having courtly manners; indeed, Chaucer explains that "in curtesie was set ful muchel hir lest" and that she would "countrefete cheere / Of court, and to been estatlich of manere" (132, 139-140). He mentions that around her neck hangs a "brooch of gold ful sheene" that reads "*Amor vincit omina*," which could refer to either earthly or spiritual love (160, 162). There is no attention in her portrait to her religious duties, and this absence is not commented on. Though Chaucer's narrator does not critique or endorse the Prioress's more courtly than religious behavior, he goes out of his way to approve of the Monk's more untraditional courtly practices, which is revealing because the Monk appears to be even richer in worldly goods than the Prioress.

Chaucer's narrator makes it a point to describe the Monk in direct contrast to others in his profession; he explains that the Monk "was nat pale as a porpyned goost" (205). Instead of being cloistered, Chaucer's Monk is revealed to be a hunter and finely dressed. The Monk is described as wearing expensive squirrel fur that was "the fyneste of a lond" and a "ful curious pyn" made of gold (194, 196). His desires are more self-serving than community focused, as "huntyng for hare / Was al his lust, for no coste wold he spare" (192). Even though he is identified as a Monk, his worldly proclivities are not criticized. Indeed, it appears that the narrator admires the Monk for being more active in the world, and worldly profit, than those in his office traditionally are.

Chaucer continues to consider the religious pilgrims as he turns to the Friar next, and it is with this pilgrim that Chaucer's deviation from his contemporaries is most explicit. Friars were certainly a profession that encountered much criticism in the later Middle Ages. Chaucer's depiction of the Friar as "an esy man to yeve panaunce, / Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce" is much in line with the criticisms found in his contemporaries (223-224). Chaucer's Friar also takes money instead of true contrition as a sign of penance. Though this practice is harshly critiqued, like it is in Gower and Langland, Chaucer's narrator describes it without judgment, as if it were a simple fact:

> For unto a povre ordre for to yive
> Is signe that a man is wel yshryve;
> For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt
> He wiste that a man was repentaunt;
> For many a man so hard is of his herte,
> He may nat wepe, althogh hym soore smerte.
> Therfore in stede of wepynge and preyeres
> Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres. (225-232)

The care the narrator takes to explain why Huberd is an exemplary beggar and the lack of direct criticism distinguishes his representation. The narrator does not see the problem with the Friar not serving the poor. Indeed, he reasons that it would do the Friar no good because it would not advance his position in society. Huberd is described as not having acquaintances with those who "may nat avaunce" him like the poor and sick lepers (245). Rather, he is interested in financial "profit," and when there was an opportunity for it, "Ther was no man nowher so vertuous" (249, 251).

Here Chaucer puns on "profit," which usually denoted spiritual benefit at this time, as in the case of common profit, and "vertuous" (MED 1b); Chaucer means profit here in the sense of financial wealth, which was its less popular definition (4a), and virtuous describes his ability to gain profit. Like the Monk, Chaucer's narrator describes the Friar as exemplary; he is "the beste beggere in his hous" (251) and deemed a "worthy man" (243) and "worthy lymytour" (269). The repetition of "worthy," an adjective used also to identify the Knight and the Merchant, is another pun. Worthy, like profit, is polysemous and denoted "of great monetary value" (MED 1a) as well as something "worthy of reverence" (MED 2a). Though the Friar uses his powers to deceive and "worthy" could be read as ironic, Chaucer's narrator does not critique this behavior outright. This section appears to comment on how the nature of the friar has transformed in the community based on the market. Instead of saving souls and thus profiting (in the spiritual sense) due to that alone, worldly friars now work for financial profit as others in secular professions do. Though many have commented on the irony in the Friar's portrait, Chaucer's approach reveals that this type of thinking was probably not far from how

certain friars may have tried to justify their illicit acts. In leaving the reader as the final judge, Chaucer questions what this type of reimaging of the profession (and the realities of it) means for the community.

It is perhaps no surprise that the portrait of the Merchant comes right after the Friar's, but though his profession was a sticking point for many penitentialists, Chaucer only describes him for 15 lines, which is in stark contrast to his longer engagement with the Friar (61 lines). Unlike Langland, who is deeply troubled like many other penitentialists about the merchant profession, Chaucer hardly spends time describing him. Though the merchant practices usury, he is deemed a "worthy man," again punning on worthy (283). The adjectival form of worthy not only serves as a class marker in this instance but also continues to repeat that claim that to succeed in the world, one must gain money.[117]

The Pardoner, too, is not treated with scathing reproach like he is in other texts despite the fact that, like the Friar, he commits a deadly sin in that he works to "wynne silver" and not save souls (713). The narrator explains, "But of his craft, fro Berwyk into Ware / Ne was ther swich another pardoner" (691-2). By describing these avaricious religious figures as successful in their jobs, even if it is in skills that directly oppose their professional morality, Chaucer presents a more worldly answer to "How shal one best serve the world." This answer is one can best serve the world by profiting financially through one's professional skills, and there is implicit irony here. Chaucer's narrator

[117] *Ibid*., 196.

appears to be fully supportive of the Pardoner's prowess despite this irony. Though these practices are associated with a deadly sin and not in line with the spiritual demands of the profession, these two pilgrims are clearly superior in reaping worldly rewards. In this prologue, there is no overt condemnation of them, no comment on how they are poisoning society, or what effect their practices have on the poor. As mentioned before, the victim is omitted, much like the victim of current economic exchanges is from economic theory.[118] The focus of Chaucer's narrator is on the monetary gain the pilgrims achieve and not the consequences of this type of deception to society. Lest we think Chaucer's narrator completely goes against traditional professional morality for his religious pilgrims, he repeatedly describes the Parson as a "noble ensample" despite his lack of worldly goods. He is described as "povre" but "rich . . . of hooly thoght and werk" (477, 479). Nonetheless, the narrator explains, "A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys" (524). However, the Parson is exemplary also because he is the only religious pilgrim who appears not to have been tainted by avarice. Though his tale is ultimately the last one followed by Chaucer's *Retraction*, his portrait here is not last. Indeed, the final pilgrim the reader is introduced to before the Host is the Pardoner.

Avaricious practices plague the pilgrims outside of those with religious duties, too, though they are also not criticized for them. Whereas Langland and Gower, following the penitential tradition, criticize those that use their knowledge of the law for

[118] For more on this being due to the split between ethics and economics, see MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*.

financial gain, Chaucer's narrator reveres his Sargent of Law as "war and wys" and "ful riche of excellence" (309, 311). He explains that this Sargent was

> For his science and for his heigh renoun,
> Of fees and robes hadde he many oon.
> So greet a purchasour was nowher noon. (316-20)

Much like the Friar, the Sargent's true occupation seems at odds with another part of his professional identity. As Richard Newhauser has shown, liberality and justice were often pitted against avarice as its virtue counterparts.[119] In this case, the Sargent's granting of justice seems to be in contrast with his propensity to purchase land. Because he "semed bisier than he was" (321). Chaucer once again incorporates irony into his portrait of the pilgrim, but there is no criticism from the narrator like that of Langland's in the C-text *Prologue* who reiterates the ill effects the lawyers who interrupt justice have on the community. There are many other pilgrims who practice avarice in described in the *General Prologue*: most notably the Summoner and Physician, to name a few. Chaucer's choice not to incorporate the critique of professional vices or the consequences of avaricious acts on the poor allows him to present a view about the shifts to understandings about profit that is unique from his contemporaries and directly has implications to the social order he presents in his work. Avaricious practices here, too, disrupt the traditional order of society, but they are not depicted as negative occurrences.

[119] Newhauser, "Justice and Liberality: Opposition to Avarice in the Twelfth Century."

Chaucer appears to at least be open to considering disparate views regarding societal flourishing that were arising.[120]

Conclusion

Chaucer, Langland, and Gower are all deeply interested in the effects of an economy that demands one to work according to mutual obligation but that also increasingly values individual profit. Though Gower and Langland are more blatantly bothered by the corruption of the social order due to the proliferation of avarice, Chaucer's presentation of avaricious behavior highlights the social changes that were occurring due to the shifting economic realities of the fourteenth century. Chaucer's decision to omit the victims of usury and other avaricious practices in his *General Prologue*, though vastly different from his contemporaries' approach to the topic, reveals a method of thinking about profit that would sadly become standard in later centuries. Through their engagement with estates satire in the prologues to their final works, these poets demonstrate that avarice's shifting definition directly undermined the traditional principle of common profit. Chaucer's lack of dedication to the ideal enables him to understand certain avaricious practices as more laudatory than those more attached to it, like Gower. Langland, on the other hand, gives up on the idea in his text due to avarice's corruption of the order of society. Though these prologues are not the extent of the authors' engagements with these concepts, their prologues nevertheless demonstrate how

[120] I find Paul Strohm's argument about the attention the *Canterbury Tales* commands its readers to have regarding social possibility very helpful: "The comprehensiveness and argumentative energy with which Chaucer's work opens itself to its historical moment allow readers in posterity a continuing opportunity to refresh their own belief in social possibility." *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 182.

their understandings of common profit shapes, or is shaped by, their conception of avarice, and thus how it then shapes the content of their poetry.

CHAPTER III

NAVIGATING "THE MIDDEL WEIE": THE ANATOMY OF AVARICE IN JOHN GOWER'S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

Obstat auaricia nature legibus.
—John Gower, *Confessio amantis*

Car s'un soul homme avoir porroit
Quanq'en son coer souhaideroit
Du siècle, pour soy deliter,
Trestout come songe passeroit
En nient, et quant l'en meinz quidoit,
Par grant dolour doit terminer.
—John Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme*[121]

Though John Gower is perhaps most infamously remembered as "moral Gower" due to Geoffrey Chaucer's invocation of him at the end of his epic romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, Gower's final, and only, major work in the English vernacular *Confessio amantis* is much less moral—in terms of genre and content— than Chaucer's *Parson's Tale,* a text that similarly follows a penitential frame.[122] Both authors have much to say about avarice throughout their oeuvres, but I will restrict myself to interrogating Gower's unique construction of avarice in Book 5 of the *Confessio amantis* in this chapter. A

[121] G.C. Macaulay, ed. *The Works of John Gower Volume 1 (The French Works)*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1899, 3. "For if any man could have whatever his heart desired of the world, for his delight, it would all pass away like a dream into nothing, and, when he least expected it, end in great sorrow" (lines 25-30). Translation Nancy Wilson Van Baak, trans. *John Gower: Mirour de l'Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*. East Lansing, MI, 1992, 3.

[122] "O moral Gower, this book I directe" (V.1856). All references to Geoffrey Chaucer's works are from Larry D. Benson, ed. *The Wadsworth Chaucer* (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 1987).

period of economic stability and the subsequent revival of the town life brought new tensions to bear on fourteenth-century English society, and Gower reacts to this shift and its implications in his penitential work on love by magnifying the vice of avarice and giving it more careful attention than the other deadly sins he interrogates in the same text.[123] I already gestured to the influx of moral literature and urban markets in the first chapter of this study, but there were also many material markers, such as the extravagant displays of wealth by Richard II's court, that heightened avarice's role in the cultural consciousness of fourteenth-century Londoners. As Jill Mann explains, this increase in royal extravagance attracted both criticism and defense, the latter linking to a justification of the separation of estates.[124] Ricardian literature participated in the argument regarding what amount of wealth was appropriate for each estate and an expansion of this conversation may be seen in the *Confessio amantis*'s focus on common profit, as Russell Peck has called attention to.[125] Though I agree with scholars, like Peck and R.F. Yeager, who have argued that Gower's *Confessio amantis* is in itself a call for communal reform, I tend to concur also with David Aers and Winthrop Wetherbee who both resist arguments that seek to make Gower's politics and ethics in his call for common profit

[123] For more on the tumultuous political climate of late fourteenth century despite the "relative economic prosperity," see "Preface" in Russell A. Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (London: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), xi.

[124] Jill Mann, "Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009): 231-265, 233-4.

[125] Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis*.

consistent and without tension.[126] Indeed, I argue that Gower's formation of avarice in Book 5 showcases how complicated it must have been even for intellectuals to make sense of the ethical and social shifts of a burgeoning proto-capitalistic society.

The Construction of the *Confessio amantis*

Before turning to a close examination of the anatomy of avarice in Book 5, I will provide some context on the narrative construction of the *Confessio amantis* that will be crucial to the claims I make about Gower's formation of avarice in the work as a whole and in the section that explicitly treats it. Gower reimagines the virtue and vice portion of the confessional form in the *Confessio amantis* by utilizing it to interrogate not only an individual's spiritual state but also, with urgency, a society's ethics. The blending of various popular literary genres (pastoral, historical, and fictional) in the frame of the narrative enables this interrogation and creates new opportunities and tensions that are not found in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, as the Parson in his *Tale* is characterized as a rather traditional and reliable Catholic parish priest and the text a close analogue of a penitential manual.[127]

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[126] R.F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990); David Aers, "Reflections on Gower as '*Sapiens* in Ethics and Politics" in *Revising Gower: Politics*, ed. R. F. Yeagar (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 1998), 185-201; and Winthrop Wetherbee, "Latin Structure and Vernacular Space: Gower, Chaucer and the Boethian Tradition" in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R.F. Yeager *ELS Monograph Series* 51 (Victoria: English Literary Studies, 1991), 7-35.

[127] Though scholars largely argue over whether Chaucer's Parson is orthodox or not due to inconsistencies in his depiction over the span of the *Canterbury Tales*, his characterization in his *Tale* is agreed to be traditional. Katie Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2006), argues that Chaucer's Parson's contradictory nature reveals "an uneasy and unresolved dialectic between, on the one side, the demands for a reformed language with which to define the self and, on the other, the limits of clerical language to enact that reform," 82.

Although seven of the *Confessio amantis*'s nine books are modeled on penitential manuals, with each analyzing the various manifestations of one of the seven deadly sins and demonstrating their qualities with exempla, the Prologue laments the decline of the contemporary estates and Book 7 outlines Aristotle's education of Alexander. The complexity of the *Confessio amantis* is further enhanced by Gower's transformation of the self-examination in preparation for the confessing of one's sins to a parish priest into a process of interrogating individual intention in regards to love.[128] This particular blending of popular secular (fiction) and sacred (penitential) traditions as well as the Middle English with Latin incipits and marginalia with Middle English narrative aids Gower in his transformation of the self-examining preparation for the confessing of one's vices to a parish priest into a multi-layered process aimed at searching for the best way to enact communal reform by interrogating the morality of passionate love. As C.S. Lewis noted in his study *Allegory of Love*, passionate, or romantic, love as something to be admired is novel and inherited through the concept of courtly love originating in the 11th century from Troubadour poetry.[129] Gower, an avid reader of classical authors as evidenced in the numerous *exempla* dedicated to retelling Ovidian stories, considers secular love seriously and systematically and invites a broad readership with this strategy and his utilization of plain language. This imaginative penitential approach to considering love is what makes Gower's *Confessio amantis* so unique from his classical sources and

[128] See Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's Confessio amantis* for an extended study of the *Confessio amantis*'s interest in common profit.

[129] C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 4.

contemporary ones. Gower considers secular love seriously and systematically through this reimagining of an orthodox confessional mode.[130]

Instead of a traditional parish priest, he creates a fictive confessor, Genius, who serves both Venus and a Christian God.[131] Moreover, his penitent is Amans, or another French character type, the lover. Although these characters immediately signal Gower's interest in the *fin'amor* tradition, or maybe even a parody of it, the confessional frame and serious tone should not be ignored, despite the fact that Genius and Amans are problematic figures to distinguish illicit sexual modes of desire from licit ones. Gower attempts to reconcile these genres to demonstrate that conjugal love is moral, as Peter Nicholson has argued.[132] That Gower would seek to use tropes and characters from the *fin'amor* tradition in a confessional frame to speak about common profit makes sense as these two traditions were beginning to be put into dialogue often with each other for various purposes.[133]

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[130] For some arguments in favor of this approach, see J. A. Burrow, "Sinning Against Love in *Confessio amantis*," in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet*, eds. John Hines and R. F. Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 217-229; Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's Confessio amantis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Gregory M. Sadlek, "John Gower's *Confessio amantis*, Ideology, and the 'Labor' of 'Love's Labor'," in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 1998), 147-158; and, C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*. For how his penitential approach is orthodox, see Candace Barrington, "Common-Law and Penitential Intentionality in Gower's 'Tale of Paris and Helen'," *South Atlantic Review* 79.3-4 (2015): 132-43, 136.

[131] Burrow, "Sinning Against Love," sees Genius in relation to the double part played by household priests.

[132] Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's Confessio amantis*.

[133] For more on the relationship between the *Confessio amantis* and courtly love, see Nicolette Zeeman, "The Verse of Courtly Love in the Framing Narrative of the *Confessio Amantis*" in *Medium Aevum* 60 (1991): 222-240.

Due to Gower's desire to combine different narrative forms and traditions, it is no surprise that his characters' voices at times appear to be disjointed or to promote a combination of ethical modes. As Russell Peck asserts in the introduction to Volume One of his edition of the *Confessio amantis*, Gower cultivates the voice of a historical folklorist in his only major English work, writing history from his culling of the "common echoes that reverberate in ever-present oral traditions."[134] Unlike Chaucer, who sustains more private, complicated narrative voices, like his Criseyde, Constance, and Wife of Bath, Gower recites "diverse cultural strands as if they were components of a communal psyche" through his *dramatis personae* (Amans and Genius) and *exempla* in the *Confessio amantis*.[135] Rather than asserting one distinct way to promote communal ethics and love, Gower explores varying points through fourteenth-century penitential practices to arrive at an understanding of virtue that, though at first glance interested in Amans' specific situation as lover, is able to discover virtue in a more general sense.

Gower sets out to write the *Confessio amantis* in "the middel weie… / Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore" (Prol.17, 19), which ends up fittingly being recorded "In oure englisshe" as "A bok for Engelondes sake" (Prol. 23-24).[136] As many critics observe, this "middle weie" also invokes Gower's Aristotelian and Thomistic understanding of virtue's

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[134] Russell Peck, ed. *John Gower*: *Confessio Amantis Volume 3.* Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publication, 2006, 7.

[135] *Ibid*. I will explore this claim that Chaucer creates more personal narrative voices in the next chapter.

[136] The book was first dedicated to King Richard "A book for King Richardes sake" in line 24 of the Ricardian recession of the prologue. All references to the *Confessio amantis* in this chapter come from Russell Peck's scholarly edition based on the Fairfax 3 manuscript for TEAMS *Confessio Amantis*, 3 vol., Russell Peck, ed. (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 2006).

mean that Book 7 on Aristotle's education of Alexander will take up again more fully.[137] Genius explains to Amans at the end of Book 5 that

> Between the tuo extremites
> of vice stant the propretes
> of Vertu (5.7641-7643)

In other words, virtue is "the middel weie" between excess and frugality (5.7691). By linking the language of the narrative aim with that of virtue, Gower reveals more than a linguistic resemblance between the two.[138] He also is claiming that these two different genres (the ethical and amatory) work together to create virtue. Gower also uses this idea at the end of the Prologue where he explains that he will write

> Towards hem that now be grete
> Between the vertu and the vice
> Which longeth to this office. (Prol. 78-80)

Gower writes in the final version of the prologue that a blend of historical and amatory narrative forms, both arguably ethical, may provide the best opportunity to teach reform to the English community, through "hem that now be grete," because this combination shows one how to navigate a middle ground (virtue's mean) between diverse traditions that co-exist and influence common profit in sometimes opposing ways.[139] This blending

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[137] Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit*, 103.

[138] Anne Middleton views this "middel weie" as a rhetorical move that enables Gower to write between his personal moral choices and that of societies'. See her "Idea of Public Poetry."

[139] For a reading that considers this line as a indictment of the ecclesiastical failures during the time Gower was living and thus as an appeal to the lay power not to succumb to the same evils, see Aers, "Reflections on Gower as '*Sapiens* in Ethics and Politics,'" 196.

of form does not, however, render the significance of the overarching confessional frame superfluous. Rather, as Nicholson and Kinneavy argued decades ago, Gower engages the penitential genre as well as the courtly love tradition.[140] These two traditions are equally important in this text as Gower uses them simultaneously to reach and to implicate the broader English community. After all, Gower explains in his Prologue that he will write equally of lore and lust to further his project of communal reform, and Book 1 is set in the spring, known figuratively for its connections to fertility and Christ's resurrection. This combination and extended dramatic form of confession enables Gower to reimagine the often abbreviated practice of the self-examination of conscience in preparation for oral confession; such a systematic review of one's actions against an inventory of vices and their countervailing virtues not only has the ability to restore one to virtue and to rid oneself of vice privately on a micro (soul) level, at least in theory, but also is able to do so on a more sustained, public, macro (community) level.[141]

Due to this overarching objective and the social tensions of the time, avarice's status in the *Confessio amantis* becomes central (both in emphasis and in placement) as

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[140] Peter Nicholson, "The 'Confession' in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*" *Studia Neophilologica* (1986): 193-204. Gerald Kinneavy, "Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the Penitentials," *Chaucer Review* 1 (1984) —He comes to find this thesis after comparing the *Confessio amantis* to Robert Mannyng de Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* and John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*. Mary Flowers Braswell also engages with Gower's use of the confessional model, see *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (East Brunswick, Associated University Presses: 1983). For more on the *Confessio amantis*' use of the *fin'amor* tradition see Nicolette Zeeman, "The verse of courtly love in the framing narrative of the *Confessio Amantis*" *Medium Aevum* 60 (1991): 222-236.

[141] For more on confessional practices in late fourteenth-century England, see Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.

this vice has corrupted all aspects of society. The clergy and secular leaders all the way to husbands who rule their families that the *Confessio amantis* is aimed at teaching—"towards hem that now be grete"—are all implicated in this vice. Book 5 that treats avarice reflects its ever-penetrating status in late fourteenth-century English society—on an organizational level, it is two thousand lines longer than any of the other books and echoes the mounting political and communal anxiety over avarice's ever-increasing power to corrupt English justice (from church to state to family to individual). Gower abandons the exclusive use of familial grammar of Sin (*Pecché*) and her daughters (*les filles du Pecché*) that he used in his *Mirour de l'Omme* and instead uses this schematic with others that are more politicized in his *Confessio amantis*; The Seven Deadly Sins now have "courts" in addition to progenies, and Avarice has the largest court of all of the sins, which includes twelve servants (5.1973). Book 5, through its expanded scope and politicized schematic, reveals the manifold ways in which avarice may corrupt positive and natural law and the severe consequences that corruption may have on every level of society.

