

Stitching Time:
Transtemporal Labor and Middle English Literature

Caitlin Postal

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Reading Committee:

Colette Moore, Chair

Jeffrey Todd Knight

Paul Remley

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Caitlin Postal

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

ABSTRACT

Stitching Time:
Transtemporal Labor and Middle English Literature

Caitlin Postal

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Colette Moore

Department of English

This dissertation analyzes two parallel trajectories for examining labor in Middle English verse literature: the first, a consideration of textual labor involved in writing and editing literary texts; the second, an exploration of craft labor involved in textile production and implicit in descriptions of textile objects. I consider how objects accumulate the traces of their makers, calling attention to visible and invisible labor involved in textual and textile craft. I propose the notion of *transtemporality* as a reading practice that accumulates temporal subjectivities within a reading experience. To develop the concept of transtemporality, the research weaves through different threads of collective construction across time. Case studies include John Lydgate's metanarratorial construction in the *Siege of Thebes* alongside theories of medieval authorship, an examination of authorship focused on the role of the contemporary editor and interpretive labor in preparing digital editions of medieval literary texts, and two linked considerations on how the

construction of texts and textiles provide important material context for the garments and textiles described in medieval romance. Each thread engages a variety of methodological impulses which converge in my interdisciplinary and transhistorical study of Middle English literature. Focused on Middle English verse, my dissertation studies craft labor—literary and textile—as an avenue for coterporal experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I analyze how Middle English verse illustrates and accumulates the presence of artisans' labor, focusing on textual and textile craft. I draw attention toward the traces of labor—textual and textile—that present themselves not just in the production of material artifacts, but also in the work of composition. To accomplish the task, I select key entry points for a concept I call *transtemporality*. This dissertation will provide two parallel trajectories: mediating texts and authorship practices; and considering craft expertise and the speculative embodiment of historical material culture. Both directions hold in tension ideologies of literacy and the experience of time. In this project, I offer a reexamination of authorship, literacy, craft labor, and the intersections thereof in Middle English verse in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. My dissertation develops *transtemporality* as a reading practice attuned to collaborative and embodied experiences with and within Middle English literature. Such a project considers textual labor and textile craft as avenues of exploration that view time as accumulative, inviting readings in which experiences cohere in and around the text regardless of the moment in time in which the experience occurs.

The term *transtemporality* and its related derivative, *transtemporal literacy*, attempt to capture a sense of community and conversation with scholars across disciplinary boundaries and with medieval writers despite the temporal divide. In a conversation with Bridget Whearty for episode ten of *Coding Codices*,¹ I shared that citation becomes that method of conversation for

¹ *Coding Codices* is a podcast co-produced by members of the Digital Medievalist Postgraduate Committee. In the podcast, we discuss digital humanities projects and processes relevant to medieval studies. Episode 10 features Bridget Whearty as the guest interviewee, reflecting on her experiences with manuscript digitization processes and her book, *Digital Codicology: Medieval Books and Modern Labor*, which is forthcoming from Stanford University Press.

me. I use *transtemporal* rather than *diachronic* to invite movement, drawing on the prefix *trans* for its “sense ‘across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing, or state to another’” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 204575). *Diachronic*, meanwhile, suggests a static conception of temporality (*OED* 51786), rather than the sense of motion invoked by *transtemporal*.² The prefix *trans* promotes a change to common understandings of and engagements with time, whereas diachronicity—capturing change over time—does not seem to invite an asynchronous relationality that endures between past, present, and future.³ M. W. Bychowski, similarly, defines “trans-textuality” through its morphemic structure: “The prefix which transgender has claimed as its own, ‘trans,’ suggests that we attend to trans bodies between the inside and the other and to the fluidity of what moves from one side to another, be it verso to recto, man to woman, or somewhere in between” (319). Bychowski’s description engages fluid movement across and between bodies and pages; while my project involves a similar movement between pages and craft labor, my dissertation does not claim a place among scholarship on the trans Middle Ages,⁴ nor do my chapters illuminate characters

² Linear teleologies are enticing. They seem to provide simple answers, such as a historical trajectory that leads to more efficient technologies and streamlined production, but simple answers can obscure the synchronous histories that co-occur within such changes in production. A linearity from scribal manuscript production to the printing press, for example, appears to present technological progress that relegates manuscript production to the past. However, the relationship between scribal manuscript production and print books in the late medieval period does not align with the narrative of linear progress. For more on this topic, see M.T. Clanchy “Looking Back from the Invention of Printing” for a continuity between manuscripts and the early printed book and Seth Lerer “Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology” on similarities between the manuscript miscellany and the early modern *sammelbande*.

³ Scholars in queer studies have written extensively on the implications of queering time against linearity. For Elizabeth Freeman and for Heather Love, living with the past is affective and bodily such that a queer experience of time strains against heteronormative linearity. My interest in defining a transtemporal reading practice is informed by the work of queer scholars like Freeman and Love, though I do not focus on queer experiences in historical literature. Dinshaw, similarly, disengages queer time from queer experience but I want to take multivalent temporal reading practices further than her affective asynchronous reading.

⁴ Blake Gutt beautifully defines the trans Middle Ages as “a cross-temporal engagement that mobilizes the viewpoint of the modern trans subject to recognize and elucidate the traces of transgender subjectivity that inhere in certain medieval narratives” (452).

and behaviors in medieval literature that are aligned with queer relationalities. My work does, however, embrace cross-temporal relationships, particularly as they appear through literary and craft laborers. Aylin Malcolm's description of "transhistorical kinship"⁵ supports my case studies on John Lydgate's transtemporal relationships with his dead interlocuters and on textile laborers and garments that appear in Middle English verse.

As I am interested in the affective engagement between the past and present, my dissertation investigates intellectual and craft labor indicative of medieval and modern attachment. In this way, I attend to what Carolyn Dinshaw describes as "time [that] is lived; it is full of attachments and desires, histories and futures" (3). Though my project does not claim the same affective connections traced by Dinshaw in *How Soon Is Now*, her verve for cross-temporal relationships inspires my work, especially in the craft-oriented project that comprises my final chapter. Resisting temporal linearity helps contemporary readers appreciate the accumulative echoes of the makers, mediators, and readers of historical texts.

The remainder of this introduction is separated into two sections: the first, placing transtemporality within similar methodological contexts and reviewing threads that are picked up by the case studies in each chapter; the second, presenting the structure of the dissertation in a chapter overview.

I. TRANSTEMPORALITY AND . . .

This dissertation explores how the collaborators, creators, and audiences of late medieval English verse literature recorded and constructed craft labor. Transtemporality, as I define it in

⁵ Aylin Malcolm's forthcoming dissertation examines categorical identities in medieval literature and includes a section on recent developments in medieval gender variance, animal studies, and queer ecology. They shared an early draft with me, in which they write, "By studying even canonical texts through lenses that are . . . fundamentally anti-canonical, we destabilize established views of the past that have resulted in overidentification and exclusion, while also fostering new forms of transhistorical kinship."

this project, is one temporal reframing which sees, at its core, an asynchronous and accumulative textual experience coterminous with and disjunctive from periodized epochs. I focus on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries due to a developing sense of authorship and canonicity in an expansive manuscript environment, and I examine works edited for the contemporary reader to identify what contemporary editors find compelling enough to mediate for contemporary readers. Transtemporality builds on foundational work in the fields of book history and textual editing. Applied to medieval material culture and its appearances in Middle English verse, transtemporality likewise connects fashion theory with aspects of new materialism. Each chapter will elaborate on the methodological frameworks central to its study. In the subsections that follow, I briefly articulate how transtemporality interacts with periodization, reception theory, new materialism, and experiential history.

PERIODIZATION

Time is often categorized in historical epochs that are recognized by a sense of rupture from the past rather than gradual change, but the resurgence of the past in the present entails thinking beyond linear periodization.⁶ I examine a focused temporal period in connection with modern experiences of historical craft to demonstrate the endurance of the *long durée*, though my project does not study textual transmission across the *long durée*. Transtemporality, I suggest, anticipates cumulative experiences that are not singularly reliant upon linear time, thus posing a critical counterbalance to theoretical models that focus exclusively on a single historical

⁶ Ted Underwood argues in support of a gradual survey after describing chronological periods as the governing structure of literary studies in *Why Literary Periods Mattered*. See Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now*, for clarity on the residual affect present in contemporary amateur medievalism.

moment and linear history.⁷ Transtemporal approaches hold the possibility of both *long durée* and *short durée*, inviting the two modes of thought into conversation.

Periodized boundaries can hinder the application of temporally expansive theoretical models across specializations in literary studies. Recent scholarship in early modern and Renaissance literary studies, for example, expresses a keen interest in crossing periodized boundaries, though the disciplinary strictures of linear time have not brought such work as William Kuskin's *Recursive Origins* and Jonathan Gil Harris's *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* into conversation with medieval literary studies. Kuskin defines "recursion" in early modern literary studies as time travel occurring conceptually through the reading process. The movement between and across time through reading—central to both Kuskin's and my own projects—requires adjusting conceptions of literary history and periodic time. He distills the historiography of literary studies and what he sees as its failure on the second page of his book: "Literature is fundamentally of the imagination; in recognizing this, we should also recognize that the telling of its history needn't be shackled to a linear narrative. Chronological progress punctuated by periodic break is not the only way to account for literary time" (2). The invitation to imagine literary history beyond a linear chronology is enticing, and Kuskin recuperates fifteenth century literature as a crucial interlocuter for early modern English writers. However, as Jeffrey Todd Knight astutely observes in his 2015 review of Kuskin's book for *Modern Language Quarterly*, Kuskin relies upon a calendrical structure to make his argument about a literary inheritance from fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. Harris, too, problematizes linear history, focusing instead on what he calls "polychronic materiality." By examining material objects as palimpsestic, Harris proposes a model for reading the past with, to, and through the present and

⁷ Such as the Anthropocene or a Hegelian as-yet utopia.

future. He uses an object-oriented approach to define the titular “untimely matter” as material artifacts that are “often saturated with the unmistakable if frequently faint imprints of many times” (7). As I will explain below, new materialist and object-oriented readings can flatten the experiential field such that scholars claim inanimate objects act upon others in ways that are not productive for my readings. Though I find Harris’s “temporalities of matter” (16) compelling, I am disinclined to obscure the laborers who create and perpetuate the objects present in his study; authorial and editorial labor are central to my first chapters, and textile laborers play a key role in my latter chapters. Still, the temporal methods in early modern studies suggest that medieval studies, too, could benefit from temporally expansive theoretical approaches.

For medieval studies, linear accounts of time appear to produce an emergent proto-nationalistic England such that teleological time seems inextricable from “a colonialist impulse to map other regions of the world onto a European past” (Underwood 3),⁸ though scholarship has attempted to reconsider linear history as gradual change (Underwood), queer time (Dinshaw), the *long durée*, and modernity’s crisis (Latour *We Have Never*). More recently, scholarship has demonstrated a growing interest in temporality paired with premodern critical race theory, such as the 2021 special issue of *New Literary History* on “Race and Periodization.” Described by co-editors Urvashi Chakravarty and Ayanna Thompson, the essays in *NLH* 52.3/4 “[think] in genealogical, transnational, and transtemporal frameworks to propose new ways into—and out of—the hold of periodization” (xiv). The capacious frameworks offered in the special issue demonstrate an interest in considering movement *between* and *across* temporal moments.

⁸ On the emerging English nation in the Middle Ages, see Susan Nakley *Living in the Future*; Lynn Staley *The Island Garden*; Kathy Lavezzo, ed. *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*; and Thorlac Turville-Petre *England the Nation*.

Periodized time provides a useful measurement for arranging historical moments, though less useful if taken as a neutral construction to support arguments about literary progress. While I am not advocating for the complete dismissal of calendrical time, this dissertation provides transtemporal reading approaches attendant to the accretive and intentional experiences of textual and textile creation. The “nonsynchronous chronology” that Paul Strohm posits in *Theory and the Premodern Text* and the affective asynchronicity woven through Dinshaw’s *How Soon Is Now* preface the transtemporal work in my dissertation. Throughout, my case studies center the relationship between temporal subjectivities and the laborers who craft objects, including an examination on traces of use accumulating in literary texts that are prepared as digital editions and the references to surviving textile artifacts that may aid reading fashion in medieval verse.

RECEPTION THEORY

Reception theory elicits phenomenological reading whereby the mind of the reader plays a role in the development of the text.⁹ Transtemporality develops from elements of reception theory, though a transtemporal approach maintains that the creation(s) of the textual object is important alongside the readerly experience of the textual object. I include a plural creation to accommodate the various laborers who participate in the creation of the text and, particularly resonant for medieval studies, the continued remediation and revivification of said text. The transtemporal approach that I lay out in this dissertation progresses from major critical models that present a readerly experience, and my project seeks moments of connection between

⁹ Reception theory and reader-response theory are reading approaches that center the spectator’s subjective perception of the textual artifact. Key theorists for reception theory include Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, and Jean-Paul Sartre. While Sartre is most often associated with French existentialism, his essay “Pourquoi écrire?” [Why Write?] offers that readers enter into co-production with authors. Reception theory may develop from Immanuel Kant’s articulations of subjective pleasure and judgment of beauty in his “Critique of the Power of Judgment.”

historical materialism (focused on the textual object in its historical moment) and reception theory (examining the transmission of the textual object beyond its historical moment).

Reader-response theory, when applied, can provide an ethnography of readers, but reading ethnographies are most easily accomplished with contemporary readers who can be observed and interviewed.¹⁰ This method of reception-based study is more difficult for historical texts such as my corpus of medieval verse. While there are methods to assess evidence of use in medieval literary artifacts—including marginal notation and other codicological marks representative of reading experiences—a transtemporal reading practice aligns the readerly focus with an impulse to understand medieval readership through the constructed nature of the literary text. As it is not possible to perform a modern ethnography of medieval readers, transtemporality places elements from reception theory into conversation with other models of literary review to propose a richer understanding of the complexities of medieval verse.

I will, briefly, describe the thread of reception theory from which my intervention arises: the relationship between writer and reader. Jean-Paul Sartre welcomes readers into an active role when experiencing the text, suggesting that “Reading is a pact of generosity between author and reader. Each one trusts the other; each one counts on the other, demands of the other as much as he demands of himself” (61). The relationship between writer(s) and reader(s) becomes an interaction and intimacy even as the reader may be at a temporal remove from the author. In a similar manner, *Citation, Intertextuality, and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*—a

¹⁰ Reader-response theory responds to New Critical modes of thought, especially William Wimsatt’s fallacy, positing that the reader plays an active role in the meaning-making process. Reader-response theory is often defined through the approaches offered by Jean-Paul Sartre, Wolfgang Iser, and Stanley Fish. Roland Barthes’s *Death of the Author* similarly offers the importance of the reader, though his work is typically associated with structuralism rather than reader-response theory. Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* offers a case study exemplar of reader-response theory that is focused on romance readers. However, as Radway’s study suggests, the ethnographic focus of reader-response approaches reveal major limitations about whose voices are present.

collection dedicated to the study of “citational play” in medieval and early modern cultural production—provides a capacious definition of intertextuality in which readers function as a crucial recipient of rhetorical devices provided by the writer,

“If we take as a starting point the idea of ‘memory’ as a general factor of human knowledge, ‘intertextuality’ can be understood as a concept that invites us to consider cultural production as negotiated between an ‘author’ and a ‘reader’ whose respective associations and interpretations are determined by their individual or shared memories and experience. A distinction can be drawn, however, between the general web of associations elicited by a text (whether or not the author meant these to be recognized) and instances in which an author intentionally invited a response from his reader by naming or quoting from a work he knew would be familiar to his target audience” (Plumley, Di Bacco, and Jossa, vol. 1 “Preface” ix).

The distinction that Plumley, Di Bacco, and Jossa clarify in the quotation above points to the significance of the relationality in Sartre’s conception between writer and potential reader. The craft of writing remains central in examining intertextual referents, and the text, then, requires a balance between the readerly experiences and the cues provided by the writer(s).

I use *writer* rather than *author* to clarify that the modern conception of authorship imperfectly aligns with understandings of authorship in the late medieval period. Geoffrey Chaucer was one of the first writers in the medieval English literary environment to think of himself as an author in a similar sense as the modern reader would, and his writing methods become a paradigm from which other English writers curate an authorial persona recognizable as

single-authorship to the modern reader.¹¹ There are countless examples of medieval literary texts which do not easily accord with the conception of the individualized author, and even those texts with a named author might be considered co-created through the scribes who copy and remix the text or, as I will argue in chapter one, crafted through a system of intertextual referencing and *auctoritas* that enables transtemporal collaboration.¹² Roland Barthes' notorious "Death of the Author" might provide a method for readers to examine how their own historical moments carry into a literary text without reliance on the intentional fallacy.¹³ However, the proposal that a literary text is formed primarily through its appeals to a reading public separate from other historical moments will fail to account for the nuances of textual preparation and remediation—a core component of textual creation for texts which circulate before the single-author approach becomes normalized.

Further, medieval English literature may not be reliant upon the death of the author when the death of the author is experienced within the text itself. The literal death of the author—in my chapter one case study, *the* author, Geoffrey Chaucer—appears throughout late medieval literature, as Bridget Whearty articulates in her 2013 dissertation on late medieval death culture. Whearty continues to develop her understanding of literary deaths through the "pray for Chaucer" tradition in her 2018 piece for *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, which provides the foundation for my reading of John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*. My assessment of the digital

¹¹ On authorship in medieval English writing, see M. B. Parkes *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers*, Alastair Minnis *Medieval Authorship*, and Stephen Partridge and Erik Kwakkel's edited collection, *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*.

¹² On the function of scribal authorship in medieval writing practices, see Elizabeth Bryan *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture*, Matthew Fisher *Scribal Authorship*, and Alexandra Gillespie *Print Culture and the Medieval Author*.

¹³ See Wimsatt and Beardsley on "The Intentional Fallacy." Note, too, that New Critical approaches and reception theory devoid of historical reflection draw limitations about what readers can learn from historical texts.

editor of medieval literary texts is likewise inspired by Whearty's work on bookmakers. Especially poignant for my work is her invitation to "Expand our circle of inquiry to include living bookmakers as well as the dead, in order to write them—to invite these bookmakers to write themselves—back into the long history of medieval books" ("Adam Scriveyn" 197), which I aim to do by recognizing digital editors' interpretive labor. A metacognitive awareness of authorial and literary deaths in medieval literature indicates how medieval authors and bookmakers were also readers and how their textual projects anticipate that shared role. Where Barthes claims that the author should not implicate the text and Walter Benjamin purports that "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell" (94), my dissertation seeks to understand how textual creation appears in metadiscursive writing and resonates across temporal divides.

Metatextual narrative construction is crucial to transtemporality as distinct from reception theory because it foregrounds a temporal consciousness in crafting texts. Narratorial and metatextual statements recur throughout medieval literature from Geoffrey Chaucer's dream visions and frame tales to Thomas Hoccleve's complaints about the physical labor of writing and beyond. This thread appears in the early chapters, where I examine conceptions of authorial and editorial labor in creating medieval texts.

To illustrate the effects of narratorial metatextual statements, we might consider Chaucer's "House of Fame," which provides a brief distillation of this concept in the metadiscursive statements that appear in the proems and throughout the unfinished dream vision. By the proem of Book II, the dream becomes an authority above all other well-known dreams, through which Chaucer offers himself influence matching that of legends, dream visions, and renowned authors. In the invocation of Book III, Chaucer suggests that his craft is guided by the

gods, “[made] sumwhat agreable / . . . / wilt helpe me to shewe now / that in myn hed ymarked ys” [made somewhat agreeable . . . you helped to show what had been made in my head] (ll. 1097–1103), though the remainder of the third book recounts what seem to be Chaucer’s literary idols: writers renowned for their history and poetry. Perhaps, then, the invocation’s claim—that art is a craft and skill—anticipates a literary community that transcends linear chronologies. Chaucer alludes to his own status as a writer in the final lines in the unfinished poem:

“Atte laste y saugh a man,

Which that y [nevene] nat ne kan;

But he semed for to be

A man of gret auctorite . . . “

[At last, I saw a man that I have not yet mentioned, but he seemed to be a man of great position] (ll. 2155–2158).

The use of *auctorite* may refer to the status and position of the man, but it may also refer to the literary authority of *auctoritas*. Throughout the “House of Fame,” Chaucer establishes the significance of reading and, as a necessary preface to reading, of writing. Is the closing figure the *auctor* from whom the dream vision ensues? Or perhaps the figure is not identified because he represents a long history of *auctoritas* referenced throughout the dream vision and which may transcend time and space to appear as one within the dream? If we begin from the position that this poem is “Chaucer’s fullest exploration of the poet’s position and responsibilities, the sources of his knowledge, and the limits of his vision” (Flyer 348), then the “man of gret auctorite” may even represent the poet as he most wishes he could be: a culmination of all possible interlocutors, including those mentioned elsewhere in his other works. This short example emphasizes literary verse as a craft through the appearance of metacognitive textual remediation.

Transtemporal reading practices implicate contemporary understandings of authorship and authority in textual transmission, so I define literacy throughout this dissertation to include composition and criticism. Literacy acts are the layers of textual meaning, including composition, copying, glossing, marginal annotations, markup, and metadata. Not limited to reading for comprehension, this understanding of literacy invites writer and reader into community. I emphasize the authorial and editorial functions in the production and transmission of texts, especially for historical reception across time. A transtemporal model maintains a connection with the historical past, including textual creation and remediation.

NEW MATERIALISM

The networks of information and collaboration that create manuscripts can likewise be identified via tactile history. This dissertation offers the possibility for a transtemporal reading process which embraces the compelling material histories underlying a contemporary fascination with the medieval. Reading materiality in literature has found a resurgence in new materialist approaches, though this reading entails a different initiation than reading material culture transtemporally.¹⁴

New materialism(s), as described by *New Materialisms* (edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost) and Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, is both a renewal of materialist theoretical modes and an invitation to explore the agential power of posthuman and nonhuman matter. Coole and Frost define materiality as "always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess,

¹⁴ New materialism(s) emphasizes the role of matter and how it is perceived, though new materialist frameworks often aim to de-emphasize the human perception. Jane Bennett's "vital materialism" attends to the relationships between people and things, with a focus on the object that acts upon the person. Actor-network theory as defined by Bruno Latour in *Reassembling the Social* and object-oriented ontologies as coined by Levi Bryant, developed by Graham Harman, and later clarified by Ian Bogost in *Alien Phenomenology* demonstrate models that also center objects as the loci of study. Latour's network theory can be applied beyond material artifacts, though it is often discussed in the context of agential objects.

force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-recreative, productive, unpredictable” (9). While new materialist approaches provide insights into the relationships that appear in the reverberations of material objects of the past into the present, I have sought to reject a flattening of moral agency whereby inert objects act upon humans (Coole and Frost 10; Latour *Reassembling*). New materialism(s) aids my search for transtemporal movement in which material culture finds new resonance in the present. I define inert matter as that which was created by and necessitates use by human hands, though I do not cast it as dull the way that Jane Bennett does in the opening to *Vibrant Matter*. Nonhuman actants in the biological world have energy which can enact change, but objects created by human actors do not gain sentience and power separate from the humans who make and use them.¹⁵ Rather, I aim to examine the human labor and transmission histories that affect the reception of objects.

New materialist approaches support scholarly directions like the object history. Here, I distinguish an object history from object-oriented ontologies, as the latter sees agential power as the province of inert matter.¹⁶ Object histories offer a historiographical approach to material artifacts, which is a method long supported by disciplines such as art history, manuscript studies, and museology. The new materialist approach to object histories has been adopted more recently by scholars in collections such as *Rhetoric Through Everyday Things*. Rhetorical ontology, defined by Scot Barnett and Casey Boyle in the collection, emphasizes the realm of the

¹⁵ Jane Bennett describes the hermeneutics of suspicion as identifying “the secret truth (a human will to power) below the false appearance of nonhuman agency” (xiv). While my work does take a suspicious eye to object-oriented ontological approaches, I also reorient myself around affective potentials that appear in the space between transtemporal relationships.

¹⁶ Object-oriented ontologies center nonhuman objects and reject anthropocentrism around human perception. Object-oriented ontology seems to rely upon *dehistoricizing* objects. Levi Bryant, Graham Harman, and Ian Bogost are all proponents of object-oriented ontology. Object-oriented ontology should not be confused with object-oriented programming, as the latter is a standard paradigm in software development.

posthuman whereby the object “[wields] rhetorical force ... in relation to others” (2). However, traditional object histories may also chart the histories of the object through information such as historical provenance and analysis of artisan techniques. While new materialist approaches provide a novel way to consider objects, a limitation to “assemblage thinking” (Jodie Nicotra *Rhetoric Through*) and actor-network theory (Latour *Reassembling*) is the impetus to identify the agential power of the object, thus obscuring laborers who create and use such objects. Traditional object histories trace the networks in which the object circulates without suggesting that the object itself acts without being acted upon.

The labor involved is a critical distinction between transtemporality and new materialisms. The former retains a distinction between human actors and inert matter (or what new materialist approaches call agential objects) and builds upon the conceptions of orientation that Sara Ahmed defines in “Orientations Matter.” Ahmed seeks the “forms of labor that disappear in the familiarity or “givenness” of objects such as tables” (235). Her emphasis on labor implies an object history that charts the network through which an object is made and used:

If we were simply to “look at” the object we face, then we would be erasing the “signs” of history. We would apprehend the object as simply there, as given in its sensuous certainty, rather than as “having got here,” an arrival which is how objects are binding and how they assume a social form. So objects ... are “transplanted.” They take shape through social action, through “the activity of a whole succession of generations,” which is forgotten when the object is apprehended as simply given.

What passes through history is not only the work done by generations but the “sedimentation” of that work as the condition of arrival for future generations.

History cannot simply be perceived on the surface of the object, even if how objects

surface or take shape is an effect of such histories. In other words, history cannot simply be turned into something that is given in its sensuous certainty, as if it were a property of an object. (241)

Object histories, then, require a deep understanding of time, use, and provenance.¹⁷ The accumulative potential in an object history suggests what Bruno Latour identifies as “tracing the associations” that comprise a networked sociality of objects (*Reassembling* 5). Study of medieval manuscripts has long focused on these aspects of a manuscript’s movement in the world. The accumulative potential of historical objects is well known, though the affective impact of relationships with the past through the objects of the past has often been relegated to amateur engagement and is often criticized due to a perceived lack of rigor.¹⁸ With an increase in experiential teaching activities such as hands-on scribal workshops, medieval literary studies is well positioned to make visible the labor and expertise that have been historically rendered invisible.¹⁹

A reading method informed by transtemporality attends to the labor involved in crafting objects, including literary objects. Engaging hobbyists and costumers as valued interlocutors, by making space for their labor and experience within academic scholarship, is one method to understanding the tactility of the past. As a component of this dissertation, the historical sewing

¹⁷ While historical materialism provides useful avenues to examine such object histories, it relies on diachronic linearity which, as I explained earlier, I hope to reimagine through a transtemporal lens.

¹⁸ Again, I draw on Dinshaw’s *How Soon Is Now*, paired with a long history of amateurish medievalism that occurs outside academic institutions and affiliations.