The Semantics of Avarice

Before interrogating Gower's construction of avarice and its ethical implications, I would first like to distinguish "avarice" semantically from words it largely gets conflated with, "covetousness" and "greed." As bell hooks writes, "Definitions are vital starting points for the imagination. What we cannot imagine cannot come into being. A

good definition marks our starting point and lets us know where we want to end up."[142] Definitions of "avarice" and its related term "covetousness" are especially useful to consider as these words and ideas have largely faded from the modern English language. Today "avarice" is most often understood as greed, a word capitalist societies are perhaps all too familiar with. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*) defines greed as having an *avaricious* or *covetous* desire (emphasis mine). Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, the source cited in the *OED* as providing the first use of avarice in the English language, makes a much more obvious distinction between avarice and covetousness than may be gleaned from the definition of greed in the *OED* that appears to conflate the two. The Parson explains, following the penitential tradition, that the "difference bitwixe Avarice and Coveitise is this: Coveitise is for to coveite swich thynges as thou hast nat; and Avarice is for to withholde and kepe swiche thynges as thou hast, withoute rightful need" (743). From the Parson's point of view, then, it would appear that avarice is much more akin to what one would consider as hoarding today and covetousness more similar to envy, another one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

In the *Confessio amantis*, covetousness is also related yet dissimilar to avarice. Though written roughly around the same time as the *Parson's Tale*, Gower provides more of a distinction between covetousness and avarice than Chaucer by personifying and politicizing both vices. Covetousness becomes Dame Avarice's principal servant, *Covoitise*, and is described as a "pourveour" and an "aspie" that goes out in the world and

[142] bell hooks, *all about love: new visions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 14.

brings more gain for Dame Avarice (5.1975). As in his *Mirour de l'Omme*, Gower sets covetousness against the virtue justice, as Covoitise's "gredi wille" (5.2006) plagues the laws of lands so badly that "no lawe mai rescowe / Fro him that wol no riht allowe" (5.2019-2020). Indeed, the only way this type of injustice brought on by Covitise may be redressed is through "that grete God alofte" (5.2024). This political personification further highlights the destructive nature these vices to the community and encourages a more polysemous understanding of their scope.

Though the word greed entered the English language around 1600, the adjective form it came from, greedy, was in use much earlier as reflected in Gower's description of Covoitise's will above. Greedy, developing out of the Old English *grǽdig*, has hunger as one of its roots, and this denotation remains in Gower's use of the adjective in Book 5. He not only uses it to describe Covoitise's will but also her actions as she is described as "griedeli devour[ing]" lands that come in her grasp (5.2017). The *Middle English Dictionary* reveals the polysemous nature of the word "devouren." The first definition it provides is "to devour, feed on" (*MED* 1a) and "to eat (food) greedily or profusely" (*MED* 2b), though it could also denote "to waste or squander (possessions)" or "to devastate or ruin… destroy, ravage, despoil" (*MED* 3a, 3b). These definitions of devour, though diverse, are, significantly, all related as subforms of avarice in Book 5, illuminating the broadened scope of the vice, which now includes covetousness, false witness, perjury, usury, parsimony, ingratitude, ravine, robbery, stealth, pilfering, sacrilege, and prodigality, and its close connection with its neighbor sin gluttony.

Though avarice and gluttony were considered separate deadly sins, their distinction appears to become more tenuous in the vernacular literature of the later Middle Ages. Gluttony, as represented in Cassian's early schematic (d. 435) created largely to teach monks how to avoid vice, was thought to be the gateway to sin for a monastic audience that valued fasting, though Pride was still the chief vice.[143] Gluttony lost its pivotal role in Gregory's (d. 604) re-conception, and its diminished role centuries later in Gower's *Confessio amantis* may further reveal its deteriorated status on the spectrum of sins taught to a non-monastic audience over time. While Gower expands avarice to cover twelve sub-forms rather than five, he shrinks gluttony to cover only two, drunkenness and delicacy, of the five subordinates it ruled in his *Mirour de l'Omme*; avarice devours some of the characteristics that were previously associated with gluttony, like prodigality.

Avarice as Disease That Plagues Those in Power and Their Subordinates

Gower asserts through his hierarchical, political schematic of avarice that it is a vice associated with those in power— the lords, not the servants—which makes its role in the *Confessio amantis* especially dominant. This construction also connects Book 5 back to the Prologue, as Gower asserts that the work is directed at those in power. As mentioned earlier, Gower used a family scheme to depict all of the seven deadly sins and

[143] As is revealed in the inherited traditions, there is a debate as to which sin is the most dangerous and the proper concatenation. Much of these distinctions center on the audiences the theologians were writing to. Although Cassian wrote for ascetic monks and Gregory to a more general populace, they both agree that pride is the so-called "queen of the vices" in their hamartiologies. They see greed differently, though—Gregory sees avarice as a sign of inner-emptiness while Cassian understands it as an "organic extension of lust, a further aggrandizement of the self." For more see Carole Straw, "Gregory, Cassian, and the Cardinal Vices," 51.

their offspring as well as their opposites the seven cardinal virtues and their brood in his *Mirour de l'Omme*; however, in Book 5, Gower eschews that formation in favor of a more political grammar of avarice. Avarice does not have a progeny but a court, "Servantz manyon," and "procurours" (5.1971, 5.2862). All of the *exempla* in Book 5, even those in direct reference to the vice generally, and its manifestation in the context of love particularly, highlight the crimes of those in power, like that of *Covitious*'s opportunistic influence on the law.

The focus on the evils committed by those in power ties to the overarching theme and critique of the clergy and nobility in the work. The Latin incipit that opens Book 5 reveals avarice's status as the most destructive vice in Gower's society as it proclaims avarice's opposition to the law of nature and charity in and out of love. The incipit reads,

> *Obstat auaricia nature legibus, et que*
> *Largus amor poscit, sticcius illa vetat.*
> *Omne quod est nimium vicisum dicitur aurum,*
> *Vellera sicut oues, seruat auarus opes.*
> *Non decet ut soli seruabitur es, set amori*
> *Debet homo solam solus habere suam.* (5.i)

> (Avarice obstructs the laws of nature, and those things that generous love requests, she [Avarice] very stingily denies. All gold that is excessive is called vicious; as a sheep preserves its coat, so an avaricious man preserves his wealth. It is not fitting that coin should be kept of one alone. So in love, one single man ought to have his sole woman.)[144]

[144] Translation from Peck, *Confessio Amantis Volume 3*, 35.

Throughout his text, Gower uses incipits, which were normally used as markers and summaries of the main ideas of early texts. As is shown, then, from this Latin incipit, and from the content of the book, avarice's status on the schematic of sin is heightened above the others because of its ability to obstruct the virtues of justice, or the laws of nature—*obstat auaricia nature legibus* (Avarice obstructs the laws of nature)— and charity—*largus amor poscit, striccius illa vetat* (that which generous love requests, [Avarice] very stingily denies). As Peck points out, Gower returns to the "voice of the Prologue" in Book 5's demi-prologue: "for fifty-seven lines [Gower] reviews the larger history of mankind to reassert the primal virtue of common profit."[145] That avarice is most directly opposed to common profit not only highlights its amplified role among the vices but also signals Gower's conviction about the destructiveness of this particular vice in the fourteenth century.

The decision to contrast avarice with justice and generosity carries over from the *Mirour de l'Omme* where avarice's remedy is listed as generosity and covetousness's justice and from the prologue of the *Confessio amantis* where avarice is used to describe the injustice of the clergy. Indeed, avarice's first appearance in the latter materializes in its Latin form (*auaricia*) in the incipit found in the section of the prologue that introduces the clergy. There the vice is in opposition to peace, faith, and positive law:

> How now that holy cherche is went
> Of that here lawe positif
> Hath set, to make were and strif
> For worldes good, which may noght last. (Prol. 246-249)

[145] Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit,* 99.

The vice of avarice, it would appear, has expanded in the *Confessio* due to the larger focus on its ability to redirect the law, even positive law, to fund wars, which destroys justice. In Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* "misericorde," or mercy, that follows pity in performing charitable works as well as, in a departure from its assumed Latin source, "reasonable largesse" (805, 810) are given as the remedies to avarice.[146] It is worth noting that Gower does not pair mercy with any of avarice's, or any other vice's, progeny in the *Mirour de l'Omme*. Pity, the virtue that leads to mercy in the *Parson's Tale*, however, is linked with homicide, a sub-form of wrath in the *Mirour*; though, like other crimes first associated with wrath in the *Parson's Tale*, murder is also attributed to avarice. Though Chaucer mostly follows his alleged Latin source in the *Parson's Tale*, he also makes subtle changes in some of the vice's subspecies and remedies. Gower, though, appears to upend the traditional pairings in favor of his narrative aims in the *Confessio amantis*, especially in regards to the expanded nature of avarice (subsins and *remedia*) and his discussions of virginity and pagan religions that he chooses to write about in the context of the book.

All of these choices further highlight avarice's unique ability to upset the common good. Genius begins his explanation of avarice by declaring that it brought fortune into this world. Avarice's pivotal role in fortune's birth is also explained to be the cause of the first war at the beginning of Book 5:

[146] For more on one of Chaucer's original sources for the Parson's Tale, see Siegfried Wenzel, ed. *Summa Virtutum de Remediis Anime* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984).

Ferst whan the hyhe God began
This world, and that the kinde of man
Was falle into no gret encress,
For worldes good tho was no press,
Bot al was set to the comune
Thei spieken thanne of no fortune
Or for to lese or for to winne
Til Avarice broghte it inne. (5.1-8)

Here Genius underscores that when God created the world he did so according to the "comune," or common good. Due to the project's focus on reinstating the virtues of the past, significantly when the Christian "hyhe God," not pagan gods, created the world, *avarice*, not pride, appears to be the sin most at fault for the day's *current* evils.[147] This assertion that avarice is now the chief sin is expounded in the description of the "florin," or gold coin, as the "bringere inne of alle were . . . Thurgh the conseil of Avarice" in the first exemplum about King Midas's greed (5.335, 5.345, 5.347). Before coins no one needed to fight over gold or fear being robbed of it—God's law ensured all had what they needed to thrive.

This devastating desire for money is further implicated in Genius's use of the grammar of disease (one that affects not only the person afflicted but also the person's community) in the same exemplum. Avarice is understood here as a "maladie" to proper knowledge of God and thus communal flourishing (5.249). The language of disease and its manifestation as a physical illness, like dropsy, was a conventional way to conceive of

[147] For more on avarice's importance during this time, see Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

avarice, and the vices in general, during this time.[148] King Midas is not only suffering from a physical malady of everything he touches turning to gold, but he also suffers more greatly in this exemplum from a mental one. Midas determines through his own diseased reason that "gold is the lord of all man and beste" and "that al the world to gold obeieth" (5.242, 5.245). This exemplum emphasizes avarice's indiscriminate ability to pervert reason in that the desire for a material good, gold, can make even a great king, such as Midas, a slave to it. The desire for gold ends up becoming an obsession for Midas, and he prays to the classical god Bacchus to make everything he touches turn into it. Due to the success of this prayer, Midas finds himself not only mentally diseased but also physically sick, thirsty, and starving, until he repents, revealing that one's basic needs and society's cannot be met by gold alone.

This same language of unnatural, unquenchable thirst is used again in the second *exemplum* Genius provides in his explanation of the punishment of Tantalus with the avaricious in hell and in his discussion of the jealousy of lovers. To set up the former, Genius explains that many of the officers of avarice reside in hell. There they are overcome with "swich thurst and hunger . . . / that nevere his appetite ne faileth" (5.377-

[148] Peter Biller explains that the proliferation of pastoral literature to guide those in preparation for confession and the overwhelming popularity of such texts during the fourteenth-century are a result of the numerous papal synods written in the thirteenth century and the 1215 Fourth Lateral Council's mandate for the laity's annual confession to their parish priest. This latter process of the penitents admitting and repenting their spiritual ills to a parish priest was likened to patients seeking a physician who needed to discover the cause and condition of their particular disease in order to find the right remedy. "Confession in the Middle Ages: Introduction," in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis (York: York Medieval Press, 1998), 1-33, 8. In his sustained consideration of Gower's approach to confessional conversation in the *Confessio amantis*, Joe Stadolnik argues that Gower "adopts" both confessional and medical methods of inquiry to "inaugurate the frame" of the poem. "Gower's Bedside Manner," *New Medieval Literatures* 17 (2017): 150-174, 151.

89). In other words, though they can see the food and drink they desire, they are never able to satisfy their hunger or to satiate their thirst for them. Much like Midas and those avaricious in hell, jealous lovers are not only diseased in their bodies but also their minds by that miserable or "unsely maladie" (5.459). They are never satiated by their obsessions, resulting in both mental and physical ramifications. Therefore, avarice's nature to Gower may be understood in a way similar to Augustine's in *De libero arbitri*o, where avarice is understood as "a desire to possess anything which is not directed towards God, intangible qualities as well as material objects."[149] Augustine's definition of avarice is purposefully broader than those that came before as it flows out to a more far-reaching definition than Cassian's, for example, material understanding.[150] Avarice to Augustine and Gower infects not only one's physical state but also their mental state, causing one to be unable to reason or navigate virtue. The modern reader does not need to do much work to imagine these avaricious figures in hell, as the disastrous, manic craving for more wealth and material goods is well documented through news reports on the chaos that ensues on Black Friday and through art, like the recent film *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Though one proposed modern day remedy to avarice, particularly consumerism, in a capitalist society is the "Minimalist" movement, Genius offers a perhaps simpler solution that will not sound foreign to medieval nor modern day Christians. The only way

[149] Augustine. *De libero arbitrio*, 3.17.48.165-66, as cited by Richard Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Xiii.

[150] Straw, "Gregory, Cassian, and the Cardinal Vices," 51.

to avoid avarice and the "seknesse" it causes, Genius advises Amans, is to "be gracious and do largesse" (5.410, 5.409).

Though Gower favors the language of individual physical and mental disease to describe the dangerous aspects of avarice, he highlights the consequences of this malady to a larger group of people rather than just the sinner. Gower's message here becomes much more broadly didactic. Midas, for instance, is quick to redress the sins he committed when he was overtaken by avarice by enacting new laws to ensure that avaricious pursuits do not disrupt the peace of his kingdom again; they include laws that force men to live off cloth and meat and only raise livestock and, perhaps, most importantly of all in this context, they disallow the hoarding of gold (5.329-3). In this example, Gower reveals that laws are instrumental to the cultivation of virtue. Though Midas alone appeared to be plagued with avarice, his disease also affected his subjects because of his ability to dictate the law as ruler. This communal consequence is what makes avarice more dangerous than the other deadly sins to the common good.

This consequence is revealed again in Genius's consideration of jealousy as a species of avarice. Genius recites with careful, sympathetic consideration the legal hardships that women with jealous husbands have to endure due to the law's granting husbands complete control over their wives in his *exemplum* on the jealousy of lovers. Much like a sovereign, men have a duty to rule justly over their wives at this time. Genius explains,

Ha, to what peine sche is dyht,
That in hire youthe hath so beset
The bond which mai noght ben unknet!
I wot the time is ofte cursed,
That evere was the gold unpursed,
The which was leid upon the bok,
Whan that alle other sche forsook
For love of him (5.556-561).

The "bond" referred to here is marriage and the husband's ills drive his wife to feel "peine" that she is unable to voice.[151] Therefore, the sin is not only causing the sinner pain but injustice to those he/she is legally bound to, in this case the ever-faithful wife. These first *exempla* on avarice's overarching nature help to set up the rest in that they highlight that, since avarice affects the law at an essential level, it affects not only those individuals who are avaricious, but the whole community.

Further explicating avarice's unique ability to corrupt those in positions of power, Genius states that avaricious desire is unnatural because it makes those who are afflicted "serveth" avarice "where that he scholde maister be" (5.55-56). Though romantic love is normally accused of doing the same thing, Genius deems Amans's love for his mistress to be natural: "Thogh thou to serve be put under / With love which to kinde acordeth" (5.118-119). These assertions tie back to avarice's ability to inflict communal pain and

[151] Though there were exceptions, the legal status of wives in the fourteenth century was comparable to a servant. Take for example one of the statutes defining petty treason (*petit treason*) from the rolls of Edward III in 1352: ""And moreover there is another manner of treason, that is to say, when a servant slayeth his master, or a wife her husband, or when a man secular or religious slayeth his prelate, to whom he oweth faith and obedience." 25 Edward III. Stat. 5, c. 2 as given in William James Ashley, ed. *Edward III & His Wars, 1327-1360: Extracts from the Chronicles of Froissart, Jehan le Bel, Knighton, Adam of Murimuth, Robert of Avesbury, the Chronicle of Lanercost, the State Papers, & Other Contemporary Records* (London: David Nutt, 1887), 138.

reveal that the nature of secular, and significantly romantic, love is not immoral, but is rather central to common good. Indeed, sacred and secular love are both deemed by Christ to be principle commandments given by God:

> *Ait illi Jesus: Dillges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo et in tota anima tua, et in tota mente tua. Hoc est maximum, et primum mandate. Secundum autem simile est huic: Diliges proximum tuum, sicut teipsum. In his duobus mandatis universa lex pendet et prophetae.* Matthew 22:37-39

> [Jesus said to him: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.][152]

Therefore, Christ explains that loving God, one's self, and one's neighbor as one's self are all cornerstones for divine or natural law. Love, even in its secular form, does not obstruct the nature of justice in the ways avarice does but upholds it and brings one peace in life and in the afterlife. If one loves another as themselves, they will act with not only their desires in mind but the other person's as well. Though certainly this love refers to a spiritual love that the Church upheld, Gower, through Amans, questions if this love could also extend to the love one has for his lady, which Genius answers yes to. After all, this love aligns with *kinde*. Gower has already made the point of gesturing to the healing power of love in the prologue of the *Confessio amantis*. There he writes,

[152] The Latin here is taken from the Vulgate and the English translation from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

Echon to sette pes with other
And loven as his oghne brother;
So may he winne worldes welthe
And afterward his soule helthe. (Prologue 1049-1052)

This secular love goes hand in hand with peace, which are both set up as the antitheses of war. The stakes of avarice, then, are increased in this work by the juxtaposition of avarice, as war maker, and love in Book 5, as it further reflects the vice's nature to obstruct laws and destroy community, which leads to misrepresent the true nature of love, both divine and secular.

Avarice as a Species of Idolatry

Genius's understanding of jealousy as a species of avarice is amplified by the exemplum about Vulcan, Mars, and Venus. The moral dilemma posed by Venus's adulterous behavior precipitates the lesson on the religions of the world. Genius asserts that an "ensample" should be made of the cuckold, Vulcan, due to his "misgovernance" of his wife (Venus) and that men on earth should be wary that this humiliation could also happen to them (5.699, 5.693). Though this statement aligns Vulcan with the other avaricious characters and jealous husbands in this book, his characterization as avaricious seems oddly unjust. Instead of locking Venus up in a tower so that he might keep her beauty all to himself, as do many jealous husbands in medieval literature, such as the one in Marie de France's *Guigemar,* Vulcan merely senses that something is not right with his wife and spies on her to get to the bottom of it. The ocular proof reveals that Vulcan is justified in his suspicions that Venus is cheating on him. Genius notes, however, that the

gods judging Venus's adulterous act were "loves [Venus's] frendes," which calls their judgment, and arguably justice, swiftly into question (5.690).

Though the lesson of this exemplum should be about Vulcan's jealousy and the reprehensible nature of it, the reader cannot help but focus on the injustice of the shame that is brought to a classical god by his questioning of his wife's confirmed infidelity. Venus's adulterous action is a sin after all. In this same book in fact, Genius highlights its evils in his tale of Echo. Adultery, as explained in the Latin incipit that introduces the tale explains that Genius will present an exemplum "… *contra istos maritos qui vltra id quod proprias habent vxores ad noue voluptatis incrementum alias mulieres superflue lucrari non verentur*."[153] Adultery is typically treated as a species of lechery, as it is in Gower's own *Mirour de l'Omme* and in penitential manuals like Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis* and *The Book of Vices and Virtues* among others. The reader is not alone in feeling uncomfortable with this tale and its moral given that Genius is Venus's servant, and she is depicted as sinful. Amans also finds this exemplum difficult, but more it would seem because of the jealous or adulterous behavior of all three gods in this tale and the fact that there is more than one God in the story. Amans complains to Genius,

> Mi fader, this ensample is hard,
> Hou such thing to the heveneward
> Among the goddes myhte falle.
> For there is bot o God of alle. (5.729-32)

[153] "… against those husbands who are not ashamed to gain, in excess profit, other women beyond what they have as their own wives, for the purpose of the profit of novel pleasure." Translated by Andrew Galloway, *Confessio Amantis Volume III*, ed. Peck, footnote 4579 ff., 410.

Demonstrating his authority as a priest in a Christian context, Genius swiftly disavows the pagan gods and their sinful nature by explaining that it is with those "that stonden misbelieved, / that suche goddes ben believed" (5.739-740).

Critics view this so-called digression on religion to be either "ill-advised" (in the case of G.C. Macaulay) or "irresistibly funny" and sometimes "mere absurdity" (in the case of C.S. Lewis).[154] I agree more with Peck, though, in that if this section is funny it is intentionally so, and "the glimmering of a humorous tone does not detract from its overall argument."[155] Indeed, I argue that Genius's turn to a discussion about the religions of the world from the cataloging of the main sin and its species helps not only to bolster his role as a Christian authority but also his scriptural claim that avarice is a species of idolatry. As noted above, Gower showcases Genius's tutelary role in Book 5 throughout his section on the religions of the world. In this discussion, Genius emphasizes that the corrupt pagan gods' vices are echoed in their false laws, which cause people to worship idols. For instance, Venus (in her amoral figuration) alters the law to allow for prostitution, which is sometimes associated with avarice in the penitential literature.[156] She is named as the first who told "that wommen scholde here bodi selle" (5.1431). This

[154] For the full quote regarding Macaulay's disdain for the digression see Peck's footnote on page 393 on line 729 ff. in Volume 3 of his edition of the *Confessio amantis*. For C. S. Lewis's comments, see *Allegory of Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 211. Russell Peck does a great job in his edition explaining the interpretations and the numerous traditions Gower makes use of in his digression in his third volume on page 394 on line 917-18.

[155] Peck, *Confessio Amantis Vol. 3*, 394.

[156] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, for instance, refers to prostitution as one of the "wikkede craftes" that is the "nynþe branch of couetise." *The Book of Vices and Virtues: A Fourteenth-Century English Translation of the Somme le Roi of Lorens d'Orléans*, eds. Dominican Laurent and W. Nelson Francis, Early English Text Society OS 217 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1942), 41.

shifting of the law to serve her own overwhelming personal desires is resonant of King Midas's prayers in the first exemplum in this book; remember that he prays to Bacchus to ensure he receives all of the gold.

This polysemous understanding of idolatry gestures back to the nature of avarice in the Tale of Midas as the consequence of a diseased reason:

> The worschipe of ydolatrie
> Drowh forth upon the fantasie
> Of hem that weren thanne blinde
> And couthen noght the trouthe finde. (5.1587-90)

Though this statement refers to the worship of pagan gods, Genius explains that the Jews, like Lucifer and Adam before them, also fell into idolatry. Avarice corrupted God's chosen people during Noah's time, as the desire turned toward the flesh to an irredeemable level. In order to curb this false desire, Abraham outlawed idolatry:

> This patriarch to his lignage
> Forbad, that thei to non ymage
> Encline scholde in none wise,
> Bot here offrende and sacrifise
> With al the hole hertes love
> Unto the mihti God above
> Thei scholden give and to no mo. (5.1635-41)

In Moses's law there was an emphasis on common profit, on the promised land being shared: "That ech of hem as heritage / his porpartie hath underfonge" (5.1690-1691). Ultimately, however, the Jews fell not from pride but due to their inability to recognize

Christ at "moste nede of alle," which in Gower's idiom ties their failure to a misplaced desire for goods rather than a love for God (5.1696).

The relationship between avarice and idolatry is more thoroughly examined in the *Confessio amantis* than in any of Gower's other works or those of his contemporaries. In his *Mirour de l'Omme*, he explains that "*Ce dist l'apostre, q'avarice / Est des ydoles le service*," and God punishes those that worship unjustly (7609-11).[157] He does not elaborate on either of the claims, though. Chaucer, in his *Parson's Tale*, provides a bit more insight into the relationship between avarice and idolatry than Gower does in his *Mirour de l'Omme* and explicitly alludes to Saint Paul's letter to the Ephesians (5:5); however, he does not expand avarice to include rapine, which, as in Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme*, remains a species of lechery.[158] Chaucer's Parson explains that idolatry is the first thing that God decried in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt have no false goddes bifore me, ne thou shalt make to thee no grave thyng" (5.750). He elucidates that avarice is damnable because it does wrong to Jesus and connects idolaters to the avaricious, perhaps commenting on Dante's similar claim:[159]

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[157] G. C. Macaulay, ed. *The Works of John Gower Volume 1 (The French Works)*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1899, 88-9. "The apostle says that avarice is the worship of idols." William Burton Wilson, trans. Nancy Wilson Van Baak, ed. *John Gower: Mirour de l'Omme*, 105.

[158] "For know you this and understand: that no fornicator, or unclean, or covetous person (which is a serving of idols) hath inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." This quotation of Ephesians 5:5 is from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

[159] "You've made yourselves a god of gold and silver; / how are you different form idolaters, / save that they worship one and you a hundred?" *Inferno* 19:112-14. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Random House, 1995), 140.

> What difference is bitwixe an ydolastre and an avaricious man, but that an ydolastre, per aventure, ne hath but o mawmet or two, and the avaricious man hath manye? For certes, every floryn in his cofre is his mawmet. (748)[160]

Both Gower and Chaucer reiterate Saint Paul's assertion that avarice is the worship of idols, which pits it, as evidenced in all three works, directly against the Christian God, but the *Confessio amantis* alone elaborates on Paul's connection of the fornicators with the avaricious and idolaters.

Gower emphasizes avarice's ability to infect reason in that imagined wealth in the form of idolatry is opposed to true wealth, the "hevene[']s] mede," which humankind was offered in the act of Christ's Incarnation (5.1792). Though false religions ask for material goods and sacrifices and cannot understand the concept of true wealth, Christ committed the ultimate act of generosity and selflessness: "For that wherof his wo began / was after cause of al his welthe" (5.1758-59). Christ does not offer physical wealth but rather spiritual wealth that is achieved through charity. Following scripture, Gower uses economic language to fuse the idea of material and spiritual wealth when he explains that "Crist . . . boghte [the redemption] with His fleissh and blod" (5.1753). Avarice, then, is the opposite of good works, which Gower asserts, in line with orthodoxy, are necessary to salvation:

> If we the goode dedes werche;
> For feith only sufficeth noght,
> Bot if good dede also be wroght. (5.1800-2)

[160] See the note to line 749 in the *Parson's Tale* in *The Wadsworth Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 1987), 962.

Gower also provides the biblical verse, James 2:26, that echoes this sentiment in the Latin marginalia—*Iacobus. Fides sine operibus mortua est*. (James: Faith without works is dead.) Langland in *Piers Plowman* makes a similar move when Holy Churche uses this same Latin verse in Passus I to explain that even those who are chaste, like the religious, will be "cheyned in helle" if they do not have charity (1.184). Gower, like Langland, focuses on the avaricious nature that causes false prelates to corrupt the Church and their fellow Christians but also equates them to "False Lollards" by pairing them together. He renounces those such as "false Lollards" and prelates who do not follow Christ as an example and therefore corrupt the Church and their fellow Christians.[161] Indeed, because the prelates are afflicted with sloth, another Deadly Sin, they allow the people to be seduced by avaricious desires and to be estranged from the love that the clergy should have taught them. Instead of worshipping Christ, people serve the "lusti" world and will pass without reward "wher Crist himself is auditour," continuing the economic metaphor of the grammar of Atonement (5.1934, 5.1919).

What is worst of all, then, is that idolatry contaminates the imaginations of people through the work of the corrupt clergy. Instead of understanding how to be truly generous and to love naturally, they fall into avarice due to their misunderstanding of God and virtue. Genius explains,

> And [an offering to a pagan god] is a sacrifice,
> Which, after that th'apostel seith,
> Is openly agein the feith

[161] Gower's choice to pair these two distinct groups (Lollards and the clergy) here is unique. For more on Gower and Wycliffism, see Anne Hudson, "The Context of Vernacular Wycliffism" in *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 390-445.

Unto th'idoles gove and granted.
Bot natheles it is nou haunted,
And vertu changed into vice,
So that largesce is Avarice. (5.1952-8)

The fact that "largesce" has changed into a vice rather than remain a virtue is especially a problem. Though Genius speaks of a past, a "history" of idolatry, his gesturing to the late fourteenth-century Church, through his examples of the current prelates and false Lollards, signals that the disease of avarice that "haunted" previous societies is now threatening to destroy the current Church and monarch and thus the realm.

Rape as Stealing Virtue and the Debate about Venus

With Genius's turn to the fourteenth century in mind, I will now consider the second apparent digression on virginity in Book 5 to explain how this context distinguishes avaricious forms of sexuality (like rape) from Amans's love for his lady. The Latin incipit in the Prologue to the work mentions that the Church formerly had a double virtue—charity and chastity—both of which are lost in the current time due to avarice's hold on those in power. Gower subsequently examines these virtues in Book 5, though a long meditation on the latter is perhaps far more surprising in a book that considers avarice than the former. Indeed, in his *Mirour de l'Omme*, the act of rape, which in Book 5 is what guides Genius into a discussion on virginity, is a species of lechery, not avarice. Here, though, the most sustained consideration of it is under avarice. Sexual violation does occur in other tales in the *Confessio amantis*, such as the Tale of

Canace (Book 3), but in that instance, like in the tales found in Book 8 on Lechery, it is incest that is the focus, not rape.[162]

The reader, and Amans, finally gets to consider the "branches… Of Avarice" in love and in general after Genius establishes in the first 1960 lines of Book 5 that the world has turned upside down due to avarice: "vertu changed into vice" (5.1957). The following *exempla*, like the one on The Tale of Virgil's Mirror, highlight how the sub-sins of avarice, in this case covetousness, link to idolatry and how avarice perverts one's imagination. It is at this point where the morality of romantic love is taken up most earnestly, and the reader finds that it hinges on intention (or well-directed reason). When Genius turns to covetousness in love, he gives tales arguing against promiscuity that is derived from one wanting all of the worldly gain he can get through each lover. Gower's inclusion of the dual priesthood of Genius in the *Confessio amantis* is a deliberate invocation of this character's involvement in the debate about sexuality between Alain de Lille's *De planctu naturae* and Jean de Meun's section of the *Roman de la Rose.* In her seminal study in defense of the morality of Gower's Genius, Denise Baker compellingly argues that "Genius as a priest of Venus teaches Amans the law of *kinde* espoused by his counterpart in Jean de Meun's poem [*Roman de la Rose*]. But the inadequacy of this natural law as a moral standard for man is expressed by Genius the orthodox priest."[163]

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[162] For a consideration of the connections between the Canace exemplum in Book 3 and the Apollonius of Tyre one in Book 8 of the *Confessio amantis*, see C. David Benson, "Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis,'" *The Chaucer Review* 19.2 (1984): 100-109.

[163] Denise Baker, "The Priesthood of Genius: A Study of the Medieval Tradition," *Speculum* (1976): 277-291, 287. Theresa Tinkle argues that Denise Baker and Winthrop Wetherbee have "laid to rest" the concern of Genius's authority. *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, & English Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 259. Wetherbee, "Genius and Interpretation in the 'Confessio Amantis'" in

Through the union of the laws of *kinde* and *reson*, Gower restores the moral authority which Genius originally exercised in Alain de Lille's *De planctu naturae*. In arguing for the critical appropriateness of this section in Book 5, Yeager makes a similar observation, explaining that Venus and Genius are not static allegorical figures in Gower's text and do not simply align with their ironic counterparts in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*. He writes that as a result of Venus's complex role in medieval literature, especially in works by Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, and Chaucer, "Gower had to separate [Venus's] dual personalities [as both a moral figure and an amoral one], and keep them strictly apart, in order to rectify, and restore meaning to, the language applied to love."[164] Yeager argues that Gower finds the device for Genius's blatant dismissal of the "other" Venus in the religions of the world section in Book 5.[165]

Since critics such as Baker and Yeager have revealed that Gower had multiple models in mind for Venus and Genius and that Genius ultimately denounces only Venus's amoral figuration, I want to continue analyzing these figures' duality in Book 5. Venus in the *Confessio amantis* has a dual nature as both a figure for *kinde* love and amoral sexuality. Speaking about idolatry in a strictly religious sense first, and denouncing the illicit Venus, allows Genius to transition into the more novel forms of

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Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske, ed. Arthur Groos (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 241-260.

[164] Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, 187. For another view of Gower's Venus, especially her figuration in Book 8, and Gower's use of his pagan predecessors, see Lynn Shutters, "Confronting Venus: Classical Pagans and Their Christian Readers in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *The Chaucer Review* 48.1 (2013): 38-65.

[165] Ibid., 186.

avarice found in the *Confessio amantis*, which appear when he considers avarice in the context of love.

It is at this point where the *Confessio amantis*'s central question about the morality of Amans's love in regards to avarice is explicitly addressed. The morality of Amans's love hinges on intention and whether, following Augustine, he desires virtue more than vice.[166] The reader finds that Amans's intentions are not covetous, as he would rather live as poor as Job and loveless than covet his lady for her worldly possession; he would love her even if she was "as povere as Medea" (5.2539).

However, the dialogue between Genius and Amans at this point in Book 5 gets complicated as the way Amans speaks about his lady borders on idolizing her. Amans explains that even covetous men would not be able to think of the financial gain they could achieve by being with his lady since they would be so in love with her. Amans uses personification and alliteration to explain that she not only has superficial value but also virtue. He boasts, "Nature sette in hire at ones / beauté with bounté so besein" (5.2594-95). Amans deems his lady to be "…the pure hed and welle / and mirour and ensample of goode" (5.2604-5); therefore, he does not need to think of the material gain she will bring him as he is satisfied "to love such on and to serve" her based on her virtues alone (5.2609).

Before he elaborates on his lady's finer points, Amans sets his intentions in love apart from those of covetous lovers by explaining,

[166] Candace Barrington argues that intention is at the heart of tensions between canon and common law at this time and a topic that Gower is interested in exploring in this work. "Common-Law and Penitential Intentionality."

For I love in so plein a wise,
That for to speke of coveitise,
As for poverte or for richesse
Mi love is nouther mor ne lesse. (5.2557-60)

Echoing the language of virtue's mean, Amans explains that his love is in the middle of two extremes (poverte and richesse). He ends his confessional dialogue in this section by stating,

That nevere for no worldes good
Min herte untoward hire stod,
Bot only riht for pure love;
That wot the hihe God above. (5.2621-24)

The work's central question about whether Amans's love for his lady is virtuous is again raised here. Genius responds,

Mi sone, I seie it is wel do.
For tak of this riht good believe,
What man that wole himself relieve
To love in eny other wise,
He schal wel finde his coveitise. (5.2626-30)

Though Genius has found Amans's love not to be avaricious, he continues to expound on this topic.

This continuation might be explained by Gower's desire to distinguish further good marriages from the bad marriages Genius first spoke of at the beginning of the book and especially on the suffering of the wives who are married to jealous husbands. Genius explains that covetousness is "noght of loves kinde," explicitly detaching avaricious love

from Amans's *kinde* love (5.2829). Genius relays yet again the importance of this teaching not to just Amans but to the broader community:

> Nou in this time of thilke rage
> Ful gret desese in mariage,
> Whan venym melleth with the sucre
> And mariage is mad for lucre,
> Or for the lust or for the hele.
> What man that schal with outher dele,
> He mai noght faile to repente. (5.2831-37)

Marriage, in Genius's opinion, is inherently sweet, but it has been poisoned by "venym," or avarice. Amans, though not plagued by this vice, responds by explaining he intends to repent if he is afflicted with such failings: "Mi fader, such is myn entente" (5.2838). However, though Amans attempts to argue that it is good to have possessions, he ultimately explains that "God, which wot myn hertes wille" knows that he "…nevere for richesse / [was] Beset with mariage…" (5.2842, 5.2844-45). Therefore, it appears that if one has good intentions in love and does not have lustful or covetous desires, the love is virtuous and not idolatrous.

The exempla turn here from those focusing on the more traditional species of avarice that stem from coveting riches, to the more novel forms, like rape, that arise from the deceit that often follows such possessive desires in love. The exempla Genius uses in these later sections are strictly classical and most are Ovidian, and thus reminiscent of his prior denunciation of the adulterous Venus.[167] As mentioned before, rape is most

[167] For more on the Ovidian elements in Gower, see T. Matthew N. McCabe, "Gower's Ovidian Voice in English," in *Gower's Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the Confessio Amantis*

commonly associated with lechery, but here it is driven by avaricious desires and figured as the ultimate forced fornication, which links to the corrupt Venus's unrestrained sexuality that Genius denounces in the religions of the world section. The lineage of Rapacity is through Extortion, who is named as its mother, as evidenced in the Latin marginalia to the Latin incipit that starts the section on this species.[168] In the context of lust, rapacity transforms into rape, which comments on the legal definition and reality of *raptus* than connections of avarice and illicit sexuality usually made in penitential works. Rape in the Middle Ages had a broader definition than it does today. As Corinne Saunders has argued, the definition of *raptus* is more akin to the term "ravishment" in that it incorporates what we would now consider to be rape (forced coitus) with abduction and enforced marriage.[169] Chaucer, too, explores this crime and its connections to violence and theft in his representation of it in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Indeed, as Carissa Harris explains, the Wife of Bath in narrating the rape scene at the beginning of her tale "tells us that [the knight] has 'rafte' [the maiden's] hymen, using a verb meaning 'to tear' and also 'to plunder,' connoting both violence and theft."[170] The "mayd" who is raped in this tale

(Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 11-67; and Conrad Mainzer, "John Gower's Use of the 'Mediaeval Ovid' in Confessio Amantis'," *Medium Ævum* 41 (1972): 215-222.

[168] *Hic tractat super illa specie cupida que Rapina nuncupatur, cuius mater extorcio ipsam ad deseruiendum magnatum curiis specialius commendauit.* "Here he treats that cupidinous species which is called Rapacity, whose mother, Extortion, particularly connects her (Rapacity) to the service of magnates in courts." Translated by Andrew Galloway, *Confessio Amantis Volume III*, ed. Peck. Footnote 5505 ff., 413.

[169] *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, Boydell and Brewer: 2001), 4.

[170] "Rape Narratives, Courtly Critique, and the Pedagogy of Sexual Negotiation in the Middle English Pastourelle," *JMEMS* 46:2 (2016): 263-287, 263.

is an unmarried virgin, which, as historical records show, was the group that brought forward the most complaints of rape during the Middle Ages.[171] Gower explores the connections between theft and violence that occur in the crime *raptus* in an even more sustained fashion than Chaucer in Book 5. The relationship between *raptus* and virgin women most likely explains another part of Gower's rationale for placing these forms of illicit sexuality under avarice and provides further reason for his consideration of virginity in this book.

The brutal Ovidian tale of Tereus, Procne, and Philomena leads Genius into his exposition on robbery and its relation to rape. Genius focuses on the ravenous nature of Tereus, who is condemned as a "tirant ravine" and the harsh injustice done to Philomena (5.5627). Gower emphasizes that Tereus not only takes Philomena's virginity but also her voice. As Peck notes, Genius shifts the emphasis from Tereus's use of seductive rhetoric to convince Philomene and Procne's parents to allow Philomene to go with him due to their familial desire to see him do well, which results in his betrayal of the domestic structure that does not occur in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[172] In this section, Genius gestures to the earthly and spiritual importance of a maiden's virginity.

In tales such as the ones of Medea, Philomena, Cornix, and Calistona, Gower's main focus is on men stealing women's virginity (their most precious commodity). In the

[171] Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 55.

[172] Peck, *Confessio Amantis Volume 3*, 414 n. 5605-11.

tale of Neptune and Cornix, the latter's maidenhead is described in economic terms as a treasure, of which Neptune attempts to rob her. Genius explains that Neptune

> putte his hond toward the cofre
> Wher for to robbe he made a profre
> That lusti tresor for to stele,
> Which passeth othre goodes fele
> And cleped is the maidenhede,
> Which is the flour of wommanhede. (5.6177-82)

Her virginity, then, is made into a "lusti tresor" that can be stolen. Fortunately for Cornix, the goddess Pallis listens to her prayers. She intervenes for Cornix by turning her into a bird so that Neptune cannot recognize her and thus not rob her of her maidenhead. Although Cornix is spared the horror of rape, the next exemplum Genius presents is the heartbreaking tale of Calistona. In this tale, Jupiter is not shamed by the other gods, as the reader would expect, due to his rape of Calistona, but rather Calistona is doubly punished: first because she was raped and can no longer serve Diana; and second, because she is transformed into a bear by the jealous Juno and hunted and killed by her own son. In this case, like that of the one in the tale of Tereus, Philomena, and Procne, *kinde* both as licit sexuality and family relations is disrupted by the act of rape.

Much like the injustice revealed in the tale of Vulcan, Venus, and Mars, Calistona's horrific and unwarranted fate incites Genius to an alleged digression on the precious nature of virginity. Yet this discussion is not a digression, but in keeping with the way Gower both emphasizes avarice's ability to harm those who come into contact with the person plagued by it and enhances Genius's role in a Christian context, which in

turn allows him to deem Amans's love for his lady as virtuous instead of vicious. The injustice in the exempla on Venus, Vulcan, and Mars and on Calistona, Jupiter, and Juno and the detours that accompany both showcase the nature of the pagan Venus as representing unnatural fornication or sexuality unrestrained by reason, which here includes rape in addition to her other sexual depravities such as adultery, incest, and prostitution. Like the discussion on the religions of the world, Genius's authority in a Christian context is reaffirmed in his discussion of virginity. Both sections return the focus of the book to Christ, who is the true model for love and therefore the only one who may deliver justice. The first incipit in Genius's discussion of virginity invokes Christ by referring directly to Him and Mary:

> *Ut Rosa de spinis spineto preualet orta,*
> *Et lilii flores cespite plura valent,*
> *Sic sibi virginitas carnis sponsalia vincit,*
> *Eternos fetus que sine labe parit.* (5.x)[173]

The rose and the lily refer to Mary's perpetual status as a virgin. Despite giving birth to Jesus, she maintains her virginity and surpasses earthly marital unions by engendering eternal offspring through Him. After hearing Genius's catalogue of virtuous male virgins, Amans counters with a Jovinian argument similar to the Wife of Bath's defense of marriage as opposed to virginity in her *Prologue*:

> Al this wel mai be,
> Bot if alle othre dede so,

[173] "As the rose, born amidst thorns, prevails over its thorny thicket, and lily flowers are worth more than sod, so virginity triumphs in itself over fleshly marital unions, and without sin gives birth to eternal offspring." Translated by Andrew Galloway, *Confessio Amantis Volume III*, ed. Peck, 1n., 175.

> The world of men were sone go
> And in the lawe a man mai finde,
> Hou God to man be weie of kinde
> Hath set the world to multeplie. (5.6418-23)

Though Amans does not completely denounce Genius's teaching on virginity, he does not necessarily regard virginity as a mandate from God, as Jerome does. Unlike the Church Father, Genius does not disagree with Amans's way of thinking, but instead reiterates the condemnation of rape by reminding Amans that, because virginity is so precious, those who take it away from others "withoute lawes ordinance" will be severely punished (5.6431). This invocation of the law further enhances the connection of robbery with rape evident in the legal term *raptus*.