¹⁹ Literary studies and history are, more recently, embracing physical making. At the International Congress on Medieval Studies 2019, the “Tactile Teaching” roundtable identified how making projects could function pedagogically.

project views tactile, recreation-focused knowledge as a valued participative method for understanding literary texts.

THE MAKING TURN AND EXPERIENTIAL HISTORY

The material turn is not exclusively the domain of new materialisms. Speculative, experimental history appears in historical recreation projects,²⁰ and the embodied and making turn(s) signal a tactile engagement with material cultures.²¹ Book history and manuscript studies have long engaged experiential learning through studies in papermaking, quill-and-ink workshops, a visit to the campus printing press or book arts lab, and other experiences that find their premise in simulating the physical experience of bookmaking processes. My research concentrates on how texts accumulate meaning across time and how the craft of *making* (i.e., making clothing and making texts) might impact the audience experience.²² Developing from an analysis of dress as it appears in medieval verse, I sewed a garment inspired by its description in a medieval romance, using plausibly medieval construction techniques.

Scholarship on medieval dress is often situated in two arenas: historical documentation of surviving materials or the semiotics of clothing as it relates to cultural norms. These foundations strengthen my approach to bring textile craft labor—past and present—to reading literary descriptions of dress and will be further detailed in my chapter on dress and textiles in Middle English verse. The study of medieval dress would be much more challenging without the

²⁰ See the *Refashioning the Renaissance Project* and Alexandra Makin's *St. Cuthbert Maniple Embroidery Recreation Project*.

²¹ For a dress historical approach to historical garment reconstruction, see Peter McNeil and Melissa Bellanta's co-edited issue for *Fashion Theory*, including their introduction "Letters from the Editors: Fashion Embodiment and the 'Making Turn,'" Hilary Davidson "The Embodied Turn," Serena Dyer "State of the Field: Material Culture," and Alexandra Makin "Early Medieval (Mostly) Textiles" [blog](#).

²² Leigh Gruwell's forthcoming *Making Matters: Craft, Ethics, and New Materialist Rhetorics* introduces "craft agency" as a method to assess new materialist rhetorics and reclaim process-oriented practices. I hope to incorporate her work as I continue to examine craft labor.

comprehensive work of Gale Owen-Crocker and other textile historians, and the portion of my dissertation dedicated to medieval textiles relies on the documentation provided by historians of dress. The *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles of the British Isles c. 450–1450*, edited by Owen-Crocker, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Maria Hayward, provides robust documentation for medieval garment vocabularies related to textile production and use in England. The *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project*, directed by Owen-Crocker with Cordelia Warr and Louise Sylvester, is an online database and dictionary for terminology related to medieval dress and textiles. Like the *Middle English Dictionary*, the *Lexis Project* includes orthographical variants, quotations from extant sources, and etymological cognates. Owen-Crocker also wrote *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, a comprehensive study of early English dress from the fifth through eleventh centuries. Stella Mary Newton's *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince* offers a similarly rich study for clothing from 1340–1365, drawing on both surviving textiles and the appearance of clothing on statues. Sylvester, Mark Chambers, and Owen-Crocker compiled the *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain: A Multilingual Sourcebook*, which records textile-related excerpts from the English Middle Ages in seven key areas: wills, wardrobe accounts, livery rolls, moral and satirical works, sumptuary regulations, petitions, and excerpts from epic and romance. Further, archaeological and museological study has elucidated much of the fiber composition in surviving textiles and textile fragments. I draw on the archaeological survey done by Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard, and Kay Staniland in *Textiles and Clothing 1150–1450: Medieval Finds from Excavations in London*, documenting excavations along the Thames in the 1970s and 1980s in which many medieval textiles were recovered. Their survey reviews the fragments with illustrations and photographs where possible, as well as describing various weaving and sewing

techniques. As textiles are fragile and natural fibers decompose at a faster rate than synthetic fibers, records of historical textile artifacts are invaluable to scholars of historical dress.

Modern readers may not have the textile knowledge that would have been familiar to medieval audiences reading the same texts. I will illustrate briefly how to read the details of medieval dress as social commentary with Robert Henryson's late fifteenth century poem, "The Garmont of Gud Ladeis." In addition to his rumination on feminine virtues, Henryson offers a description of dress norms. He provides just enough descriptive imagery to invoke garments familiar to a medieval reader alongside allegorical details that reflect societal expectations, such as the kirtle that has been "lasit with lesum lufe" [laced with love] (l. 14). As "slight details and general terms would call to mind in a medieval reader a picture which the modern reader can only obtain by research" (Eagleson 339), Henryson's perfunctory details may align a medieval reader's personal closet with that of the so-called 'good ladies.' A virtuous woman's dress, in Henryson's paradigm, includes a hood, shift, kirtle, gown, belt, mantle, hat, tippet,²³ partlet,²⁴ sleeves, gloves, shoes, and hose. The details are primarily left to the imagination, save the kirtle which features lacing "mailyeis,"²⁵ a gown trimmed with fur (possibly decorated with pearls or beads), and a tightly fitted belt. Robert Kindrick, in his edition of Henryson's poems, suggests that this poem functions as spiritual instruction for fifteenth century women (224), emphasizing

²³ Kimberly Jack details the fourteenth-century occurrence of the tippet as a decorative element that attaches to a sleeve in "What Is the Pearl Maiden Wearing, and Why?" See also Netherton "[Tippet](#)" in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles*.

²⁴ Eleanor Standley, in "'Best' gowns, kerchiefs and pantofles: gifts of apparel in the north-west of England in the sixteenth century," illustrates the significance of gifted apparel, which includes items that Henryson's narrator identify as gifts given to his good lady. Standley clarifies that kerchiefs connect the gift's recipient with the Virgin Mary, whereas gloves are often given at celebratory events (144).

²⁵ Nicole Smith considers the associations of tight dress with sexual behaviors versus courtly behaviors in *Sartorial Strategies*. Henryson's inclusion of the tight dress as indicative of good women is another example of Smith's argument that tight attire functions as a courtly "sign of restraint."

allegory over materiality. While Henryson's poem leaves most visual and textile details to the audience, the poem provides a wardrobe from which readers can imagine their own "garmond gudliest" (l. 3) in connection with a performance of virtuous behaviors such as chastity (l. 10) or humility (l. 23). Medieval audiences would not need substantive textile descriptions to understand the connection between garment, construction, ornamentation, and behavior in the "Garmont." Henryson's understanding of women's dress illustrates a historical social context that is not familiar to twenty-first century audiences who do not demonstrate interest in historical dress. One example connecting the historical practice of dressmaking with allegorical understanding is the kirtle. By the era in which Henryson writes, kirtles are typically tight-fitted undergarments that provide support to the chest and torso. The process of drafting a pattern for a late medieval supportive kirtle enabled me to identify that the "continwance" (ll. 14–16) of the kirtle described by Henryson is both literal (a supportive garment) and figurative (emotional or spiritual steadfastness).²⁶ While the semiotic reading can be assumed by astute readers, the dual meaning may remain unexamined without the knowledge that a kirtle can be a supportive undergarment.

The second half of this dissertation addresses descriptions of textiles in Middle English verse through a traditional case study focused on medieval verse with *Emaré* as the central text of study and the documentation of a historical sewing project inspired by textile descriptions in *The Awynters off Arthure*. In the process of analyzing these texts, I use my sewing knowledge and historical reenactment experiences to identify possible readings of the material descriptions. Using historical techniques to recreate material objects similar to surviving artifacts or reminiscent of what could have existed can illuminate elements that may otherwise be missed.

²⁶ Helpful tutorials for drafting a kirtle pattern include Morgan Donner's "[Tutorial: Supportive Kirtle](#)" and Tasha Dandelion Kelly's "[A straight-front seam fitting method for a bust-supportive dress](#)" on her blog *La Cotte Simple*.

II. CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This dissertation is conceived as a set of thematically related threads analyzing Middle English verse through the intersection of authorship and artisanship. Drawing on medieval *compilatio*, I see these threads bound together as commentary on a larger whole while existing as discrete entities. Each thread, distilled in a chapter, offers a representation of transtemporal reading that does not rely on having read the others. The threads explore craft in Middle English literature, identifying traces of visible and invisible labor. Chapters one and two focus on the labor involved in textual craft, whereas chapters three and four develop from the sensory knowledge of textile artisanship known to historical costumers. The first three chapters use historical and archival research to inform close readings of interactions between linguistic form and the form of historical artifacts, while the fourth chapter is an experiential making project using historical sewing techniques. The temporal reading experience is twofold: the literary case studies move back in time from the fifteenth century to earlier periods but forward in labor from medieval writers to my contemporary sewing project. I seek a sense of balance between materialist and formalist approaches, evidenced by the two directions.

Chapter one, “Metadiscursive Textual Construction in John Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes*,” describes transtemporal collaboration, a term I use to demonstrate how intertextual references and metadiscursive statements illustrate an intimate relationship between writers despite temporal distance. The *Siege of Thebes* functions as an extension of the *Canterbury Tales* where the pseudo-autobiographical author, John Lydgate, joins the Canterbury pilgrimage to tell a historical story that draws on classical fictive histories. I argue that Lydgate writes *with* Chaucer and other interlocutors in *Thebes*, and I examine the craft of writing as it appears in Lydgate’s narratorial statements.

In chapter two, “Digital Editing as Authorial Collaboration across Time,” I turn from medieval author to contemporary editor, examining digital editing as a method of authorial collaboration and additive interpretive labor. Chapter two more concretely outlines the editorial and readerly roles in transtemporal literacy, and I argue that editors’ literacy acts, especially in digital editing projects, function as interpretive composition accumulating around the historic text. I examine trends in textual editing and examples of current digital editions in medieval studies, such as the *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive*, to establish the significance of editorial authorship in textual mediation.

In my third chapter, “Craft Labor and Garment Histories in Middle English Verse,” I examine descriptions of garments and textiles in Middle English verse through contemporary costuming knowledge of historic textiles and material culture. I consider the social implications of descriptive dress in Middle English literature, then elaborate on textile labor as it appears in the romance *Emaré*. Craft process and textile labor serve a significant narrative purpose in *Emaré*, which make the romance a compelling example for studying textile literacies and clothing experiences of medieval audiences alongside contemporary historical costumers’ knowledge.

“Making a Medieval Hood,” the sewing project that comprises chapter four, documents my experience making a medieval hood. The historical craft project continues the insights observed in chapter three through an experiential process that records sensory textile knowledge which may have been known by medieval reading audiences. The sewing project is based on an extant archaeological find (London hood no. 246) and manuscript illustrations of hoods; a descriptive passage in the *Awynters off Arthure* inspires the visual details and embellishments. My sewing project draws on historic techniques to create a physical object based on my close

reading; through this project, I learned that interpretation moves in multiple directions. Sewing created space for thinking and the focused textile work invited labor of the hands alongside labor of the mind. My sewing project is simultaneously demonstrative of specialized labor and what Dinshaw identifies as “queer/amateur” (5), because I am a skilled textile hobbyist (though not a professional textile worker) using my experiences to augment traditional scholarly models.

As a whole, this dissertation analyzes medieval verse through a focus on textual and textile laborers (past and present) and accumulative time. As I hope to articulate in the ensuing chapters, contemporary readers may be empowered to imagine themselves in larger communities across temporal boundaries.

CHAPTER 1

METADISCURSIVE TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTION IN JOHN LYDGATE'S *SIEGE OF THEBES*

In this chapter, I investigate how metadiscursive statements in John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* signal discrete textual construction, rendering visible an intentional use of linguistic and literary devices. I contend that the ways the narrator simultaneously constructs and is constructed by the text invoke the benign specter of the author, inviting the audience to meditate upon the temporal construction of the narrative itself. Layering time, which Lydgate does as both the tale-teller in the pilgrim story and the textual author, results in an elision of easy temporal boundaries. Transtemporal literacy invites modern readers to observe how medieval texts bring the author(s) into community with their readers and their past interlocuters.

I propose reading *Siege of Thebes* for transtemporal collaboration, a term I use to examine how a medieval author actively participates with a larger community of authors and readers by incorporating external textual referents and adapting familiar tropes for a listening audience.²⁷ The process helps modern readers reconsider how a variety of interlocuters play active roles in a narrative's composition and reception across time; it likewise indicates the larger literary community represented in texts for medieval audiences.²⁸ *The Siege of Thebes* presents an especially rich example of transtemporal collaboration because the frame narrative presents audiences with an authorial persona within the story, while the metadiscursive elements illustrate

²⁷ This chapter focuses on the role of the author in transtemporal literacy. See chapter two on digital editing practices for a description of the editorial and readerly experiences in transtemporal literacy. I do not elaborate on the role of scribes; readers interested in scribal authority should refer to Alexandra Gillespie *Print Culture and the Medieval Author*, Elizabeth Bryan *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture*, and Matthew Fisher *Scribal Authorship*.

²⁸ Arthur Bahr writes on the "temporally fragmented, radically reassembled audience of modern and medieval readers who must join with the authors and scribes of the Middle Ages to give form . . . to compilations to come" (49). I believe that Lydgate's writing anticipated temporally distinct interlocuters who are "reassembled" in the *Siege of Thebes*.

a connective relationship with classical and medieval authors. In *Thebes*, Lydgate activates an intertextual relation by utilizing the pilgrimage frame in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the storytelling frame of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*. *Thebes* acts as a supplemental addition to the *Tales*, with the in-text pilgrim version of Lydgate encountering Chaucer's pilgrims on their return journey to Southwark where he joins the host's storytelling game. By engaging the frame tale of both Chaucer and Boccaccio to tell a mythic semi-history of Thebes, Lydgate develops a collaborative *auctoritas* that is reliant on a historical literary community of asynchronous peers.²⁹ Despite the frame construction, Lydgate's narratorial style is always present and the Lydgate-pilgrim persona continually reminds the audience of the deliberate construction in his tale-telling.

I argue that metadiscursive textual construction in *Thebes* illuminates how transtemporal narrative collaboration could have functioned for medieval audiences. While it is true that the physical object of the book itself crosses temporal boundaries, I examine how the narrative questions linear storytelling, as the latter consigns the text and author to the past. The chapter is organized in eight sections. To begin, I provide an overview of scholarship on the *Siege of Thebes* in section I, "Communing with the Past." The next two sections (II and III) examine Lydgate's prologue to *Thebes* and manuscript evidence which suggest that Lydgate wrote in an inclusive literary environment. The following sections (IV, V, and VI) align with the three *pars* [parts] of Lydgate's text to illustrate how writing functions as a craft for both author and audience(s). I then provide two case studies within *Thebes*: in section VII, a thematic examination on moral lessons; in section VIII, a narrative study of the Hypsipyle tale in "Tercia

²⁹ Carolyn Dinshaw refers to a "temporal co-presence" for nineteenth-century medievalists dwelling in the past (*How Soon* 64), but her frame is applicable for shorter durations, such as Lydgate with Chaucer or Chaucer with Boccaccio.

Pars.” I close with a reflection on a line of *occupatio* as my conclusion, which delivers a crucial acknowledgment on writing in the fifteenth century.

I. COMMUNING WITH THE PAST

Citation in this chapter functions as a form of collaboration, and writing—as contemporary scholars may experience it—can be an act of intimate relationship with literature. To recognize transtemporal interlocuters, I use collaboration as an expansive term that accounts for those transtemporal interlocuters.³⁰ *Commune*, the verb chosen to title this section and linked to the Middle English *commune*, suggests a coming-together or something that is jointly shared.³¹ To align with how I see Lydgate communing with the past in *Thebes*, I find myself in conversation with an academic community interested in Lydgate and in writing across temporal junctures. Before illustrating how I read *Siege of Thebes*, I share a glimpse of the multifaceted conversations at the complicated nexus of narrative and literary authorship in the fifteenth century.

The social and material histories of literary texts have inspired such scholars as Elizabeth Bryan, Matthew Fisher, Alexandra Gillespie, and Seth Lerer, among others, to envision a medieval literary studies that does not rely solely upon the premise of authorial genius and

³⁰ In this way, I draw on the “citational play” offered by Plumley, Di Bacco, and Jossa in *Citation, Intertextuality, and Memory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*: “Citational play exploits the collective memory; it arises from the desire of authors and artists to effect a knowing exchange with their reader or audience while simultaneously establishing their own position in relation to contemporary or past authorities” (“Preface” x).

³¹ See the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) entries 8618 and 8617. *Commun*, MED 8616, describes a shared ownership as “Owned or used jointly” (n.1a), “Of sentiment. . . unanimous” (n.2a), and “Pertaining to, affecting, or open to, all the people of a community or class” (n.4). *Commune*, MED 8617, refers to the body politic, such as “A commonwealth; a community, town” (n.1), “the common people” (n.2), and “a fellowship or brotherhood, as of a religious community or of devotees” (n.3). I reference both definitions as they both derive from the Old French *com(m)une* and Latin *commūn*. The noun form indicates a larger community, whereas the adjectival form suggests an action of that community.

singular authorship.³² Recent work, including a collaborative scribal authorship offered by Bryan in *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture*, a mutual discourse between scribe and author as described by Fisher in *Scribal Authorship*, the “medial agency” proposed by Sophus Helle, and Gillespie’s view of a medieval author-fiction in *Print Culture and the Medieval Author*, provides the foundation to understand medieval writing practices. The “open text of a manuscript culture” (Bruns 113) and the medieval multitext, proposed by Iain Higgins in *Writing East*, likewise indicate a move toward what scholars now know to be a complex medieval Anglophone literary environment. While medieval literary scholars have started to untangle the entrenched ideals of the single author and the fixed text, old habits fade slowly with Middle English canonical literature and their authors. This is due, in part, to stemmatic recension practices that seek a stable text from which to identify a piece of literature.³³

Scholarship on fifteenth-century writers—especially at the nexus of Chaucer’s English successors, Thomas Hoccleve, John Lydgate, and Robert Henryson—often focuses on how their writing suits the patterns and style of the so-called ‘Father Chaucer.’³⁴ The ongoing debate focuses on “where the origins of greatness actually lie—in unmatched individual achievement or collective labor, community, and care” (Whearty “Chaucer’s Death” 336). *The Siege of Thebes* operates as commentary on literary writing beyond Chaucer as Lydgate invokes his own

³² For a brief history of the contemporary shift toward social histories of texts, see chapter two on digital editing.

³³ *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* share the experience of being determined through their manuscript genealogies. The search for the closest manuscripts to an authorial holograph has staged a conversation in linear histories that sometimes disregards the rich textual environments in which the text transforms.

³⁴ Bridget Whearty problematizes patrilineal literary history when developing the guild metaphor for late medieval writers: “Using genealogy and inheritance to understand literary history, thus, suggests literary excellence is something of a zero-sum game with a newcomer’s success predicated on patricide” (364). She continues, critiquing the existing models, “But even as it celebrates sons’ ambitions, this familiar, archetypal reading of literary history disempowers individual writers and elides their diversity. If all poets must either be sons or fathers, fated to play predetermined roles in a patricidal dance, then writers are fundamentally powerless—pawns to universal instincts beyond their control” (364).

spectral presence by inserting himself into the narrative as the tale-teller. Alain Renoir employs stemmatics to seek direct sources to downplay Lydgate's authorship. Daniel Kline reads *Thebes* as Lydgate's Oedipal drama, both a retelling of the Oedipus narrative and an enactment of his own authorial Oedipal tale to excise Chaucer's "paternal presence." However, I take issue with a Freudian framing, which I view as an inability to see past Chaucer to the capacious *auctoritas* invoked in *Thebes*. Kline's reading of a violent battle does not cohere with my understanding of a shared project: he writes that Lydgate "textually sutures his tale into Chaucer's story-cycle" (230), whereas I might suggest the continuation of a tapestry by multiple weavers. Leah Schwebel also relies on literary patricide, which she examines through "authorial erasure" in Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate. While Schwebel demonstrates the depth of intertextual care required by authors who negotiate their legitimation through the elision of their direct sources, her emphasis on patrilineal dominance impedes her closing remarks on viewing Lydgate "as a canny, even playful, interlocutor of his English and Italian sources" (168). In this way, scholars fail to notice community formation that develops beyond Chaucerian emulation. Tim Machan's examination of how fifteenth-century writers invoke Chaucerian textual authority establishes a metatextual idea for English vernacular poetry, but his attention to Lydgate's work in *Thebes* and *Fall of Princes* demonstrates that he views Lydgate's metadiscursive textual construction as merely rhetorical flourish (286–295). By examining what Machan calls "metrical fillers" (286) for their metadiscursive cues, I illustrate Lydgate's familiarity with a communitarian textual environment.³⁵

³⁵ Dismissals of Lydgate's discursive directions fail to see their dual purpose, which John Ganim identifies as a guide to readers and evidence of rhetorical style in *Style and Consciousness of Middle English Narratives* (9). Further, the denigration of such lines as "filler" does not address their purpose as what Laurel Brinton calls "clausal discourse markers" (289–290).

Fraternal strife in *Thebes* offers an implicit metaphor for patrilineal authorship, thus *Thebes* becomes a method for unworking modern sensibilities of authorship applied to Lydgate's corpus.³⁶ When describing the moral impetus in Lydgate's *Thebes*, Paul Clogan examines how "the house of Oedipus is ruled by discord, strife, fraternal hate, and death" (16). Fifteenth-century Middle English verse appears in the shadow of what has been deemed Chaucer's brilliance, but often fifteenth-century authors write alongside Chaucer. In *Congenial Souls*, Stephanie Trigg suggests that *Siege of Thebes* presents an elegiac view of Chaucer as an author and functions as an example of early literary critical engagement with Chaucer. The provocation that Andrea Denny-Brown identifies in fifteenth-century literature relies upon audience engagement, such as the encounter Trigg articulates between Lydgate and Chaucer in *Thebes*. Trigg writes that "Lydgate does not actively seek to resurrect Chaucer from the dead, to 'speak' to him across time and mortality" (95), but what is the *Siege of Thebes* if not a way for Lydgate to memorialize Chaucer and to write *with* him though he is gone? In a wonderful reimagining of fifteenth-century literary communities, Bridget Whearty illustrates a model through which writers like Lydgate understand themselves in community with their forebears by deploying prayers for the dead in their works; she proposes that prayers for the dead recur throughout fifteenth-century literature as an invitation and, in Denny-Brown's setting, a provocation for writers and readers alike to convene around a since-dead literary community. Whearty's suggestion that Lydgate puts the self in community with readers through a relationship with Chaucer provides the foundation from which I develop my argument examining how Lydgate

³⁶ Schwebel, Nolan, and Kline, as well as Seth Lerer in *Chaucer and His Readers*, preface their work on Lydgate within the realm of literary patricide, which is detrimental to the imaginative possibilities they're keen to offer. Lee Patterson, too, in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, comments on Lydgate's seeming failures to match a perceived Chaucerian brilliance (though Patterson offers his views on Lydgate primarily in footnotes). A patrilineal frame does a disservice, too, to the knowledge that "[f]or John Lydgate, Chaucer's most prolific fifteenth-century admirer, the older poet was always 'mayster'" (Cook 207).

consciously frames himself in community with the past through his use of metadiscursive textual construction.

Source studies on *Thebes* make possible my argument for capacious, transtemporal communities of authors because scholars have illustrated the varied sources from whose threads Lydgate weaves fullness. Maura Nolan provides a good reference for scholarly treatment on Lydgate's "notion of literary history produced by the intersection of his source texts" (61), and she notes patron control over *Fall of Princes*, which is not the case with *Thebes*. My central issue with Nolan's approach is the continued emphasis on poetic competition, which limits readings of Lydgate. She offers that Lydgate integrates disparate sources, but she does not elaborate how that signifies a different form of literariness even as she writes that his poetic approach is that "in which auctors communicate with other auctors and history rages on outside the text" (91). Despite her familiarity with Lydgate's literary play, Nolan, among others, ultimately relies on modern conceptions of medieval authorship. I argue that *Thebes* experiments with ideas of authority, and my analysis of Lydgate's metadiscursivity allows for a more generous reading of the fifteenth-century literary environment.

Moral advice (often as asides throughout *Thebes*) similarly demonstrates a reminder to audiences that the narrative is intentionally crafted and constructed to suit a purpose: in this case, as a source for didactic behavioral reminders that address a variety of reading audiences. I consider the plurality of audiences apparent in the *Siege of Thebes* crucial for the transtemporal reading. In response to scholarly critiques of Lydgate's verse as dull, John Ganim writes, "part of his uniqueness is in his creation of a voice that could speak to prince and merchant on the same level" (108). Lydgate's ability to write for varied social strata is evident in the conflation of the pilgrim-audience in the *Thebes* frame and an aristocratic and upper gentry audience of the book

object. While articulations of the specific individuals who read *Thebes* is limited to provenance studies, there is something to the ease with which Lydgate speaks (well, writes) to diverse audiences as illustrated in the *Siege of Thebes*.³⁷ A didactic monologue on age and directed to the readerly audience that begins in line 2941 of “Tercia Pars” may serve as a brief example. Here, Lydgate identifies the differing perspectives of youth and age, suggesting that “youth” (implying young knights and princes) do not think of the long-term picture but see themselves as infallible. He likens this behavior to “he that hurtleth ageynes harde stonys” [he who hurtles himself against hard stones] (l. 2951). The alternative, Lydgate continues, is that older individuals do nothing without “good discrecioun” (l. 2954). While he ties the monologue to the Greek soldiers who disregard Amphiorax’s prophecy (ll. 2910–2932), the metadiscursive implication applies to many audiences, including the aristocracy of the later Middle Ages.³⁸ In a shift from the didactic statement back to the Theban story, Lydgate expresses his concern for the degradation of wisdom. He references famed authors and orators—Plato, Socrates, Seneca, Diogenes, Abu Ma’shar, Ptolemy, and Cicero (ll. 2971–2974)—for their wisdom and knowledge, suggesting that Amphiorax, whose prophecy is disregarded by the Greeks, could be categorized alongside the aforementioned experts. Lydgate employs anaphora briefly toward the end of the didactic section in “Farwel wisdom, farewell discrecioun” (l. 2983), which suggests that the insights offered by exemplars from antiquity will be disregarded in what remains to be told of the siege of Thebes. Robert Ayers’ work is useful for understanding Lydgate’s moralization through storytelling, but a lack of attention to textual construction and metadiscursivity obscures a central question that makes the didacticism so interesting: who is Lydgate’s audience? The frame tale

³⁷ See also Ganim *Style* on the “audience of mixed composition” (110).

³⁸ Because other works in Lydgate’s corpus were written for aristocratic patrons, it is reasonable to imagine that the same audience could have read *Thebes*.

creates the question. While Ayers provides a useful source for Lydgate's focus on moralizing lessons to rulers, which appear frequently through *Thebes*, he insists on a strictly historical approach. Clogan, too, focuses on genre-based analysis, suggesting that the *roman antique* is repurposed into Lydgate's historical romance in verse. Clogan examines the models of kingship that appear in *Siege*, attending to historical romance over chivalric romance (and thus missing elements of the latter that do indeed appear³⁹). Scholarship focused on identifying a singular source or classifying *Thebes* within one category or genre erase the fictional impetus through which Lydgate composes his pilgrimage tale.

Misattention to historicity is an issue for a text like *Thebes*. The multitextual literary environment in which Lydgate wrote complicates modern categories of genre—a limitation in many scholars' work on this text. The multitextual environment creates a space for what I have been calling transtemporal literacy: a method that describes the accretive, lived experiences of reading and writing by resisting temporal linearity in ways that make contemporary readers attendant to the accumulative echoes of the makers, mediators, and readers of historical texts.

II. CHAUCER'S SPECTER AND LYDGATE'S METADISCURSIVITY IN THE "PROLOGUS"

I read Lydgate's insertion into the *Canterbury Tales* through *Thebes* as placing himself creatively in league with Chaucer, among other literary models,⁴⁰ and experimenting with the

³⁹ Lydgate tells a version of Oedipus which follows the style of chivalric romance and the language used echoes Arthurian exploits of a *knight adventurous*. The Tydeus section in "Tercia Pars" incorporates references to chivalric romance tropes with Tydeus who is "lich an erraunt knyght" (l. 1316) and "a verray gentyl knyght" (l. 1629).

⁴⁰ On Lydgate's Chaucerian *Thebes*, Pearsall writes, "So too in the *Siege of Thebes*, which is framed as an additional Canterbury Tales, Lydgate gives us his version of what he thinks a Canterbury Tale should be, not only long and massively didactic but also interspersed with references to the relation of the progress of the telling to the progress of the pilgrims along the road. Chaucer had never attempted to make allusions of this kind, but Lydgate thought himself the wiser" ("Lydgate as Innovator" 7).

forms available for historical fictions.⁴¹ The writing process sets Lydgate in transtemporal community with the dead poet Chaucer who is missing from the *Thebes* return pilgrimage though a pilgrim Chaucer was on the initial pilgrimage journey in the *Tales*. Whearty provides the fraternal guild as an example of linear temporal community, which I hope to expand toward a deliberate co-temporal presence and which I call transtemporal collaboration. Lydgate uses language that stems from Chaucer and that causes readers to pray for Chaucer as his tools to write *with* Chaucer, despite the certainty of Chaucer's death.⁴² To view Lydgate as continuing Chaucer's legacy while Chaucer is a spectral presence reckons with the reality that Lydgate will soon be dead too.

Lydgate, the narrator reembodyed as a pilgrim within the Canterbury frame during the "Prologus," illustrates a reading of *Thebes* through flexible textuality, intentional construction, and accumulations of temporality. The "Prologus" situates Lydgate's metadiscursivity in two sections. Lines 1–65 provide a metatextual framing by the authorial Lydgate, whereas the pilgrim Lydgate enters the *Canterbury Tales* narrative proper in lines 66–176. The parallel prologues demonstrate Lydgate's awareness of an ongoing literary environment and a playfulness regarding the story's temporality and evince his own position as both frame-teller and tale-teller. Like Chaucer, Lydgate experiments with multiple storytelling identities while narrative time is in flux. Lydgate's entry into the *Canterbury Tales* relies on the *Tales* as an ongoing present, though Lydgate's *Canterbury Tales* frame necessitates a since-dead Chaucer (unlike Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in which Chaucer is not only alive but is also a participatory

⁴¹ As an example of his creativity, see Whearty "Chaucer's Death" on the "pray for Chaucer" topos that Lydgate employs in *Thebes* and elsewhere.

⁴² On Chaucer's vocabulary, see Pearsall, "Lydgate as Innovator," pp. 9–10. On the "pray for Chaucer" topos, see Whearty, "Chaucer's Death," pp. 359–361.

pilgrim with a tale of his own). By pairing Chaucer's frame narrative (which is an intertextual collection of stories based, in part, on Boccaccio's *Decameron*) with a Theban retelling (including Lydgate's version of Seneca's *Oedipus*, itself retelling Sophocles' version), Lydgate plays with the craft of storytelling as well as narrative temporality.

While the opening lines mirror the descriptions in Chaucer's General Prologue,⁴³ elsewhere the writing lifts the veil from Lydgate's Chaucerian performance to render visible the craft of writing and to invoke the benign specter of the author. Lines 18–22 provide the basis for Lydgate's later entry into the frame tale:

The tyme in soth whan Canterbury talys

Compleat and told at many sondry stage

Of estatis in pilgrimage,

Everich man lik to his degré.

[The time, truly, when the Canterbury tales were complete, told in many

individual moments of time by the various estates who were on pilgrimage,

everyone to their status.] (*Thebes* ll. 18–22)⁴⁴

Lydgate's use of *compleat* in line 19 is a playful reading of the seemingly unfinished status of the *Canterbury Tales* at the time of Chaucer's death with an understanding that Chaucer embeds an anecdotal sense of completion throughout the *Tales*, such as when the host declares "Fulfilled is my sentence and my degree; / I trowe that we han hed of ech degree; / Almost fulfild is al myn ordinaunce" (*Canterbury* ll. 17–19) in the prologue to the Parson's Tale. The conflation of

⁴³ Others have described the similarities better than I could. On the topic, see Higl *Playing*, pp. 51–52, and Smith "Lydgate's Refrain," p. 186.

⁴⁴ All modern English translations are my own, unless otherwise specified.

orality and written storytelling appears in both Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, with the latter describing the former as "Word for word with every circumstaunce, / Echon ywrite and put in remembraunce" (ll. 37–38). Lydgate signals that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* has passed: the "Prologus" describes a time after Chaucer's General Prologue (ll. 1–17) when Chaucer's pilgrims have told their tales, paid homage to Thomas Becket, and are about to embark on their return journey (ll. 18–35, 58–62), and Chaucer, though dead, exists "alwey fressh ben in [Lydgate's] memoyré" (l. 45).⁴⁵

Lydgate enters the *Canterbury* story in line 66, narratively joining the pilgrims in Canterbury on the night before the return journey. The preceding sixty-five lines are outside the scope of the Canterbury pilgrimage and therefore function as a metadiscursive prelude. Lines 66–176 provide context similar to the *Canterbury Tales*: a description of Lydgate's appearance and a conversation with the host wherein the host requests for a story. The language used by Lydgate's host in *Thebes* mirrors that of the *Canterbury Tales* throughout the conversation but most notably in the host's request, as follows,

Tel some tale, and make therof a jape.

For be my rouncey, thow shalt not eskape.

But preche not of non holynesse.

Gynne some tale of myrth or of gladnesse,

And nodde not with thyn hevy bekke. (*Thebes* ll. 165–169)

The call for a "tale of myrth" or a "jape" echoes the request to the Pardoner by Chaucer's host,

Or but I heere anon a myrie tale,

Myn herte is lost for pitee of this maybe.

⁴⁵ See lines 39–65 for Lydgate's praise of Chaucer.

Thou beel amy, thou Pardoner, he sayde,

Tell us som myrthe or japes right anon. (*Canterbury* ll. 316–319)

If the pilgrim Lydgate tells his story on the return journey, the author Lydgate may consider this tale as added after the close of the *Canterbury Tales*, which scholars typically identify as Fragments IX and X with the Manciple's Tale and the Parson's Tale. While the Manciple's fable offers a moral warning, the Parson closes the pilgrims' tales with a treatise on penance rather than the "myrie tale in prose" (l. 46) initially promised. If Lydgate's story is added after the Parson's sermon told "at a thropes ende" (l. 11), the pairing demonstrates an awareness of Chaucer's host written as disinterested in morality stories without humor (as evidenced by the similarity of language in the Chaucerian host's request to the Pardoner, above, and to the Parson for a fable). Lydgate's narration of the host, who asks that pilgrim Lydgate "preche not" but rather tell "of myrth or of gladnesse," suggests that the *Siege of Thebes* could follow in sequence after the Parson's penitential sermon in the *Canterbury* frame. N. F. Blake indicates that fragment groupings "merely reflect the state of the poem when Chaucer died" (223), so my reading of the sequential framing used by Lydgate could be hindered by the likelihood that Chaucer had not constructed or finalized a tale order prior to his death. However, Lydgate composed the *Siege of Thebes* twenty or so years following Chaucer's death and therefore would have known a postmortem ordering that closes with a penitential tale.

Lydgate places authority within Chaucer's writing, using craft-based terms to emphasize composition as craft labor. Lisa Cooper's *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late Medieval England* contextualizes the function of craft language deployed by and for medieval literary imaginations. She notes that Chaucer "saw himself as an artisan of verse" (11), which implicates

Lydgate because *Thebes* emulates the *Canterbury Tales*.⁴⁶ The physical construction of text is clarified in an imperative to “Rede his *making* who list the trouthe fynde” (*Thebes* l. 44, emphasis added). The “*crafty* writinge” (l. 57, emphasis added), which Lydgate admires, blurs the distinction between prelude and narrative as Lydgate transitions from metadiscursive frame to narrative frame. Cooper briefly references the “tangible traces of artisanal practice” that survive into the modern day (9) and, though she does not refer to the artifact acting as a signature when the signatory is no longer present, the artisan is both present and absent as the object outlasts its moment of making.⁴⁷ On Lydgate, Cooper considers his translation of *La pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, the “juxtapos[ition of] an idealized view of craft practice with an unequivocal condemnation of craft practitioners” in the *Fall of Princes* (169), and the importance of “the way the English *maker* imitates the way that his poetic predecessors Virgil and Dante . . . confront questions of artistic and literary failure” (13). *Thebes* does not factor into Cooper’s discussion, but an emphasis on textual construction throughout Lydgate’s tale aligns *Thebes* with what Cooper identifies as the use of craft imagery in a literary sense of self.⁴⁸

The craft of writing necessitates rhetorical skill, and Lydgate incorporates *auctoritas* consistently in *Thebes*. Even brief reminders of the pilgrim audience cannot obscure the

⁴⁶ Though Cooper does not reflect on *Thebes*, she classifies Lydgate among those who utilize the language of craft in his verse translation of Guillaume de Deguileville’s *Le pèlerinage de la vie humaine* (see chapter three in *Artisans and Narrative Craft*).

⁴⁷ Keen eyes may recognize here the echoes of Derrida’s “Signature, Event, Context.”

⁴⁸ Derek Pearsall, too, aligns Lydgate with medieval artisans, writing in his biography of the poet: “What one would like to establish is a picture of Lydgate as a highly professional and skillful craftsman in a wide range of related literary arts, capable of turning his hand to an epithalamion as well as an epic, an exposition of the Mass as well as a satire on women’s fashions in headgear, working like a mason or a sculptor or a mural-painter, not like a *poeta vates*. For him, poetry is a public art, its existence conditioned and determined by outer needs and pressures, not by inner ones” (*John Lydgate* 5). See also page 65 on Lydgate’s use of specific craft terminology.

significance of literary referents for Lydgate's storytelling.⁴⁹ Though Lydgate refers to his *auctour* as Boccaccio throughout "Tercia Pars," Chaucer looms as an important influence. His spectral presence appears explicitly when Lydgate references the opening section of the Knight's Tale during the *Thebes* denouement: "as my mayster Chaucer list endite" [as my master, Chaucer, writes] (l. 4501). Incorporating elements of the Knight's Tale demonstrates Lydgate's ease with what I consider to be collective and transtemporal storytelling. Lydgate likewise reminds his pilgrim audience that the story was told elsewhere, earlier in their journey: "Yif ye remembre ye han herde it to for" [If you remember, you have heard it before] (l. 4522). While Lydgate, as pilgrim, may not be familiar with the pilgrims' tales, Lydgate, as author, certainly is. Distinctions between the two identities flicker throughout *Thebes*, especially in the closing moments. Lydgate provides a summary for closure of his own pilgrim tale but gestures to Chaucer's Knight's Tale for what happens after the city's destruction (ll. 4531–4532).

An appeal to his *auctour* often returns the narrative plot from its metadiscursive frame. At the end of the tale and despite purporting to truncate the grief and mourning for the women of Greece, Lydgate describes the women's clothing and visible grief "as myn autour doth clerly certifie" [as my *auctour* declares plainly] (l. 4426). The external narrative becomes a legitimating feature of his own narrator, and each moment of *auctoritas* builds agency in Lydgate's storytelling, putting his work into existence with the others. In addition to the opening frame, Lydgate provides three references to his source and one to the pilgrim audience in "Tercia Pars." The pilgrim audience layers atop the reading audience in the line, "afor as I you tolde"

⁴⁹ See Minnis *Medieval Authorship* for the definitive understanding of medieval *auctoritas* (10). In this chapter, I reference *auctoritas* for its function through quotative and referential statements.

[before as I told to you] (l. 4431).⁵⁰ When Lydgate specifies oral storytelling, he pairs the pilgrim frame with sequential narration for a reading audience. Noting external motivators, Lydgate provides, for his reading audience, an explicit illustration of textual construction and his skill as a textual craftsman. In the same section on Greek women's mourning, Lydgate states "as the story liketh to declare" (l. 4437) and "as I fynde" (l. 4448) to indicate that his story incorporates materials from elsewhere. In a playful moment of metatextuality, he declares that "bookys can not lye" [books cannot lie] (l. 4452). The books referenced here include his source materials and his own *Thebes* tale which is, per lines 3825–3830, written with a stylus. A stylus is a writing instrument but may also pun on rhetorical *style* (see *stile: MED* 42945 n. 1). Lines 3826–3827 read, "For which a while my styell I mot dyverte / and shortly telle, by descripcioun..."; *styell* serves a dual function since the pen will be diverted from one story to the another's details, but so too will the narrative be told in *descripcioun* rather than the usual rhetorical flair.

Lydgate employs metatextual statements, including mentions of *auctors* and writing tools, to legitimate his Canterbury tale. His metadiscursive writing illustrates how literary authority can develop from collaborative, transtemporal textual environments. My understanding of the late medieval, transtemporal textual environment develops from Whearty's fraternal guild metaphor, which offers flexibility to the realities of earlier writers and the needs of later writers. Whearty emphasizes the use of prayers for the dead to reimagine something beyond the patriarchal literary environment: "[later writers] must respond to the [guild] metaphor, but the varying responses become the method through which new writers (re)create the larger community they seek to join" (367). The pilgrimage frame presents Lydgate with the ability to suspend and perpetuate time: to contain and recreate it while recognizing its passing, or what D.

⁵⁰ For a description of Chaucer's audiences in the *Canterbury Tales*, see Moore *Quoting*, pp. 172–179. If my reading holds, Lydgate carries the audiences of the *Tales* alongside the reading audiences for *Thebes*.

Vance Smith identifies as an “open when” and the “lyricist’s desire for the world, the sadness at its passing away” (185). Lydgate’s intimate familiarity with the world passing away (as Whearty illustrates with Lydgate praying for the dead) provides an opportunity to envision a mutable time based in the capacious manuscript literary traditions of the fifteenth century.⁵¹ The Canterbury frame set-up in the prologue draws a direct connection between Lydgate and Chaucer, despite their temporal disjuncture.

III. BINDING THE TALES

There is also a codicological implication for entering a storytelling environment with Chaucer, as some extant manuscripts for *Thebes* circulate with the *Canterbury Tales*, thus linking physical compilation with the metaphorical and sequential narrative. So, too, do occasional vocabulary terms reinforce the conflation of narrative and codex, such as the declaration “Lik in story as it is *compyled*” (l. 307, emphasis added). If, as Arthur Bahr offers in *Fragments and Assemblages*, readers can infer meaning across texts bound or compiled together, then there is a manuscript impetus for reading the *Tales* and *Thebes* in line with each other, so to speak. When they are bound together, the two texts (and, as a result, the two authors and all scribes) are in conversation across time. While I chart each manuscript only in brief, examining a singular manuscript in depth may unwork presumed truths about fifteenth-century literature and its relation to a Chaucerian corpus.⁵² Tale order in Chaucer’s collection of Canterbury pilgrims can vary, as does the combination of Chaucer’s texts and other literary materials. Standardizing

⁵¹ I use the phrase “mutable time” in recognition of Blake Gutt’s article on “Transgender mutation and the canon: Christine de Pizan’s *Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*” in *postmedieval* vol. 11. Gutt, in his article and elsewhere, successfully argues for a trans Middle Ages that “takes each of these multiple, momentary identifications seriously” (456).

⁵² For close examinations of singular manuscripts containing the *Tales* and *Thebes*, see Daniel Mosser “The Cardigan Chaucer” on University of Texas HRC MS 143 and Christopher Queen “‘Ploughman Tylyer, draw the nere’: Attaching Continuations in Christ Church 152” (in his forthcoming dissertation) on Christ Church MS 152.

the text of the *Canterbury Tales* as stable and consistent in modern editions obscures and betrays its unfinished state, complicating the subsequent openings in fifteenth-century literary-textual environments that write into the *Tales* and thus alongside Chaucer.⁵³

In the five manuscripts that contain both the *Canterbury Tales* and *Siege of Thebes*, *Thebes* often follows the *Tales*.⁵⁴ London, British Library, Additional MS 5140 closes the *Canterbury* section with the Manciple, Parson, and Retraction, after which *Thebes* appears.⁵⁵ With a large explicit and incipit on fol. 359^r, the scribes for Additional 5140 mark the boundary between Chaucer's *Tales* and Lydgate's *Thebes* in a similar but larger style as the distinctions between pilgrim tales (see, for example, the transition from the Second Nun's Tale to the Canon Yeoman's Prologue on fol. 297^v or from the Manciple to the Parson on fol. 315^r). London, British Library, Egerton MS 2864 similarly offers the Manciple's Tale and Parson's Prologue before Lydgate's *Thebes*.⁵⁶ Longleat House MS 257, an exception to the aforementioned order, opens with *Thebes* before *Canterbury*.⁵⁷

⁵³ See W. W. Greg "The Rationale of the Copy-Text," p. 133, on the impetus to 'fix' texts; and Gerald Bruns "The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Context" for the concept of an "open text" in medieval literary environments.

⁵⁴ Of the thirty manuscript witnesses for *Thebes* documented in the *Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, six manuscripts include both *Thebes* and the *Tales*. The six witnesses bound together demonstrate a pattern, further evidenced in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printings that likewise incorporate *Thebes* with a Chaucerian corpus. Some manuscripts may be rebound, no longer representative of their original ordering; however, the continuity between witnesses and later printings illustrates that the two pilgrim-focused stories are connected. Unfortunately, most of the manuscripts that feature *Thebes* alongside the *Tales* have not been made publicly accessible in digital form, so I am unable to assess how codicological features construct boundaries between each literary passage.

⁵⁵ For the contents of Additional MS 5140, see the British Library's Digitised Manuscripts: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_5140.

⁵⁶ See the DIMEV entry for Egerton 2864: <https://www.dimev.net/Records.php?MSS=BLEge2864>. Egerton 2864 is not available as a digital manuscript.

⁵⁷ See Jordi Sánchez Martí "Longleat House MS 257: A Description" in *Atlantis*. Longleat 257 is not available as a digital manuscript.

Oxford, Christ Church MS 152 features the *Tales* with additional texts claimed within, including Lydgate's "tale of the churle and hys bryd" (fol. 281^v) as well as *Siege of Thebes*.⁵⁸ Christ Church 152 features a table of contents written by its second scribe which identifies, as its closing tale, "the monk of Buryys tale of the sege of Tebes" (fol. 1^v). Preceding *Thebes* in the manuscript table of contents are the Parson's tale and "The Churl and the Bird," whereas the catalogue for MS 152 identifies piece closing the *Canterbury* section as Hoccleve's "The story of the monk who clad the Virgin," and the *DIMEV* states that the Parson's Prologue appears before Lydgate's works.⁵⁹ Each of the *Tales* includes a red rubricated heading and a two- or three-line red initial; *Thebes* receives red titular rubrication and a six-line blue initial. Of the two scribes who contributed to Christ Church 152, the first prepared what is generally thought of as the *Canterbury Tales* together with the *Siege of Thebes*, with later additions from the first and second scribes.⁶⁰ If, in fact, the first scribe recorded what is considered the *Tales* with *Thebes*, they demonstrate the inclination to read *Thebes* as undertaking authorial collaboration with Chaucer, which brings it into the *Canterbury Tales*. Christopher Queen writes that "The scribes responsible for Christ Church 152 typify, in its earliest stages, the desire to meaningfully add to what rightly qualifies as a 'Canterbury tale'" (n.p.), and I agree that the *Siege of Thebes* should

⁵⁸ For an extensive analysis of Christ Church 152 and affective attachment to Chaucer's corpus by fifteenth-century poets and scribes, see Christopher Queen "Ploughman Tylyer, draw the nere": Attaching Continuations in Christ Church 152" (chapter four in his forthcoming dissertation from the University of California, Riverside). For descriptions of paratext and *ordinatio* in Christ Church 152, see Andrew Higl "The Many John Lydgates in the World of the *Tales*" in *Playing the Canterbury Tales*, pp. 64–66.

⁵⁹ See the manuscript catalogue in the Oxford Libraries: https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_3935; and the *DIMEV* entry for MS 152: <https://www.dimev.net/Records.php?MSS=OxfChrCh152>. The "Churl and the Bird" appears in a different hand than *Thebes* and, per the catalogue entry, seems to have been added by the second scribe.

⁶⁰ See the Bodleian Library's catalogue entry < https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_3935>, whose entry on hands reads "Written in anglicana, originally a single scribe for items 2 and 6, who later added item 3; subsequently, another scribe, also writing an anglicana, inserted item 4 and, at another sitting, item 5."

be viewed as an intended Canterbury tale, not only by the scribes of Christ Church 152 but in scholarly readings of Lydgate's textual construction and in the transmission histories of the *Canterbury Tales*.⁶¹

Austin, University of Texas, Humanities Research Center MS 143, commonly referred to as the "Cardigan Chaucer" and which the HRC has made available in digitized form, includes a version of Chaucer's retraction and a short excerpt believed to be from the *Brut Chronicle* between the close of the *Tales* and the beginning of *Thebes*. HRC MS 143 features the Manciple and Parson as the final pilgrims in the portion identified as Chaucer's *Tales*.⁶² Each new pilgrim narration in the *Tales* section features a large incipit heading and a flourish initial; the shift from the *Tales* to the *Brut* features neither incipit nor explicit but approximately an inch of blank space and an empty area for a decorative initial that would occupy three lines. The *Siege of Thebes* begins on a new page (fol. 246^r) in what appears to be the same hand as the preceding material, but there is no heading to indicate the new text (unlike the paratextual features identifying each of the individual *Tales*) and only a flourish on the initial letter (which is small compared to the space allocated for the *Brut* initial on fol. 244^r). Lydgate's tale seems to disappear into Chaucer's *Tales*, illustrative of a narrative connection that exceeds linear temporalities. The shift between each of the *Thebes* sections presents the larger explicit and incipit seen in the *Canterbury* section with a decorative initial to start each new part (see fols. 248^r, 258^r, 277^r). The codicological structure provides supporting case studies that anticipate a fifteenth-century textual environment in which *Thebes* circulates together with the *Tales*.

⁶¹ Please note a distinction between my appeal to view *Thebes* as a Canterbury tale in transtemporal collaboration with Chaucer from the existing scholarly trend to see it as a spurious tale or fifteenth-century addition.

⁶² See the *DIMEV* entry for UT HRC MS 143: <https://www.dimev.net/Records.php?MSS=Austin143>. A [digital facsimile](#) of UT HRC MS 143, "The Cardigan Chaucer," is available online.

While Lydgate was not likely the compiler of the manuscripts, the placement of the *Siege of Thebes* after the *Canterbury Tales* in multiple manuscript witnesses suggests that the late medieval literary environment understood *Thebes* in a sequential ordering after Chaucer's existing pilgrim tales.⁶³ The codex structure appears in composite books and early printings as well, perhaps because the *Thebes* frame performs a narrative collaboration in its literary set-up. Aditi Nafde describes Oxford, St John's College, MS 266 as a composite book pairing Caxton's printing of the *Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* with a *Thebes* manuscript, noting that the *Thebes* manuscript follows the printed materials (i.e., *Canterbury*, *Troilus*, and *Quattor sermones*).⁶⁴ The *Siege of Thebes* following the Parson's Tale makes sense, even for manuscripts such as Christ Church 152 which do not feature Parson (see fol. 276^v for what closes: "de tercia parte penitentie").

For the *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts that most scholars deem authoritative, the ending tales imply connection with Lydgate's *Thebes* frame. The Manciple and Parson's tales, often paired,⁶⁵ are not ordered together in the Hengwrt manuscript (National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, MS Peniarth 392 D), and the Tale of Melibee—a moral tale in prose—precedes Parson in Hengwrt. Even with Melibee, which is labelled as the "tale of Chaucer" on fol. lxxj^r in

⁶³ For a comprehensive discussion of the early printed collections of Chaucer's complete works, see Megan Cook *The Poet and the Antiquaries*, especially chapter one "The First First Folios." The "temporal doubleness" central to Cook's project implicates not only early modern antiquarians but also fifteenth centuries writers like Lydgate who, in Cook's words, "simultaneously celebrate a connection with the past and measure distance from the past" (19–20).

⁶⁴ See Nafde, "[Manuscript prints](#)" for Newcastle University's Medieval and Early Modern Studies research blog and "Replicating the Mechanical Print Aesthetic in MSS before circa 1500," pp. 120–144. The catalogue for St. John's College 266 is not available online.

⁶⁵ Larry Benson, in the introductory matter to the *Riverside Chaucer*, writes, "There are no explicit connections between the fragments (save for IX – X and, in the tradition of the Ellesmere manuscript, IV – V) and, consequently, no explicit indication of the order in which Chaucer intended the fragments to be read" (5). Benson identifies fragment IX as the Manciple's Prologue and Tale and fragment X as the Parson's Prologue and Tale with the Retraction.

the 1561 printing of the complete works of Chaucer, the need for “myrth” following morality stories holds while Chaucer’s voice glides into Lydgate’s voice in *Thebes*. The Ellesmere manuscript (San Marino, Huntington Library, EL 26 C 9) closes with the Manciple’s tale, the Parson’s tale, and Chaucer’s retraction, but I do not dwell on the retraction here because its metadiscursive status separates it from the narrative frame and, therefore, it could be perceived as following *Thebes* if *Thebes* were understood as a tale.⁶⁶

The section on codicological evidence demonstrates how manuscripts and early print books provide materials complementary to my view of *Thebes* as written in the context of a larger textual community. The book objects highlight a literary environment in which fifteenth-century writers and readers understood the same. While this chapter draws on traditional manuscript studies and, indeed, owes a huge debt to codicology as shaping readerly experience, I offer a study of metadiscursive construction in *Siege of Thebes* that examines the textual structure as it appears in the narrative conceit.

IV. TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTION IN “PRIMA PARS”

Lydgate uses the Theban cycle within the pilgrim frame to authorize himself as an equivalent storyteller alongside Chaucer, making the physical structure of the codex only one metric through which to assess the relationship between *Thebes* and the *Tales*.

“Prima Pars” begins the Theban tale, connecting the pilgrim frame of the prologue with Lydgate’s narrative craft. Throughout the first part, keen readers may identify metatextual

⁶⁶ Chaucer’s Retraction appears in only 30 of the remaining *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts (Partridge 114–115) and, as Joseph Dane illustrates, it became a standard addition to the Chaucerian corpus following John Urry’s posthumously printed 1721 blackletter edition (*Who Is Buried* 95–96), so I do not view the Retraction as a necessary element when considering tale order and the connection between Chaucer’s *Tales* and Lydgate’s tale of *Thebes*.

iterations of Lydgate's author-persona in relation to that of Chaucer, chiefly around the concept of the frame tale and literary craft.