Though Amans does not appear to be culpable for any of avarice's many manifestations, he does admit that he may be sacrilegious. Genius explains that this sin affects those who do not focus on God when they are at church, especially those who try to pick up women by dressing and acting flamboyantly while in that holy place. When asked if he suffers from this vice, Amans answers that though his "contienance is on the bok" at church, he looks towards his lady while there (5.7115-6). In his response, he seems to suffer from both idolatry and sacrilege because while at church all his "devocion," "contemplacion," "herte," and "corage" are "only set on hire ymage" (5. 7125-7). Therefore, though he does not desire to steal a vestment, he "wold stele, if that [he] mihte, / A glad word or a goodly syhte" (5.7137-7138). But other than a word or a look, he has not taken anything else from her because she is so well protected. It is at this point that Amans admits he has an erring will and asks Genius if he has "gult or non" (5.

7182). But once again the act of desiring her is deemed not to be in error because Amans does not go to church with the intent to shop for the best woman but simply cannot stop his desire for his lady while there. Genius explains that Amans's will is to blame and that he simply desires her at the wrong time and place. He reminds Amans,

> That alle thing hath time and stede,
> The cherche serveth for the bede,
> The chambre is of another speche. (5.7187-9)

Therefore, Genius asks Amans to amend his will when he is in Church, but does not tell him to atone for his love of his lady. In fact, he implicitly permits Amans to desire her in "the chambre." Genius again reveals that Amans's love is not idolatrous and thus not unnatural.

Gower ends his book on avarice by explicitly stating the concept of virtue's mean as the property "between the tuo extremites" and by deeming "Liberalite, / which is the vertu of Largesse" as the one that stands between avarice and prodigality (5.7641, 5.7646-47). Tying the whole book together, Genius finishes by once again highlighting that love results in common profit. He explains that there is much joy

> Wher that largesse an herte guydeth.
> For his mesure is so governed,
> That he to bothe partz is lerned,
> To God and to the world also,
> He doth reson to bothe tuo. (5.7702-6)

The person who understands the world and God would relieve the poor of distress by providing them shelter and food without charge and not harm them through their

avaricious desires. If one "frely give[s]," he or she will be rewarded with "double grace" by God (5.7711, 5.7713). This connection further reveals that one should focus on receiving grace by doing good works instead of hoarding earthly goods that will diminish. After all, Genius explains that God's love is the only certainty one has in the world as all of its creatures are subject to chance. Once again, St. Paul's edict that avaricious people will not inherit the kingdom of God is emphasized as well as avarice's potential to corrupt the earthly community.

Conclusion

Gower's final major work is one that is in dialogue with many facets of discussions taking place in medieval England from literary to legal to penitential. Book 5 engages with different strands of them through its many exempla that consider why avarice is one of the most dangerous sins to every part of society from the individual to the family to the monarch to the Church. By linking discussions of avarice, idolatry, and fornication in Book 5, Gower relates the legal realities of *raptus* to penitential discourse. While some critics have found Genius's consideration of the religions of the world and virginity in a book on avarice to be unwarranted digressions, this chapter has revealed that Gower utilizes both passages to clarify Genius's role as a Christian priest and a proponent of natural sexuality restrained by reason and to reiterate the devastating consequences of avarice for its practitioners and victims.

CHAPTER IV

AVARICE SPEAKING: SIR HERUY IN *PIERS PLOWMAN* AND THE WIFE OF BATH, CANON'S YEOMAN, AND PARDONER IN *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

I hate hym that my vices telleth me,
And so doo mo, God woot, of us than I.
—Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*

"Y haue be couetous," quod this kaytif, "Y biknowe hit here."
—William Langland *Piers Plowman C-Text*

Literature, it has been said, is not so much about things as about ways of seeing things.
—V. A. Kolve[174]

A famous ninth-century hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, opens the fourteenth-century form of confession (Harley 6041) that belonged to a knight of Richard II, Sir William Hoo, and his family, *c.* 1425.[175] The opening line of this hymn—"*Veni Creator Spiritus*"—appears on fol. 85^{v} in the same manuscript with a composite of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (the A-text Prologue through Passus 11 and C-text Passus

[174] V. A. Kolve, *Telling Images: Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), xv.

[175] London, British Library, Harley 6041 fols 97^{r}–102^{v}, fol. 97^{r}. Michael Cornett's refers to this form of confession as *The Piers Plowman Form of Confession*. "The Form of Confession A Later Medieval Genre for Examining Conscience" (PhD Dissertation, UNC Chapel Hill, 2011), 158. For more manuscript details about British Library, Harley 6041, see also *Piers Plowman Revised Edition: The A Version*, ed. George Kane (Berkley: The University of California Press: 1988), 6-7.

12.297 to Passus 23).[176] This hymn is sung in the penultimate passus as Grace appears, just after Piers receives the power of the keys from Christ. Conscience directs Wille to "Welcome [Grace] and worshipe hym wiþ *Veni Creator Spiritus*!" (C.21.210).[177] The form of confession and the composite version of *Piers Plowman* are the only texts in British Library Harley 6041, and they share the same scribal hand.[178] That this form of confession was copied with *Piers Plowman* suggests that they were intended to serve together as works of edification and spiritual devotion for a noble family.[179]

These two works both include examples of two stages in the sacrament of penance: the examination of conscience and auricular confession. In the case of the form of confession, the readers are asked to follow a first-person narrator in reviewing a detailed catalogue to discern and then speak out those aspects of the seven deadly sins and acts against the Ten Commandments of which they are guilty. In *Piers Plowman*, the sins themselves become the penitents and voice their own aspects in a confession to Repentance, identifying sinful behaviors included in the form of confession. For instance, *The Piers Plowman Form of Confession* lists the "spices" of "coueytise" to be "auarice, thefte, fylonye, vsure, dist[r]eynaunce, symonye, trecherie, robberye."[180] Though all of

[176] "The *Piers Plowman* Form of Confession: British Library, MS Harley 6041," ed. Michael E. Cornett, in manuscript.

[177] In this article, unless otherwise noted, I look specifically at the C-text. All quotations are from *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008) and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

[178] Cornett, "The Form of Confession," 158.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Harley 6041, fol. 99^{v}.

these aspects are described in the specific behaviors Covetise discloses in his confession in Passus 6 of the C-text, some appear in Passus 5 of the A-text version that appears alongside the *Piers Plowman Form of Confession* in the Harley Manuscript.

Many scholars have found a link between penance and fourteenth-century English literature, especially in regards to the formation of the self, and some have connected the sins' confessions in *Piers Plowman* to the pilgrims in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.[181] Though I am indebted to their work, to my knowledge, none of these scholars has yet put Covetise's construction in *Piers Plowman*, the Wife of Bath's, Canon's Yeoman's, and Pardoner's in *The Canterbury Tales* in a sustained dialogue with the section on avarice found in the penitential genre forms of confession.[182] This chapter thus

[181] Morton Bloomfield suggests that the earliest taxonomies of the deadly sins in Christian traditions were pagan poems. *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 1–3. J. A. Burrow argues that the moral psychology of Ricardian poetry "derives very largely from the 'psychology of sin' […]" *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the Gawain Poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 106. For other studies that consider confession and literary production, see Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner Character and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1983); Lee Patterson, "The Subject of Confession," in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 367–94; Jerry Root, *Space to Speke: The Confessional Subject in Medieval Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Katherine Little, *Confession and Resistance*; and Kisha Tracy, *Memory and Confession in Middle English Literature* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Anne Middleton, along with others, has argued that Langland inspired Chaucer. If, as she proposes, "Chaucer learned late, but deeply, from Langland," then it may be that *Piers Plowman* informed his thoughts about covetous desire and its larger ramifications. See Anne Middleton, "Commentary on an Unacknowledged Text: Chaucer's Debt to Langland," *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 24 (2010), 113–137 (31). Alastair Bennett argues that Chaucer is responding to Langland "not only in local allusions but also in the larger structures and concerns of his poetry." His analysis of *Piers Plowman* and *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* "suggests not only that Langland and Chaucer drew on the same stock of images to discuss the effects of covetousness, but also that they developed those ideas in complex and comparable ways." "Covetousness, 'Unkyndenesse,' and the 'Blered' Eye in *Piers Plowman* and 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale,'" *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 28 (2014): 29-64, 31.

[182] Lee Patterson comes the closest by arguing that Langland's Covetise, along with medieval lyrics, inspired Chaucer's Pardoner. He does not consider the generic form of confession, though I hope to show that such a study is just as useful to understanding these figures constructions. For his argument that penitential literature provides a context for reading the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*, but one that focuses

builds on the rich conversation that connects penance to poetry by attending to the resemblances between these poem's representations of avarice and this penitential genre.

I will start by defining the form of confession. The underexplored relationship of this genre to fourteenth-century English literary works is arguably due to the fact that modern scholars have used so many different terms to refer to the form of confession in different languages, and the terms they choose seldom conform to the manuscript rubrics; for example, some have referred to this genre as *confessio, forma, summa de cassibus consciencie,* treatise of confession, among many others.[183] After distinguishing the form of confession as a unique penitential genre, I will turn a few form of confession examples and especially engage with their treatments of covetousness.[184] From there, I discuss

more on the literary influences of *Piers Plowman's* sins' confessions and penitential lyrics, see Lee Patterson, "Chaucerian Confession: Penitential Literature and the Pardoner," *Medievalia et Humanistica,* 7 (1976): 153-73. He also connects the form of the Pardoner's confession to the "liar's confession or *confessio ficti*," 163. Patterson expands his original argument in the chapter "The Subject of Confession," in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 367–421. Here he locates the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* in medieval discussions surrounding the theological and penitential understandings of despair; he argues that the Pardoner is "… a man in despair whose discourse is best understood in confessional terms," especially in terms of medieval lyrics and through the influence of *Piers Plowman*'s confessions of the deadly sins, 384. He later distances himself from the "psychoanalytic twist" this chapter's argument took in "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch: Psyche and Clio in Medieval Literary Studies," *Speculum,* 76 (2001): 638-680, especially 657-8. Following Patterson, I avoid using psychoanalytic terms in my engagement with the Pardoner here. Larry Scanlon finds Chaucer's "reworking of *Faus Semblant*" from the *Roman de la Rose* who is "an allegorical instantiation of the Liar's Paradox" to "illuminate the semiotics of penance, while the discursive features of the penitential tradition Chaucer draws from Langland and elsewhere helps illuminate the poetics of personification." "Personification and Penance," *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, 21 (2007): 1-29, 11.

[183] For a detailed list of names that have been used, see Cornett, "Form of Confession," 8-9.

[184] In addition to the *Clensyng of Mannes Soule*, which contains a form of confession, the *Speculum Christiani* is cited by Morton Bloomfield as a link in the chain that leads from the act of confession to scenes of the sin's confessions in *Piers Plowman*. He explains that the *Speculum Christiani*, a confessors' manual contemporaneous with Langland's *Piers Plowman*, is closer in form than other penitential manuals to the poem in that it likewise personifies the sins using the first-person voice. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 186. The quatrain that begins the section on avarice in the *Speculum Christiani* reads as follows: "Auaricia. | I Couete ay and wyles oft caste, | Hou that I may be ryche in haste. | Ful faste I holde

Langland's Covetise to demonstrate how the sin's more humanized personification can be connected to the intimate process of identifying sin in oneself that the form of confession demands. Finally, I examine Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Canon's Yeoman, and Pardoner (representations of avarice as literary characters), who manifests not only the exterior traits but also interior dimensions of avarice.[185] In choosing to give avarice a confessional first-person voice, and thus examine its conscience, both Langland and Chaucer engage with the techniques of the most personal penitential genres of the Middle Ages—the form of confession. In the generic form of confession, the readers are asked to follow a first-person narrator as they examine their own conscience by reviewing a detailed catalogue to discern and then articulate those aspects of the seven deadly sins and acts against the Ten Commandments of which they are guilty.

The dynamic demand on readers to discern their own individual sins from the manifold potential ones identified in the form of confession arguably inspired the proliferation of first-person narratives in the later medieval period and that the requirement for all members of society to practice confession might have directly catalyzed this literary choice. Though Michael Cornett draws connections between the

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al that I wynne, | Al-thoue my parte be leeste ther-inne" (ll. 1-4). The medieval distinction between avarice and covetousness as Chaucer's Parson outlines is that "Coveitise is for to coveite swich thynges as thou hast nat; and Avarice is for to withholde and kepe swiche thynges as thou hast, withoute rightful need" (*Parson's Tale* 10.743). These terms are more or less conflated in many of the texts (both poems and penitentials) that engage with them, though there are moments when they are distinguished. The reference to the *Speculum christiani* is from *Speculum Christiani: A Middle English Religious Treatise of the 14th Century*, ed. by Gustaf Holmstedt (London: Early English Text Society, Oxford University Press, 1933), 67.

[185] Though she does not expand on the statement, Rosemond Tuve, describes the Pardoner as "the very essence of Covetousness in human form*." Allegorical Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 177.

dream vision genre and the techniques in the form of confession, I argue how this penitential genre must have inspired the personification of Covetise in *Piers Plowman* and the characterization of the Wife of Bath, Canon's Yeoman, and Pardoner in the *Canterbury Tales*.[186] These figures offer different stakes on a personalized history of sin, namely a history of avarice. Though Donald Howard cites Chaucer's writing of dialogue to be the pedagogical force behind his version of what Howard calls mimetic art—one that focuses on an inner versus exterior reality ("a world within the mind")—I propose that the form of confession, too, largely influenced Chaucer's version of characterization.[187] After all, the penitents would speak the lines in the form of confession in their own voice and dialect, examining their conscience to see if they committed grave sins against God. This process would likely provoke a searching of their memories and the stories of their life.

This chapter thus builds on the rich critical conversation that connects penance to poetry by showing how the examination of conscience prompted through the form of confession in particular helps illuminate difficult figures like Langland's Covetise and Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Canon's Yeoman, and Pardoner who all represent avarice. I continue to elucidate here why that sin is the most disastrous to the community in late medieval England. I argue these figures are all different iterations of the deadly sin of avarice; however, I read Covetise as a personification, who has no conscience, while

[186] Cornett, "The Form of Confession," 23.

[187] *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, 383-384.

Chaucer's pilgrims are fully aware of their duplicity. Though I read Covetise as a personification, Langland's personified sins represent more than allegory, as Katharine Breen has shown, in that they "are a dangerous psychological or spiritual state that threatens sinners at all levels of society."[188] Avarice itself was considered the most dangerous vice during this time given its ability to disrupt communal bonds and subvert mercy and charity. While Breen explains that most of the prominent thinkers in the Middle Ages from Aristotle on did not believe that bad habit could be self-consciously cultivated, the Pardoner appears to suggest that the opposite is true through his continual performance of avarice.[189]

Despite this difference, these figures serve as examples of the consequences of mishandling a sin that the form of confession was so concerned with avoiding. Since sin, in medieval doctrine, threatens integral personhood by cutting sinners off from knowledge of God, the form of confession provided ample guidance to teach its readers how to properly confess and thus instructed them how to examine their consciences to achieve proper contrition. While Covetise shows an inability to understand Repentance because he has no self-awareness and is thus rendered to be more a rhetorical trope than a human figure capable of redemption despite his confession, the Pardoner is at the opposite end of that spectrum in that he plays the role of preacher against avarice

[188] Breen, *Imagining an English Reading Public*, 202.

[189] Ibid., 200.

although his inner habitus is avarice.[190] Neither figure properly engages in the process of confession. They both subvert not only the process but also the purpose of the model of interiority their nature relies on: that taught in the form of confession. The Wife of Bath and the Canon's Yeoman, too, reimagine the penitential genre, though in a less direct fashion in their apologia. To make this argument, I will contrast the way the form of confession genre and these texts animate and/or represent interiority and emphasize that the effect of this process demands the reader engage with the consequence of avarice more intimately as it becomes animated as a personal attribute and social reality.

Since understanding how the form of confession activates interiority is crucial to my argument and because this genre is not well known, I will begin by defining the model of interiority generated in the form of confession. The underexplored relationship of this genre to fourteenth-century English literature more broadly is, as mentioned, arguably due to the fact that modern scholars have tended to collapse this genre into others. Because of this, scholars have overlooked the unique opportunities different modes of confessional language have to show conscience in literary characters. After showing how the form of confession animates inner life through an examination of conscience, I will turn to a discussion of Langland's Covetise to demonstrate how the sin's more humanized personification subverts the intimate process of identifying sin in

[190] As Hanna notes in his *Penn Commentary* on C Passus 6; B Passus 5; A Passus 5, "The Vices, whatever their humanity, are…personifications that by their nature exclude virtuous action. Pride, were it to perform an actual penitential process, would cease to be what it is, would require annihilation into another personification. Thus, it logically, as a psychological and a literary construction, can never perform the act for which it ostensibly has been created, but only repeat itself in all its variations," 78. For more on the limits of personification in the Seven Deadly Sins, see especially 77-80. *The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman C Passūs 5-9; B Passūs 5-7; A Passūs 5-8* Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

oneself that the form of confession demands. Finally, I look at Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Canon's Yeoman, and Pardoner, who manifests not only the exterior traits but also interior dimensions of the deadly sin. In choosing to give avarice a confessional first-person voice, and thus examine its conscience, both Langland and Chaucer engage with the techniques of the form of confession and stress that one's self-identity and salvation are at stake in not only sinning but misunderstanding and misusing this process of self-examination.

Creating Interiority Through the Form of Confession

In the first and only extended study that defines and catalogues the known examples, Michael Cornett demonstrates that the form of confession was one of the most ubiquitous penitential genres in the Middle Ages; there are both prose and verse versions extant in "over 440 copies of 198 different Latin, French, and English manuscripts" from *c.* 1200 to *c.* 1500.[191] The imagined audience of this genre was normally quite broad, though a few of the forms of confession can be linked to a specifically monastic or noble audience. Indeed, most of the introductory material that accompanies these forms of confession describe it as a general rather than specific confession and invoke a general audience as does this one found in Beninecke MS 317 (*c.* 1470–1480): "In this generall confessyon her wryten may euery man and woman see and vndirstande clerly how and wheryn þey haue offended God and goostly wounded þeyr sowle, and be þe vertu of þis

[191] As Cornett demonstrates, "Functioning as a mirror for self-examination, the form of confession voices through a first-person speaker the manifold variety of sins that might be acknowledged by the penitent." "The Form of Confession," iii–iv.

seyd confession be mad perfyȝtly hoole in soule as þat howr þey came out of þe fonte stoon, and þerfor euery man and woman as þey fynde þeymsilf gylty so confesse þey[m].[192] The main purpose of this genre was to help Christians examine their conscience so that they may be made "perfyȝtly hoole in soule" after identifying and repenting for their sins.

The medieval Christian reader cannot experience this genre passively. Another form of confession found in Harley 6041 (the form that circulated with a composite version of *Piers Plowman*), for instance, demands the penitent "beseche God ententeliche þat he ȝyue wit to þe and konnyng, þiselue riȝtfullich to acuse thi synnes for to schewe."[193] Demonstrated mostly aptly in the words "ententeliche" and "acuse," the genre highlights the importance of the penitents' intent to examine their conscience and show all sins to God and thus serves as an aid to help identify the different aspects of the sins. The requirement that one have the proper intention is common to penitential manuals in general. These texts counseled the confessing subject, the sinner, to retell the story of herself in the most truthful and complete manner possible—her soul depends on it. The form of confession, however, guided penitents themselves in examining their own conscience before they went to the formal confessional. Unlike confessors' manuals, chiefly written for priests, the form of confession was written to guide the penitent in a pre-emptive, self-guided examination of her own conscience. The reader, thus, was

[192] New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, MS 317, fol. 42^{v}.

[193] London, British Library, MS Harley 6041 fols 97^{r}–102^{v}, fol. 97^{r}.

expected to structure her own interiority by a process of examining her conscience against the first-person statements about the characteristics for each sin. This reflexive and generative effect occurs in a large part due to the "I" voice of the text— the form of confession's most prominent feature, and one that distinguishes it from other penitential genres.[194] The penitent would not be expected to recite every aspect of the sin, indeed the introduction of the form of confession made that clear. For instance, the long form of confession found in the Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 923, 72^{r}–107^{r} in *The Clensyng of Mannes Soule* provides an introduction of the work, much like others do. It first identifies itself as a "Foorme of general confession" and explains that it teaches "hou a man may schewe cleerli bi þe seuene deedli synnes: alle oþere synnes."[195] It instructs the penitent to "specifie oonli þo synnes. In which he fyndiþ him gilti."[196]

The form of confession itself is a script for self-consciousness as the manifestations of the deadly sins are articulated in order to enable the penitent to recognize herself morally and enact repentance. The section on avarice in the form of confession found in Beniecke 317, for example, begins with an acknowledgment that the penitent has committed the sin, in this case covetousness: "I haue also synned yn couetyse."[197] Likewise, Harley 6041, states, "I haue synned be coueytise and be his

[194] Cornett, "The Form of Confession," 62.

[195] Walter K. Everett, "A Critical Edition of the Confession Section of The Clensyng of Mannes Soule" (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1974), 64.

[196] Ibid., 65.

[197] Yale University, Beinecke Library, MS 317, fols. 42^{v}–50^{v}.

spices."[198] The Harley form of confession continues with many statements starting with "I haue" or "I ne haue" followed by a detailing of covetous behavior, such as "I haue entysid grete lordis for to benemen of here pore tenamites her goodis," and "I ne haue be almesful, ne þe pouere I holpe nele."[199] Not only emphasizing the poor as particular victims, the form of confession highlights, like both *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales*, how the sin disrupts the Christian community on every level. For instance, later in the covetousness section of this confession, the penitent might say "Benomen I haue þe pore and þe riche here goodis, and straunges and neiȝbours þat neuer I ne ȝelde may."[200] Communal consequences such as this example are ubiquitous in this section, as they are in *Piers Plowman* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

Covetise opens his confession in *Piers Plowman* with an analogous acknowledgement: "'Y haue be couetous,' quod this katif, 'Y biknowe hit here'" (6.206).[201] The Pardoner, too, makes a similar confession, though he changes the language to "myn entente is nat but for to wynne" (*Pardoner's Prologue* 6.404).[202] Instead of repeating the language of the confession, the Pardoner subverts the practice in that he is still iterating that he is avaricious, but this time he is imparting that he has

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[198] Harley 6041, fol. 99^{v}.