By the beginning of "Prima Pars," Lydgate shifts from a metatextual prelude into the pilgrim frame itself. "I entred am into your companye," he proclaims in line 179, positioning himself among the fictive cohort of Chaucerian pilgrims. His narrative entry into the group of pilgrims is not the only entry suggested by this line; Lydgate offers a metaphorical entry into Chaucer's frame narrative through his prelude and prologue. Through the construction of the frame tale, Lydgate provides the environment structuring speaker and audience in a set time and place.⁶⁷ *Thebes* includes reference to Chaucer and Boccaccio's frame narratives with Lydgate inviting audience to "Rede her books" (l. 200) for "a thing of poetes told" (l. 211). A directive to read Chaucer is notable for those manuscripts which contain *Thebes* alongside the *Canterbury Tales* because both narratives appear in the same textual object.⁶⁸ Perhaps, Lydgate may have wondered, it is better to tell a familiar tale that readers can judge comparatively with its existing versions (i.e., the Oedipal tales told by Seneca and Sophocles) than attempt a new story. Reliance on an *auctour* would not signify a lack of imagination but could demonstrate a shared authorial relationship across temporal junctures. Lydgate's pilgrim tale focuses on the destruction of Thebes throughout the bulk of the text with the expectation that his audience—both the internal pilgrim listeners and external readers—already know how Thebes was built.⁶⁹ While his metanarratorial statements allude to the larger reading audience, Lydgate, within the frame,

⁶⁷ On the 'new philological' approach to medieval literature and the "metalinguistic function" of tense narration and communicative norms, see Suzanne Fleischman "Philology, Linguistics, and the Discourse of the Medieval Text," pp. 36–37. See also, Susan Ehrlich "Literary Texts and the Violation of Narrative Norms," pp. 324–326, on the "incoherence" of temporal events narrated in repetition.

⁶⁸ See the above section on "Binding the Tales."

⁶⁹ Approximately 3700 lines focus on the conflict between Etiocles and Polymite out of a total 4716 lines.

narrates the destruction of Thebes to a group of known pilgrims on a specific journey at distinct locations with temporal markers.

Lydgate's *auctours* might include Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Seneca, though he does not specify whom in his various references to "myn auctour" at the onset of "Prima Pars." The language describing Amphion's talents echoes descriptions of Chaucer earlier in *Thebes* and elsewhere by Hoccleve and Henryson.⁷⁰ References to Amphion's craft in Lydgate's writing may carry vestiges of respect for Chaucer,

And his song, this auctour can yow teche,
Was nothing but the crafty speche
Of this kyng ycalled Amphion;
Wherby he made the contrés envyrroun
To han such lust in his words swete
That were so plesaunt, favourable, and mete
In her eerys that shortly ther was noon
Disobeysaunt with the kyng to goon,
Whersoevere that hym list assigne.
His cheer, his port was outward so benygne
That thorgh his styryng and exortacioun
With hym they went to byld first this toun

⁷⁰ Henryson's portrait of Chaucer in the *Regiment of Princes* aligns the earlier poet with the "swetnesse" of Cicero's rhetoric, as heir to Aristotle, and as following the "steppes of Virgile in poesie" (ll. 2073–2090). In the *Testament of Cresseid*, Henryson describes Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as written "in gudelie termis and in joly veirs" (l. 59). *Joly* is none too far from *plesaunt* and *veirs*, which suggest metrical poetry, and could be linked to the "words swete" of Amphion's music. Lydgate's "The Floure of Curtesye" also describes Chaucer as "fayre making that was without wene / fayrest in our tongue" (ll. 236–239).

[And his song was nothing but the crafty speech of the king called Amphion, through which he made all the nearby areas take pleasure in his sweet words that were so pleasant, favorable, and appropriate in their ears. Shortly, there was no one who would be disobedient to the king, but they would go wherever he desired as a representative. His face and demeanor were so outwardly gracious that, through his motion {plucking of strings} and urging, they went with him to build this town.] (ll. 225–235)

The “crafty speche” (l. 226) assigned to Amphion is not too far from the “crafty writing” (l. 56) ascribed earlier to Chaucer. The positive vocabulary used for Amphion’s music mimics Lydgate’s praise for Chaucer’s writing. One result is personal accreditation, as Lydgate uses an ambiguous pronoun in line 225: “this auctour can yow teche.” While the antecedent is likely the earlier “myn auctour and Bochas bothe two” (l. 199), the ambiguous *this* in place of *myn* suggests that Lydgate may view himself as an *auctour* authorized through his references to *auctours* of his own. The repetition of “as poetys feyne in her writing” in lines 242 and 292 indicate that Lydgate refers to other poets for authorization and to bring himself into community with the poets he admires. He implicates himself with every reference to *auctours*, poets, and other storytellers. Just as he gestures to writers whose texts are based upon others (“Groundyng hem upon olde auctours” in line 294), Lydgate exposes his own habits. Retelling the Theban cycle through a Chaucerian frame narrative (which follows that of Bocaccio) situates Lydgate’s metadiscursive style in community and collaboration with others.

The pilgrim storyteller and the authorial persona meet in lines that structure episodic boundaries. In lines 316–324, Lydgate contextualizes the passage about Amphion because the description provides “informacioun / cleerly the pith and exposicioun” (ll. 317–318) for the

following Theban stories. Intentional textual construction and metatextual framing aid the reading experience for both the fictive pilgrim listeners and the medieval reading audiences. Metanarratorial statements signal the next segment of a story for pilgrims (and readers) who may be listening to a story told from books, as Lydgate proposes his tale will serve “to telle forth, in bokes as I rede” (l. 335). Clauses such as “in story as I fynde” (l. 614) simultaneously finish the poetic line and signal the construction of the texts. The same principle applies in the line “as the story after shal declare” (l. 874). The term *after* functions as linear and directional: both the next section of the story and the materials which occupy the following space (of time and of the book). The closing lines in “Prima Pars” likewise situate the time and space for the pilgrim frame rather than the temporal setting for the following section of the Theban story (the “Secunda Pars”),

And whan we ben descendid doune this hil

And ypassed her the lowe vale,

I shal begynne the remnant of my tale.

[And when we have descended this hill and here passed by the low valley, I shall begin the remainder of my tale.] (ll. 1044-1046)⁷¹

The closing statement provides narrative transfer into “Secunda Pars,” which opens after the pilgrims have descended the hill and passed the valley. Close attention to lines in this style help readers identify the overall structure of the Theban tale nestled within the frame tale, which is itself a textual construction further demonstrative of transtemporal authorial collaboration.

Auctoritas provides writers with the ability to highlight themselves through collaboration with others. According to Alastair Minnis, the use of external writing justifies an author’s project

⁷¹ Describing the ensuing 3500 lines as a “remnant” is hilarious.

(10), and J. A. Burrow, too, suggests that authors may obscure their authority through reference to their *auctors* (35). To introduce his Oedipus tale, Lydgate writes two lines emphasizing a book that he read: “And called hym Eddippus, *as I rede*” (l. 452, emphasis added). Twice later, he states that the book he read with this story does not include specific details and, as such, neither will he. The two instances are that Polibon may not have a wife (“I fynde not and therefore lat it goon” in l. 466) and that Laius has no heir to Thebes (“for heire was non, as books specifie” in l. 761). Lydgate could have chosen to obscure missing information or fill in his own details; however, constant references to external authority illustrate his understanding of how *auctours* and existing stories can validate new authors. While the narrator Lydgate claims not to have this information, the audience (pilgrims and readers) knows that Oedipus is heir to Thebes because Lydgate documents Laius and Jocasta’s prayers for a child earlier in the text (ll. 336–433). Choosing to maintain the perception of a gap in information indicates Lydgate’s commitment to situating his story in conversation with his *auctours*. The pilgrim-narrated siege maintains its focus on the destruction of Thebes, referencing other books “as sondry clerkes write” (l. 880) for readers who are interested in the lives of Oedipus and Jocasta’s two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. Lydgate’s focus remains on the two sons, Etiocles and Polymite, from whom the destruction of Thebes ensues. He suggests reading Seneca’s version of Oedipus (which suggests that Seneca may be “myn auctour”) for the tragedy of Oedipus, though he provides a summary of Oedipus and Jocasta’s sorrow for narrative closure and a transition into the central conceit of Thebes’ destruction. References to other books, like the *auctours*, legitimate Lydgate’s storytelling task.

In “Prima Pars,” Lydgate forms his authorial persona. The frame construction suggests that fifteenth-century audiences might recognize Lydgate’s interlocutors through the literary

continuum that appears in references to the frame, other books, and his many *auctours*. The inclusion of these referents may likewise appeal to the transtemporal literary community as I have described it above.

V. DESTABILIZING THE FRAME IN “SECUNDA PARS”

My analysis of “Secunda Pars” establishes the role of readerly communities and *auctorial* authority with the latter often presented in Lydgate’s use of *occupatio*. The metatextual elements in the second part destabilize the frame constructed in the “Prologus” and “Prima Pars.” The same metatextual features establish the significance of Lydgate writing to an audience while knowing he was part of that audience. Through Lydgate’s keen understanding of audience communities, contemporary readers might consider their experience at a temporal distance from the initial reading audiences: identifying various reading moments in their historical contexts alongside how reading experiences change across time is one facet of transtemporal literacy.

The beginning of the second part returns to the overarching frame tale, identifying the time (9:00 am) and space (Boughton under Blean) at which Lydgate “shal begynne the remnant of [his] tale” (l. 1046). However, before “rehercyng forth as it was in dede” (l. 1060), Lydgate offers a brief description of the nature-scape and the details mirror the descriptions in both his “Prologus” and the opening to Chaucer’s General Prologue (ll. 1047–1060).⁷² The sun makes an appearance (l. 1049) as does Zephirus the personified west wind (l. 1054) before Lydgate returns to his tale-telling.⁷³ Following the time-space continuum of the pilgrims, Lydgate provides a

⁷² Again, find summaries of these similarities elsewhere: Edwards’ textual notes to the Middle English Text Series edition of *Thebes*, Spearing “Lydgate’s Canterbury Tale,” and Higl “The Many John Lydgates” in *Playing the Canterbury Tales*.

⁷³ For Lydgate’s pilgrims, Zephirus is “vapoured in the eire alofte . . . with his blowing softe” (*Thebes* ll. 1053–1054); compare to Chaucer’s description in the General Prologue of “Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth” (*Canterbury Tales* l. 5).

temporal contextualization for his Theban tale: “Whan Edippus buryed was and grave” (l. 1061). The story told within this section is not that of Oedipus but occurs after his burial and focuses on Oedipus’s two sons, Etiocles and Polymite. Lydgate articulates, briefly, the overall story (ll. 1061–1104): the two heirs were meant to trade rulership of Thebes on an annual basis, Etiocles does not recant his rulership after one year, and “at the ende everich loste his lif” (l. 1102). Despite the early synopsis, Lydgate suggests the tale will hence follow in a linear fashion “as ye shal after here” (l. 1103). The reference to oral storytelling provides a metadiscursive directional indicator for what comes next.

Phrases about both oral storytelling and reading from written materials destabilize the frame tale context. While scholars typically identify certain phrases as metrical necessities, these moments reveal connections between different narrative forms. Colette Moore supplies the term “lexical markers” for the moments where a writer deploys common phrases or structures to introduce speech (*Quoting* 44–49). Many of the common lexical markers she identifies are present in Lydgate’s writing in what I refer to as his metadiscursivity. While Moore’s project involves the identification of direct and indirect speech as it appears in Middle English texts, I consider the lexical markers central to the project of metatextual construction in *Thebes*.⁷⁴ As an example, a metanarratorial statement appears in “As ye han *herde* in the storye *rad*” (l. 1407, emphasis added). Lydgate connects oral and written storytelling by referencing the fictional frame pilgrims who have *heard* and his own experience having *read* (see, too, “as I rede” in line 1303), further augmented by the likelihood that an audience of the whole frame would have

⁷⁴ What some scholars view as “filler,” I understand as intentional; Moore’s approach provides much-needed context for why not dismiss such common phrases and deictic pronouns.

heard for their reading experience.⁷⁵ When “the story seith” (l. 1660), an auditory sensibility collides with what Lydgate reads in “myn auctour writ” (l. 1679) and which he “fynde[s] writ” (l. 1716). He places himself into community with his audiences when “the story telleth us” about Tydeus (l. 1874). The appearance of an innocuous first-person plural pronoun *us* demonstrates Lydgate’s understanding of literary communities as communities that include him.⁷⁶ He later refers to his *style* or *stylus* (l. 2124) as though he is actively writing this tale with a pen rather than recounting it aloud to a group of pilgrims, thus destabilizing the temporal pilgrim frame with a reference to physical writing. On the idea of subjective narrative, Moore writes,

[It is] worth considering a hypothesis that the notion of a strictly controlled and consistently voiced narrator depends upon a precise method of distinguishing voices in narrative. The dramatic monologue, the unreliable narrator, the meticulously constructed personae in narrative orientation that we find in literature rely upon the reader or listener being able to clearly separate this narratorial *I*-subject from the *I*-subject of passages of reported discourse and passages of authorial intervention. In a discursive environment where these textual perspectives are shifty and variable, this kind of narrative project is not available in the same way. Middle English texts, therefore, have only partial control of the marking of discourse orientation and cannot invoke clearly-defined narrators in the same way that later texts can. Middle English literature clearly

⁷⁵ Individual reading done in silence is not a common occurrence until the late Middle Ages, which Paul Saenger documents in *Space Between Words* as a fifteenth-century trend (see, especially, pp. 264–276). However, individualized reading, though becoming more common at the time, is not the only method of reading in this period. The transitional mode occurs more slowly than is often documented in scholarship. Joyce Coleman illustrates how aristocratic audiences in the fifteenth century experienced public reading as the “sociable literary mode” that “would have flowed naturally into conversation and commentary (or gossip) about issues of current importance in the country or the court” (72).

⁷⁶ Including that of the fifteenth-century guild (see Whearty “Chaucer’s Death”).

shows some use of narrators, but these narrative *I*-subjects are not consistently detached from the other voices that make up the narrative. (*Quoting* 163–164)

Moore's emphasis on the variable narrator compels contemporary readers of *Thebes* because Lydgate's narrative persona remains unstable and is developed through metadiscursive terminology, deictic phrases, and multiple envisionings of a Lydgate-subject within various fifteenth-century textual environments. While Moore examines speech markers in Chaucer's poetics rather than that which appears in Lydgate's corpus, I cite this passage in full to establish the unstable narratorial subject that ripples from Chaucer's writing outward to fifteenth-century English writers whose vernacular literary environment remains entangled with Chaucer's legacy.

Moments with metadiscursive phrases demonstrate how Lydgate plays with textual construction and narrative sequence. He elides information which does not appear in his sources "for it is nat declared in my boke" (l. 1505); in this moment, implying that experienced lovers would know what these characters did. While he recognizes that life experience would provide the foundational knowledge, Lydgate is hesitant to recite what lovers do "in such maner thing" (l. 1503), despite the reality that Chaucer—one of Lydgate's *auctours*—elaborates in detail on lovers and what they do throughout much of his corpus, including the *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. However, Lydgate "fynde[s]" and "the story specifies" (ll. 1506–1507) what may occur if Adrastus betroths his daughters to Polymite and Tydeus (though Lydgate minimizes women by refusing to describe the newly betrothed women in lines 1476–1479). The implication suggests that readers familiar with Chaucer's corpus would recognize the content which is conspicuously missing from Lydgate's tale. *Occupatio* may be metadiscursive, though it may also be driven by the narrative, such as when Polymite is hesitant to speak of his parentage to Adrastus,

The which, in soth, he was ful loth to telle.
And eke the kyng wold hym not compelle
Of gentillesse but bad, withoute blame,
Of his birth forto have no shame;
For hool the caas and maner every dell
Touchyng his kynne he knewe the ground ful wel,
Lich as it was, by ful clier report.

[That which, in truth, he was very unwilling to tell, and also the king, in his nobility, would not compel him to do so, but bade him to have no shame nor blame in his birth. He knew the whole case and manner, each piece concerning his genealogy such as it was, in full and clear report.] (ll. 1417–1423)

Adrastus does not compel Polymite to explain his family history, perhaps because Lydgate does not want to rehearse information that his audience(s) already know from the first part. Elsewhere, it is more explicit, such as in metadiscursive statements “Of which toform I made mencion / [. . .] / It nedeth nat to reherce it mor” (l. 1520–1522) and “For lak of tyme I lat it overslyde” (l. 1565). These lines signal the audience to recall the plot conceits despite the presence of didactic asides.

Lydgate’s *auctours* shift throughout *Thebes*, though he does not always identify his interlocuters outright. While possible that he expected aristocratic readers to identify *auctours* from context, he may have viewed himself as bringing multiple authors together in this text and within his frame tale, writing with them to retell the destruction of Thebes in the English vernacular. For example, when Lydgate introduces Tydeus, he uses the phrase “as seith myn autour” (l. 1266), which suggests that he refers again to the *auctors* Chaucer or Boccaccio,

though Lydgate later identifies Statius as he who “writ the manere howe” (l. 1272). The Tydeus section may then follow as that of Statius because Lydgate incorporates the common “as I rede” (l. 1303) to authorize his narrative retelling of materials he read in a book. However, the section on Adrastus’s dream vision comes from Boccaccio since Lydgate explicitly states it was “like as writ Bochas” (l. 1541), though he claims to shorten the tale due to time constraints of the pilgrimage frame (l. 1565). The *occupatio* here does not limit the narrative, as Lydgate references Boccaccio outright so his audience will know what to read for a fuller version of this section. When Lydgate recounts “myn autour *seith*” (l. 2144, emphasis added), it suggests that he may have been in a listening audience. His references to *auctours* and his use of the *Canterbury* frame simultaneously buttress his authority and provide cover for when he changes narrative elements.

Drawing on known tropes and stories could offer a sense of familiarity to his audiences while affording Lydgate the credentials necessary to document the destruction of Thebes in English. Line 1206 suggests both narrative and *auctors*: “And as the story pleynly can devise” (l. 1206). *Pleyn* carries multiple semantic meanings, including “completely, fully, entirely” (*MED* 33661), “(a) Of validity, permission, authority, power:” (*MED* 33666), and “(a) Clearly, distinctly, plainly; explicitly, expressly” (*MED* 33562). In “Prima Pars,” Lydgate frames his writing style as “writ in wordys pleyn” (l. 877), which contrasts with the highly ornate style most often associated with his work. *Pleyn* functions primarily in the first two definitions for *Thebes* by authorizing the story as a complete account with the power of *auctoritas* and the adverb does not appear to define his style as the so-called ‘dull’ or ‘plain’ style associated with fifteenth-century English poets after Chaucer.⁷⁷ Rather, Lydgate’s style appears often in his use of

⁷⁷ In the foundational “Dullness and the Fifteenth Century,” David Lawton argues that dull style was a topos of humility necessitated by the social atmosphere in which fifteenth-century writers worked. Lawton recuperates the

metanarratorial phrases like his plea that the pilgrims return to an earlier description: “Yif ye remembre late as I you told” (l. 1697).

Metanarratorial framing also punctuates narrative beats, helping Lydgate move between sequences in the sprawling multigenerational tale. Events transpire, at times, out of sequential order in what Susan Ehrlich calls “temporal juncture” and “incoherence.”⁷⁸ After Tydeus visits the court of Etiocles, Lydgate writes “Thus leve I hym ride forth a while, / Whilys that I retourne ageyn my style / Unto the kyng which in the halle stood” [Thus I leave him to ride forth for a while, while I return my stylus to the king who stood in the hall] (ll. 2123–2125). While Tydeus rides forth, so too are the group of pilgrims riding on their return journey. Narrating Tydeus’s travel reminds the audience that action will occur even as Lydgate deliberates further on Etiocles. Meanwhile, a story within a story appears as Tydeus rests in the garden tended by Lycurgus’s daughter. Lydgate’s *occupatio* knows no bound as he states, “It were but veyn to reherce it mor” (l. 2376) after describing what has already transpired. Lydgate states that he will not “rehercen owther telle,” but proceeds to list a series of locations Tydeus traversed and his return to the court of Adrastus (ll. 2426–2438). To his audience, Lydgate states that “Of all this to gynne a newe taler / It were in soth a maner ydelnesse” [To begin a new tale from all of this

‘dull’ style of the fifteenth century, which is, for Lydgate scholars, defined by Derek Pearsall in *John Lydgate*. Pearsall does not define Lydgate by a perceived dullness though, as he identifies the ‘dullness’ as the ‘didactic’ (*John Lydgate* 11–12). Though Pearsall describes three exceptional qualities in Lydgate’s writing in “Lydgate as Innovator,” he remains indebted to a history of Middle English literature as defined by the perceived grandeur of Chaucer’s corpus. Chaucer is certainly a crucial figure in medieval English literary studies but determining all Middle English literary verse by one figure does a disservice to both the similarities and dissimilitude in other works. Andrew Higl, in “Printing Power,” states that Lydgate’s deference to other authors and the appearance of sixteenth-century paratextual frames minimize his literary authority (64–66), whereas I read Lydgate’s references as a metadiscursive act of collaborative worldbuilding that legitimates his project.

⁷⁸ Ehrlich examines Virginia Woolf’s writing in depth, noting occasions when an event recurs with a perspectival shift. Her approach cannot be applied directly to *Thebes*, but her description of a disruption to the story’s flow by repeating events described multiple times within a linear sequence (324–326) is a compelling thought experiment for Lydgate’s constant shifts between pilgrim narrator and authorial writer.

would truly be a waste of time] (ll. 2440–2441), as though he would not dare elaborate further. Yet he continues to articulate the next things that happen (ll. 2442–2447), finally offering that “withoute which my tale is long ynowe” (l. 2447).⁷⁹

Sections with metanarratorial statements also provide requisite narrative information. After describing Tydeus’s arduous journey back to Adrastus’s court, Lydgate returns to the court of Etiocles: “But now most I make a digressioun / To tell shortly as in sentement” (ll. 2466–2467). After Tydeus defends himself from Etiocles’s assassins, one surviving knight must return to Thebes to warn Etiocles. That happens here, with the returning knight warning Etiocles about his falseness (ll. 2495–2505). “Secunda Pars” ends in this section. The knight warns Etiocles, then the knight dies by suicide, and finally all the knights who died fighting Tydeus are laid to rest. Funerary rites close “Secunda Pars,” recalling the earlier rites described for the deaths of Laius and Oedipus. The cyclical repetition of narrative beats provides literary parallelism that anticipates the forthcoming destruction while reminding the audience of death: of Oedipus in “Prima Pars,” of the knights here, of Chaucer, and, eventually, of Lydgate and the readers themselves.

The rhetorical style in “Secunda Pars” reflects its credentialing nature and the importance of the storyteller with particular writing habits. John Lydgate, as a particular writer,⁸⁰ employs common rhetorical phrases with a metadiscursive flair through which he implicates himself as both reader and writer, both tale-teller and tale-listener. The metatextual construction of his *Thebes* story through the Canterbury frame tale shows its seams in its references to other tales. A garment could not be made without a variety of materials: thread, fabric, needle. Fabric requires

⁷⁹ Lines 2446–2447 provide a frame context for the pilgrim audience.

⁸⁰ By particular, I refer to the common description by scholars of Lydgate as a dull and expansive cataloguer.

threads and weaving tools; thread requires roving and spinning tools; roving requires fiber and carding tools; and so on.⁸¹ The collaborative labor is often hidden by the singularity of the finished object. From such, comes this. Lydgate's rhetorical style and frequent use of intertextual references can be read as deferential and dull if it is seen in only its constituent parts. However, when references to *auctors* are paired with canny *occupatio* and a developing but mutable narratorial persona, the constituent parts of Lydgate's *Thebes* are carded, spun, woven, and sewn together into an object that offers glimpses of each that are told through the one.

VI. METADISCURSIVE SIGNALS IN "TERCIA PARS"

Throughout the *Siege of Thebes*, Lydgate weaves in references to textual construction. The threads come together by "Tercia Pars" and the significance of writing can be clearly identified by the focused reader in Lydgate's metadiscursive signals and narratorial style. In the following section, I illustrate how it is not simply the Canterbury frame which illustrates a shared transtemporal authorship, but the careful use of rhetorical style and clausal phrases that connect Lydgate's project with his literary community in the fifteenth century and with the authors of his past who share in his telling of the destruction of Thebes. Guiding statements in the construction of the text illustrate the historic context in which Lydgate accumulates multiple histories across temporal junctures.

References to *auctoritas* continue in the third part, and Lydgate embeds metadiscursive narratorial style in the first fifteen lines by referencing "bookes olde" (l. 2561). The Theban narrative memorializes *unkynde*: that which is against nature (*MED* 49020). Allusions to other texts that document the destruction of the city emphasize that "the story maketh mynde / oonly of blood corrupt and unkynde / b'ynfeccioun called orygynal" [the story tells of corrupt blood,

⁸¹ See chapter three for my work on textile labor in Middle English verse.

unkynde, and original sin] (ll. 2563–2565). The reference to *unkynde* and original sin in lines 2564–2565 suggest that the “bookes olde” may include not simply his Thebes *auctours* but also passages from religious scripture.⁸² When introducing a narrative segment with “as the story fully hath devised” (l. 2887), Lydgate assigns creative credit to the story itself rather than his past interlocuters. In another instance, he writes that the “bookes specifye” each of the descriptors assigned to Amphiorax in the tale (ll. 2809), though the accolades in *Thebes* may differ from those of his exemplars.⁸³ Lydgate reinforces the legitimacy of his narrative retelling by noting that the next section of the tale comes from a book, using the metadiscursive “as I rede” (l. 2597, l. 2766) and “as I fynde” (l. 2603) to establish intertextual referents. When he introduces Palamon (as in Palamon and Arcite of the Knight’s Tale), he prefaces that “the story telleth us” (l. 2608) and “myn autour seith” (l. 2616). Lydgate’s inclusion of the first-person plural *us* illustrates that, though he is narrating the story, he is also in community with his audience and was a reader himself. While Lydgate utilizes tropes of *auctoritas* to support his project, he also makes clear when he digresses from his exemplars to construct his own narrative.

Though Lydgate references *auctours* and other books frequently in *Thebes*, he also provides clear statements about what he does to tell the story and the phrases are often connected to the conceit of the frame tale. In “Tercia Pars,” Lydgate returns to the metadiscursive frame tale to justify his occlusions and *occupatio*. In one such example, he identifies two limitations to a recounting of the clothing and heraldry of the knights assembling for battle,

And therupon do my bysy cure

⁸² It makes sense, of course, because John Lydgate was a monk of Bury St. Edmunds.

⁸³ As an example, Edwards, in the explanatory notes to his edition of *Thebes* (170) refers to Renoir’s *The Poetry of John Lydgate* wherein the latter articulates that Lydgate provides a positive description of Amphiorax in opposition to a French source.

It wer in soth almost a dayes werk

And the termes also ben to derk

To reherce hem clerly and to ryme.

[And thereupon, describe with my full attention / It would be, in truth, almost a day's work / And the words are also too obscure / To tell them clearly and in rhyme.] (ll. 2666–2669)

The chief issues are that it will take too long to describe all the heraldic devices and, even if he did, it would necessitate specialized language. Readers may perceive the additional vocabulary required to describe clothing and heraldry as “intentionally obscure, deceptive, malicious” (*MED derk* 11230, n. 5) and an excessive use of time, or at least that is how Lydgate describes it. As Moore notes, “the word *termes* indicates particular words that are used in larger proportions in a certain genre or register of texts and therefore begin to characterize these texts” (“Everyday English” 199). The specialized vocabulary that Moore associates with *termes* illustrates a genre awareness underlying Lydgate’s elision of heraldic details. Lydgate further states that it would be taxing to list the full attributes in rhyme, though he claims to exclude such details “only for lak of tyme.” The pilgrim frame provides the reasoning through which Lydgate does not elaborate, even as he is fully capable of cataloguing the assembly of knights. D. Vance Smith, among others, refers to Lydgate’s impressive abilities as encyclopedic cataloguer (187–189), so the moments wherein Lydgate does not amplify, elaborate, or expand deserve attention as examples of his experimentation with form and textual construction.

A transitive moral message about princes follows the above *occupatio*. Lydgate writes, “And in a prince it is ful gret offence / As clerkes seyn and a greet reproof / Suffre his puple lyven at mescheef” [And in a prince, it is a huge transgression, / as clerks say, / to allow his

subjects to live in hardship] (ll. 2688–2690). He defers to the authority of clerks, as in “a learned person” (*MED* 7991, 2a) or “an official in charge of records and accounts” (7991, 3a), but implies *the* clerk: Chaucer. The aside that begins in line 2688 and lasts until line 2722 describes a moral tale demonstrative of what such “clerkes seyn;” the king’s record keepers would be aware of what royal behaviors do or do not hurt the king’s subjects. In the didactic section, Lydgate implies that writers and record keepers with royal patrons may not be willing to share when “in a prince it is ful gret offence” (l. 2668) to misbehave, though they may know their patron’s shortcomings. If *Thebes* is Lydgate’s advice to princes, it is significant that he does not mention a patron in the text. Unlike the *Troy Book*, which has a known patron, the patron-less *Thebes* suggests that Lydgate comments on general (mis)behaviors and the conduct of the aristocratic ruling class.⁸⁴ Lydgate’s central message here values interpersonal relationships over material possessions, chiefly for the “love of his puple evermore to wyne” (l. 2712). He offers Adrastus as a model in lines 2724–2726, drawing on the *specula* tradition to encourage an audience to treat him as “a merour” [a mirror] (l. 2724). Adrastus’s model behaviors (ll. 2725–2735) serve as cue to an aristocratic audience and a narrative marker back into the Thebes plot: “All attones to Thebes forto ryde / . . . / As ye toforn han herd me specifie” [All at once to ride to Thebes / . . . / as you have heard me describe before] (ll. 2732–2736). The return to the frame, together with intentional *occupatio* and a didactic message, illustrate intentional textual construction.

Metadiscursive phrases establish Lydgate’s familiarity with late medieval multitextuality. He incorporates a brief story from Statius where a gentle tiger is sent to Thebes as a gift for Ismene and Antigone. When the tiger is let into the fields outside the town, young Greek soldiers kill the tiger because they fear that it is vicious (ll. 3828–3873). Theban soldiers, angered by the

⁸⁴ In his introduction to the text, Edwards notes the general scholarly consensus that *Siege of Thebes* does not have a patron in contrast M. C. Seymour’s suggestion that *Thebes* was written for Humphrey Duke of Gloucester.

tiger's death, choose to "t'avengen yif they might" by attacking the Greek soldiers (l. 3880). Lydgate contextualizes the shared storytelling with four metadiscursive lines that construct *auctoritas* for his version: "as clerkys make mencion" (l. 3835); "wryten as I fynde" (l. 3839); "myn autour writ the same" (l. 3849); and "the story doth expresse" (l. 3862). Each moment illustrates that external sources make possible Lydgate's inclusion of Statius's tiger anecdote, and the phrases carry an implicit connotation of written referents. The tiger story acts as a "dyverte" [diversion] (l. 3826) wherein Lydgate can bring an *auctor's* tale into his own. The tale is *mencion[ed]*, *wryten*, and *writ* for Lydgate to *fynde* and *expresse*. The inclusion of vocabulary terms tailored to bookish authority demonstrate how Lydgate tells a story across temporal discontinuity with his interlocuters and exemplars. Metadiscursive indicators that the tale exceeds singular authorship continue in the transition from the tiger anecdote to the section where Jocasta seeks to foster peace between her sons (ll. 3933–3944) as Lydgate deftly illustrates a transtemporal *auctoritas* by comparing "some bookes" to "my autour" (ll. 3971–3972). In a later section focused on Amphiorax's descent to hell, Lydgate pronounces that the prophet is "ful renomyd of antiquité / and wel expert because he was old" [fully renowned from antiquity / and clearly an expert because he was old] (ll. 4024–4025). The descriptors imply deference to age but also function as a metadiscursive statement about Lydgate's sources as *auctours* that are likewise "renomyd of antiquité," such as his Theban literary forebears, Sophocles, Statius, and Seneca. However, despite the characters' respect for Amphiorax, he plunges into hell from which "never after Grekis with hym mette" [never after would Greeks meet with him] (ll. 4034–4038). The judgment implies that even the wisdom of the pagan prophet cannot provide his salvation. Edwards notes the claim that Lydgate draws on Chaucer's Franklin's Tale for Amphiorax's fate, suggesting that pagan rites align with descriptions in

Troilus and Criseyde. I add that Lydgate's background as a Christian monk could further emphasize an impetus for compelling conversion in the Greek soldiers. The expansive literary environment that crosses periodized boundaries becomes evident in Lydgate's skillful storytelling as he incorporates references to the existing tales and vocabulary that helps the reader identify how the narrative is structured.

Adrastus's remark on the "example of our progenitours" (l. 4139) reminds the reading audience of the many examples Lydgate has woven together throughout the tale thus far. Though "as I fynde" is often considered a formulaic phrase, it functions as a metadiscursive statement as well. Here, the metadiscursive "as I fynde" (l. 4174) illustrates that Lydgate *finds* components of his tale. Marginalia narrates Tydeus's death which, as Lydgate later states, he brings from Boccaccio's work (l. 4218). Lydgate further appeals to the authority of Boccaccio "as myn auctor wel reherce kan" (l. 4231) and "Bochas writ" (l. 4235). When Lydgate applies the same descriptors as his *auctor* rehearsed, he is in conversation and collaboration with his literary predecessors. Edwards, in an explanatory note, pairs Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium* with Statius, Dante's *Inferno*, and Chaucer's Monk's Tale. Because Lydgate has referenced each author at various moments throughout *Thebes*, it is plausible that he implies each of them as an *auctor* that "wel reherce kan" and from whose stories he develops the *Siege of Thebes*.

A metadiscursive reference to *auctoritas* and elements that emphasize transtemporal collaborative world-building often coincide with a narratorial reminder of the pilgrim storyteller. Lines 4252–4254 pair *auctoritas* with *occupatio* to justify truncated storytelling: "But al the maner tellen I ne may / Of her fightyng nor her slaughter in soth, / Mor to declare than myn autour doth" [I may not tell in any way / Of their fighting or their slaughter, in truth / More to say than myn *auctour* does] (ll. 4252–4254). While Lydgate does not seem to want to embellish the

existing story more than his *auctour*, he does modify elements in the Oedipus tale. Despite referencing that he will not add what is not there (as he does in the Jocasta passage toward the end of “Prima Pars”), Lydgate elaborates throughout *Thebes*, putting his work into collaborative, transtemporal multitextuality. The fighting and slaughter that Lydgate hopes to elide is, in truth, the climactic moment of the tale. He will “fynde as ye may sen” [find as you may see] (l. 4255) the fratricidal combat between Polymite and Etiocles, which serves as another reminder of layered audiences and the conflation of seeing in a book, the mind, or in person. Placing two brothers in single combat echoes that of Palamon and Arcite in Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale, which is also referenced during the Hypsipyle portion of “Tercia Pars.” The aftermath of the two brothers’ deaths in battle incorporates multiple references for finding the details in other stories, thus brought into Lydgate’s narrative “lik as it is founde” (l. 4391) and “lik as I rede” (l. 4417). Metadiscursive *occupatio* follows, prompting the reading audience to notice how Lydgate embeds the Thebes story in a pilgrim frame. He references the space-time continuum of travelling pilgrims to elide further descriptions of mourning over the deaths: “Therof I myghte make a newe tale / Almost a day yow to occupye” [Thereof if I might make a new tale / it would occupy you for a day] (ll. 4425–4425). In a section editorializing women’s lament, Lydgate provides a familiar point of reference for the pilgrim audience as well as reading audiences familiar with pilgrimage. The women “barfote forth they wente” [barefoot, they went forth] (l. 4445), a reminder of the legend that Henry II journeyed barefoot to Becket’s tomb in Canterbury. Because the destruction of Thebes is told through a Canterbury frame, ritual mourning can be aligned with pilgrimage rituals.

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasized the significance of a collaborative *auctoritas* across temporal boundaries, including such boundaries as being alive at the same moment in

time. John Lydgate's Canterbury tale—often appended to the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, especially throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—anticipates how the craft of writing can reveal transtemporal connections. Attention to metadiscursive cues helps the reading audience see a literary relationship no longer bound by patrilineal authorship.

VII. THEMATIC CASE STUDY: A STORY THAT CAN TEACH

While the previous sections examine metadiscursive textual construction as it appears in manuscript evidence, the prologue, and each of the three parts comprising *Thebes*, I now turn to specific examples of moral instruction that occur throughout *Thebes*. My elaboration on the moral focus is not to undermine existing scholarship on Lydgate's moral motivations, but to examine the importance of audience awareness for the moments in *Thebes* concentrated on moral instruction. Earlier, I referenced Ganim's recognition of Lydgate's appeal across social divisions; Pearsall, too, suggests that Lydgate's audience is not limited to the aristocratic court but includes the rising middle class:

The real pressure [for didactic and moral materials] comes from elsewhere [than court patronage], from the minor gentry and upper bourgeoisie, not so much as patrons but as readers, a large and growing audience eager for information and instruction as well as entertainment. . . . Nothing happened overnight, but by the early fifteenth century the class which before Chaucer has to be content with second-hand and second-rate versions of French romance, has the prestige and authority not only to absorb in modified form the full didactic tradition in literature, but also to annex courtly literature to its own tastes. (*John Lydgate* 71)

Thebes, as I have suggested thus far, subverts easy descriptions of a primary audience. Because the text moves fluidly between the frame narrative and a metadiscursive reflection on authorship, the appearance of didactic appeals to specific audiences is unsurprising.

Lydgate uses the destruction of Thebes and the animosity between two brothers, in part, to teach his audiences: the frame tale pilgrims as well as audiences beyond the frame. Perhaps the *Siege*, a precursor to *Fall of Princes*, was Lydgate's version of Hoccleve's *Regiment*?⁸⁵ Continuous didactic asides seem better suited to rulers and those in power than the collection of pilgrims that Chaucer describes. Ayers suggests that the primary audience for *Thebes* is "those groups which were generally preoccupied with the privileges, responsibilities, and problems of government" (465), such as rulers and the upper gentry. Possible evidence to that theory, Lydgate tailors the advice against incest to "every man take hede / wherso he be prynce, lorde, or kyng" (ll. 802–803). There are no princes, lords, or kings among the Canterbury pilgrims in either Lydgate or Chaucer's descriptions of them, so this section demonstrates a keen awareness of both the in-narrative audience and an external audience. However, the text is not limited to the pilgrims, the court, and the rising middle class. Lines 1019–1046 provide advice to children, who do not appear in the roster of pilgrims, which again indicates Lydgate's awareness of an extratextual audience. A statement appearing as part of the Adrastus story serves as a warning to pilgrims that anticipates the extratextual readers: "But thing in soth that destiné hath shape / Her in this world ful hard is to eskape, / Eke merveyulous a man t'eschewe his fate" [But, truly, the thing that destiny has shaped is hard to escape here in this world: it is also astonishing for a man to escape his fate] (ll. 1233–1235). The warning gestures toward that ultimate fate: death. In *Thebes*, men cannot escape their fates, their turn on Fortune's wheel. Neither, as the warning

⁸⁵ Or vice versa: perhaps Hoccleve borrowed the thematic idea from Lydgate, as the latter was more renowned in their time.

claims, can readers eschew that which will come to them. Chaucer is dead, but Lydgate is not—at least, not yet.

With *Thebes*, audiences hear warnings against falseness and duplicity alongside the reminder that destiny may yet shape the good and bad alike. Advice for princes is distinct from the Theban tale (ll. 1721–1773) and calls on the destruction of Thebes to serve as a warning for those in power (ll. 1776–1800). Referencing Esdras, Nehemiah, and Solomon, Lydgate advises rulers toward honesty such that “trouthe first, withouten eny wene, / is chief pylar that may a kyng sustene / in joye and honour for to lede his lyff” [truth first, undoubtedly, is the chief pillar that will support a king in order to lead his life with joy and honor] (ll. 1725–1727). He invites kings to read to the end of the story, both his Theban tale and that of Esdras, to “seth how many han ben overthrowe / thorgh her falshede fro Fortunes Whel” [see how many have been overthrown from Fortune’s Wheel through their falseness] (ll. 1756–1757). The section on Esdras is distinct from the Theban frame, though Lydgate utilizes Etiocles as an example of that “falshede” which will result in ruin. Lydgate establishes his authority with didactic messages direct audiences to other stories and invite readers to consider an expansive multitextual literary environment.

Lydgate deftly nestles stories within the frame to summarize information and illustrate a sense of shared narrative. By allowing the characters to tell their own stories, Lydgate narrates together with the stories from which he pulls threads. When Tydeus brings Etiocles’ offer to Polymite, Lydgate frames the nestled story as “Gynnyng his tale thus, as ye shal here” (l. 1900). This line elides narrative boundaries by suggesting that the audience—and again, *Thebes* has dual audiences due to the internal pilgrim audience and the external reading audience—will hear the character speak. Not only does this approach allow the transfer of narrative information,

Lydgate demonstrates his ability to let the characters convey moral lessons. Tydeus becomes Lydgate's representative for assessing morality when he suggests that Etiocles select a council of witnesses to ensure the peaceful transfer of power between the two heirs to Thebes,

Lik thi desert thow shalt ha thy mede.

For God above of his rightwysnesse

Swich open wrong shal in hast redresse,

And of his myght al such collusion

Reforme ageyn and al extorsioun.

For this the fyn, falshede shal not vaile

Ageynes trouth in feeld to hold batayle.

Wrong is croked, bothen halt and lame.

[Like your merit, you shall have your reward. / For God above in his justice / shall redress such open wrongs in haste / and, in his might, reform again all collusion and extortion. / For this ending, falseness shall not profit / against truth in the field where battle is held. / Wrongness is crooked, both will be stopped and disabled.]

(ll. 2072–2079)

While Tydeus speaks directly to Etiocles in this passage, the moralizing tone and appeals against “falshede” echo other didactic passages. The similarities between Lydgate's metanarratorial asides and Tydeus's warning to Etiocles indicate an interest in providing didactic lessons throughout all sections of *Thebes*.

Lydgate editorializes the advice, inflecting the narrative with his own thoughts on siege warfare, when Polymite, Adrastus, and the Greek army surround Thebes in “Tercia Pars.” Etiocles suspects that some of his counselors may support his brother Polymite, so he concocts a

plan to seek counsel through which he might identify who to trust (ll. 3618–3620). Those who encourage Etiocles to fight, as Lydgate explains, “hadde of were non experience” [had no experience of war] (l. 3636), whereas the “moor prudent” deliberate before declaring that Etiocles should accord by the original terms “so that his word, the worse to mak hym spede, / be nat founde variant fro the dede” [so that his word, to his advantage, may not be found different from his deeds] (ll. 3639–3646). The reminder to be true in words and deeds echoes earlier didactic cues, which suggest an implicit motivation by Lydgate to compel rulers toward good action. The moralizing sentiment continues with a statement from Jocasta, who tells her son that “swich doubleness” does not befit a king (l. 3650). Jocasta’s recommendations, like Adrastus’s conversation with Lycurgus and his queen on mourning,⁸⁶ provide an opportunity for Lydgate to speak through the characters. Where Jocasta tells Etiocles that “as al the toune wil record, in ded, and ber witnesse” (ll. 3653–3654), the audience also hears Lydgate declaring the same record. The witness now is the *Siege of Thebes* itself: a king’s duplicity will lead to death, destruction, and a narrative retold across time. All will record and bear witness repeatedly when reading and rereading *Thebes*. Still, Etiocles disregards the sensible warning and declares that he will allow Polymite the year as a ruling subject under the titled king Etiocles (ll. 3761–3764), though none of his counsel will carry this message to Polymite so Jocasta must go in their stead (ll. 3727–3732). When Jocasta shares the offer with Polymite, Adrastus, Tydeus, and the full company of Greeks, the sieging company does not agree. Amphiorax delivers another vision, which Lydgate uses to remind the audience of the destruction that is coming: “This fyn shal cause a destruccion / Of hem echon, yif it forth procede / To be parfoured and execute in ded” [This end shall cause the destruction / Of each of them if it proceeds forth, / Performed and executed in this

⁸⁶ See the narrative case study below.

way] (ll. 3808–3810). Were the combative men to listen to the aged Amphiorax, they might well see the coming annihilation but, as Lydgate illustrates, Amphiorax had little audience for his visions (l. 3812). So too might Lydgate consider his own little audience, resulting from a patron-less piece that preaches peace.

Each moment of didactic teaching in *Thebes* indicates an awareness of fifteenth-century readers' desire for moral instruction. In Lydgate's deft hands, the prestige of court literature merges with a burgeoning vernacular tradition, resulting in an instructive and engaging book that compels readers to consider their behaviors and to continue their instructional readings elsewhere (in Chaucer, Boccaccio, and all manner of Classical histories). Lydgate knits such edifications together with ease for an audience receptive to this manner of moral education. About halfway through his tale, when Lydgate brings Tydeus to challenge Etiocles for Polymite's inherited right to rule in "Secunda Pars," the tale-teller again refers to his story as the authoritative one—a metaphor that alludes to authors and not simply author. Lydgate writes, "the story can you teche" (l. 1995), which seems at first, situated within a larger description,⁸⁷ to qualify the derision with which Etiocles denies his brother's claim and inheritance. With the recurring moralistic passages, the line connects the fifteenth-century English audience's interest in moral education with Lydgate's clever ruse to speak peace through his text.

VIII. NARRATIVE CASE STUDY: HYPISYPYLE IN "TERCIA PARS"

As a focused study on metadiscursive reminders about its collaborative and intertextual basis, I now consider Lydgate's Hypsipyle tale, which appears in lines 3019–3543 of "Tercia

⁸⁷ The full passage reads "Al that he spak, who that couth adverte, / Of verrey scorn, rooted in his herte: / As it sempte, the story can you teche, / By the surplus sothly of his speche. . ." [All that he said, known and observed the true scorn rooted in his heart as it seemed by the remainder of his true speech, the story can teach to you. . .] (ll. 1993–1996). The passage continues with Etiocles' speech inviting Tydeus (and, by extension, Polymite) to challenge his rule if they so dare (ll. 1993–2034).

Pars.” After describing Tydeus and his retinue of Greek soldiers entering an arbor where Hypsipyle sits with an infant, Lydgate specifies that his version of this story develops from an existing tale “in story as I rede” (l. 3034).⁸⁸ The Hypsipyle portion in the third part of *Thebes* provides a concentrated exemplar for Lydgate’s metadiscursive storytelling, multitextual world-building, and awareness of codicological and textual construction; these three elements signify writing practices indicative of transtemporal literacy in Middle English literature.

Hypsipyle’s story in the arbor is a tragic one, and Lydgate opens with her fall from Fortune: “But now, allas, my mater disespeyred / of alle joye and of welfulnesse / and destitute of myrth and alle gladnesse / for now of woo gynne the sharpes shoures” [But alas, the thing loses all hope, joy, and good fortune, and is destitute of mirth and gladness, for now begins the storms of woe and strokes of misfortune] (ll. 3212–3215). The Greek army disregards a prophecy from Amphiorax and begins their journey to Thebes, but a lack of potable water causes unbearable thirst and soldiers die by suicide rather than suffer the effects of dehydration (ll. 2989–3018). Tydeus scouts ahead to seek water and discovers Hypsipyle with an infant (ll. 3019–3037). He asks her for aid, and she is stirred by “verrey pité” (ll. 3038–3068). Though she is loath to put the infant’s life at risk and equally fearful of leaving the child unattended, she offers to lead him to a nearby stream (ll. 3069–3088). She hides the infant under a bush so that she might save the Greeks without endangering the child (ll. 3089–3099). While she attends to Tydeus’s needs, the child is “slayn of a serpent” (l. 3218) and dies from its venom. Lydgate gives voice to Hypsipyle’s grief, and, in her monologue, she takes singular responsibility for the

⁸⁸ Lydgate seems to tell Hypsipyle’s story from the *Thebaid*, where she is in servitude as nurse to the son of Lycurgus and his queen, deferring to Boccaccio’s *De Claris Mulieribus* for Hypsipyle’s life as queen of Lemnos when she saved her father when the women of Lemnos killed the men of Lemnos. As queen of Lemnos, she had an affair with Jason of the Argonauts, who leaves her and their two children during his quest for the golden fleece. There are multiple accounts of Hypsipyle’s encounter with Jason and the Argonauts, including Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica* and Ovid’s *Heroides* 6. Though Jason’s relationship with Medea is better-known, Hypsipyle and Medea are paired in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*.

child's death (ll. 3229–3259).⁸⁹ In her misery, she begs Tydeus and Adrastus to plead on her behalf so that she will not be killed as punishment for the child's accidental death (ll. 3260–3289).

The section on Hypsipyle's grief reminds the reader of its metatextual framing, highlighting Lydgate's skill in weaving together sequential narratives, compiling linked tales, and situating each within the overall frame tale. A half-line clause reminds the audience of the frame tale's oral storytelling: "And to Adrastus seid, *as ye shul here*" (l. 3315, emphasis added). While the half-line provides poetic meter, it also prompts the reader to recall the overall frame and its nestled stories. Hypsipyle speaks to Tydeus, Tydeus shares her woes with Adrastus, and Adrastus shares the tragic news of the child's death with Lycurgus. However, the frame tale limits the depth of this portion with Lydgate reminding his audiences of a temporal rather than textual construct:

But al a day wolde not suffise

Alle her sorowes in ordre to devise

First of the kyng and of the quene also

To tellen all, I shulde never ha do

Not in the space of almost an hour.

[But an entire day would not be adequate / To place all her sorrows in sequence /

First, of the king, and of the queen also / To tell all, I should never be able to do /

Not in the space of an hour.] (ll. 3401–3405)

⁸⁹ Lydgate's misogynist tendencies appear whenever he describes women as wholly to blame for tragic occurrences.

Though Lydgate notes that a full description of parental grief would exceed his allotted time, the next section features Adrastus discussing grief, death, and the afterlife with Lycurgus and his queen. Lydgate sets the scene,

And Adrastus in the same tide
Lycurgus took a litil out aside
And ful wisely with his prudent speech
(The qwen present) gan hym forto tech
That so to sorowe awaylle may right noght
To mordre hymself with his owne thouht
Sith loos of deth no man may recure
Thogh he in woo perpetuelly endure
Al helpeth nat whan the soule is go.

[And Adrastus, at the same time, took Lycurgus and the queen aside and wisely, with prudent speech, began to teach them that sorrow may not be all beneficial, nor would it help to murder himself with his own thoughts, since loss by death may no man recover. Though he will endure woe perpetually, it does not help at all when the soul is gone.] (ll. 3409–3417)

Adrastus teaches the king and queen how to grieve without succumbing to it, while Lydgate uses Adrastus as an agent through which to convey another moral message. The passage that follows in lines 3418–3449 suggests a monologue, but the lack of narrative-specific details indicates a wide applicability to various audiences and not simply Lycurgus and his queen. Lydgate reminds the audiences that “Nor kyng is non, duk, nor emperour / that may hym shroude ageyn the fatal shour / of cruel deth” [There is no king, nor duke, nor emperour who may shroud himself against

the fatal shower of cruel death] (ll. 3425–3427), which prompts aristocratic and gentry audiences alike to think on their eventual deaths. Through Adrastus, Lydgate reiterates that death comes for all, regardless of status, and that “Yourself to drowne in torment and in woo . . . is gret folly and undiscreccioun” [To drown yourself in torment and woe . . . is great folly and poor judgment] (ll. 3446–3449). Such a moment combines a moral impetus for goodness with a gentle reminder that death and the grief that follows are natural but must be measured.⁹⁰ All this he fits into just over one hundred lines, a moment in a much longer text (which is itself a short text compared against his larger corpus).

The Hypsipyle tale frequently reminds the reader of its collaborative referents whereby “the story maketh mynd” (l. 3291). *Mynd*, here, may refer to the common Middle English definition of human consciousness and memory (*MED* 27806, n. 1a, 2, 3a), but it could also suggest the *mynd* that is “a great number, a multitude” (*MED* 27807). The story, with Lydgate’s careful attention, illustrates a multitude of stories. Metadiscursive phrases recur, including “myn autour maketh rehearsaille” (l. 3154) and “as ye may rede” (l. 3157). Lydgate names his *auctour* as Boccaccio in line 3172: “as Bochas telle can.” A description of Hypsipyle’s story justifies her significance, and Lydgate references the iterative versions that appear in Boccaccio and elsewhere (including Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*, and Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*). For context, I quote the descriptive passage in full,

And by Jason some bookis telle
That this lady hadde sones two
Whan that he and Hercules also
Toward Colchos by hir contre cam

⁹⁰ See the above section, “Thematic Case Study: A Story that Can Teach,” on didactic instruction.

For t'acomplyssh the conquest of the ram

But who that lyst by and by to se

the story hool of Ysyphylee

Hir fadres name of which I also I wante

Thouh some seyn he named was Thoante

And some bokes Vermes ek hym calle

But to knowe the adventures alle

Of this lady Isyphile the faire

So feithful ay and inly debonayre

Lok on the book that John Bochas made

Whilom of wommen with rethorikes glade

And directe be ful sovereyn style

To fayre Jane, the queen of Cecile

Rede ther the rubrich of Ysiphyle

Of her trouth and her hegh bounte

Ful craftily conpiled for her sake.