[199] Ibid., fol. 99^{v}.

[200] Ibid., fol. 100^{r}.

[201] In this chapter, unless otherwise noted, I continue to look specifically at the final version, the C-text, in *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*. References in the text are to passus and line numbers.

[202] All references to Geoffrey Chaucer's works are from *The Wadsworth Chaucer*.

interiority through his use of "myn entente." Of course, his intent, if he were giving a proper confession, would be to repent. Furthermore, the interiority produced by examining first-person statements about avarice calls attention to what neither Coveitse, the Wife of Bath, the Canon's Yeoman, nor the Pardoner can do as they speak about the acts of avarice in their own voice: they cannot recognize themselves morally and thus cannot enact repentance.

Covetousness Personified as Sir Heruy

Before looking at Covetousness's confession in the C-text, I would like to first explicate the passus that sets up this scene to show how Wille's apology precipitates the confessional turn in the poem and also how its inclusion conveys the close nature between apologia and confession. Both Chaucer and Langland (in Passus 5 in his C-text alone) insert authorial defenses, or apologia, into their works—Langland in defense of his clerical profession in the waking interlude directly before the second dream vision that begins with the confessions of the sins.[203] Many critics have taken up this authorial apologia to understand better the life of the poet, William Langland. This section is also

[203] For more on the 1381 rebellion, see Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). See, too, Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chapters 10 and 11. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton explores the function of Langland's C-text *apologia* to understand what it can tell us about William Langland the author. "Langland and the Bibliographic Ego" in *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship*, eds. Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997): 67-143, 69. In the same book, Ann Middleton argues that the Statute of Laborers provided the occasion for the C-text's *apologia*, see her chapter "Acts of Vagrancy: The C Version 'Autobiography' and the Statute of 1388," 208-318. In that same work, Middleton argues that Wille's apologia is the closest counterpart Langland will offer to Chaucer's Retractions. She argues that Langland's apologia calls into question what Chaucer's Retraction assumes: "that the poet's life work is simply the sum, or array, of his works," 213. For the argument that Chaucer's "Retraction… explicitly transforms the social persons of penance into literary persons that embody a new structuring of intention," see Elizabeth Fowler, *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 75.

integral to the movement of the poem from apologia to confession and thus to understanding the personified sins that are introduced after it. Wille, the dreamer, is incited to provide a defense of his profession when Reason "aratede" him as to why he is "romynge" and not laboring for the common during the harvest though he is in good health (5.11). Reason interrogates Wille as to why he is being idle:

> Can thow seruen… or syngen in a churche,
> Or koke for my cokeres or to the carte piche,
> Mowen or mywen or make bond to sheues…
> Or eny other kynes crafte that to the comune nedeth,
> Hem that bedreden be byleue to fynden? (5.12-14, 20-21)

Though this is only an excerpt of the questions Reason asks him, one can see that there is emphasis on physical labor that conflicts with the interior work of the cleric. Wille defends himself by claiming that he is too weak to do agricultural work. At this point Reason insinuates that Wille appears to be guilty of a deadly sin:

> … For an ydel man thow semest,
> A spendour that spene mot or a spille-tyme,
> Or beggest thy bylyue aboute a men hacches… (5.27-29)

In this short remark, Reason has accused Wille of committing two of the deadly sins—avarice and sloth. The poem has already been scathing of false beggars, so Reason's accusation that Wille is one is a high charge.

Wille distinguishes himself from the false "lollarne lyf" by giving insight as to why he chose the life of the religious; he has also made a point in the opening of this passus to remark that he is "lytel ylet by… / lollares of Londone and lewede ermytes"

because he wrote about their misdeeds as Conscience and Reason taught him (5.31, 3-4). Though the first explanation Wille gives to justify his profession is that his family paid for him to go to school to learn holy writ, the greater reason for his choice appears to be due to his grief over his friends' deaths. He explains that he never found "… in feyth, seth [his] frendes deyede, / Lyf that [he] lykede but in this longe clothes" (5.40-41). Their deaths have caused him to sing for others' souls and practice the role of cleric in a proper, not avaricious, fashion. Wille explains that he begs "withoute bagge or botel but [his] wombe one" (5.51-52). Unlike the Pardoner and false lollards, Wille's intentions do not implicate him in avarice. His work is centered on penitence and guiding others towards it, placing his professional duties in direct dialogue with penitential discourse.

Wille provides an estates justification shortly after his interrogation, though one that is contradictory at times, to justify further his picture of the social landscape and his place in it as a cleric. His assertion of the hierarchy in the estates could be in direct response to the 1381 Peasant's Revolt and the rebels' misunderstanding of the ubiquitous scathing contemporary preaching that might have inspired the attacks. As G. R. Owst explains, many sermons and preacher's handbooks, like John Bromyard's *Summa predicantium*, emphasized and provided rationales for the claim that all people were created out of the same substance.[204] Langland's own text was alluded to by the rebels to present their case and was thus potentially misinterpreted in the same fashion as the

[204] G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961). Owst links the *Summa predicantium* as a source of inspiration for *Piers Plowman*, 302.

taunts included in preacher's handbooks and sermons.[205] However, as Owst notes of the tone of sermons and handbooks, Langland's scathing approach to the vice of covetousness does not shift despite this defensive inclusion.[206]After Wille provides his estates justification, which has ample biblical exempla and separates him from the cause of the peasants, he concludes his apologia with the confident assertion that "Preyeres of a parfit man and penaunce discrete / Is the leuest labour that oure lorde pleseth" (5.84-85). Conscience explains that this "parfit" man does not align with Wille in practice, as he begs in cities—"Ac it semeth no sad parfitnesse in citees to begge, / But he be obedience to prior or to mynistre" (5.91-92). This point is the catalyst for Wille's shift from apology to confession, as he admits he committed avarice in that he has misspent time. He laments, "… and so Y beknowe / That Y haue ytynt tyme and tyme myspened" (5.92-93). Apology and confession are related terms, though they are not exactly the same, especially before the late 1500s in English. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* outlines, apology denotes "a written defense or justification of the opinions or conduct of a writer, speaker, etc." (*OED* 1). The defensive intention behind the genre is crucial in distinguishing it from the intentions desired for a proper confession. It is not until the late 1590s that apology gets associated with a feeling of regret for one's intentional or unintentional actions (*OED* 3). On the other hand, confession, in its religious sense (the

[205] For an extended argument that conveys that this apologia in the C-text is a response to the revolt of 1381, see Kirby-Fulton, "Langland and the Bibliographic Ego." For one that argues that it is the B-text instead, see Anne Hudson, "*Piers Plowman* and the Peasants' Revolt: A Problem Revisited," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 8 (1994): 85-106.

[206] Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, 304-5.

legal denotation of confession is not available until the 1500s) is an acknowledgement of sin or sinfulness rather than defense of one's actions (*OED*). Nevertheless, both confession and apologia require the speaker, and thus the reader, to deliberate about their behavior in relation to the greater community, and Langland here is explicitly connecting them.[207] Wille's apologia gives the character more dimensions, as the reader learns he has a family, has lost friends, and why he has chosen to live the life he has, and this information is used as evidence in his defense of his life.

Wille's confession also identifies begging to the misspending of time, as they are connected in idea and in language through the pun on "myspende" (5.93). Most of the denotations of the verb "spenden" are economic (*MED*). Indeed, he metaphorizes market language to talk about divine grace:

> So hope Y to haue of hym that is almighty
> A gobet of his grace and bigynne a tyme
> That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne. (5.99-101)

Though heaven and its treasures are often mentioned in economic terms in the Bible—indeed Matt. 13:44, the verse Wille includes in his confession, describes heaven as a "*thesauro abscondito in agro*"— the choice here emphasizes the contrast between the spiritual good (grace) one should desire as opposed to those material goods coveted by the false beggars Wille pits himself against (5.98). Finding his contrition well

[207] Anne Middleton connects this defense to his defense of his writing of poetry to Ymaginatif in the B-text; see "Narration and the Invention of Experience: Episodic Form in *Piers Plowman*," in *Chaucer, Langland, and the Fourteenth-Century Literary History*, ed. Steven Justice (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 143-171.

intentioned, Reason and Conscience bid him to go to church and to honor God. Wille obeys and gives a heart-wrenching confession:

> And to the kyrke Y gan go, god to honoure;
> Byfore the cross on my knees knokked Y my brest,
> Syhing for my synnes, seggyng my pater-noster,
> Wepyng and waylyng til Y was aslepe. (5.105-108)

This confession, full of contrition, spurs him to revisit the dream on Malvern Hills and explicate it "muche more than [he] before tolde" (5.109).

I take special notice of Wille's confession here to emphasize how different it is in relation to Covetousness's. Indeed Covetousness's confession appears to be more like an apology in that, though he acknowledges prescriptively that he has committed avarice, he does not repent. Of course, the crux of a sin confessing and thus desiring to be something other than itself is paradoxical, but such is the effect of the paradox between literary form and penance.[208] Though all of the sin's ultimately reflect this absurdity, Covetousness is linked to this previous passus especially, as Reason's concluding sermon is directed at covetous clerics "that out of couent and of cloystre coueyteth to dwelle," a criticism often repeated throughout the poem (5.151). Reason warns apocalyptically, in a fashion that mirrors the Prologue, that "ther shal come a kyng and confesse yow alle" and ends his sermon by directing all men to love each other and to seek "Seynt Treuthe in sauacioun

[208] Lee Patterson notes that Langland's revision of Covetousness's confession from B to C expresses this ontological paradox in his inclusion of figures like Robert the ryfeler participating in the *salus animarum*, a condition a being who is covetous could never participate in. "Chaucerian Confession: Penitential Literature and the Pardoner," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 7 (1976): 154-168, 158.

of [their] soules" (5.168, 198). It is at this point that the reader meets the figure of Repentance and the deadly sins who live among the commons.

When Repentance first appears in response to Reason's sermon for all men to confess and seek salvation, Wille again dramatically "wepe[s] water with his eyes" in response (6.2). His outward show of repentance serves as a foil for the sins that enter the scene. The confessions of the sins are expanded in the C-text, as is penance, restitution, and the figure of Repentance.[209] The consideration of covetousness is given more space: 154 lines in the C-text and thus 36 longer than its analogue in the B text. Indeed, it is the longest and most detailed confession in the passus because of Repentance's interrogatories. Even though Langland expands Pride the most in the C-text (by fifty lines), his take on covetousness is 154 lines versus pride's fifty-nine, making it fifty-two lines longer (almost double). Just as in Gower's *Confessio amantis*, Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis*, and *Speculum vitae*, to name a few, Langland's *Piers Plowman* emphasizes covetousness's aspects and effects. Avarice is regarded as the most pernicious sin because it destroys communal bonds. The malpractices Covetise acknowledges involve deceptive trading and theft, as well as an unrepentant heart.[210] Covetise does not appear alone in his confession but with his wife "Rose the regrater" and other personified iterations who confess their avaricious behavior in collusion with Covetise, reflecting the different branches of the sin and its pervasive impact on communal bonds.

[209] See Pearsall, 121 n. 1 and 3.

[210] Pearsall, 128 n. 196.

Although Covetise acknowledges multiple acts of covetousness, this speaker does not express any awareness of the heinousness of his sin nor any ability to experience the repentance required for a valid sacramental confession. As many scholars note, as a personification, Covetise can only be covetous.[211] What is at stake in this presentation of the sin, though, is that the process of penance has been disrupted. Instead of understanding himself as a moral subject, as the form of confession would have taught, Covetise speaks only aspects of his sin as statements of fact, or tricks of his trade, with neither boastfulness nor shame. Though he is given a concrete appearance, a wife, and multiple professions, he is still rendered static through the absence of any sense of conscience and consciousness.

Right before the passus of the confessing sins in *Piers Plowman*, Reason and Conscience interrogate Wille about his refusal to work and bid him to go to Church. He obeys and gives a heart-wrenching confession:

> And to the kyrke Y gan go, god to honoure;
> Byfore the cross on my knees knokked Y my brest,
> Syhing for my synnes, seggyng my pater-noster,
> Wepyng and waylyng til Y was aslepe (5.105-108).

[211] In his analysis of the confession of the seven deadly sins, particularly Gluttony, in B.5, Larry Scanlon asserts "that Langland was intensely interested in the convergence between personification and penance." He argues that "what Langland saw and embraced in the convergence between poetry and penance was a mutual fascination with semiotic instability." Scanlon, "Personification and Penance," 1–2. Scanlon explains that "nearly all of the studies of any medieval allegory of any note stress its semantic complexity and instability," 3. For some studies that generally agree with this view, see Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*; Carruthers, "Allegory Without Teeth" and *The Search for Saint Truth*; Mann "Langland and Allegory"; Griffiths, *Personification in Piers Plowman*; and Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory*.

This confession, full of contrition, spurs him to revisit the dream on Malvern Hills and explicate it "muche more than [he] before tolde" (5.109). I take special notice of Wille's confession here to emphasize how different it is in relation to Covetise's.

When Repentance first appears in response to Reason's sermon urging all men to confess and seek salvation, Wille again dramatically "wepe[s] water with his eyes" in response (6.2). His outward show of repentance serves as a foil for the sins that enter the scene. Indeed Covetise's confession appears to be more like an apology in that, though he acknowledges prescriptively that he has committed avarice, he does not show any sign that he is repentant. Of course, the crux of a sin confessing and thus desiring to be something other than itself is paradoxical, but such is the effect of the paradox between literary form and penance.[212] As Anne Middleton explains:

> Narration, particularly, which 'speaks the self,' is thus rendered double-edged. Its ideal use is in the service of confessional 'truth-telling,' the contrite return through memory to one's past, enabling the subject to transform the present into a new starting-point from which to make a good end. Yet first-person narration, even if nominally confessional, also carries within it a second kind of hazard. In the psychology of sin implicit in the medieval handbooks, in which the subject's capacity to see and tell the truth about himself is circumscribed by the empty recursiveness formed by his own habitus, such utterance is in practice equally capable of deflecting and deferring penitential contrition, enacting a fruitless and endless auto-exegesis which keeps the narrative subject in *medias res*, able only to 'heavily from woe to woe tell o'er,' his story a pattern of repetition rather than revelation […] Not only for these speakers, but often for Will himself, declaration of one's own designs quickly becomes indistinguishable from self-justification, reasons blur into excuses, and confession repeatedly decomposes into apologia.[213]

[212] Patterson notes that Langland's revision of Covetise's confession from B to C expresses this ontological paradox in his inclusion of figures like "Robert the ruyflare" participating in the *salus animarum*, a condition a being who is covetous could never participate in. "Chaucerian Confession," 158.

[213] Middleton, "Making a Good End," 179.

As Middleton shows, the process of narrating one's sins is slippery. Though the form of confession pays special attention to providing introductory material that laid out how it should be used, the genre appears to have another concern about the penitent spending too much time confessing her sin. For instance, the long form of confession found in a manuscript of *The Clensyng of Mannes Soule* cautions the penitent to

> …not ofte siþis to reherce o synne / as to schewe aȝen in declaryng of þe ten preceptis þat same spicis of synne which was schewid tofore in declaryng of þe seuene deedli synnes / such rehercyng is not needful ne a man schulde not reherse so ofte o þing and haue so many wordis / For such ofte rehersyng may liȝtli be tediouse to his confessour.[214]

Instead of worrying that the penitent's confession would keep the sinner in an habitual state of sin, this confession has more concern for the confessor. The penitents came to the form of confession anew each time they prepared for the sacrament and used the form to create themselves as moral subjects. Though misunderstanding of the form was a concern, an overabundance of an acknowledgment of sin did not seem to be a pressing issue for the penitent's soul in this genre.The defensive intention behind the apologia is crucial in distinguishing it from the intentions desired for a proper confession. Nevertheless, both confession and apologia require the speaker, and thus the reader, to deliberate about their behavior in relation to the greater community, and Langland here is explicitly connecting them.[215] However, Covetise has no self-awareness and thus does

[214] Everett, 67.

[215] Middleton connects this defense to his defense of his writing of poetry to Ymaginatif in the B text; see "Narration and the Invention of Experience."

not understand the most central tenet of the process of an examination of conscience and thus confession.

Furthermore, Covetise's description in the poem reveals that his physical characteristics express his vice, but rather than be emblematic of it, they are more complicated. Though Wille remarks that he cannot describe Covetise, he nevertheless gives the reader a picture of his likeness by describing his facial features and clothes in detail. Indeed, an early scribe brings him to life based on this concrete description in Bodleian Library MS Douce 104. Floating mid-step in the margin of the manuscript leaf, Covetise waves with his right hand towards his confession in the text while he grabs the purse that hangs around his waist with his left. His big, red lips slightly tilt up and his black irises (he appears to have no pupils) bulge out of their sockets as he smirks and stares intently at the accompanying confession that brings him to life.[216] Covetise wears a hood and big brown hat atop his head. His robes appear threadbare as an effect of the artist's choice to draw stray lines coming off of them in many areas. Despite Wille remarking that he can "nat descreue" Covetise, he nevertheless describes him for 8 lines as being hollow, hungry, wobbly, having leathered pores, full lips, old tattered clothes, and "two blered eyes," which Pearsall translates as eyes that have "gummy discharge" (6.196-200).[217] At once, the reader is forced to imagine this deadly sin in its human form.

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[216] London, Bodleian Library, Douce 104, detail of fol 027^{r}.

[217] Pearsall, 128 n. 198. Lavinia Griffiths explains that Covetise's physical description renders him "as more and less than an emblem […] since it expands in directions which have little or nothing to do with the name it carries; the contours of the two parts of the figure do not unite into a decipherable whole—and neither of them is precisely defined." *Personification Allegory*, 56.

This description also mirrors his sin in that his leathered complexion is like a leathered purse, and his threadbare clothes show how miserly he is.[218] Covetise also begins his confession in a more personalized manner than that of the other personifications. We learn that he has a wife (the only sin to have one named) who also practices avarice and a name, Sir Heruy.[219]

The details of Heruy's appearance reflect avarice, but they do not immediately signal the vice. Lavinia Griffiths explains that the choice to render Covetise as a hybrid figure is a feature of Langland's personification and a product of his work of turning an abstract sin into a human. The effect, she describes, is that distinctions between human and sin "tend to blur and break down."[220] Griffiths argues that it is the fact that Langland allows these personifications "to create themselves through speech (*confiteor*)" that moves them beyond mere emblematic figures.[221] Though Covetise is shown to be more than a mere emblem and creates himself through his speech, Langland does not imbue him with interiority, I argue, as he lacks a conscience.

Though his physical description perhaps signals a more individualized nature than an emblematic one, the inconsistencies in his avaricious practices, which occur in a large

[218] Schmidt also points out that Covetise's pors and yshaue are also emblems for avarice. He remarks that the latter attribute is "improves on B's merely visual description." Notes to C.6.199 and C.6.201 in *William Langland: Piers Plowman*, 531.

[219] Glutton is the other sin whose wife is mentioned, though she is not given a name or described in any fashion (6.415–16).

[220] Griffiths, 56.

[221] Ibid., 56-7.

part due to Langland's combination of Haukyn's confession from the B text, not only make him a more varied manifestation of avarice but also disrupt his more unified identity. Wille introduces Covetise by both the sin's proper name and as Sir Heruy—"thenne cam Couetyse—Y can hym nat descreue, | So hungrily and hollow sire Heruy hym lokede" (6.196-7).[222] This name enhances the more commonplace nature of this sin. The title "sir" connects Heruy to either high rank or priesthood and would create the expectation that this sin is chiefly working within a knightly or clerical mode. However, the rank of this personification shifts throughout his confession, and the first aspects of covetousness Sir Heruy confesses are related to trade, not to the practices of the lay or religious elite. He divulges, "For som tyme Y serued Symme at the style | And was his prentis yplyht, his profit to wayte" (6.207-208). He then proceeds to list many urban trading malpractices and then shifts to a rural context at line 260. Whatever individuation this name has given him fades with the manifold disparate acts of covetousness he admits.

Though Covetise acknowledges his vicious actions in his confession, he does not repent nor intend to give restitution as Repentance demands. Therefore, while the offenses treated share similar focus and the effects of them are taken up later in the poem, Covetise's confession employs the first-person voice and its catalogue of the exhaustive aspects of the sin from the form of confession, but this figure only describes his avaricious actions as opposed to reflecting on them and expressing any feeling of guilt.

[222] Pearsall notes that this name is usually applied to a person in holy orders but that an actual allusion found in the name has not been traced, 128 n. 197.

When Repentance asks Covetise if he has ever repented for his avaricious behavior or made restitution, Covetise appears not to understand what the word restitution even means. He decides it means stealing and answers that yes when he had lodgers, he "roes and ryflede [their] males when they a-reste were" (6.237). Repentance responds that Covetise will be "hanged heye therefore, here other in helle" (C.6.238) for that "rufol restitucioun" (6.237).

Covetise's inability to comprehend restitution is reminiscent of Envy's misunderstanding of repentance earlier in the passus and of Covetise's misunderstanding of "usury" as a form of lechery in the next few lines.[223] In his response to Covetise's concealed usurious practices, Repentance turns to restitution, but it seems unlikely that Covetise could possibly provide restitution to those he has injured and, even worse, it appears he does not desire to do so even if he could.[224] Covetise admits that "As, thow Y deddly synne dede, Y dradde nat so sore | As whenne Y lenede and leuede hit lost or longe or hit were payed" (6.276-7). Though this is a striking admission, the reader is perhaps not all that surprised given his chief state as covetousness. After all, the reader is reminded that he is nothing more than an "vnkynde creature" (6.294). Furthermore, this image of the avaricious being more concerned with their money than God was

[223] For Envy's misunderstanding of repentance—what it means to be "ryht sory | For [one's] sins" (6.91), see 6.93.