[And some books tell that this lady had two sons by Jason, who came with

Hercules through her country toward Colchas to accomplish the conquest of the

ram. Whosoever desires to see in due time the whole story of Hypsipyle (her

father's name of which I also want, though some say his name was Thoante, and

in some books he is also called Vermes) and to know all the adventures of the

lady Hypsipyle the fair, so faithful and debonaire, look at the book that Giovanni

Boccaccio made, formerly that of women with eloquent discourses, and dedicated

in full sovereign style to fair Jayne, queen of Sicily. Read there the rubric of
Hypsipyle, of her truth and her high bounty, fully and craftily compiled for her
{Jane's} sake.] (ll. 3187–3207)

Multiple references to books demonstrate that Lydgate worked with an extensive knowledge of the existing stories. While he identifies Boccaccio's work as the "story hool," Lydgate demonstrates his knowledge of the multitextual literary environment in which he writes *Thebes*. The codicological framework in lines 3205–3207 likewise indicate a familiarity with the physical construction of a story: rubricated lines identify a shift in the narrative (the "rubrich of Ysiphyle" in line 3205); compilation was often used to organize manuscripts with a selection of connected tales ("ful craftily conpiled" in line 3207). Hypsipyle's appearances elsewhere become doubly compelling for sixteenth-century printings that bind *Thebes* with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *Legend of Good Women*, as well as Lydgate's "Floure of Curtesye." In those moments, the imperative to read her story elsewhere includes the possibility that an audience has read her story elsewhere in the same book object.⁹¹

A reference to different endings demonstrates the collaborative, open text environment in which Lydgate and Boccaccio wrote. Lydgate concludes his version of Hypsipyle with a pardon from Lycurgus, though he notes that "John Bochas the contrarie telle" (l. 3510). He summarizes Boccaccio's version, where Hypsipyle flees Thracia (ll. 3510–3519). After describing the two different endings for Hypsipyle, Lydgate notes further information that he "rede in another

⁹¹ Hypsipyle appears in both the *Legend of Good Women* and "Floure of Curtesye." The 1561 printing of "The workes of Geffrey Chaucer: newlie printed, with diuers addicions, which were neuer in print before: with The siege and destruccion of the worthy Citee of Thebes" includes the *Canterbury Tales*, *Legend of Good Women*, and *Siege of Thebes*. In the 1561 printing held in the University of Washington, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections, a later reader (no earlier than the year 1718, which was written by the same hand on fol. cccxxvj") has included a marginal notation on fol. lliij" that partially reads: "The story of Hypsipyle from Statius. Thebaid 4.85 + Ovid. Espit. 6." Though the *Thebes* portion was not retained during its rebinding, the printing held at UW indicates that later readers recognized the expansive textual environment in which Lydgate wrote *Thebes*.

place” (l. 3522), i.e., it is from neither his own story nor found in Boccaccio’s works. He then refers to Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*, naming Palamon and Arcite (ll. 3522–3535). Lydgate suggests that his audiences read elsewhere for the full story and “the trouth” of Lycurgus (ll. 3536–3540). As Taylor Cowdery explains, “For Lydgate, history defies anything but a partial telling” (589). If readers were to put the “partial” stories together—pair Lydgate’s version of Hypsipyle with that of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Statius, Ovid, and others—the narrative experience expands beyond one simple story with one simple ending toward a communitarian network that retells each tale, even briefly, in each utterance. The final word is not on Hypsipyle or Lycurgus, but on Boccaccio and Petrarch, which illustrates metacognition regarding the authority afforded to poets as Lydgate references Petrarch’s renown to justify his own use of Boccaccio. The disparate pieces, which Cowdery sees as a limitation to Lydgate’s knowledge and which others call literary patricide, are the many stories coming together in Lydgate’s work. The resonant echoes of past tales accumulate here and, rather than leave them as an absent signifier, Lydgate names his interlocuters, his collaborators, outright.

IX. CONCLUSION, OR “TO GRET A CHARGE”

Lydgate curates his authorial persona alongside Chaucer and Boccaccio by echoing the language of the *Tales* and referring to both writers as his *auctours*. He further participates in a transtemporal storytelling environment with classical rhetors such as Sophocles, Statius, and Seneca in his focus on the destruction of Thebes. The connection with texts of the past illuminates what D. Vance Smith calls Lydgate’s “refusal to see the world passing away” (186). Thus, Lydgate’s pilgrim frame exists between past and present (and, as Whearty offers, future).

Though Lydgate demonstrates his familiarity with multitextual narratives, he allows neither Chaucer nor himself to have the final, authoritative word on *Thebes*. Instead, Lydgate

mentions an alternative ending in the lines “as some auctours make mencion” (l. 4541) and “in her writyng also as they sayn” (l. 4545). Edwards identifies the alternative ending as what appears in Statius’s *Thebaid* (176), which would make sense given that Lydgate has incorporated elements from the *Thebaid* elsewhere in his *Thebes* tale. These moments offer additional details about what may have occurred in the destruction of Thebes, though Lydgate is careful to contextualize when he draws on the multitextual tradition. Though he does not speak fully to Jocasta, Antigone, and Ismene’s futures (ll. 4550–4553), Lydgate refers again to the Knight’s Tale for Theseus’s next actions, which “myn autour writ certeyn” (l. 4554). Inviting readers to find the ending elsewhere demonstrates what I have suggested is a large, transtemporal literary continuum in which Lydgate writes with his *auctors* of the past.

The fictive frame offers plausible deniability, underscoring the significance of moments where the text refers to its metadiscursive construction. At the close of Hypsipyle’s tale and after ruminating on the status of poets, Lydgate prepares for the climax of the Thebes story in six short lines,

The sege sette, shortly forto telle,
Of ful entent in their hatful pryde,
For lif or deth therupon t’abide,
Whosoever therwith be agreved,
Til they fully her purpoos have acheved;
Ther may therof be maked no relees.

[The siege was established—shortly to be told—by full intent in their hateful pride, for in that, to await life or death, whosoever was aggrieved, until they fully

haved achieved their purpose; that no release from the siege} may be provided.]

(ll. 3604–3609)

Etiocles and the story of the siege provide the oppositional behavior to the desired behavior offered as Lydgate's advice for princes. Using the Theban tale for moralizing anecdotes and didactic imperatives, Lydgate nests stories that say outright what might otherwise need mitigation in a piece dedicated to a patron. "Hatful pryde" implicates Etiocles but also Lydgate and all other authors. If, as is the typical approach, fifteenth-century writers attempt to absorb their predecessors through patrilineal violence, is that not demonstrative of hateful pride? Pride in the self and hate toward the father, from which there might be no release until that purpose is achieved? But if read in a collaborative way, as I hope to have shown can be done with Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, then both the authors and their readers might let go of cruel grief and, perhaps, acclimate to grief for the dead. As Whearty beautifully articulates, Lydgate is aware that Chaucer is dead. By continuing his work, Lydgate perpetuates Chaucer's life and even prolongs it. He takes charge of Chaucer's legacy, ensuring that it shall not be lost.

Occupatio proliferates as the tale ends (ll. 4565–4607), with Lydgate affirming that "to tellyn al were to gret a charge" [to tell it all is too great a charge] (l. 4602). While scholars might read deference to *auctoritas* in the line, I find the statement to be one of humility. The great charge is the ability to put various permutations of a multitext with many varied authors into a narrative together. Reimagining medieval narrative worldbuilding through transtemporal collaboration provides readers the opportunity to view the "great charge" of storytelling as a lesson in humility rather than patriarchal domination, thus that literary succession may instead become a transtemporal community practice. The great charge functions, too, as a reminder of the pilgrim tale-telling,

To tellyn al wer to gret a charge,
And ek also, as ye shal understonde,
At the gynnyng I took no more on honde
Be my promys, in conclusioun,
But to reherce the destruccion
Of myghty Thebes shortly and no more.

[To tell all were too great a task, / and also in the same way, as you know, / at the beginning I took no more upon myself / in accordance with my promise, in conclusion / than to narrate the destruction / of the mighty Thebes shortly, and no more.] (ll. 4603–4607)

Lydgate reminds his various audiences of the central premise for *Thebes* and lightly critiques the push for more than what suits the purpose. The final statements develop from his familiarity with existing tales, as he declares “ye get no more of me / sauf, as myn auctour liketh to compyle” [You will get no more from me except as my *auctour* liked to compile] (ll. 4611–4612). He provides narrative closure for Adrastus based on information from “myn auctour” (l. 4611), “bookys” (l. 4622), and “mencioun” (l. 4623), and the pilgrim tale trails in a restrained denouement.

The final lines of *Thebes* deliver a perfunctory ending. There is no real closure for the pilgrim frame, though Lydgate returns to his didactic inclinations in the final ninety lines. The ending warns against war, citing Thebes as the “ensample ye may se” [example you may see] (l. 4631), and refers to biblical narratives to justify the statement against war.⁹² Closing with an intercessory prayer, as Lydgate does in the final lines of *Thebes*, is standard for late medieval

⁹² The Bible becomes yet another interlocuter for Lydgate’s didactic narrative.

romance. Though Lydgate utilizes a familiar trope to end his tale, he never quite returns to the metatextual pilgrim frame; throughout the text, he conflates the frame conceit with a didactic purpose. Lydgate increases his references to books and writing alongside oral narrative in “Secunda Pars” and “Tercia Pars” to prepare readers for the final metadiscursive didacticism without need for the initial pilgrimage frame. Though he continues to use the narrative style and references to other writers, Lydgate no longer relies on the Canterbury frame to justify his closing statements. He need not return to the pilgrim milieu if his work is a Canterbury tale, because the *Canterbury Tales* has its own closure. In fact, “To continue rather than to conclude” (Bahr 256) is the cue from which Lydgate does just so for the *Canterbury Tales* in his *Siege of Thebes*. The unfinished state of the *Canterbury Tales* and, in parallel, *Thebes* leaves open the possibility for collaborative continuations by others after Lydgate, just as he did in *Thebes*.

In my examination of the *Siege of Thebes*, I have illustrated the metanarrative project in which John Lydgate constructs author, audience, text, and time through a familiar storytelling format (i.e., the pilgrim frame). Reading for the presence of metadiscursive cues allows contemporary readers to identify fifteenth-century gestures toward a transtemporal literary community. In section II, I articulate how Lydgate uses the Canterbury frame to establish himself as a skilled literary artisan in the same league as his *auctors*. Section III provides a codicological assessment of *Thebes* manuscripts and the book objects related to my analysis of Lydgate’s transtemporal collaborative project. Section IV continues the threads of section II, examining the appearances of Lydgate’s author-persona alongside appeals to *auctoritas*, while section V focuses on the relationship between the author and the audience(s) through metadiscursive rhetorical devices. Section VI emphasizes the importance of writing as a craft and highlights

metadiscursive cues within the context of late medieval multitextual literary environments. The case studies that close the chapter focus on didaction instruction indicative of audience expectations in the fifteenth century (VII) and on the Hypsipyle tale as an example of metadiscursivity and intertextuality in Lydgate's collaborative project (VIII).

The Theban story begins before Lydgate, and his iteration of *Thebes* continues beyond his lifetime in remediated editions and reprintings. Because of the narrative frame, the author (i.e., Lydgate) is simultaneously present and absent to tell the tale. As a result, present and future audiences may recall the flexibility of textual presence and the importance of metadiscursivity that may have been recognizable to past audiences. While chapter one has focused on transtemporal literacy as illuminated by metadiscursive textual construction in *Thebes*, I transition from the visible author to unseen labor in the contemporary digital editing of medieval texts. Chapter two outlines how transtemporal engagement impacts the function of the contemporary editor of medieval texts. Both chapters invite contemporary readers of medieval texts to consider different forms of labor that are preserved in historical and mediated documents.

CHAPTER 2

DIGITAL EDITING AS AUTHORIAL COLLABORATION ACROSS TIME

This chapter examines the editorial and readerly roles in transtemporal literacy, building on the ideas presented in the previous chapter on *Siege of Thebes* and the author-function. In this chapter, I argue that a model emphasizing collectivity in editing in the digital domain can help us see editors' literacy acts as interpretive composition, including that of digital encoders' markup. I offer that the interpretive efforts of all contributors, including technical expertise for born-digital projects, accumulate as compositional collaboration across time.

Editing, for me, involves not simply the intellectual work of crafting an introduction or a marginal glossary, but also the technical knowledge required for digital scholarly editions. When we prepare digital editions, we encode meaning onto the historical text. That meaning, which for many digital editions comes in the form of XML and TEI markup, is a scholarly intervention and accretive intellectual labor. Dynamic digital editions and, through extension, digital archives rethink the possibilities offered by traditional print edition and single-author, single-editor genius—perhaps even bringing scholars closer to the contours of literacy and authorship in the medieval period.⁹³ As Johanna Green reminds us,

[manuscripts] are made “real” because they are experienced. Just as postmodern theories of the archive argue that manuscripts are continually re-made by every reader, medieval to modern, so the digital manifestation of that manuscript is continually remade by its users. Interaction alters content. . . with every view of

⁹³ Sophus Helle recently described a spectrum of “medial agency” afforded to premodern authorship in “What Is an Author? Old Answers to a New Question.” Helle identifies multiplicitous activities that support “authorship” throughout time to unwork the single-author model that identifies creative genius and originality as the hallmarks of authorship (116–118).

the digital manuscript, the content is made anew, as it is encountered,
experienced, and interpreted by each individual audience member. (n.p.)

When a digital edition attempts to make the whole codex virtually accessible, it presents simultaneous absence and presence of materiality.⁹⁴ Both the scribe(s) who physically prepares the medieval manuscript and the editor(s) who prepares the modern edition will be preserved in a digital archive: attestations to the labor present at the time of making and absent through transmission.

In the following three sections, I offer an exploration of the editor-as-author, an examination of the similarities and differences when working with physical or digital textual objects, and a description of digital editing practices attuned to editorial authorship and the textual object. Underlying each section is the material reality that results from the devaluation of the interpretive work in creating digital editions: intellectual workers whose knowledge may be unrecognized and under-compensated. Digital editing protocols bring the collaborative nature of literary studies forward, inviting scholars to recognize explicitly the wide range of interpretive editorial labor as intellectual work in its own right. By rethinking the production of editions, my approach provides an ethos identifying all labor as valued labor.

I. THE INVISIBLE EDITOR IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Textual editors in the twenty-first century inherit an erasure of the editor and of the editor's participation in authorship from a mid-twentieth-century trend where medieval texts were believed to be in need of editorial meditation that could recover a lost original. In 1950, W. W. Greg extols the need for the editor to be a "fixer" of corrupt texts; his approach functions as

⁹⁴ The obvious intertext here is Jacques Derrida's "Signature, Event, Context."

the norm in scholarly editing until the late twentieth century.⁹⁵ In 1970, E. Talbot Donaldson critiques the wished-for invisibility of the editor while reflecting on the subjectivity of textual editing and editors' credibility in adjudicating discrepancies.⁹⁶ By 1985, Jerome McGann identifies the corruption model as a problem that does not account for social context and histories of production, drawing on D. F. McKenzie's need for scholars of textual studies to consider the social transmission of texts.⁹⁷ In opposition to McGann, McKenzie, and Donaldson, G. Thomas Tanselle continues to rely on Greg's metaphors of correction, though he concedes that all texts are affected by their physical transmission and every copy offers distinct evidence.⁹⁸ Tanselle's preoccupation with a noncritical editor who relies on authorial intervention relinquishes the editor's agency (despite Donaldson's earlier plea against editorial invisibility). Even so, Tanselle writes "A work need not be signed with more than one name, of course, for it to be a collaboration" (190). This statement contradicts the stringent authorial intent that Tanselle extols; the collaborative environment implicit in Tanselle's statement mirrors what McKenzie refers to as the "sociology of texts," a method to understand the full range of technical and social histories involved in the historical study of making and using documents.⁹⁹ So, too, does it mirror the interdependence that Sarah Neville references in her 2019 work on the "Transactive Memory

⁹⁵ See Greg "The Rationale of Copy-Text" [1950–51], pp. 374–378.

⁹⁶ See Donaldson, "The Psychology of Editors of Middle English Texts."

⁹⁷ See McGann "Shall These Bones Live?" and *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* and McKenzie *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*.

⁹⁸ See Tanselle, "The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention," pp. 172–183.

⁹⁹ See McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*.

System” and my current description of editorial interpretation as transtemporal, shared authorship.¹⁰⁰

Over the past seventy-five years (and likely longer), scholars interested in edition-making have been asking the same questions: how is an edition made and how are readers of the edition informed of those choices? Donaldson’s provocation—on the psychology of editors and, ultimately, of users—asks why scholars of Middle English literature routinely yield their own authority through omission (105–108). McKenzie in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* and McGann in *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* follow Donaldson with an exhortation toward social models of editing that do not obscure one’s own interventions or the interventions that have accumulated alongside the text through its transmission. Dot Porter in 2016 and Sarah Neville in 2019 echo these statements with questions tailored to the digital realm. In addition to the titular question of her keynote “What is an edition,” Porter questions how to respond to the knowledge that scholars use print editions, sometimes use digitized editions, and somewhat rarely use digital editions.¹⁰¹ Her questions will guide the section that follows and so are quoted:

Are we building the editions that scholars need? That they will find useful? Are there editions that people want that aren’t getting made? But also: Does it matter? If we are creating our editions as a scholarly exercise, for our own purposes, does it matter if other people use them or not? (n.p)

¹⁰⁰ See Neville “Rethinking Scholarly Commentary in the Age of GoogleAuthor(s).”

¹⁰¹ Porter cites Patrick Sahle’s distinction between digital scholarly editions and digitized editions (n.p.). The former, in Sahle’s (and Porter’s) paradigm, would not be able to be printed, whereas the latter, digitization of a print edition, could. Porter’s survey of self-selected medievalists, documented in the keynote, identifies an increased use of digitized editions alongside print editions, with a much smaller percentage for use of digital editions as distinct from digitized editions. To draw on an example of the *Middle English Text Series* and the *METS Online* (which I will later document in fuller depth), *METS Online* would be classified as a digitized edition in this paradigm.

Neville's approach in "Rethinking Scholarly Commentary in the Age of GoogleAuthor(s)," which is to retrain editors and users toward shared but distributed knowledge, is the beginning of an answer to Porter's first question. To answer Porter's latter question, the answer is not quite as simple as yes or no. It is "No, *but...*" and "Yes, *and...*" No, other scholars need not use a digital edition if the digital edition was a meaningful exercise for the editor, *but* academic metrics, such as job applications and tenure dossiers, rely on quantifiable projects to illustrate one's research. Yes, the preparation of an edition is an in-depth process that showcases deep intellectual work, *and* this approach demonstrates a mode of authorship that showcases transtemporal engagement. As the first user of an edition is the editor themselves, redefining the editor as an author provides an opportunity to consider the editorial conventions inherited across time.

A transtemporal approach to literary texts and their interlocuters makes possible a citation and collaboration process in, across, and through time, which broadens authority beyond a model of single-author or single-editor genius (a singularity that is often retroactively applied to medieval texts). Alexandra Gillespie presents the idea that the single author is a fiction in *Print Culture and the Medieval Author*, identifying the medieval author not as a singular identity but rather the resulting effects of mediation by writers, copyists, editors, and all who follow the initial publication and further prepare the literary works for later audiences (much in the style of McKenzie's sociology of texts).¹⁰² Where Gillespie is most interested in the circulation of medieval authors through early modern print editions, I explore the digital preparation of medieval texts and so expand her definition of the author-fiction to be inclusive of an editor-fiction. Editors reshape texts according to their sense of authorial presence or their interest in

¹⁰² As this is distinct from Foucault's author-function, I playfully refer to Gillespie's argument as the author-fiction per her development on the "author-function" (15–19).

unworking the author-fiction. The latter is evident in Míceál Vaughan's print edition of the *Piers Plowman A-Text*, where he describes the variant *Piers* poems as "distinct(ive) enough to warrant attention being paid to them on their own account and not merely in the context of the intellectual and poetic life of a supposed single fourteenth-century author, whatever his name" (10). Each contribution, when reading across time, may be relevant for understanding the development and transmission of a given text, though not every contribution is indicative of good writing or compelling authorship.¹⁰³

Those who curate texts—from medieval scribes and compilers to contemporary editors—do so by legitimating themselves and inviting readers to assume that credibility.¹⁰⁴ Editing conventions and reading practices of print editions justify the edition while fostering linear periodization and the elevation of the single-author (and, frequently, single-editor). Neville demonstrates how editors authorize their own editions through access to and mediation of archival materials, viewing editing as a practice reliant on the editor's authorized knowledge instructing readers in how to read (11–22). The resulting implication is that editorial commentary and paratextual materials construct hierarchies of editions that are determined by how much the

¹⁰³ Just as there can be harmful writing, there can be harmful editing. As an example of valuing things that perhaps should not be valued, a reviewer asked me how to respond to the editors who changed Shakespeare's use of pronouns into a heteronormative sonnet. As that information is part of the transmission and reception history, it is incumbent upon the contemporary editor to contextualize the impact of such a change. Heteronormative—indeed, homophobic—editors of Shakespeare's texts have changed the text and its reception through their interpretive decisions. Those decisions can impact the readerly experience in a major way. If the contemporary editor were to maintain the changed pronouns, they would perpetuate the ideals of the post-Shakespearean editor. If the contemporary editor reverts the pronouns to Shakespeare's initial choice, they might preclude the reader's ability to assess the use (and misuse) of editorial interpretation on the literary text (unless the editor includes paratextual material to contextualize the transmission history, which might appear as a footnote, gloss, or statement in a critical introduction; or, as with the flexibility of digital encoding, could appear in any of the aforementioned ways and directly in line with the text).

¹⁰⁴ In "Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology," Seth Lerer illustrates the flexible authority and fluid canonicity of manuscript culture through its transition to early print. For a case study in the way that early editors and readers legitimate the *auctoritas* of the medieval writer, see Megan Cook's *The Poet and the Antiquaries* on Geoffrey Chaucer's antiquarian readers.

editors illustrates that they are ‘in the know’ about this text. Gillespie writes that “Authors mediate the place of a fictional text in the world. They assign themselves and they are repeatedly assigned” (5), and I would further add that *editors* mediate the place of texts in the world. While textual scholars and book historians might agree that editors mediate texts,¹⁰⁵ some might be less enthused by the idea that editorial interpretation is a form of authorship and, further, that the preparation of texts for digital editions through in-depth encoding is also a form of editorial authorship. Bernard Cerquiglini writes that editing “always comes down to [. . .] arranging [writing] according to one’s convictions, then making their calm, self-assured order available to readers” (72). Cerquiglini focuses on the literary variance of medieval texts, which often appears as distinct material in different manuscript witnesses of the same text, and suggests that editors trace the scribal contours, the “reweavings,” which remake literary texts.¹⁰⁶ But more than his insistence on maintaining the variance and multitextuality of medieval literary traditions,¹⁰⁷ I argue that these “reweavings” can recognize the interpretive labor enacted by editors as a form of *auctoritas*. The metaphorical and etymological connection between *textile* and *textuality* is no accident: textile arts, including weaving, are created through the various labors of many workers. This network of participatory artistry mirrors the many layers of labor involved in making digital editions, including interpretive digital mark-up.

¹⁰⁵ On the nature of editorial interpretation, see Donaldson, McGann, McKenzie, Cerquiglini, Greetham, Shillingsburg, and Neville.

¹⁰⁶ For more on medieval manuscript variance, see Cerquiglini *In Praise of the Variant*, Gerald Bruns “The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture,” and Iain Higgins *Writing East*.

¹⁰⁷ I follow Iain Higgins in using “multitext” to refer to medieval texts that vary across surviving manuscripts (17–19). As many popular medieval literary texts feature structural variance between witnesses, medievalists frequently employ “multitext” to describe such texts. Stemmatic genealogy is one approach which attempts to fit multitextual narratives into a standard singular text, as is the traditional approach to *Piers Plowman* (see the introductions to almost any edition of *Piers* for an example of stemmatics in manuscript studies). Higgins’ work on *The Book of John Mandeville* assesses the variations in the conclusion of *Mandeville* as meaningfully distinct (239–264).

A born-digital edition of a literary text could document interventions at different temporal moments as generative contributions, identifying different interlocuters' encounters through time. With a flexible digital interface, users (i.e., readers) could opt into viewing this array of information. Existing digital projects feature interactive digital elements to provide user-based experience. The [Piers Plowman Electronic Archive](#) uses a mark-up system that identifies editorial notes as superscript characters ([^C] for codicological notes, [^T] for textual notes, [^P] for paleographical notes). Clicking on the superscript character expands a text box that features the content of a discursive editorial note anchored to the line that the note discusses and changes the font color of the superscript character to illustrate which note has been expanded. For the comparative [Book of the Duchess: A Hypertext Edition](#), Phoebe MacIndoe integrates hovering tooltips which provide supplemental information according to a color-coded reading guide provided at the top of the edition. The [Middle English Text Series Online](#) provides notes as endnotes in a separate section within the browser window; there is a hyperlinked marginal gloss for (see note) or (t-note) which will move the text in the "Notes" section to the corresponding numbered note. These examples demonstrate flexibility in the visual display of the edition. The inclusion of a transparent editorial apparatus might explain how and why the editorial team chooses to represent their notes, while training the user of the edition in how to access the notes.

I want, to borrow Neville's words, "editors to demonstrate to users that their authority is not absolute, but contingent, reliant on a larger and integrated scholarly ecology that extends backwards through decades, and sometimes through centuries, of scholarship" (23). This sense of citational practices parallel medieval *auctoritas*, which I see as extending not backwards linearly, but rather fluidly across time and instantiated simultaneously within distant temporal moments. In *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, Alastair Minnis understands *auctoritas* as both the

abstract sense of authority belonging to an *auctor* (“at once a writer and an authority . . . to be respected and believed”) and the specific quotative references employed by the writer referencing their *auctor* (10). Here, I use the abstract definition. Authorial agency as negotiated through one’s understanding and use of existing materials has not disappeared in the twenty-first century; it has simply relocated from all creative writing to some creative writing and nearly all academic writing. In *Medieval Authors and Their Work*, J. A. Burrow states that “Authority belongs to the *auctor*” (31). Gillespie in *Print Culture* argues that “the author, named or unnamed, *has always been* a way for those who produce texts . . . to describe the place of those texts in the world” (15, emphasis original). For Burrow and Gillespie, as for Neville and myself, authority to create and curate texts is woven into the histories of literary texts across time.¹⁰⁸

Linear periodization, when it upholds authorial singularity, belies the temporal collaboration that, I argue, continuously occurs across and through time. Linearity may address the material presence of a literary text but may likewise separate the linguistic artifact from physical form. The aesthetic text, or content, cannot always account for the long histories that have marked it. *Piers Plowman*, with its genealogical manuscript tradition, is a compelling example of long material histories that are carried into a digital project. The *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive (PPEA)*, an incredible feat of collaborative editing and an inspiration to the digital editing of medieval texts,¹⁰⁹ provides an example of a digital project for a text whose editing history is marked by interpretive choices made long after the medieval manuscripts were

¹⁰⁸ For a better understanding of medieval authorship and the development of the single author, see Copeland, Gillespie, Helle, and Minnis. In chapter one on John Lydgate’s *Siege of Thebes*, I explore the threads that connect medieval writers and which allow Lydgate to consider his position to a community of writers, including Chaucer, Boccaccio, and Statius.