[224] Pearsall explains that these usurious practices are "ostensibly innocuous practices which in effect constitute a disguised form of usury… The reason for this subterfuge is that usury was not only forbidden by canon law but was also regarded a particularly odious sin, which no one would readily confess to outright. See Pearsall, 130 n. 240.

commonplace in the sermons of the period.[225] Covetise in the C-text is rendered completely unrepentant though his counterpart in the B-text expresses despair for his actions. In the B-text, the narrator explains "Thanne wex that shrewe in wanhope and walde have hanged himself | Ne hadde Repentaunce the rather reconforted hym…" (5.279-80).[226] This despair never occurs in the C-text and thus Repentance does not offer any consolation to Covetise, shifting the construction of the sin.[227]

Glaringly absent from his confession are the particular avaricious acts of the religious. The concentration on the laity aligns Covetise with the penitents reading forms of confession, rather than the priests they confess to. Repentance's responses ensure the reader does not get enticed by the avaricious acts for long and also, as Patterson argues, do not despair.[228] The reader recites the "Y" of Covetise in her voice and hears many specific tricks. This use of the first-person confession ties directly to form of confession, as the readers would be urged to consider if they had committed the many sins identified in Covetise's self-disclosure. Though he lacks a conscience, Covetise is a humanized personification of avarice who narrates a history of sin. While the reader realizes he is a deadly sin, she pities his way of life, much like Repentance does—"Y haue reuthe of thy lyuyng" (286-7). This ability to demand the reader's pity occurs even more fully in

[225] Owst, *Literature and* Pulpit, 315.

[226] All references to the B text are from *Langland, William, William Langland: Piers Plowman. A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z Versions*, ed. by A. V. C. Schmidt, I: Text (London and New York: Longman, 1995).

[227] For the significance of the two figures added following Covetise's confession, see Hanna, "Robert the Ruyflere, 81-96.

[228] Patterson, "Chaucerian Confession," 158.

engagements with the Pardoner's embodiment of the sin, which exhibits the interior as well as exterior aspects of avarice. The reflective nature of the form of confession that asks the readers to search their own conscience in relation to first-person statements about avarice inspires them to take on a similar engagement with this personification. Ultimately, the readers will be relieved that they can acknowledge the pernicious nature of the sin and that they can examine their own conscience in relation to this vice's deeds. This ability to demand the reader's sympathy occurs even more fully in engagements with the characterizations of the sin found in the Wife of Bath, Pardoner, and Canon's Yeoman.

The Wife of Bath, The Canon's Yeoman, and the Pardoner as Characterizations of Avarice

Like Langland's Covetise, Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Canon's Yeoman, and Pardoner speak themselves into life in *The Canterbury Tales*.[229] However, unlike in Langland's text, these iterations of avarice are increasingly self-conscious and embody both external and internal dimensions of the sin.[230] As H. Marshall Leister explains, "The Pardoner has long been recognized as the most self-conscious of the Canterbury pilgrims.

[229] Samuel McCracken identifies the *Merchant's Prologue* as a similar confessionary work in the *Canterbury Tales*, though I do not engage with it here due to its short length and dissimilar content. "Confessional Prologue and the Topography of the Canon's Yeoman," *Modern Philology* 68.3 (1971): 289-291.

[230] Elizabeth Fowler has a similar understanding of Chaucer's pilgrims. In her seminal study on literary character, she argues that Chaucer's "character habituates its readers to imagining the person as a bodily container for interiorized conflicts among different social representations of the person…[Chaucer's] satirical representations dissuade us from practicing the hypocrisy these conflicts seem to diagnose, yet at the same time they persuade us that such conflicts make up the very nature of the person." *Literary Character*, 38.

Part of that self-consciousness involves an awareness of his own condition [...]"[231] The self-conscious nature of not only the Pardoner but of the Wife of Bath and the Canon's Yeoman is at the heart of the difference between them and Langland's personification Covetise. It demonstrates the issue of characters who perform an identity that conceals their inner state. Though Covetise is able to offer a retelling of his evil deeds and is given a more narrative history than other personifications of the sin, Langland does not offer any look into his conscience or consciousness; thus the interior dimensions of the sin that the pilgrims display to different extents are absent from Covetise's confession.[232] In the remainder of this essay, I assert that these particular pilgrims' interiority is represented by the aspects of avarice she/he confesses and that his/her duplicity reveals that he/she is conscious of his/her sin.

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[231] *The Disenchanted Self*, 39. Though I find his argument about the Pardoner intriguing, I disagree with his statement that "*cupiditas*, of course, means far more than avarice," 45. As is clear in the penitential manuals and in Newhauser's *Early History of Greed*, these terms were largely conflated as were covetousness and avarice, despite different technical nuances of the terms found in some works—for instance, *cupidus* is a synonym for covetousness (one who desires what is another's) at one point in Isidore of Seville's work on the deadly sins and also stands in for desire in general. Newhauser has shown that Augustine's understanding of avarice (*avaritia)* and Gregory's is what Marshall contends belongs to the term *cupiditas* alone. Avarice's nature in Augustine's in *De libero arbitrio* is "a desire to possess anything which is not directed towards God, intangible qualities as well as material objects." Avarice to Augustine infects not only one's physical state but also their mental state, causing one to be unable to reason or navigate virtue. Augustine. *De libero arbitrio*, 3.17.48.165–66, as cited by Newhauser *The Early History of* Greed, xiii. For his argument about Gregory's understanding of the vice, see 109. For the one about Isidore of Seville, see 103. For his argument that "the view of *avaritia* and *cupiditas* were equivalent designations [… that] was supported by the growing dominance of the Vulgate text of the Bible, for many writers who use these terms as synonyms refer to the Vulgate version of 1 Timothy 6:10," see 111. Finally, for a fourteenth-century construction of avarice similar to Augustine's, see avarice's construction in Book 5 of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*.

[232] Though Elizabeth Fowler explains that Chaucer is indebted to confessional and penitential discourse, her argument centers on Chaucer's need to claim the territory of the interior for poetry. She uses the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* as examples to distinguish Chaucer's more "serviceable third-person literary character that can bear the weight of fiction's power to explain the interior experience" from the characters found in Gower's *Confessio amantis* and penitential manuals. *Literary Character*, 37.

We can better understand the transition from the abstract sin to a conscious character by examining the interiority of pilgrims in their Prologues and Tales and by putting it into conversation with the penitential form of confession. Subverting the genre's concern that the penitents will not be able to recognize their sins and merely speak the script of the form of confession, the Pardoner in particular is the perverted product of the ability to confess sin without the intention to rid oneself of it. His manipulation of penance and his loquaciousness go beyond the long form of confession in *The Clensyng of Mannes Soul*'s worry about the penitent's confession being tedious to the confessor. Chaucer demonstrates through the Pardoner's apologia just how thrilling one speaking at length about his or her sins can be, even if the reader is just as repelled by the Pardoner as she is by an emblematic vice figure. Though the avaricious nature has erased the potential personhood of Langland's Covetise as he has done nothing to show a conscience that would be able to ask for and seek repentance, the Pardoner's fate remains more of an enigma, as does the loquacious Wife of Bath and sorrowful Canon's Yeoman.[233]

Much as Sir Heruy engenders pity from Repentance and arguably the reader, Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Pardoner, and Canon's Yeoman create a similar effect through their defense of their professions. The apologia genre in itself demands that a reader judge based on the specific situation reported in the text and relate to it. The intimate

[233] See Kittredge for more on the Pardoner's humanity, "Chaucer's Pardoner." For an alternative view that argues the Pardoner has no feelings or thoughts (except, he admits, anger towards the Host), see Pearsall "Chaucer's Pardoner: The Death of a Salesman," *The Chaucer Review* 17.4 (1983), 358-365.

experience of this engagement occurs due to the author's use of the first-person voice, as this voice is one that is associated with penitents' own confessions and links the literary genre to the form of confession.[234] The fact that Chaucer's poetry, as D. W. Robertson aptly acknowledges, "achieves an easy and conversational manner, spiced by the rhythms of vigorous speech" also helps achieve this relationship and distinguishes his poetry from the alliterative *Piers Plowman* and other medieval works that follow more strict formal requirements.[235] The Wife's digressions, for instance, are one of the many rhetorical techniques Chaucer employs to achieve this connection.

Many readers of the *Canterbury Tales* have long remarked that the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner are the most complex, thus most relatable, out of the pilgrims. Though they represent avaricious medieval types, those types are easily identifiable to modern readers, along with the Canon's Yeoman. For instance, a modern reader easily grasps the similarities between the Wife's desire to marry for money and sexual voracity and that of the modern "gold digger" in case of the three old husbands and "cougar" in case of the two younger ones. The Pardoner is often likened to a modern "snake oil salesman," and

[234] For the argument that penitential literature provides a context for reading the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* but one that focuses more on the literary influences of *Piers Plowman's* sins' confessions and penitential lyric, see Lee Patterson, "Chaucerian Confession: Penitential Literature and the Pardoner." He also connects the form of the Pardoner's confession to the "liar's confession or *confessio ficti*," 163. Patterson expands his original argument in the chapter "The Subject of Confession" in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 367-421. Here he locates the *Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* in medieval discussions surrounding the theological and penitential understandings of despair; he argues that the Pardoner is "… a man in despair whose discourse is best understood in confessional terms," especially in terms of medieval lyrics and through the influence of *Piers Plowman*'s confessions of the deadly sins, 384.

[235] D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

the Canon's Yeoman shares attributes of the investor in a Ponzi scheme who obsessively attempts to turn nothing into money. Their recognizable attributes render these pilgrims relatable, and the self-disclosing form of their first-person prologues demands the reader encounter them on their own terms, not prescriptive ones, though the latter would arguably be in the reader's mind regardless. Indeed, their sins of avarice are not only against charity but also against justice, thus requiring restitution, not just penance.[236]

Patterson's argument that "Chaucer has, with typical economy, taken the defining terms of the Pardoner's character from the very penitential system of which he is an agent" is one I would like to reframe in the rest of this chapter. I build on Patterson's argument about the Pardoner's penitential self-construction to maintain that the Pardoner's along with the Wife of Bath's and the Canon's Yeoman's defining terms are taken from the aspects of avarice they confess, thus characterizing the deadly sin.[237] The authors of *Sources and Analogues* open their entries on these prologues by stating that they are the most original out of all the tales.[238] *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* is said to

[236] Elizabeth Fowler elucidates that "Classification of the sins mattered in a material way, because sins against charity, such as avarice, required penance but not restitution; sins against justice, however, could not be satisfied by penance without restitution, even if they were considered solely in the confessional." *Literary Character*, 51. In the fourteenth century, avarice in its various iterations, not just usury, was being treated as an injustice, as shown in Gower's *Confessio amantis* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*.

[237] Patterson, "Chaucerian Confession," 153-154. Patterson in his later book, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, connects the formal aspects of these three pilgrims prologues and tales, but he only acknowledges the rhetoric of penance of self-constituting the Pardoner. He argues that the rhetoric of misogyny constructs the Wife's "feminine subjectivity"; whereas the Canon's Yeoman's self-construction relies on alchemy. "The Subject of Confession" in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 367-368.

[238] The entry that opens *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* in *Sources and Analogues* asserts that it "is surely among the most original and vital of Chaucer's poems." The one on the Canon's Yeoman's Tale similarly identifies it as "extraordinary among *The Canterbury Tales* in having neither any known major sources nor analogues that suggest the early existence of a primary source." Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, eds.

encourage the anomaly that it has no sources or analogues due to its autobiographical nature.[239] The autobiographical nature of all of these works arguably stems from their shared source inspiration— the penitential genre form of confession.

While Langland's Sir Heruy is not professionally consistent and does not explain the rationale for his avaricious acts, these Chaucerian pilgrims most certainly are and do. Indeed, their avaricious nature is directly related to their avaricious professional practices. While the Merchant also gives a short apologia describing his marriage, these three pilgrims give a first-person history of avarice in their apologia. Instead of having these figures confess to a priest figure, like Langland has Covetousness do to Repentance, these pilgrims offer a defense of their avaricious deeds to their fellow pilgrims (the members of the poem's community) in their sinful histories. These pilgrims are connected formally through their apologia and due to their obsessions with their avaricious professional practices. They are all also unrepentant for their actions, like Covetousness. The connection between the form of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and *The Pardoner's Prologue* and their shared avaricious obsessions may be observed in the Pardoner's interruption of the Wife of Bath when she is giving her defense.[240] The Pardoner tells the Wife not to spare any details of her tale: "Telle forth youre tale, spareth

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Sources and Analogue of The Canterbury Tales, Volume II (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005, reprint. 2009), 351, 716.

[239] Ibid., 716.

[240] For a complementary argument to mine that takes this interruption as a dramatic center to Alisoun's *Prologue* and *Tale*, and one that argues that "*cupiditas* may serve as a center for the analysis of the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner and of the parallels between them," see Anne Kernan, "The Archwife and the Eunuch," *ELH* 41.1 (Spring 1974): 1-25, 10.

for no man" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 186). One of the chief requirements of confession was that the penitents tell their narrative of sin exhaustively. Though the situation is different, there is a parallel in the Pardoner's request given the form of the Wife's prologue. He then asks her to "teche us yonge men of [her] praktike," acknowledging that he can learn more avaricious practices from her (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 187). She responds that she will "Gladly," but anticipates her defense of her avaricious practices as a wife will offend the other pilgrims and asks them to not take "agrief of that [she] says" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 188). She disclaims that her "entente nys but for to pleye" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 188, 191, 192). Like the Pardoner, the polysemous "pleye," sexual denotation and all, implies that she is "wont to preche for to wynne" (*Pardoner's Prologue* 461) (MED 2).

Though her disclaimer is ironic given her character, it is perhaps necessary, of course, because she is characterized through her avarice and thus disrupts the institutions and ideals of her society just as the sin was accused of doing. Her economic independence, as Patterson has noted, "challenges the traditional order of feudal society."[241] Chaucer must have known, however, how enticing her questioning of authority and entertaining her avaricious monologue might be. Her disclaimer, then, could also be read as an authorial warning not to take her too seriously.

Alisoun acknowledges the many branches of avarice and their role in shaping her life in her *Prologue*. The first information the reader learns about Alison is that she has

[241] Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, 281.

authority to talk about the "wo that is in mariage" because she has been married five times (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 3, 6). This admission in itself is head turning, as it still would be today, due to the excessive number. The reader soon finds that everything about Alisoun is related to excess and her voracious appetite; indeed she would "welcome the sixte" husband when he comes (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 45). She also divulges that she has "loved never by no discrecioun, / But evere folwede [her] appetyt" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 622-623). Instead of acknowledging the problem of her marrying her husbands for "here nether purs and . . . here cheste," Alisoun boasts about it (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 45a). Her rationales and practices only get more avaricious as her tale goes on. Instead of listing her avaricious attributes to rid herself of their power, she defends them and thus becomes them. To make a case for her avaricious acts she uses many of the arguments and interpretations of Scripture offered by Jovinian, the opponent whom the Church Father Jerome refuted in *Adversus Jovinianum*, which she cites later as being included in Jankin's Book of Wicked Wives. As many have also remarked, though her view is quite transgressive, Alisoun, echoing Jovinian, asks how would humanity continue on if everyone were a virgin and did not use their "sely instrument" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 132). However, her argument is undermined by her avaricious nature. Everything is about possession and excess to Alisoun—the two chief aspects of avarice.

As Alisoun continues her defense, she turns marriage (a sacrament) into a business. The chief aspects of it are sex and money, and both are described in economic terms. Sexual organs are turned into "instruments" of the marriage trade. Though copulation was supposed to result in children (the fruit of marriage)—as Alisoun even

acknowledges in her allusion to Genesis 1:28— she significantly does not have appear to have any (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 28). The fruits of her marriage, instead, are her three old husbands (they are her "detour" and her "tral") as are their lands and treasure (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 155). Of course, the Pardoner enjoys the way the wife reads Scripture to align with her avaricious desires. Chaucer even has him interrupt shortly after she claims that the Apostle gives her complete ownership of her husband's body. He exclaims dramatically: "By God and by Seint John! / Ye been a noble prechour in this cas" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 165). The Pardoner recognizes a kindred spirit when he sees one!

Though Alisoun claims her theme is the "wo in mariage" and the "tribulacion in mariage," it is clear from the start that it is really a defense of her avaricious nature in marriage (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 3, 173). One might imagine such a high-spirited woman visiting a priest to be confessed having a similarly defensive experience. After all, Alisoun clearly notices the many sinful aspects of avarice she reads about in herself even if she does not view them as such. She retorts that "I hate hymn that my vices telleth me, / And so doo mo, God woot, of us than I" (662-663). Though Alisoun does not like her vices to be told to her by others, she has no problem listing them herself and even asks her audience to agree with her. Does anyone like being told they are wrong?

Chaucer takes on the aspects of avarice listed in the form of confession and brings them to life through Alisoun's justification of them. These sins constitute who she is, and she would arguably cease to exist as we know her without them. What makes her so endearing is that Chaucer has her speak in defense of her practices in a way that makes the reader commiserate with her, as many critics have. Who can help but sympathize

when Alisoun asks, "Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose, / The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne?" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 786-787). Despite how compelling she is, the reader must acknowledge that she has already admitted to being like many of the wicked wives Jankin reads about. After all, she has already confessed to being a liar and even dramatized her deceitful tirade against her previous husbands—"For half so boldely kan ther no man / Swere and lyen, as a womman kan" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 227-228). This admission undermines her authority and further reveals her avaricious nature.

The position of the wife at this time was one with little, if any, agency, and so many have called Alisoun a feminist for her apparent and unusual expression of female subjectivity. However, she is not, and would not have been understood, as an ideal. Her self-construction relies on her avaricious nature in marriage, which includes miserliness, lying, perjury, idolatry, and desiring money and property above all. Three of her husbands give "hir lond and hir tresoor" to her willingly so she does not care for their pleasure; while she commits adultery just like her fourth husband (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 204, 464-471). Instead of being repentant and shameful for her misdeeds, the Wife revels in them. She laughs fondly,

> …whan it remembreth me
> Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
> It tikleth me aboute myn herte rote. (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 469-471)

She admits to her desire only for profit when she recounts her putting up with her older husband's lust and urges men to get rich so that they might also have things to sell to their wives:

> And therfore every man this tale I telle,
> Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;
> With empty hand men may none haukes lure.
> For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure,
> And make me a feyned appetite;
> And yet in bacon hadde I nevere delit. (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 412-418*)*

Though married, Alisoun is admitting to prostituting herself to gain more of her husband's goods, which lure her to him.

Alisoun confesses to practicing behavior associated with misers and idolaters, as well. In regards to the former, she refuses to spend money on her fourth husband's funeral, as she remarks that "it nis but wast to burie him preciously" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 499). Lest the reader think for a moment she is something other than a miser due to this choice, she clears that up later when she admits that she, like a medieval Scarlett O'Hara,

> … weep algate, and made sory chere
> As wyves moten, for it is usage,
> And with [her] coverchief covered [her] visage;
> But for that [she] was purveyed of a make,
> [She] wepte but small, and that [she] undertake. (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 587-91)

She does not really care for her husband's soul and would not hesitate to spend an excessive amount of money on herself. As for idolatry, Alisoun speaks more reverently of her treasures both of sexual and physical nature than she ever does the divine treasure of God. Indeed, she confesses that her neighbor Alisoun knew her "herte and eek [her] privetee / Bet than our parrishe preest, so moot [her] thee!" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 530-

531). Alisoun's soul is in peril due to this admission, as she fully admits that she has consciously not fully confessed her vice to her parish priest as demanded by the church.

With deception, Alisoun controls the marriages she is in, even that of her fifth husband, whom she claims she married for love, but the reader knows that the love she refers to is more akin to lust given the contents of her apology (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 526). She is dishonest with Jankin from the beginning, claiming that she was enchanted by him and "mette of him al night," though "al was false—[she] dreamed of it right naught" (*Wife of Bath's Prologue* 577, 582). Alisoun in every relationship exhibits avarice. Indeed her dramatized argument with Jankin at the end of her prologue is about finances. Through Alisoun's self-construction, one might see some of the hypocrisy in the way marriage was understood at the time and its possessive legal nature, making it easier to understand with this pilgrim who embodies a deadly sin. It is arguably refreshing to encounter a strong woman in a medieval text, especially when the tables were normally turned. However, Alisoun is primarily a representation of a deadly sin, but one that was becoming more justified in the market.

The Canon's Yeoman like Alisoun and the Pardoner exhibits excess and explains that he will "nat spare; / Swich thing as that [he] knowe, [he] wol declare," gesturing to the form of confession (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 719).[242] He also demands empathy

[242] For the argument that the device of *confessio* is used in his *Tale* in "an entirely original manner to achieve his masterful portrayal of a spiritually confused and terrified creature," see Lawrence V. Ryan, "The Canon's Yeoman's Desperate Confession" *The Chaucer Review* 8.4 (Spring 1974): 297-310, 299. He also distinguishes between the Canon's "sacramental" confession and the "literary" ones of the Wife of Bath and Pardoner, 307.

in his self-construction, though he readily acknowledges before he details his nature that he could never leave his avaricious ways:

> And yet, for al my smert and al my grief,
> For al my sorwe, labour, and mischief,
> I could nevere leve it in no wise. (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 712-714)

Despite his ability to acknowledge the sinful nature of his acts and that the effects of them will render him and those who practice with him "beggers atte laste," his voracious desire to practice alchemy, and thus his idolization of it, is the basis for his character (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 683). Once again, Chaucer uses the qualities of avarice characterize a pilgrim. The culpability of the Canon's Yeoman in the avaricious acts he participates in is lessened by the figure of the Canon, whose secrets he divulges. Of course, they are his own, too. Indeed, the deception the Canon practices is mirrored in the Yeoman's first description of the Canon to the Host. The Yeoman knows the Canon is a fraud, but still he describes him as "gretter than a clerk" and boasts that he could transform the ground and "he koude al clene turnen up-so-doun, / and pave it al of silver and of gold" (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 623-626). Before he details his practices, he explains that he lived with the Canon among "robbours and thise theves by kynde" (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 659). Though the Yeoman was lured into the deceitful practice, he continues it by his own volition. He explains that with the Canon, "To muchel folk we doon illusioun, / And borwe gold, be it a pound or two…" (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 673-674).