¹⁰⁹ The *Archive of Early Middle English*, SEENET series, including the *Siege of Jerusalem Archive*, and *Richard Coeur de Lyon Multitext* reference *PPEA* as an inspiration.

created. Despite acknowledging the variance of the manuscript history, the *PPEA* adopts W. W. Skeat's nineteenth-century conception of an author named William Langland and the subsequent recension tradition that identifies Langland as the *Piers* author. Following Skeat's proposal of the Langland-author with A/B/C versions of the text alongside the transcription model laid out by George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson in the mid-twentieth century,¹¹⁰ the *Piers* represented by the *PPEA* is already mediated by layers of editing histories and acknowledged as a recent editorial approach on the page for "[Creating the Archive](#)" in the section subtitled "*Piers Plowman* in Modern Editions."¹¹¹ Accounting for the many interpretive contributions that have shaped *Piers* in its postmedieval reception might name Skeat explicitly as co-author or co-editor on all editions that are attributed to William Langland.¹¹² While indeed cumbersome to identify all individuals involved in the editorial history of a text, I find it no more misleading than the explicit exclusion of those editors. My point is not that everyone need always be cited (though perhaps my personal preference) but that the sociology of texts, to use McKenzie's phrase, relies upon a much larger network of participants than is traditionally cited. With *Piers*, for example, citing the Langland-author without likewise referencing the history through which the Langland-author became a norm—Skeat's contributions to *Piers* reception—illustrates a flaw in traditional editing methodologies. Collaborative projects without clear delineation of individual work can share both credit and blame for successes and failures, but projects with that model frequently

¹¹⁰ See Skeat's 1869 *Piers* for the Early English Text Society; Kane and Donaldson's 1975 *B Version* for Athlone Press.

¹¹¹ J. Eric Ensley shared with me that forthcoming editions for the *PPEA* indicate a shift in the project's editing methodology from the current Lachmannian ur-text toward scribal authorship. My anticipation is brewing.

¹¹² To that end, the women who aided Skeat should be cited alongside or in lieu of Skeat (see the 'Preliminary Notice' to Skeat's 1881 edition of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, which was documented by Kathryn Maude in "Citation and marginalisation: the ethics of feminism in Medieval Studies").

defer to the project director as the leading expertise which, in turn, minimizes the work of other contributors.

Digital editions, like their print counterparts, often carry an apparatus of editorial principles and a history of the text which recognizes the network surrounding a text through its lifetime, as well as the varied labor involved in preparing its forms. I will continue with the *PPEA* as an example of such networks, as the project team is constituted by a variety of scholars, including cross-institutional work with contributions from graduate students and independent scholars. The “[Credits](#)” page for the overall project outlines the named individuals involved, beginning with editors (including technical editors), followed by adjunct editors, sponsors, technical staff, and project assistants. While many readers may want to get to the text directly, so to speak, making the credits legible is a wonderful expression of the communitarian nature of editing. In the single text edition for each witness, the *PPEA* provides a front page featuring the manuscript shelf mark, the Langland author,¹¹³ the editors’ names, the technical editors’ names, the designer of the software, plus research assistants and computational consultants (see Figure 1, below). Documenting each contributor to an edition, as is shown in Figure 1 for the *PPEA* edition of Laud Misc. 581 (manuscript L), negotiates the complexities of labor recognition. The temporal history of this edition appears briefly on the acknowledgments page, which is dated August 1, 2004 and digitally signed by editors Ralph Hanna and Hoyt Duggan. A discursive representation of manuscript L’s participatory network is helpful but provides only a fraction of the ecology of contributors to this manuscript witness at different moment in time. The introductory page for L indicates that the CD-ROM edition was published in 2004, whereas the web edition was published in 2014; yet the front matter for the digital edition does not

¹¹³ I follow Mícheál Vaughan by not assigning *Piers Plowman* to William Langland (see *Piers Plowman: The A Version*, pp. 8–10).

demonstrate a clear sense of the intervening years. As the front matter does not feature explicit bylines, the individuals responsible for the interpretive work involved in transitioning from CD-ROM to browser-friendly edition remain unclear.

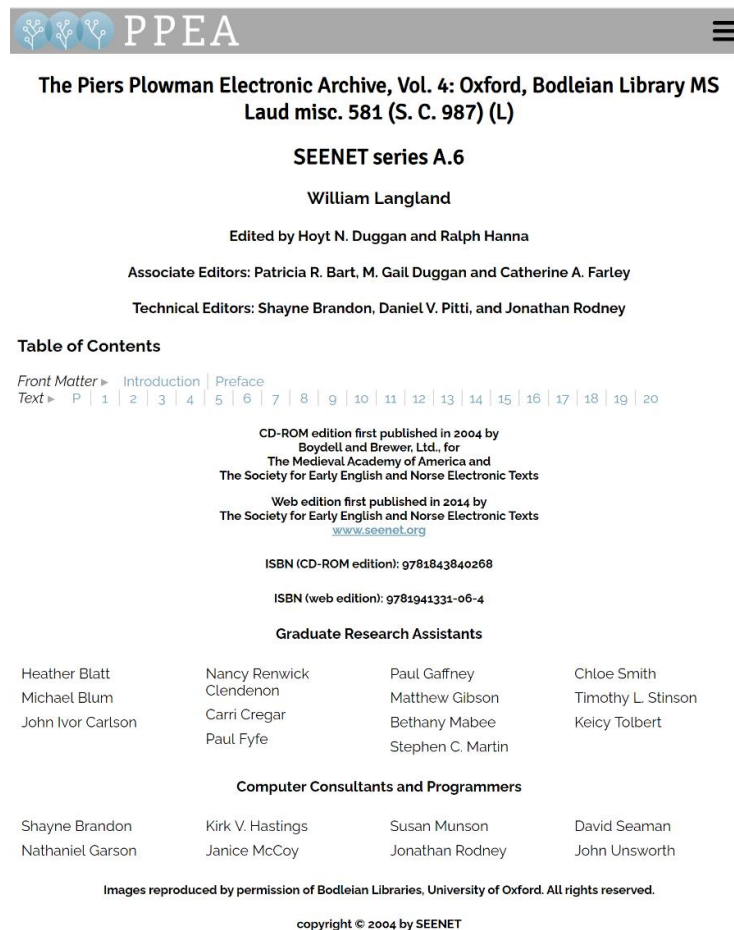


Figure 1. The front page for the PPEA digital edition of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud misc. 581 (S. C. 987) (manuscript L). Screenshot taken October 2020.

Many hands contribute to the creation of digital editions, including transcribers, editors, programmers, and those whose scholarly contributions provide an apparatus for understanding. Neville refers to this community of specialists as an “ecology of knowledge” reliant on “cognitive interdependence,” where knowledge and expertise are simultaneously shared and

individual (17). Her method redistributes authority among specialists in a way that makes expertise clear to users and invites users as participants.¹¹⁴ In this way, the success of the project relies on all interlocking parts functioning together.¹¹⁵ My articulation of the people involved with edition-making is similar to Neville's ecology: a collective of active participants engaged in an ongoing literacy practice not dissimilar to the production of medieval manuscripts. The many hands description that opened this paragraph is not limited to the twenty-first century. Many hands have always crafted the textual object: artisans who specialize in physical book object and collaborative compositional environments where authorship may be shared between *auctors*, textual authors, scribal authors.¹¹⁶ Central to my argument is the textual object itself, not simply its literary content. Readers across time interact not only with the literary text in their current moment but also the object at the time of production and the many hands interacting with the text through its transmission across time. Medieval manuscripts carry residue from every person who interacts with them: scribes who mark parchment with ink, their hands opening the codex, their fingers thumbing pages or carefully gluing the bindings that piece codices together; readers who scrawl their thoughts in the margins or stitch together a torn page. Faded ink and discoloration indicate the passage from a historical moment to a contemporary one, the sediment of time as moisture and sunlight chemically transform the physical presence of texts.

¹¹⁴ Neville notes that scholars often resist sharing authorial legitimacy with non-specialist users (6–8; 19–24). Non-specialists cannot follow an academic trail of breadcrumbs as a credibility system, though that is the traditional scholarly approach.

¹¹⁵ There is no room for hubris in a successful, functioning “Transactive Memory System” project nor, as I offer, in an ethical digital edition.

¹¹⁶ For more on shared authorship, see Burrow, Gillespie, and Minnis. See Lisa Cooper's *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late Medieval England* for an introduction to how textual construction mirrors artisanal activities.

II. A TEXT BY ANY OTHER (DIGITAL) NAME

An Everyman *Canterbury Tales* with cracked spine and yellowed pages. Scant margins filled with half-formed thoughts in a fine print using at least two different kinds of ink and, on occasion, pencil. Colorful tabs mark the pages that transition between tale-tellers. Despite the normative scholarly use of the *Riverside Chaucer*, I continually return to this small paperback instead of the hefty red *Riverside*. When I read the *Tales*, it is this version of them, in no small part because this little book carries not merely Chaucer's stories, with the editorial work of A. C. Cawley and Malcolm Andrew, but an accumulation of my own thoughts through different moments in my life. Eight years of observations are scrawled in the margins, a testament to my engagement with this text. We each have our own version of a meaningfully marked text, like my Everyman *Canterbury Tales*, with traces of interpretation layered into the textual object. The experience of annotating a text, of leaving oneself notes in the margin, is familiar to many of us, especially those of us who study literature and its book objects.

Owners and readers over time mark the text with evidence of use. The remaking of textual experience occurs not only through audience interaction, but also through editorial interventions. In preparing medieval manuscripts for digitization, contemporary scholars continue to leave marks, though ours are most often in the form of metadata, high-resolution digital facsimile images, or encoding in digital editions.¹¹⁷ Digital tools are widely used and

¹¹⁷ The digitization debate most frequently moves between digitized materials as a *loss* of the material object (often embracing the "aura" of an object described by Walter Benjamin) or as increased *access* to the material object. Elaine Treharne, Sian Echard, and Dot Porter ("Zombie Manuscripts") frame digitization processes in a seemingly negative vein, where digitization results in mutilation or an uncanny experience with an *almost-but-not-quite* material object via digital means. Thomas Bredehoft, Bonnie Mak, Johanna Green, Shillingsburg, Raymond Siemens et al. cite the digital as increasing access and adding new materials. Daniel O'Donnell, Kenneth Price, Bridget Whearty ("Adam Sciveyn"), Roberto Rosselli Del Turco document the added technological complexities that accompany digital projects, namely in metadata (Whearty, Siemens et al.) and technical obsolescence (Rosselli Del Turco, Price, O'Donnell).

The political affordances of shifting toward digital materials are promising. If scholars can access codicological information by way of inline markup, metadata, and digitized images, then the need to travel intercontinentally may decrease. However, digital projects require the maintenance of physical infrastructure.

frequently created by large collaborative teams. Each iteration of medieval texts, from manuscript to print to digital, is a localized moment of composition generating new form and meaning linked to the text's history, such that "digital medieval book culture is rooted in copying practices akin to those practiced by medieval writers, scribes, and bookmakers" (Whearty "Adam Scriveyn" 192). Readers of manuscripts, both medieval and modern, interact with material forms of texts and long histories of transmission.¹¹⁸

Literary and cultural artifacts carry meaning across temporal boundaries, building new readings through transmission and reception. This idea is the central tenet of McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, which has become a standard approach in textual studies in the thirty-plus years since publication and which offers a foundation for my argument on the environment of digital editions. McKenzie suggests that those who are curating editions need a thorough understanding of the history of transmission which carries the text into the editors' contemporary moment.¹¹⁹ He writes,

Each reading is peculiar to its occasion, each can be at least partially recovered from the physical forms of the text, and the differences in readings constitute an

Alejandra Borunda describes the impact of rising sea levels on the physical materials which support access to the internet in "[The Internet Is Drowning](#)." Where decreased air travel may result in positive ecological change, increased digitality requires more physical infrastructure and the physical impact may not be climatologically sound (for example, server rooms are notorious heat sinks). Scholars considering digital projects would do well to consult with technology specialists equipped to speak to the sustainability of digital projects in terms of their physical infrastructure.

¹¹⁸ Scholarly readers are no longer limited to print mediums, as digital editions continue to gain headway for use as scholarly tools. The [Perseus Digital Library](#) is an invaluable tool for classicists, [Digital Thoreau](#) offers a comparative viewing platform for *Walden*'s composition process, and medievalists (like myself) refer to the [Middle English Text Series Online](#) almost as frequently as the *METS* print counterparts. This is by no means a complete list. Medievalists might consider browsing the Medieval Academy of America's [Medieval Digital Resources](#) database for peer-reviewed digital materials, including digital editions, multimedia collections, and more.

¹¹⁹ The need to understand how texts are produced and received in order to understand the texts themselves is implicit in much of literary studies, including J. A. Burrow's *Medieval Writers and Their Work*.

informative history. What writers thought they were doing in writing texts, or printers and booksellers in designing and publishing them, or readers in making sense of them are issues which no history of the book can evade. (19)

My argument approaches the larger ecology of editorial participants—writers, printers, booksellers, editors—who are making these texts for readers, but also the reader-user experience that records the history of the textual object. Residual temporal engagement of medieval texts, often in the form of marginalia, glossing, or commentaries, is useful information for the contemporary scholar, just as the twenty-first-century scholar's commentary (in the form of introductions, appendices, footnotes, glossaries) is useful information for the twenty-first-century reader.

A dynamic digital edition with a well-designed user interface can offer more of the supplemental or paratextual information than often found in a print edition. The latter is constrained by a different material reality with a distinct reading experience. As the book grows—a larger page or a thicker spine—it becomes more unwieldy for human use. A manuscript or print object that contains marginal glossing or appendices needs a larger page with smaller font to accommodate the added materials, or even relegates the additive content to a second volume entirely. A digital alternative might maintain the availability of this material for more immediate access to the reader and distinct recognition for the editor's authorial contributions.

To demonstrate editorial design choices across distinct media instantiations, I will use, as sample, Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, edited by Charles Blyth for the *Middle English Text Series* which uses British Library, MS Arundel 38 as copy-text (see Figure 2 featuring folio 52^v, below). The user experience with the *Middle English Text Series Online (METSO)*—a

highly utilized resource for students and scholars of medieval studies—is fairly similar to use of the *Middle English Text Series (METS)* print editions, despite distinct editorial processes for the print editions compared to their online counterparts.¹²⁰ The visual cues between the *METS* print and *METSO* digital editions are fairly similar (see Figures 3 and 4, below), including line numeration in the left margin and glossaries or references to textual notes in the right margin, with the literary text left-aligned between the two. Taking fol. 52^v as an example (one of few digitized images that the British Library has made available to the general public), the page showcases the spatial design which distinguishes text and paratext-gloss. The digital edition mimics the behavior of the print edition while offering a less than intuitive readerly experience based in the reading practices for print texts. The print edition uses a two-fold marginal reference system, featuring a manicule in the left margin and a “(see MLG)” note in the right margin, which directs the reader to endnotes for a description and translation of the marginal Latin glosses in the original manuscript. The digital edition includes the character “L” in the left column and “see note” in the right column for the same material; “see note” is hyperlinked and, when clicked, scrolls a second window to the appropriate note (see the lower third in Figure 4). However, in MS Arundel 38, the marginal Latin glosses appear parallel to the *Regiment* text. While *METSO* editions adhere to platform- and publication-specific requirements, the negative space on the digital page can accommodate the inclusion of supplemental textual materials, whereas the marginal space in the print edition is less capable of maintaining text and paratext in a flexible medium.

¹²⁰ The *METS* team is aware of the limitations of their digital resources. At the 2019 International Congress on Medieval Studies, Pamela Yee spoke to the new directions for the project, including a new workflow to incorporate XML/TEI for structural meaning and a lightly encoded critical apparatus. Yee referenced ongoing critiques of the *METS Online* interface, chiefly that the browser interface replicating print editions is less than ideal (i.e., the digital interface is not flexible).

The appearance of glosses in Hoccleve's *Regiment* and the way the glosses appear in subsequent editions, such as the *METS* print and *METSO* digital editions, demonstrate how texts are mediated across time through textual editing and edition preparation. I reference Hoccleve's work as an example that could be extended to other manuscripts with marginal glossing and commentaries.¹²¹ The glosses, which appear alongside the text in MS Arundel 38, "may serve as an active part of his text: one of the means by which 'compiling' shades into 'authoring'" (Griffiths 96). The qualitative use of glossing in this manuscript is neither mere decoration nor simple deference. As Jane Griffiths and Elisabeth Kempf indicate, Hoccleve's glosses provide an interpretive quality that anticipates the readerly experience.¹²² The glosses, then, are a structural element of the *Regiment*, suggesting both authorial commentary as well as *auctoritas*. Deciding how to present the glosses in later editions is an active interpretive choice. Kempf, for example, compares Blyth's 1999 endnote glossing with Frederick J. Furnivall's 1897 decision to print the glosses in the textual margins (83–84). Yet Blyth's endnote-glossing endures.

¹²¹ The function of glossing in Hoccleve's works is a current topic of study: as both Jane Griffiths and Elisabeth Kempf state, Hoccleve's glosses have not been examined in depth until recently. See Griffiths, Kempf, Nafde, and Marzec for current conversations on glosses in Hoccleve's corpus.

¹²² For recent discussions on Hoccleve's glosses, see Griffiths "'In Bookes Thus Writen I Fynde': Hoccleve's Slef-Glossing in the 'Regiment of Princes' and the 'Series,'" Kempf *Performing Manuscript Culture*, and Aditi Nafde "Hoccleve's Hands: The Mise-En-Page of the Autography and Non-Autograph Manuscripts."

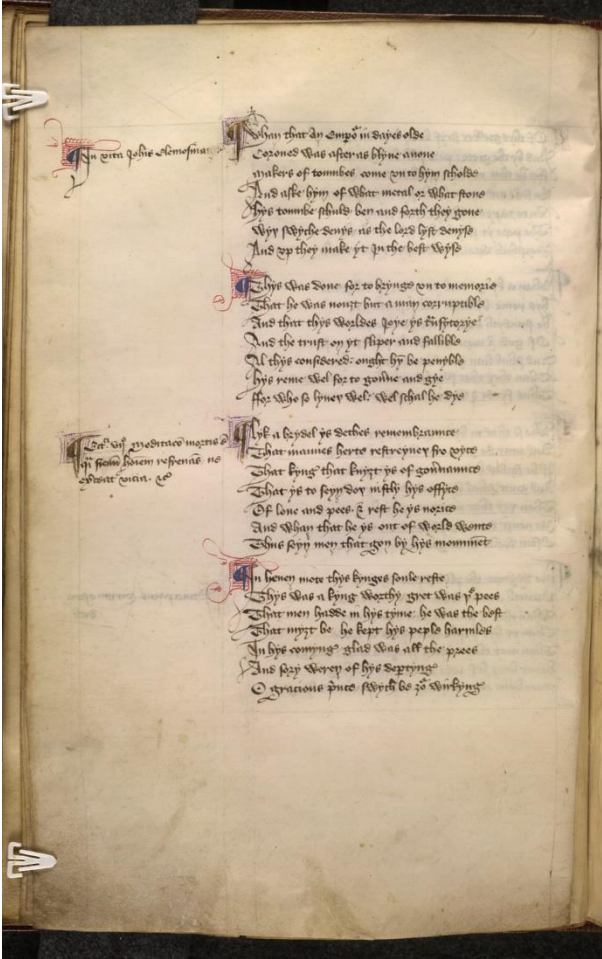


Figure 2. British Library MS Arundel 38, fol. 52^v. Made publicly available in the [Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts](#) (unknown digital imaging specialist).

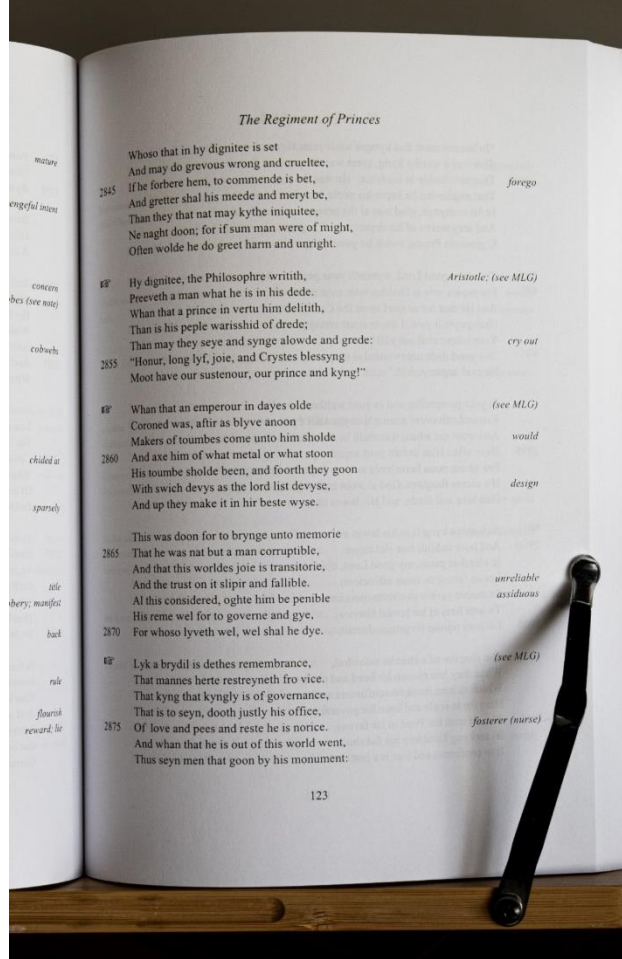


Figure 3. A photograph of p. 123 in *The Regiment of Princes* published by METS. Photograph taken by Caitlin Postal in October 2020.

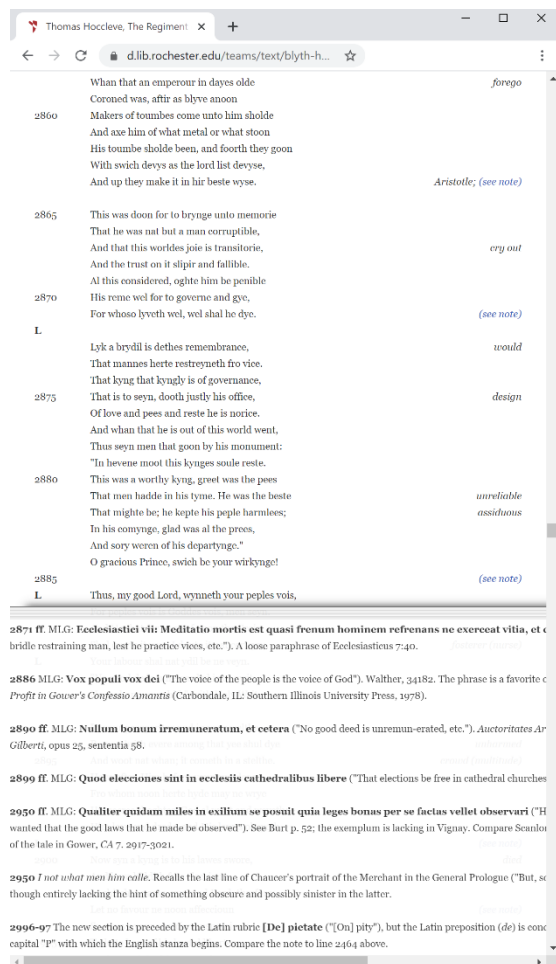


Figure 4. Screenshot of lines 2860–2884 in the *Regiment of Princes* for the METS Online. Screenshot taken in October 2020.

The endless possibilities of an expansive digital domain present a tantalizing opportunity to document the full breadth of McKenzie’s sociology of texts. However, as Odd Einar Haugen and Daniel Apollon write, “Presenting the material in its wealth is so temptingly easy. And it is the accessibility of this option that may lead the editor or expert to forget that editorial judgment is still what the editor has to offer, no matter what tools are available” (56). Editorial judgment or, as I have described it, editorial authorship is a key component in the construction of textual editions, digital and otherwise.

III. SOCIALIZED EDITING IN THE DIGITAL DOMAIN

Textual emendation is not a new approach, though browser- and computer-based interfaces for reading editions of literary texts are a more recent development. Rather than replacing the material nature of the codex, digital editions allow for experimentation and preservation in a responsive medium that extends what traditional print publications can do. Since Jerome McGann's 2006 article, "From Work to Text," on the appealing digital affordances for editors of literary texts, the production of digital scholarly editions has grown rapidly due to an increase in available software. The Text Encoding Initiative predates McGann's article, whereas the 2000s and 2010s saw the development and widespread use of tools such as [Digital Mappa](#), the [Versioning Machine](#), [Edition Visualization Technology](#), the [TAPAS Project](#), [TEI Lite](#), and [TEI Boilerplate](#), among others. With the availability of software to assist the visualization of digital editions, scholars have likewise increased the production of digital editions. But, as Dot Porter indicates when reviewing her surveys on the use of digital editions, increased production does not immediately result in increased scholarly use of digital editions.¹²³ Porter makes clear the difficulty involved in user engagement: scholars are not being taught to read outside the book-object and so it becomes more difficult to imagine making a digital edition that embraces the flexibility of the digital realm without reproducing the structure of a print edition.

New developments in producing and circulating texts require textual editors and the users of texts to learn and adapt. While these changes are often more gradual than contemporary digital avenues might suggest, shifts in production introduce alternative formats and cultivate new

¹²³ See Porter, "Medievalists and the Scholarly Digital Edition" and "What Is an Edition Anyway."

forms of reading with affordances gained and affordances lost.¹²⁴ Reading practices have shifted in time alongside production method. The shared, auditory readerly experience was gradually replaced with private, silent reading.¹²⁵ So, too, did codices adapt from larger bindings toward smaller, handheld books (like contemporary mass market paperbacks). While there are always exceptions to these generalities, the generalities are useful reminders of changes that occur in textual reception. The same is true for digital texts, so scholars trained in manuscripts and printed objects need to adjust their expectations for digital alternatives rather than treating them as a digital surrogate. When distinct from their print counterparts, digital editions can offer a breadth of critical approaches and user-based experiences. In “Digital Manuscripts as Sites of Touch,” Johanna Green illustrates how digital platforms invite contemporary habits of touch that are not less meaningful because they are different. While the haptic sensation of digitized sociality is not the focus of this chapter, I refer to Green’s piece as an example of meaningful user experience with digital venues. Echoes of codicological design appear across numerous web pages, not simply browser-based text interfaces. If a digital edition were designed with the user experience in mind, it would be more likely that “the user can then piece together the text for [themselves] and add annotations, emendations, or even conjectures” (Haugen and Apollon 55).

Transcription, as with translation, is an editorial act where an interlocuter encounters the text and its histories, potentially making changes sanguine to their contemporary needs during

¹²⁴ The flexibility of the twenty-first-century digital environment implies rapid change and quick adoption of new platforms and software. However, as Michael Clanchy and Alexandra Gillespie have shown, technological developments in textual production do not occur overnight as if by magic; see Clanchy “Looking Back from the Invention of Printing” and Gillespie *Print Culture*. The gradual change that Ted Underwood describes in *Why Literary Periods Mattered* as appearing in periodized Anglophone literary styles occurs alongside change in production methods. Clanchy and Gillespie illustrate how early printed objects mimicked the style of handwritten manuscripts (in contrast to a twenty-first-century trope that views the introduction of the printing press to western Europe as a singular moment of early modern progress).