The Canon's Yeoman is very similar in appearance and in practice to Covetousness in *Piers Plowman*. They both have "blered" eyes, threadbare clothes, are pale, and are in debt to others due to their avaricious practices. The Canon's Yeoman remarks, "I am endetted so therby / of gold that I have borwed, trewely, / That whil I lyve that I shal it quite nevere (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 724-736). Though he warns others against the craft of alchemy right after, he continues to outline with careful detail the many attributes of his "werk" for 79 lines before he interrupts himself with a lament on how cursed the craft is (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 831) but then continues on for the rest of the first part before going into a narrative about a canon who deceives using alchemy. Though he reveals the secrets of his trade, like the Wife and the Pardoner do of theirs, his voracious curiosity to continue to try to make gold will not be quelled. Though he tells others to "lete it goon," he cannot take his own advice (*Canon's Yeoman's Prologue* 1475). The reader observes the conflicts in his conscience and sympathizes with him because of his plight.

Like the wife and the alchemist, the pardoner was a position that was fraught in the Middle Ages. Those in the position needed to deal with the fact that their position was an "institutional contradiction."[243] As Elizabeth Fowler explains, "The position of the pardoner's office expresses a deep ambivalence on the part of an institutional church that had to collect funds as enthusiastically as it had to despise their collection."[244] The

[243] Fowler, *Literary Character*, 53. For an extended study of indulgences in medieval England, see R. N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[244] Fowler, 52.

pardoner's practices are inherently commercial, though their intention in collecting them is what determined whether they were guilty of avarice or not. After all, as Fowler explains, the Church validated an economy that exchanged money given on earth for the reward of the soul after death, as they sought to protect the indulgence.[245]

The Pardoner's interiority is created by his explanation and performance of avaricious professional practices and his admission that his "entente is nat but for to winne" (*Pardoner's Prologue* 6.403). Instead of having him confess to a priest figure, as Langland has Covetise do to Repentance, the Pardoner offers a defense of his avaricious deeds to his fellow pilgrims, the members of the poem's community, while he subsequently tries to dupe them. The form of confession's purpose of identifying one's inner sinful state has been subverted by the Pardoner's personal narrative.

That the Pardoner is avaricious in his professional practices cannot be denied. He reiterates three times in his Prologue that his theme, as he mentions at the start, is "alwey oon"… "coveitise" (*The Pardoner's Prologue* 334, 424, 433). Ironically, it is both the sin he preaches against and the sin he practices in his preaching. The readers cannot separate this sin from the Pardoner any more than they can separate it from Covetise. Many critics have acknowledged the Pardoner's connection to vice in general and avarice in particular and to confession.[246] The Pardoner expounds on his professional vices with precision and

[245] Ibid., 55-56.

[246] See, for instance, Joyce E. Peterson,"With Feigned Flattery: The Pardoner as Vice" for an argument of the Pardoner as Vice. *The Chaucer Review* 10 (Spring 1976), 326–336. Elizabeth Fowler explains that the Pardoner conveys the tensions between the internal and external forum of the Canon law and that he moves into a personification of avarice at times, see "Character and the Habituation of the Reader," in *Literary Character*, 32–94. Many critics have noted the Pardoner's sexuality, looking to psychoanalysis as a lens through which to better understand his character, but Minnis and Howard rightly critique this view, arguing

obsession, qualities that would have been seen as necessary to confession, though the Pardoner has no intention of giving up his avaricious nature, implicating him in the sin irrevocably. He fulfills the type of the avaricious Pardoner but also creates a persona all his own in his self-construction and psychologizing of avarice, which builds on the lists of avaricious aspects of sins found in the form of confession.

The Pardoner deceives those he encounters as he uses their own shortcomings against them, an act of avarice. Much like the Wife of Bath deceives her husbands, the Pardoner misleads those to whom he preaches and entices their donations for relics through his oral performance and thus cannot resist trying to dupe his fellow pilgrims into buying relics at the end of his sermon-like tale.[247] As Alastair Minnis explains, the Pardoner is proud of his occupation—it goes far beyond a job for him. Though he practices a deviant form, "his realization of his professional self is central to his performance of subjectivity."[248] His enthusiastic performance of his occupation, even though perverted from the ideal mode, lures in his readers. Enthusiasm is indeed contagious. By giving such detail of his tricks, the audience feels like they are a part of

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that avarice was the chief vice of the time and should not be displaced due to an emphasis on a sin that may not have even been invoked. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, 342-345. Minnis, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath* in The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008),169. Patterson, too, offers an extended critique of the psychoanalytic approach that focuses on the Pardoner's sexual orientation and argues that even if Chaucer meant for the audience to understand that the Pardoner practiced sodomy, that vice was frequently associated with simony by fourteenth-century reformers and would therefore call back attention to the Pardoner's avarice, not lust. See Patterson, "Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch," 661-665.

[247] For information on a sermon analogue to Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* found in John Bromyard's *Distinctiones*, see Siegfried Wenzel, "Another Analogue to *The Pardoner's Tale*" *Notes and Queries* 43 (1996): 134-136.

[248] Minnis, *Fallible Authors*,164.

the Pardoner's inner circle, much like they do when they hear the Wife of Bath's give her own apologia. This sin, though the most heinous, is the most alluring in that it can corrupt even the most holy of acts (penance). The Pardoner has long been acknowledged as an outcast of some sort on the pilgrimage due to his occupation.

The Pardoner outlines all of the avaricious practices of his trade in his prologue, from his ability to shift his voice when he speaks (330), to his dramatic gestures as he looks out at the congregation (395-397), to the shame he uses to increase the offerings (378). He understands the desires of other people more than they themselves do. He knows that people are motivated by shame and that "lewed peple loven tales olde" (*Pardoner's Prologue* 437). The platitude that people like listening to old stories is proven by the reader's own enjoyment of his tale, which is why it is so apt. He attempts to gain riches with his deceitful practices and "preche[s] nothing but for coveityse" (*Pardoner's Prologue* 433). Fowler argues that "Chaucer creates an exquisite *modus operandi* for him: to make a literary confession function as both a sales pitch and a sermon. By exposing his interior, he creates a spellbinding intimacy with his audience. The object of confession is to reveal one's own intentions; the object of a sales pitch and a sermon is to create intentions in others."[249] He is a seducer, much like avarice itself, who calls out to the immoderate desires of others. Indeed, his examination of conscious does not work towards amending his nature, but further justifies it. Like the Canon's Yeoman who acknowledges that he will be damned in the Final Judgment, the Pardoner,

[249] Ibid., 76.

however unconsciously, must recognize that he will meet the same fate as the three rioters in his *Tale*. After all, the rioters are all killed due to their avaricious nature, and no one can cheat Death. But the Pardoner is an Epicurean. He seizes the day and lives for his avaricious pleasures, which includes bragging about it. He does not just perform it, but lives it.

The Pardoner is more than a personification of covetousness; he is an embodiment of it. His ability, like avarice's, to disrupt the community, is seen at the end of his *Tale* when he makes his sales pitch to the pilgrims. Just before, he almost redeems himself by explaining,

> And Jesu Crist, that is our soules leche,
> So graunte yow his pardon to recyve,
> For that is best; I wol yow nat deceive. (*Pardoner's Tale* 630-3)

Has he been moved by his own words? Has he admitted to himself as well as the pilgrims that his own indulgence is corrupt?

Regardless of the response, which shows that he has some sense of the truth he needs to understand himself as a moral subject, he follows up this admission by hearkening right back to his simoniac nature:

> But sires, o word forgat I in my tale:
> I have relikes and pardon in my male
> As faire as any man in Engelond. (*Pardoner's Tale* 919-21)

In order to capitalize on the fact that many pilgrims die on their journeys in order to sell these relics, he uses shame just as he outlined in his Prologue to incite them to purchase

his indulgences. He picks out the Host first because he apparently "is moost envoluped in synne" (*Pardoner's Tale* 6.942). Therefore, he bids him to

> Com forth… and offer first anon,
> And [he] shalt kisse the relikes everychoun,
> Ye, for a grote! Unbokele anon [his] purs. (*Pardoner's Tale* 943-945)[250]

Like the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner is obsessed with sexual puns that are linked to economic grammar. The Host refuses to be duped and play the role of the "lewed" churchgoer that listens to the Pardoner preach. Instead of playing along, he threatens the Pardoner. He cries,

> I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond
> In stide of relikes or of seintuarie.
> Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;
> They sul be shrined in an hogges toord! (*Pardoner's Tale* 952-955)

To this the loquacious Pardoner is rendered silent: "So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye" (*Pardoner's Tale* 955). Perhaps the shaming tactic he used in his sermons has finally been turned against him. The Pardoner's potential shame and obvious anger at the Host's reaction points to a reflective inner state, which distinguishes him from Sir Heruy who does not react in any way in the C-text when Repentance berates him. Before their exchange can get out of hand, the Knight intervenes to keep the peace, much in accordance with his profession. Though the Knight makes all the right motions— he gets

[250] For the argument that the selling of relics is historically associated with Pardoners despite previous claims that it was unusual, see Wenzel, "Chaucer's Pardoner and His Relics" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 11 (1989): 37-41.

the Pardoner and the Host to kiss as a sign of peace— the discord that has been sewn after their exchange is so palpable that it is hard to presume the mood is as playful as it once was. This effect materializes the communal consequence the avaricious nature of the Pardoner has and reveals the Pardoner to have inner-consciousness.

Conclusion

Medieval compilers, such as the one who compiled MS Harley 6041 that includes a form of confession and a composite version of *Piers Plowman*, saw a connection between the aims and strategies of these two forms. As this chapter has shown, the ideas and structures governing the popular penitential genre form of confession can provide insight into the representations of avarice in literary texts and help to articulate the distinction between personification and characterization. I have demonstrated how Langland and Chaucer reshaped the most intimate experience of confession, the examination of conscience, to give literary form to a deadly sin, and what was at stake in their representations. Avarice in *Piers Plowman* and to an even greater degree in *The Canterbury Tales*, though still counted as a deadly sin, has nevertheless been transformed into and is animated as a personal attribute and social reality. Because of this reality, the reader is asked to engage with it more intimately. What is the significance in rendering avarice in human form? If one cannot discern why avarice is dangerous, one might be more susceptible to its powers. On the other hand, the more material depictions reveal that avarice takes on many forms and that individuals need to be more attuned to the sin to recognize it in themselves and others. Indeed, a misunderstanding of how to perform proper penance could result in eternal damnation, as the penitent becomes an iteration of

the sin itself. The penitential form of confession, *Piers Plowman*, and *The Canterbury Tales* attempt to explore the consequence of sin in the world through an imagined oral performance. Their representations also highlight how powerful and central aspects of avarice are now in capitalist cultures. Modern readers perhaps relate so easily to Alisoun, the Pardoner, and the Canon's Yeoman because they are modern types as much as they are medieval ones.

CHAPTER V

THE ISSUE OF MEDE AND NEDE: AVARICE'S CORRUPTION OF PENANCE IN THE C-TEXT OF *PIERS PLOWMAN*

> "Allas!" quod Consience tho and cryede, "wolde Crist of his grace
> That Coueytyse were cristene that is so kene to fihte
> And bolde and abydynge the while his bagge lasteth!"
> —William Langland *Piers Plowman C-Text*

> Mesure is medecyne, thogh thow muche yerne.
> —William Langland, *Piers Plowman C-Text*

The preceding chapters show that the issue of avarice is one that writers of secular and sacred texts are deeply invested in interrogating in late fourteenth-century England through a reimagination of penitential genres. Though Chaucer and Gower both illuminate the consequences of avarice on society, Langland's work *Piers Plowman* perhaps most forcefully showcases the potential apocalyptic effects of this reality through avarice's destruction of the sacrament of penance while at the same time exposing how complicated the vice is due to the market participation that even the religious orders sworn to poverty are participating in.

Therefore, this final chapter is dedicated to conveying how Langland engages with the complicated nature of avarice as it corrupts both civil and church culture and as it often disguises itself as mede (reward) and need (basic necessity) respectively in the C-text of *Piers Plowman*. I begin this chapter with a sustained engagement with Passus I

where a figuration named Holy Churche comments on the worldly preoccupation of the people in the fair field. After looking closely at her teaching and qualms with the fair field of folk, I turn to the figure she is juxtaposed with (Lady Mede) whose presence in the polity, the reader soon finds, has thoroughly corrupted civil justice. I end this chapter with a reflection on the critically debated figure Nede to convey how Langland discloses that the vice of avarice not only undoes civil society but also the Church in a community that is driven by market relations and deceived by avarice being confused through guile as just reward and basic necessity.

Holy Churche Vs. Mede the Mayde

After gazing upon the fair field of folk— a microcosm for the English community—fully implicated in matters of the world, Wille (the dreamer) meets a "louely lady of lere in lynnene yclothed" (I.3).[251] She is Holy Churche and speaks to him about divine Treuthe (God) whose teaching is in opposition to the discord and corruption in the community Wille has witnessed that follows what the "world ascuth" (Prol.20). David Aers aptly notes this figure as "the creedal Church which Christians are committed to believe" and regards her teaching as "immensely rich" in that it "deploys a wide range of modes."[252] In this opening, Holy Churche tells Wille all he needs to know regarding

[251] I continue to refer to Derek Pearsall's edition of the C-text of *Piers Plowman* throughout this chapter. *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008). References in the text are to passus and line numbers.

[252] David Aers, "The Sign of Poverty" in *Sanctifying Signs* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 99-156, 100. William F. Revere argues in his dissertation study that "it is, some might say, Holy Church who initiates Wille into the grammar of the *forum conscientiae*, Holy Church who begins to teach him the form of confession." "The Mutualities of Conscience: Satire, Community, and Individual Agency in Late Medieval and Early Modern England" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 2014), 20. For my account of the poem's engagement with this penitential grammar, see chapter 3. Revere argues that Holy

salvation, not only for himself but for all of the fair field of folk. Wille is a seeker of knowledge—of himself and of the world he lives in and beyond—but he is often led in different directions in his search in the poem. As Aers argues, it takes Wille the whole poem (his entire life) to grasp Holy Churche's teaching in this passus and thus the answer to the second question he asks her, " How Y may saue my soule…" (I.80). The poem travels down paths that she did not outline in order to elucidate the nature of the fair field of folk's culture for the reader in light of Wille's question.

Passus I opens with Holy Churche inquiring if Wille is sleeping ("Wille, slepestou?") and if he sees the people in the field who know no better than seeking worldly gain (I.5). She probes,

> … seestow this peple,
> Hou bisy thei ben aboute the mase?
> The moste party of this peple that passeth on this erthe,
> Haue thei worschip in this world thei wilneth no bettere;
> Of othere heuene then here thei halde no tale. (I.6-10)

Holy Churche calls attention to the corruption of "moste" of the people who only care for the world—"thei wilneth no bettere." Corruption of this kind is shown, as discussed in Chapter 1, in every level of society both religious and secular in the poem's prologue. Wille, too, is shown to be among the most who worship this world as he does not

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Churche is central to the poetics of the poem, and I agree with his and Aers's reading of her. For a different one that argues that though she is a crucial and figure for the poem, her teaching is complicated in the rest of the work to "expose the shortcomings of institutions precisely by acts of apparent submission," see James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 2, 1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 356-357. For another reading that similarly finds her a challenging figure, see David Lawton, "The Subject of Piers Plowman," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 1 (1987): 1-30.

recognize Holy Churche and is "afeered of here face, thow she fayre were" (I.10). Indeed, his misrecognition of her encourages him to ask her first about money as opposed to grace even after she has told him about Treuthe. Before Wille questions her about the currency of the world, Holy Churche explains that God commanded (hette) the elements to assist humanity at all times,

> And brynge forth youre bilyue, bothe lynnen and wollene,
> And in *mesure*, thow muche were, to make yow atteste;
> And comaundede of his corteseye in comune thre thynges;
> Aren non nidefole but tho thre, and nemne hem Y thenke
> And rekene hem by rewe – reherse hem wher the liketh.
> The first is fode, and vesture the seconde,
> And drynke that doth the good… (I.17-24; my italics)

In this response, she explains that God has provided all humankind needs to flourish; therefore, they do not need to seek further worldly gain. These common needs (food, clothing, and drink) being fulfilled in measure (moderation) are central to the poem's meditation on the state of the community that Wille lives and is a critique of the market circumstances of late fourteenth-century England. Though there be "muche," God provides everyone with enough.[253] I will turn to this claim and consider it further in relation to Nede later in this chapter. For now, I would like to continue to focus on

[253] Aers elaborates on the troubling nature of Antichrist's power to have the people forget the word "enough" in passus X of *Beyond Reformation?*. He explains that Antichrist's method in passus XXII "encourages us to think of the malleability of needs and the way that in the culture represented by Mede (II-IV) they can tend to infinity." He ties this moment in the poem to Aquinas's claim that "immersion in a culture driven to pursue exchange not to provide the necessities of life for the community but for financial gain ('propter lucrum') will make its subjects develop a boundless desire for wealth which tends to the infinite ("quae terminum nescit, sed in infinitum tendit" [ST II-II.77.4, resp.]." *Beyond Reformation?: An Essay on William Langland's Piers Plowman and the End of Constantinian Christianity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 90.

Wille's initial response to Holy Churche's teaching and warnings that the desires of the flesh are tied up with the devil and work to deceive (I.38-40) to elucidate that his misdirected desires at the start of the poem are a product of the market culture he lives in.

Wille explains that he "lyketh wel [her] words" (I.41); however, instead of asking her more about Treuthe, Wille follows that compliment with a question about the treasure of this world: "Ac [but] the moneye of this molde, that men so faste kepen, / Telleth me to wham that tresour bylongeth?" (I.42-43). Like the fair field of folk and the religious therein, Wille is unable to relinquish his desire to understand worldly things such as money. Holy Churche does not reprimand him in this instance for his misdirected desire as she simply remarks that God is interested in his creatures living "in mesure." Indeed, she explains that Reason and Kynde Witt should teach Wille to take treasure when he needs it. She again reiterates that the devil betrays those who desire earthly goods first: "That tristeth in tresor of erthe he bytrayeth sonest; / To combre men with coueytise, that is his kynde and his lore" (I.66-67). Avarice here is highlighted as the vice the devil uses to tempt humanity and, as we shall see, the one Antichrist employs later to dismantle the Church. Aers explains that in Holy Churche's incarnational response she neither glorifies the riches of the world nor poverty, which sets her apart from the current debates regarding the latter and mendicancy.[254] The main thrust of her teaching is that one should not desire more than he or she needs.

[254] *Sanctifying Signs*, 101.

Holy Churche's response in the first passus regarding the Trinity and the nature of good works (true labor) is the very answer Wille seeks at the end of Passus I. He asks Holy Churche, "How Y may saue my soule, that saynt art yholde?" (I.80). Though her response is straightforward enough (she repeats that "Treuthe and true loue is no tresor bettre" [I.81, 136, 202]), her teaching is proven to be particularly hard for Wille and apparently the rest of the inhabitants of the poem's community to follow due to the market reality of the world and its focus on individual gain over communal prosperity. Wille does not even think he has "kynde knowing," or as Pearsall glosses "natural (intuitive) understanding" (I.137). When he expresses this anxiety to Holy Churche, she rebukes him, exclaiming he is a "dotede daffe" (I.139). Though her remark is rather humorous, if not a bit harsh, she continues by genuinely explaining what kynde knowynge is to Wille. This faculty, she pronounces, is foundational:

> Hit is kynde knowynge that kenet in thyn herte
> For to louye thy lord leuest of alle,
> Dey rather then do eny dedly synne:
> *Melius est mori quam male viuere.* (I.142-145)

She follows this explanation with the biblical notion that "loue ys treacle to abate synne" (I.146) that analogizes love to a herbal medicine that cures sin.[255] The centrality of God's love is an idea she returns to throughout this passus. God's love is tied to the obligations of every occupation earlier in the passus; she explains to Wille that every profession

[255] This notion was popular in the penitential manuals that pulled from patristic writings as discussed in the second chapter and picked up by many writers in the fourteenth century. Pearsall notes that "the symbolism of the treacle (as the antidote provided by the Passion of Christ to the serpent-bite of Satan) was particularly influenced by the interpretation of Num. 21:8-9." *C-text Piers Plowman*, 146n.

should do its part in sharing God's love—clerks should teach the nature of true labor that works to showcase God's love, kings and knights should keep it by reason, and therefore every estate should act in charity following *Deus Caritas* (the love of God, the most precious virtue) (I.79-85). In her response to Wille, she upholds the medieval understanding of common profit, which I examined in the introduction of this project and in relation to the genre of estates satire and the penitential genre that focused on a penitent's profession in chapter 1. In this poem, like the others explored here, avarice completely dismantles common profit.

The nature of the desire for individual gain over communal wellbeing is dramatically displayed not only in Holy Churche's response to the dealings of the fair field of folk and her commentary on the avaricious men of holy church but also in the very next passus with the introduction of Lady Mede, the antithesis of Holy Churche, and a complicated figuration of avarice. Jill Mann perhaps describes the force of Langland's allegory most vividly when she describes this allegorical figure: "We all know the proverbial saying that 'money talks,' but so vivid is our sense of Mede as a person that it is with something of a shock that we realise that this is money talking."[256] Before Lady Mede appears, Holy Churche laments the state of the clergy. She remarks there are "none hardore ne hungriore then men of holy chirche" (I.187). Her ire focuses on them, as she explains they commit the most wretched sin of allowing their avarice to pervert her teaching. She describes them as

[256] "Langland and Allegory" in *The Morton W. Bloomfield Lectures on Medieval English Literature, II* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992). 6.

> Auerous and euel-willed when thei ben avaunsed,
> Vnkynde to here kyn and to alle cristene,
> Chewen here charite and chiden aftur more
> And ben acombred with coueytise—thei can nouht crepe out,
> So harde hath auaryce yhapsed hem togederes. (I.187-194)

The repetition of avarice and covetousness here emphasizes that this is their vice and the one that inhibits the community from understanding God's grace. Their insatiable appetites for worldly gain have jailed them and made them "vnkynde to here kyn," which is the most incriminatory charge in the poem. Charity and love go together and unlock grace to "conforteth alle carefole acombred with synne" (I.198). Holy Churche has provided the answer for Wille regarding how to save his soul, but the avaricious clergy have clearly played their part in misleading Wille from the truth of the trinity. Holy Church tells Wille she cannot teach him more about this truth; he must take what she has taught and apply it himself. However, Wille requests one more thing from her before she departs from the poem for good: "Kenne me by sum craft to knowe the false" (II.4). As Wille looks to his left as Holy Churche advises him to do as a part of her answer to this question, he sees a woman among the company of figures named "Fals," "Fauel," and "fikel-tonge Lyare" (II.6). The description of this woman, as Derek Pearsall notes, purposefully echoes that of Holy Churche in I.3.[257]

This figuration is the antithesis of Holy Churche and thus corrupts those who desire her. As opposed to Holy Churche's simple dress of linen, Lady Mede is introduced in lavish dress, "wonderly yclothed":

[257] Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* C-text, II.8n.

She was purfiled in pelure, non puyere on erthe,
And crouned with a croune, the kyng hath non bettre;
On alle here fyue fyngeres ful richeliche yrynged
And thereon rede rubies and othere riche stones.
Here robynge was rychere then Y rede couthe…
Here aray with her rychesse raueschede my herte.
Whos wyf a were and what was here name,
"Leue lady," quod Y tho, "layn nought yf ye knowen." (II.9-18)

Not only is her dress notably more lavish than Holy Churche's, but Wille's reaction to her is different, as well. Instead of being afraid of her despite her lovely face like he was of Holy Church (I.10), Wille is completely ravished by her rich array! Despite having initially asked Holy Churche how to recognize false, he has overlooked what his true desire should be again and that this richly robed figure keeps company with none other than those who are false.

Holy Churche highlights Lady Mede's oppositional nature by explaining that she "hath niyed [Holy Churche] ful ofte" by unraveling both secular justice at the "kynges court, and in comune court" and religious justice "in the popes palays" (II.23). Holy Churche explains that Mede is "manered" after Fauel (her father), who is a figuration of deceit (II.27-28). Holy Churche continues then to explain the differences between herself and Mede and underlines Mede's opposition to her. She also explains that Mede is to be married to the vice figure of "Fals Faythlesse" who is of the devil's kin (II.44). However, Holy Churche explains that Mede has been "foule enchaunted" by her father's "flaterynge speche," revealing that Mede is not inherently vicious despite her lineage

(II.45).[258] After all, money is not innately evil, but rather neutral, though the untempered desire for it is the vice of avarice. Wille is told that he will see this marriage take place if he waits patiently.

The answer to Wille's initial question to Holy Churche regarding whom the treasure of the earth belongs to is dramatized over the next few passūs. Before the dramatization begins, Holy Churche answers his question about how to recognize false by telling him to "Knowe hem wel yf thow kanst and kepe the fro hem alle / That loueth here lordschipe, lasse other more" (II.49-50). Holy Churche commands Wille not to reprimand any of them himself, as Christ will ultimately provide justice. Her final words to him warn him not to covet mede, a warning that is most difficult to heed in light of the society he lives in that desires a more material profit than spiritual one. She cautions him, "acombre thow neuere thy consience for coueityse of mede" (II.54). This warning foreshadows the ending and the destruction of the newly formed Church as the figuration for covetousness (frair Flatterer) enters by slipping past Conscience. Though the community Wille is apart of inevitably fails due to allowing covetousness to enter the church, I argue that Wille himself by the end of the poem has heeded Holy Churche's

[258] Theology later argues that Mede has the potential to be good as her mother was Amends (II.123). Pearsall notes that "Meed herself is morally neutral," but she is the cause of corruption in others," II.45n. Langland's allegory here is rich, as Jill Mann has argued, as Mede asks for a double reading—one where she is an abstraction and one where she is a person. Mann explains, "As an abstraction, she represents unjust profit, bribery, cash payments rather than the reciprocal fulfillment of power to unbalance the just social relationships established by the life of honest labour and the practice of Christian duty. As an abstraction, that is, Meed is cold, unattractive, corrupting. As a person, however, Lady Meed has both feminine helplessness and feminine charm, which can elicit sympathy and a willingness to forgive her faults… Responding to Meed as a person, we feel sympathy for her distress and an interest in her fate." "Langland and Allegory," 5. For more on my understanding of Langland's allegory and personifications, see chapter 3.

order here. Since I have already engaged with the complete disruption Mede has triggered in the civil and sacred courts in chapter 1, I would like now to turn to this claim about Wille, which provides some hope I think in a rather apocalyptic poem. In chapter 3, I spend time with Wille's initial response to Reason and Conscience who confront him as he is allegedly misspending time. Wille at first defends his state of life and his mendicancy but ultimately repents that he has not been laboring as he should. Keeping with his confession, he does not follow the example of those figures who are using the rhetorical technique of paradiastole to defend their selfish reasons for not paying back their debts as Piers's pardon and Christ's law demands them to do before receiving communion.[259] Instead, Wille is remarkably silent even in his confrontation with the figure of Nede who accosts him similarly, though even more aggressively, than Reason and Conscience did. This time he does not appear bothered by the order that he should *redde quod debes*. It is to the context that surrounds Nede, a highly debated figuration in the poem, that I now turn.

The Difficulty of Navigating Nede

Much has happened between the initial scenes of the poem that dealt with Holy Churche and Lady Mede and Passus XXII where Nede appears to chastise Wille. Various faculties taught Wille on the journey of the poem, and he witnessed a dramatization of Christ's life and promise fulfilled. Throughout the poem there are still dire warnings about avarice. The reader has already observed how avarice has infected the community

[259] Following Aers's explanation of these figures using the rhetorical technique of paradiastole, see *Beyond Reformation?*, 85-86. As Aers explains, a feature of paradiastole is that the vices are argued to be virtues.

before the founding of Vnity (or Holy Church) later in the poem. Even after the harrowing of hell episode, for instance, Langland includes a digression that only appears in Passus XX of the C-text to warn men of law and wise clerks who lie for covetousness's sake:

> Beth ywaer ye wyse clerkes and ye witty men of lawe,
> That ye belyen nat this lewed men, for at the laste Dauid
> Witnesseth in his writynges what is lyares mede:
> *Odisti omnes qui operantur iniquitatem;*
> *Perdes omnes qui loquuntur mendacium*. (XX.354-355a)

Here we find that liar's reward (*lyares mede*) is destruction. We have already seen those who oversee the law misusing it for their own personal mede. Will this warning be heeded this time is a question the poem asks here. Though Wille has received the teaching of the most reliable source (Christ himself in the guise of the Good Samaritan), he is still unable to comprehend the meaning of his appearance on Easter when he and Piers appear to be the same person bloodied from the joust and who Conscience refers to as Christ. Wille asks Conscience to explain this figure he sees that so resembles both Jesus and Piers: "Is this Iesus the ioustare… / Or hit is Peres the plouhman?" (XXI.10-11). Conscience explains Christ comes thus with his cross and his passion is to serve as a model for how we should live in the world:

> Ac the cause that he cometh thus, with cros of his passioun,
> Is to wisen vs therewith – that when we ben ytempted,
> Therewith to fihte and fende vs fro fallyng into synne
> And se bi his sorwe that ho-so loueth ioye
> To penaunce and to pouerte he mot putte hyumsuluen
> And moche wo in this world wilnen and soffren. (XXI.63-68)

Conscience here highlights penance and poverty as practices that Christ's example stirs those who love joy to take up.[260] As expected due to Holy Churche's teaching, there is a stark difference between what the world asks and what Christ does. He also explicates the allegory further using the language employed earlier in the poem to understand Piers' pardon (do-well, do-better, do-best). Penance is a feature that this project has been interested in tracking, and it is arguably the very focus of this poem. Do-best is repeated as Christ's decision to give Piers the pardon to

> … assoyle of alle manere synnes,
> To alle manere men mercy and foryeuenesse
> In couenaunt that they come and knoleched to pay
> To Peres pardoun the plouhman *Redde quod debes*.
> Thus hath Peres power; be his pardoun payed,
> To bynde and vnbynde bothe here and elles
> And assoile men of alle synnes, *saue of dette one*. (XXI.184-190; my italics)

This debt is the penance that must be done on earth. As Pearsall notes, citing A. P. Baldwin's work, restitution here is not in relation "solely or primarily to material terms: it is, in a larger sense, the rendering of the debt of love to God and one's neighbour."[261]

This good news Wille has received is again complicated by the coming of Antichrist. Grace explains to Conscience that he is coming with Pride as the pope and Covetousness and Unkindness as cardinals to lead him (XXI.224). Therefore the infused

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[260] For more on the poem's dealing with poverty, see Aers, "The Sign of Poverty" in *Sanctifying Signs*; and Kate Crassons, *The Claims of Poverty: Literature, Culture, and Ideology in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

[261] Pearsall, *C-text Piers Plowman*, XXI.187n. A.P. Baldwin, "The Debt Narrative in Piers Plowman" in R. R. Edwards, ed. *Art and Context in Late Medieval English Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Worth Frank, Jr.* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer), 37-50.

virtues are planted to protect the Church. The language then shifts back to that of the estates and the *Visio*. Grace gives all people (sacred and secular) crafts:

> Som wyes he yaf wyt with words to shewe,
> To wynne with treuthe that the world asketh,
> As prechours and prestes and prentises of lawe:
> They leely to lye bi labour of tonge
> And bi wit to wissen othere as grace hem wolde teche.
> And somme he kende hem craft and konnynge of syhte,
> With syllng and buggynge here bileue to wynne.
> And some he lered to laboure a londe and a water
> And lye bvy that laboure a leele lyf and a trewe.
> And somme he tauhte to tulye, to hecche and to coke,
> To wynne with here lyflode… (XXI.229-249)

As Pearsall notes, we first see the fair field of folk again in this description (Prol.19), but now not a maze (I.6) but as a field with the lines of battle clearly drawn. Grace continues to draw on the language of God's love here in relation to crafts, much as Holy Churche did in passus one (XXI.254). Grace gives Biblical books and theologians to help Piers guide the people. Then Grace gives Piers seeds, the cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice. These four seeds are sowed and harrowed with the Old and New Law so that love might grow among the cardinal virtues and destroy vice. Piers explains that vices are sure to pop up where the virtues grow, which foreshadows the later appearance of the Antichrist and the Seven Deadly Sins:

> For cominliche in contrayes cammokes and wedes
> Fouleth the fruyt in the feld ther thei growe togyderes
> And so doth vices vertues… (XXI.312-314)

Not only does this penitential discourse remind the reader of the earlier scenes, but scenes that parallel the initial discord of the earlier passūs again erupts as the people this time do not wish to pay their spiritual debts.

Much like the failure of Piers in the fair field to inspire the people to perform labor, Conscience cannot persuade the people to pay their penitential debts. Despite the founding of the Church, the people still will not listen to the requirement that they pay all of their debts before taking communion. Many secular and religious figures discount the teaching of Conscience and the cardinal virtues and want to hold on to their worldly profit instead of take Christ's grace, paralleling earlier scenes in the *Visio*.[262] A brewer pipes up first insisting that he will keep all he sells as long as people buy it from him as that is his nature. He insults Conscience and the cardinal virtue of justice outright:

> "Ye? bawe!" quod a breware, "Y wol nat be yruled,
> By Iesu! for al youre iangelyng, aftur *Spiritus iusticie*
> Ne aftur Consience, bi Crist, while Y can sulle
> Bothe dregges and draf and drawe at on hole
> Thikke ale and thynne ale; and that is my kynde
> And nat to hacky aftur holinesse – hold thy tonge, Conscience!" (XXI.396-401)

Though Grace gave the commons their occupations, the lure of worldly gain has corrupted their nature. The brewer associates his true kynde with selling ale to profit himself instead of to contribute to the Christian community. To this Conscience responds that the brewer has "lost bothe lyf and soule" unless God helps him and he takes his provisions from Conscience and the cardinal virtues alone (XXI.404-408). The

[262] For example, VII.283 and VIII.149, see Pearsall, *C-text Piers Plowman*, XXI.401n.

"curatour" responds to Conscience's reply by lamenting that many people are lost then and repeats the thread of the brewer's argument by explaining that the common people do not take the counsel of Conscience or the cardinal virtues seriously "bot hit swone, as bi sihte, somwhat to *wynnynge*" (XXI.453; my italics). He continues further that they

> Of gyle or gabbynge gyueth they neuer tale
> For *Spiritus prudencie* among the peple is gyle
> And al tho fayre vertues as vises thei semeth. (XXI. 454-456)

Yet again another virtue's meaning has been perverted due to the people's desire to profit (*wynnynge*), or "the action of acquiring material goods or money" (MED 1a). A lord follows up the parson's wish for a reformed community by again denying that he owes anything that he takes and using the cardinal virtues to defend his stance. The king, too, argues much the same by arguing that the law and the cardinal virtue justice allows him to take what he wishes (XXI.468-469). Conscience reiterates the true role of the king: he must defend the common and rule with truth and reason (XXI.477). Piers explained this fact already in Passus VIII (26-9) and it was also brought up in the prologue in line 139. As Aers illuminates, these figures have taken on the rhetorical approach of *paradiastole*. In other words, "Unhinged from their cultural role in building a virtuous community, the cardinal virtues now become practices that had been traditionally understood as vices, forms of life inimical to human flourishing."[263] This is the context in which the figure of

[263] Aers, *Beyond Reformation?*, 85.

Nede arrives, though there is a formal (passus break) and waking episode that takes place where Wille "wroet as [he] mette]" between these events (XXI.481).

Wille wakes again in the poem from the establishment of the Christian society and the failure of Conscience to spur people to repay their debts dejected with an aching heart because he does not know where he can eat. Nede aggressively accosts Wille at this moment and asks him why he did not follow the others and defend his actions on account of his basic needs:

> And hit neyhed neyh the noen and with Nede Y mette
> That afrounted me foule and faytour me calde:
> 'Couthest thow nat excuse the, as ded the kyng and othere,
> That thow toke to lyue by, to clothes and to sustinaunce,
> Was bi techyng and by telling of *Spiritus temperancie*
> And that thow nome no more then nede the tauhte? (XXII.4-9)

Wille, though as seen later, is not sure how to answer Nede's complaint. He worries about his basic needs, as he asks Kynde how he might meet them in pursuit of love, but does not necessarily feel that he does not owe anything to his community as conveyed through his silence.

Here I return to my initial claim that the dreamer has grown throughout the poem even if society remains covetous. This scene is reminiscent of Passus V where Reason and Conscience accost Wille for wasting time and his mendicancy. Wille defends himself and his profession initially but comes to repent for misspending time (V.20-21) a passage I deal with closely in chapter 3. This time, however, Wille is markedly silent and does not

provide an excuse or defense of his actions.[264] Nede's figuration is challenging, and critics have had many dissonant approaches to explicating the figure's symbolic meaning here. As Louise O. Fradenburg explains,

> The ambiguity of Need has produced such markedly different readings of these passages in part because need is so terribly useful in legitimating various (critical) desires and not others; Need will be read variously because the concept Need embodies is impossible to stabilize… The fact that the proliferation of needs immediately precedes the Antichrist's coming in the apocalyptic literature of the Middle Ages forcefully suggests the terror that need's potential for deception could inspire. We might at any time believe that we are calculating properly, obeying necessity, observing the law, respecting property; but all the while we might instead be tipping over into excess, into vile enjoyment, into crime—an anxiety embodied in the figure of Recelessnesse and not resolved, because unresolvable, at the end of *Piers Plowman*.[265]

Here Fradenburg uses the language of desire to highlight how difficult it is to decipher what one's true needs are. Necessity is contingent on the culture one lives in, which perhaps makes it even more difficult to manage in a culture that saw a proliferation of urban markets and thus had to reimagine their needs in that new system. Langland's choice to make Nede both abhorrent and sympathetic here, then, appears to be due to the circumstances he is writing in and the challenge of avarice as a desire for more than one needs to survive.

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[264] As David Aers notes, this figure affirms the rights of those in need of basic necessities and the dreamer's vagrancy so long as he only takes what he needs to survive. "Piers Plowman, Work, and Community," Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing, 1360-1430 (New York: Routledge, 1988), 20-72, 63-64. Louise O. Fradenburg remarks on the significance of Nede's appearance both at the end and the beginning of the poem in attempts to answer the "question of the poet's vagrancy and desire for strangeness" by potentially justifying Wille's "mode of enjoyment," "Needful Things" in *Medieval Crime and Social Control* eds. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 49-69, 54.

[265] Ibid.

Combating a Covetous Community

Nede's speech to Wille puts the latter to sleep for the last time in the poem. In this final dream and passus, Wille witnesses the coming of Antichrist with his vicious cohort and the corruption of the common good again, though they appear to mimic the same behavior they did in the *Visio* save the fools who show themselves to be the true followers of Christ.[266] This spurs Conscience, like Piers before him, to call in Nature, who works as a force much like Hunger. He brings in Old Age and Death, who come in to kill many of these corrupted people. Much like Piers has to call Hunger off, Conscience then calls Nature to lay off to

> se wher they wolde
> Leue pruyde priueyliche and be parfyt cristene.
> And Kynde sesede tho, to se the peple amende. (XXII.108-110)

However, the reader by now does not have much faith that the folk will reform and become perfect Christians due to their destitution alone. Therefore, Fortune's reentrance to the poem is not surprising and neither is the commons' temptation by the sins yet again. Covetousness also reappears here and systematically disrupts the secular court. Conscience cries that he wishes Covetousness was a Christian as he is "so kene to fihte / And bolde and abydynge the while his bagge lasteth!" (XXII.142). Avarice turns away so many from true faith that Conscience's ironic proclamation here is quite apt.

[266] For a compelling argument that the fools manifest "the unity of the church," see Aers, *Beyond Reformation?*, especially 157-160.

Wille has been remarkably silent as this drama unfolds. He does not speak again until Old Age "ouer [his] heued yede" and makes him bald (XXII.185). Wille is so upset over this, he cries out to scold him for making a highway of his head. To which Old Age responds by hitting him under the ear and hitting his mouth, shackling his body, and rendering him impotent (XXII.190-198). This scene of aging is quite visceral and reveals the vulnerability of embodied creatures. Kynde urges Wille to get into Vnite (Holy Church) and to "loke thow conne som craft art how come thennes" (XXII.206). When Wille asks what craft is best to learn, Kynde tells him to "lerne to loue… and to leef alle" (XXII.208). Wille picks up the language of Nede here when he probes "How shal Y come to catel so, to clothe me and to fede" (XXII.208). Kynde answers here the same as Holy Church earlier, which Pearsall explains is "woollily and impractical as ever."[267] However, it does not appear that Wille views it as such, as he immediately makes his way towards Vnite and does not further question Kynde (XXII.213). While there, he sees the sins attacking the Church.

Nede reappears while Conscience is dealing with the false priests and friars that are aligned with Covetousness. He urges Conscience that because the friars came "for couetyse, to haue cure of soules," they should be left in poverty without help (XXII.233-237). Conscience does not listen to Nede here and laughs at his council.[268] He invites the

[267] XXII.209n.

[268] Aers argues that Conscience's laughter can be read as "an impediment to critical reflection" and that this is the very case here because Conscience's decision to welcome the friars is "the beginning to his final and most catastrophic error." Because Conscience still believes that friars can be reformed but does not understand that their very nature would be subverted by this change, Conscience fails to realize the inevitable chaos that this choice will bring. *Beyond Reformation?*, 131-132.

friars into Vnite so long as they, too, "lerneth for to louye" (XXII.250). Conscience assures them they will have all they need, much like Kynde told Wille (XXII.249). He goes on to critique the limitless amount of number of friars there are and thus tells him that they should not receive pay. This rationale to curb the number of friars becomes a localized critique again of the power of covetousness to destroy penance in the "parsches of Yngelond" (XXII.280). Conscience explains that curates make people ashamed of their confession, which in turn prompts them to go to the friars for an easier penance. He provides the analogy of these penitents to those "fals folk" who go to Westminster to "borweth and bereth hit theddere and thenne biddeth frendes / Yerne of foryeunesse or lengore yeres lone" (XXII.285-286). This analogy highlights the destruction of justice in both the confessional and in the law courts that covetousness wrecks. Avarice's complete destruction of penance gets dramatized thereafter as it penetrates the church through the figure of "frere Flaterare" who gets called in because the people cannot handle the true physician's medicine that makes them

> … do penaunse
> For here mysdedes that thei wrouht hadde
> And that Peres pardon were ypayd, *redde quod debes*. (XXII.305-307)

Much like Conscience's speech regarding friars to whom the people flee due to the difficulty of true repentance and restitution. The effect of this reality in the church causes the people to demand an easier remedy. This desire ends up leading the friars to be covetous. Conscience explains that he knows no one better than the physician he called in to help them— save Piers the plowman— but allows the commons to persuade him to let

friar flatterer in. The consequence of this is the destruction of the Church as Contrition gives up on himself and causes the people with his treatments to "drat no synne" (XXII.279). Penance has thoroughly been corrupted here through covetousness, which causes Conscience to leave the church and "bicome a pilgrim" (XXII.380) to search for Piers who might destroy Pride and to bring it about so that friars have a "fyndynge that for nede flateren / And contrepledeth…Consicence" (XXII.383-384) As Pearsall notes in his edition, Langland has returned to one of the key themes of the work in that the "Unity of the Christian Church has been threatened by the friars" and especially, I argue, their covetousness or desire for material wealth that is more than they actually need.[269] Because they have corrupted penance, the friars undermine penance, the key sacrament of the poem and one that is directly tied to Piers's pardon, or salvation. The open-endedness of Langland's poem highlights how enticing it was to avoid abundance and live in moderation in late fourteenth-century England and the apocalyptic reality this temptation can cause. If poverty and sheer need is not the answer, how can one avoid being tempted by sin and especially worldly gain? Learning to love, it appears, is a lifelong pursuit and one that Langland argues must be sought outside of institutions that are in their current states susceptible to avarice, though with the love for the community always in one's mind and heart.

[269] XXII.284-289n. See also, XXII.383n. and Aers's detailed explication of the importance of *fyndynge* in the poem in regards to friars and the dreamer, "The Sign of Poverty," 99-156.

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