¹²⁵ Walter Ong and Katherine O’Brian-O’Keefe provide the foundational work on orality and textuality.

the transcription process. An effective edition includes transparent descriptions of editorial choice. Contemporary print editions offer that material most often through introductions and endnotes which task the reader with seeking out editorial decisions.¹²⁶ In an edition styled this way, the reader can find the information as they desire without it becoming intrusive to the reading process, but the reader must be trained to want to examine how materials have been reworked.¹²⁷ As Sarah Neville expertly unpacks, editors and readers alike have been traditionally trained to expect editorial authority when preparing editions. She writes, and I agree, “Making editorial labor visible to users of a scholarly edition is valuable because few readers intuitively understand editors’ mediating role” (12).

Digital texts and mediated editions extend the textual experience by way of the development stack. Stack, here, is the digital layers between data which render the underlying markup and subsequent code (for many digital editions, the underlying XML transformed by XSLT or a related program) with the front-facing user interface. Is the stack its own text, an extra-textual production method? Both? Neither? The answer depends on the purpose of assessment. At issue here is how readers are trained to approach a text and what is valued in reading said text. If a user is interested solely in ‘the text alone’ (in the style of a self-contained aesthetic literary object assessed through formal linguistic qualities), then the stack is mere

¹²⁶ It is certainly not a new critique of textual editing to wish for editorial transparency. In 1970, E. Talbot Donaldson wrote, “I am depressed by the fact that it is still apparently a common scholarly feeling that editors ought to be invisible and should ideally be non-existent” (112). In fact, I might even agree with Donaldson that “a MS has only that authority which an editor is willing to concede it” (114)! While deferring authority to the object and its histories is certainly appealing, I believe that digital tools offer mechanisms to clarify the editor’s role in preparing an edition.

¹²⁷ I am hesitant to overemphasize the importance of training readers so I will, instead, let Donaldson say it for me: “Few [readers] are going to examine [the editor’s] notes; and of those who do almost no one is going to believe that [the editor’s] notes take priority over [the] text—for if the editor really thought the text read that way, why in the world didn’t [they] print it that way?” (118).

context and production method which makes user access to the ‘text’ possible,¹²⁸ but when the ‘text’ expands to encompass context, paratext, and editorial intervention, the stack requires specialized expertise. Drawing on Neville’s articulation of a Transactive Memory System-based project, technical specialists who write the back-end development stack are integral for effective “cognitive interdependence” of coordinated labor according to individuals’ knowledge expertise.¹²⁹ For scholars uninterested in the digital affordances and new media, the stack is an essential item but not an item of analysis or scrutiny. For scholars interested in book histories and/or digital venues, the stack joins the ranks of manuscript codices and the printing press as objects of inquiry. I propose that the stack is integral to the construction of the digital edition; without the rendering mechanism which makes the digital edition possible, the edition itself is not viable.

Through visible metadata and access to markup, the user can determine the levels of mediation between medieval manuscript and modern reader. Project design always relies on “choices about what remains and what is eliminated, what is made accessible, how and in what form” (Burdick et al. 19). While Burdick et al. refer primarily to visual design, the same applies to interpretive decisions. Encoded markup, for example, allows the editor to mark up the manuscript without marking up the manuscript. Figure 5, below, illustrates how the encoding editor uses the TEI elements for <choice> and <unclear> to make note of material that occurs in the manuscript (see fig. 6 below for the lines as they appear in Bodleian Library, Laud Misc.

¹²⁸ The derision or denigration of the development stack as non-literary would be akin to discounting the manuscript or other extant edition. As Barkley Ramsey astutely observed when reading an early draft of this chapter, “I’m curious if people would say that paper, the letter forms and ink which have been pressed into that paper, golden letters on the cover, and the beautiful binding are just context and production method.” Interest in the material object can translate to interest in the digital object.

¹²⁹ One might consider an extension to Whearty’s “Caswell Test” that acknowledges, in addition to librarian and archivist expertise, technical experts as valued interlocutors.

108). The example provided, drawn from my contributions to the *Archive of Early Middle English*, shows how TEI markup remains human readable as a potentially compelling object of

```
<l xml:id="bodllaudmisc108.8.1184">
  <name type="person" ref="#bioRE001">R<sg
type="ln"/>e&ydot;m&ydot;ld</name> h&ydot;m gan b&ydot; holde</l>

<l xml:id="bodllaudmisc108.8.1185">A<sg type="ln"/>nd
  <choice>
    <orig>hyr<am>&combtildvert;</am></orig>
    <reg>hyr<ex>e</ex></reg>
  </choice>
  <choice>
    <orig>h<am>&combtildvert;</am>te</orig>
    <reg>h<ex>er</ex>te</reg>
  </choice> to <unclear reason="ill-formed" cert="high"
resp="#CMP01">k</unclear>olde </l>
```

Figure 5. XML markup for Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108, Folio 226^r col. 1 l. 1184. The initial, structural encoding was performed by Scott Kleinman, with the second phase of editorial encoding performed by Caitlin Postal for the *Archive of Early Middle English*.

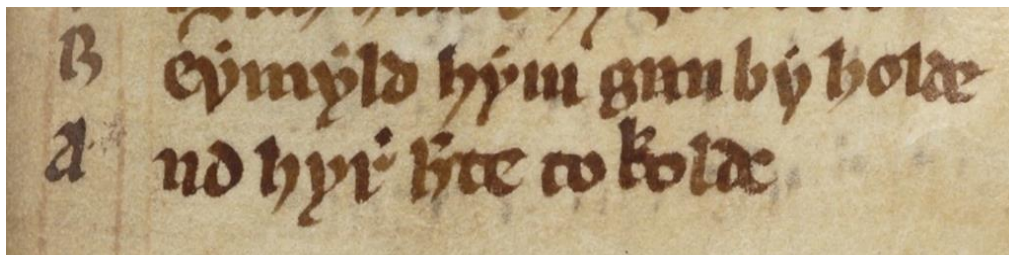


Figure 6. Screenshot of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108, Folio 226^r col. 1 l. 1184.

analysis. As part of the development stack, the underlying markup functions as an integral element for the final rendering of the digital edition.

Digital markup adds layers of authorial and interpretive meaning in line with the historical text. Siân Echard uses Derrida’s term “house arrest” to describe myriad ways that premodern manuscripts become static objects when they are associated with literary value, which I will describe as temporal lock. Where Echard states that house arrest can only be loosened through digital means, I argue that temporal lock can be broken through digital means and that

creating an encoded digital edition can move the text, both content and object, out of temporal lock. TEI-conformant XML, for example, offers contemporary editors the ability to layer interpretive meaning in line with the historical text. To illustrate how this occurs, I refer to the XML encoding for the closing lines of *King Horn* in Oxford, Bodleian, Laud Misc. 108 (see

```
<l xml:id="bodllaudmisc108.8.1568">
<hi rend="touched-red">N</hi><sg type="ln"/>ou ben he alle
dede</l>

<l xml:id="bodllaudmisc108.8.1569">
<hi rend="touched-red">G</hi><sg type="ln"/>od hem to heuene
lede </l>

<l xml:id="bodllaudmisc108.8.1570">
-<hi rend="touched-red">A</hi>m-e-n-
<note type="pal" resp="#CMP01">The spatial gaps marked as
hyphens feature decorative red curls between letters. They
could be metamarks or litterae notabiliiores. I would like to
encode them as shadow gaps but the schema does not allow for
@quantity and @units in the sg element.</note>
</l>
```

Figure 5. XML markup for the closing lines of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 108 for the Archive of Early Middle English. The initial, structural encoding was performed by Scott Kleinman, with the second phase of editorial encoding performed by Caitlin Postal.

Figure 7, below), which was performed for the *Archive of Early Middle English (AEME)*. The editor has organized materials according to the schema provided by the *AEME*, providing a line number with the <l> element that has been further clarified using the @xml:id attribute to label each individual line. Laud Misc. 108 features a space between the first letter and the rest of the line in this text, which *AEME* refers to as a “shadow gap” using the <sg> element and a classification type of <ln> for line. Each letter in the initial position features a small amount of red ink, documented with the <hi> element for highlighted materials. The “Amen” explicit includes decorative, red ink flourishes, currently encoded as hyphens that are documented in a

descriptive note. The visual design of the page might otherwise disappear in a standard printed object, so preserving this information in the markup allows later readers to familiarize themselves with the manuscript even if they do not have formal access to the manuscript (whether in-person or as digitized images).

Encoded markup can provide an interpretive, explanatory guide alongside its structural and codicological documentation. For texts which feature travel prominently (such as *The Book of John Mandeville* or *Richard Coer de Lyon*), it would be prudent to include a semantic tag which identifies each location. With TEI, there are multiple options an editor can choose, including `<name>` for proper nouns, `<place>` for geographic locations, and `<placeName>` for “an absolute or relative place name” (TEI P-5). Each of these elements can include nested elements and can be further defined with attributes featuring interpretive information to help guide the user of a digital edition. This information might otherwise be available in a footnote or other critical apparatus, which I will demonstrate with an example from *Richard Coer de Lyon*.¹³⁰ The *Richard* narrative, as with other texts focused on the Crusades, is Islamophobic. The use of both “holy londe” and “hethenesse” to describe a single region demonstrates the xenophobia present in the *Richard* text, while referencing geographic knowledge that was likely familiar to thirteenth-century audiences. Both terms appear to refer to Dar al-Islam, the geographic area under the rule of Islam in the Middle Ages, which may not be immediately recognizable to twenty-first-century audiences. Using TEI elements and attributes, this information could be provided for readers with a variety of supporting materials through attributes such as:

- `@source` to indicate an external or bibliographical source which provides this information. When defining a geographic region, the source could be extant cartography.

¹³⁰ The methodological approach I offer in this chapter was field tested in 2019–2020 during early development for the *Richard Coer de Lyon Multitext*, co-created by Bridget Whearty and Leila K. Norako.

- @ref might direct to the same information as @source but linked with a URI or URL. This attribute would be useful if linking directly to a mapping project.
- att.dateable attributes include @calendar and @period, which could be used to specify the temporal moment in which this information was available. In the example given, this information could provide helpful context for twenty-first-century readers.
- att.typed, @type and @subtype, offer a way to classify information within the TEI project, which may be useful to articulate a specific reading, as with the example above where an editor may wish to direct the reader to see the Islamophobic use of “hethenesse” in contrast to use of “holy londe.”

Additionally, attributes to indicate editorial agency (att.global.responsibility) can identify who provided the contextual markup: @resp “indicates the agency responsible for the intervention or interpretation, for example an editor or transcriber” (TEI P-5). Thus, a TEI-encoded version of lines 1665–1666 in Peter Larkin’s *METS* edition might appear as the following in Figure. 8:

```
<l>They schypped al be the see stronde</l>
<l>To wende into the <name type="location"
subtype="#DarAlIslam" resp="#editor"> Holy Londe</name></l>
```

Figure 6. Sample XML markup for an excerpt from Richard Coer de Lyon, encoded by Caitlin Postal.

In the Figure 8 markup, I separated the two lines using the <l> element and recorded contextual information about the use of “holy londe” using <name> rather than <place>. The <name> element is further defined as a location referencing Dar-al Islam through the @type and @subtype attributes. The responsible party is the editor, whose information would be further documented in the teiHeader and other paratextual materials. The information held by @resp could identify individual editors using a unique identifier defined in the teiHeader, thus my

editorial identifier might be #Caitlin or #CMP, depending on the conventions of the project. If I were the editor responsible for the sample markup, it might read [`@resp="#Caitlin"`]. This is not the only way that this information could be encoded, but it is one way that clearly identifies interpretive decisions in line with the text.

If it is not possible, as Arthur Bahr suggests, to “fully [reconstruct] either the intentions that created [textual objects of the past] or the histories in which they have participated” (255), what we can do is make clear where, what, and how our interventions appear. There is an inherent responsibility for editors mediating literary texts—particularly those texts which, like *Richard*, feature dangerous rhetoric or harmful stereotypes. Interpretive framing shifts how a reader understands the text. Literary editors already compose additive materials, frequently under the guise of the invisible editor. A paradigm adjustment can help scholars recognize editorial mediation as additive authorship. Digital literacy, which includes both reading and composing digitally, can be viewed as part of a cyclical literacy practice that continuously extends the transmission of information in innovative ways.¹³¹ Textual composition becomes transtemporal, connecting historical literacy practices across a range of mediums as part of an ongoing process. This style of reading approach might help scholars and users of digital editions to recognize the encoding work alongside that of the transcriber and other editors. Technical editors, then, are active participants in creating digital editions of texts.

Flexible and dynamic digital editions offer an exercise to reframe the editorial mindset. While an understanding of critical print editions is helpful for drafting the idea of a digital

¹³¹ In “The Literacy of the Laity,” M. B. Parkes introduces a threefold understanding of the *litteratus*, or literate person, in the Middle Ages: the professional reader, the cultivated (recreational) reader, and the pragmatic reader (555–560). I do not use professional reader to describe literacy acts which mediate contemporary textual production, because I do not find it a useful mnemonic for the different editorial and readerly experiences of the twenty-first century.

edition, approaching the digital edition with the same conventions as a print edition may result in an edition that serves neither medium.¹³² Because print often standardizes textual elements that vary across manuscript witnesses, the process of creating a digital resource asks contributors to engage their interpretive choices more directly. Unlike print editions which collapse mediation, digital editions can provide a necessary intervention by making the underlying code accessible. As Mark Marino reminds digital humanities scholars, “code is not just a list of instructions for the computer. It is a layer of discourse” ([n.p.](#)). Editors make interpretive, authorial contributions in line with the extant text as encoded markup. Documentation of editing and encoding policies, as well as the workflow process, will help to make different forms of intellectual labor more transparent to the end user. Inline markup can make explicit the otherwise implicit arguments underlying traditional editing models while providing an opportunity for editors to take ownership of their interpretive decisions. To value the interpretive labor in digital editions from the ground up—to see each moment of encoded markup as a remaking of the text in collaboration with the past—recognizes the diverse forms of labor crafting textuality.

IV. CONCLUSION

The remediation of medieval texts by editors across time indicates how editing functions to construct histories. What we read cannot be decontextualized from its temporal existence, which includes all moments of textual shaping. I provide, through the approach outlined in this chapter, an opportunity to break literary texts from the temporal lock connected to ideas about

¹³² Print editions have a built-in deadline: the printing date. Digital editions do not feature the same parameters and will expand to occupy as much time as the editor needs to complete the scope of the project. My recommendation is that scholars interested in digital editions start with a small-scale project to understand the time investment, tools and software, sustainability questions, and decision-making involved in digital projects. While a large-scale project appeals to academic metrics and funding agencies, it is less likely to materialize as a finished project without reliance on poor labor practices.

authenticity and claims to historicity.¹³³ Rather than perpetuating singular authority in the form of the canonical author, best-text, or editorial genius, my approach illustrates the accumulative collaboration occurring in editing projects and especially within digital editions. The digital preservation of paleography, codicology, and other paratextual elements brings literary scholars, archivists, librarians, art historians, digitization specialists, and textual editors (though not an exhaustive list) into a composition community that includes medieval scribes. Even academic texts are community-produced and community experienced: consider the ways the peer review process invites collaborative thinking in scholarly articles or how the writing process in graduate school navigates regular committee feedback.¹³⁴ My argument for collaborative editing recognizes the collective work of making texts and offers suggestions for crediting the participant. As I hope I have shown, digital editing projects are an occasion to recalibrate how literary studies might frame the labor of editing texts.

Digital edition-making, both process and product, offers an opportunity to retrain the editorial mindset and how we think of editors in relation to the user-audience. Editorial labor counts as meaningful intellectual work and can be viewed as collaboration with a community of editors across time. Encoding work, by extension, should likewise be valued as interpretive,

¹³³ I do not document here the full implications of digital editing practices, such as the impact on physical infrastructure which supports digital media. Further work might explore the material constraints of digital editing and its physical infrastructure.

¹³⁴ Writing this chapter has been a practice in this kind of community-building. The initial seeds were planted during my work on the *Archive of Early Middle English* with Scott Kleinman in 2015. The first draft was a seminar paper for Beatrice Arduini's Manuscript Studies course and offered a response to the conversations of session 317 "Medieval(ist) Librarians and Archivists (A Roundtable)" at the International Congress of Medieval Studies in May 2018. I revised to present on *Exemplaria's* sponsored session "Medieval Yack Meets Digital Hack" at ICMS 2019 alongside Amanda Henrichs and Lisa Tagliaferri, and which was organized by Corey Sparks. In spring 2020, I met weekly with my writing partner, Kaelie Giffel, for drafting accountability; in fall 2020, I met weekly with Aylin Malcolm for revising accountability. Giffel, Barkley M.T. Ramsey, and Juliana Amorin Goskes provided review feedback on drafts. In addition to the iterative process through which I developed this argument, I am grateful to the aforementioned and to my dissertation committee members for offering thoughtful feedback throughout the writing process.

authorial labor, because the maintenance involved in textual editing is valuable work.¹³⁵ Rather than menial tasks purged from the realm of respectable intellectual work, the tedium of digital encoding is interpretive editorial, even authorial, work. The devaluation of edition-making as a reputable method of scholarly engagement obscures the interpretive work of many contributors, including graduate students and, for born-digital editions, the technical team.¹³⁶

While chapters one and two have focused on authorial and editorial labor, I now turn to another form of labor entirely: textile labor and the tactile knowledge requisite to create garments and textiles. Textile objects invite the spectral presence of their makers, much like textual objects present their writers and editors. The following chapters emphasize the role of sensory experience in reading Middle English verse, focusing on descriptions of garments and the familiarity they might invoke for medieval audiences' sense experiences.

¹³⁵ While the finished project is valued, the laborious effort exerted for digital editing is often an issue of unrecognized and frequently uncompensated labor.

¹³⁶ When graduate and early career contributors receive little to no recognition for editorial work (while advisors and senior scholars do), the academy fails to recognize their labor. See Rachel Mann's "Paid to Do but Not to Think: Reevaluating the Role of Graduate Student Collaborators" in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* 2019.

CHAPTER 3

CRAFT LABOR AND GARMENT HISTORIES IN MIDDLE ENGLISH VERSE

“We design an outfit like we would design armor,” shared Her Universe founder, Ashley Eckstein, at San Diego Comic Con’s [2019 Her Universe Fashion Show](#). The specialized nature of armor—during battle or as a social performance—necessitates that it fit the body well to protect the wearer. Clothing can fulfill a similar function: clothes help the wearer to construct their self as they inhabit the world. The act of dressing the self may cross temporal boundaries, though extant evidence and sensory experience may not.

The loss of historical sensory experience presents challenges to modern scholarship of medieval literature, and to redress it, I suggest an approach that emphasizes the knowledge of historical material culture and textile literacy of historical costumers. Historical textile specialists and costumers bring a literal experience of the past into the present by using extant techniques and similar materials.¹³⁷ Modern sewists making historical garments are an example of transtemporal craft labor which comprises medieval time in the present. Living history projects adopt a simultaneous experience of past and present, where modern people incorporate material histories for an interactive experience of the past in the present. However, the context of making cloth and clothing, as dress historians illustrate, is lost to most people today unless they are part of historical making communities.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ In *How Soon Is Now*, Carolyn Dinshaw describes seemingly arbitrary divisions between amateur and professional (i.e., academic) approaches to medieval studies to complicate the field’s disciplinary history. Dinshaw’s plea for affect and embodiment in medieval studies provide a foundation from which I incorporate sewists’ expertise in historical costuming.

¹³⁸ The shift toward industrialized production resulted in a change for dress history. Fast fashion—the cheap and trendy clothes produced at discount rates in inhumane facilities—disconnects contemporary audiences from the physical labor involved in creating garments. Slow fashion, a trend in opposition to fast fashion and cost-efficient production, privileges sustainably sourced, ecologically friendly materials that were produced with ethical wages and production facilities. Contemporary sewists and costumers frequently associate themselves with the slow fashion movement, as their decision to curate homemade garments attempts to unwind a capitalist model of production and consumption.

Despite resonance between making manuscripts and making textiles, textile arts are often feminized such that the acquisition of knowledge through embodied experience—especially garment construction—is dismissed as non-scholarly labor. In some ways, the distinction makes sense: the material object with which people clothe themselves may not readily interact with the literary narratives that fill the mind. Scholars are limited by what information can be gleaned from an artifact, so textual references that provide an account of how material objects were used seem more promising. In the introduction to *Medieval Dress and Textiles in Britain: A Multilingual Sourcebook*, co-editors Louise Sylvester, Mark Chambers, and Gale Owen-Crocker anticipate the difficulties of accessing material culture:

Truly recovering that culture [England of the Middle Ages] through its material objects is impossible: the objects themselves cannot tell us what part they played in people's daily lives. We do, however, have access to the ways in which people wrote about those objects . . . it is the texts which make the culture of the past available to us. (7–8)

The dismissal of accumulated knowledge available in historical artifacts is understandable. Few extant medieval garments remain because they were used foremost as daily wear and, often, until they were worn out. Those of us interested in historical dress refer to other matter for evidence of historical clothing, such as manuscript illuminations, portraiture, clothing laws, and household records. Sarah Thursfield reminds historical costumers that “Attempts at reconstruction have to rely on interpreting visual sources, on archaeological finds and on scholarly research” (10).

Textiles, like texts, tell stories which labor on and across time, carrying too the stories of the people who make them. Melina Moe foregrounds the narratorial significance of dress, sharing that “Like textiles, texts are double-natured: they have physical form, but the stories they tell can

also float free of their original form” (14). Pairing medieval texts with surviving textile artifacts may illuminate the textile literacies and material culture of medieval audiences.

Negotiating the tension between material objects which do not survive the tests of time and visual or literary descriptions which do often highlights textile objects more than the people who make or wear them. Studying textile and garment histories requires an awareness of something that is always missing: the clothed (or unclothed) body. Integrating the insights supplied by modern practitioners presents an opportunity to recover a simulacrum of the material and textile literacies presumed by authors of medieval texts; this simulacrum is an iteration of what I have elsewhere referred to as transtemporal literacy.¹³⁹ Textile literacies provide a shorthand for the clothing and ideological work that are enacted through poetic descriptions and predicated on existing audience knowledge. Considering narrative descriptions of dress and textile work through contemporary sewing and historical costuming brings the twenty-first-century reader into a co-temporal experience of the past alongside medieval audiences. Historical costuming thus offers a lens for viewing the past through a creative experience that brings historical materiality into a contemporary moment. Recreated garments help to uncover historical and material contexts about the past as an opportunity to speculatively re-experience an element of the past in the present.¹⁴⁰

The chapter is organized in two sections demonstrating how wearable artifacts in Middle English verse are imbued with meaning and often rooted in temporal sense experience. I begin

¹³⁹ See chapter two on digital editing.

¹⁴⁰ The so-called “embodied turn” and “material turn” support speculative, experimental history in the form of recreation projects and object biographies, such as the [Refashioning the Renaissance Project](#). For a dress historical approach to historical garment reconstruction, see Peter McNeil and Melissa Bellanta’s co-edited issue for *Fashion Theory*, including their introduction “Letters from the Editors: Fashion Embodiment and the ‘Making Turn,’” Hilary Davidson “The Embodied Turn,” Serena Dyer “State of the Field: Material Culture,” and Alexandra Makin “Early Medieval (Mostly) Textiles” [blog](#).

with an overview of the presence of dress, followed by a case study on dress and feminine labor in the Middle English *Emaré* with an examination of the specific garments evoked in the romance. Stories that include explicit descriptions of dress and textiles are trimmed with cultural context familiar to their audiences or reflective of their writers. Clothing does not appear as a lark but as meaningful detail, symbolic signification, historical referent, and sometimes all the above. Anxieties about social status as performed through dress, including the influences of foreign clothing styles, result in poetic works that comment on social unease with changing fashions. Poems like the Middle English “Lord that lenest us lyf” in MS Harley 2253 illustrate a preoccupation with surveilling and regulating dress habits of the period. Medieval romance narratives showcasing dress and arms, such as the *Awynters Off Arthure*, indicate authors’ familiarity with fashion through visual descriptions provided for the readerly experience, whereas the Middle English romance *Emaré* highlights needlework as feminine labor.

The tension of sewing as leisure versus sewing as labor is not exclusively medieval, though *Emaré* gestures toward shifting social contexts connected to an increase in mercantile trade in England in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Textile labor, when it appears in stories, demonstrates “an implicit chronicle of women’s lives and labors” (Trumpener 37). Garments in the medieval period, whether simple or ornate, required substantive time and labor to make them, and implicit is the labor performed by women who constructed garments as skilled craft practitioners in both domestic and commercial textile environments.¹⁴¹ The focus on making the cloth and wearing the garment created from the cloth makes *Emaré* a compelling case study. The regulation of social behaviors (e.g., dress norms) through cultural critique

¹⁴¹ See Marian Dale “The London Silkwomen of the Fifteenth Century” and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh *Working Women in English Society, 1300-1600*, pp. 223–225.

appears to be a consistent experience across time, though the embodied experience of medieval cultural dress norms is often limited to recreational experiences.

I highlight the social importance of clothing and the emphasis on textile labor in *Emaré* to reconsider how we read literary texts referencing textile experiences. My survey of clothing in Middle English poetic verse identifies these descriptions as ekphrastic possibilities for transtemporal “enclothed cognition” that embraces textile literacies of late medieval English readers; I borrow the term “enclothed cognition” from Adam Hajo and Adam D. Galinsky, whose 2012 study identifies, as central principle, “the co-occurrence of two independent factors—symbolic meaning of the clothes and the physical experience of wearing them” (922). Vestimentary details are often occluded by a focus on narrative; my approach savors sartorial styling and the intimation of one’s relationship with dress. While an assessment of embodied memory and sense experience could be performed across various elements of historical material culture, including landscaping, food, architecture, and medicines, I focus on wearable artifacts to engage costumers’ and sewists’ knowledge. Medieval social norms cannot be wholly understood without considering embodiment, making the material history and clothing context for medieval audiences central to reading texts which refer to clothing.¹⁴² Examining medieval texts about clothing through costumers’ knowledge foregrounds materiality rather than abstraction, connecting contemporary fiber and textile activities with extant surviving materials.

¹⁴² Catherine Richardson’s edited collection *Clothing Culture* and Laura Hodges’s work on costume in *The Canterbury Tales* identify the ubiquity of dress across human experience and how clothing manifests social reality in medieval Europe. Scholarship in *Clothing Culture* identifies the regulation of dress and thus of bodies, such as Andrea Denny-Brown’s work on slashed garments and gendered status. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass observe similarly in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, writing in the introduction “clothes, like sorrow, inscribe themselves upon a person who comes into being through that inscription” (2).

I. THE PRESENCE OF DRESS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH POETRY

From short poems to longer romances to didactic materials, including sermons and conduct manuals, Middle English writing demonstrates an interest in regulating people's bodies and behaviors through how they produce, purchase, and wear textiles. While not every text relies on sartorial metaphors, the descriptions of clothing reviewed in this section—predominantly from poetry in late medieval England—are frequently motivated by social norms or offered as critiques indicative of anxieties about social status relative to new clothing norms during the late Middle Ages.¹⁴³ A constant exchange between expected behaviors and social dress results in written materials documenting the anxieties and affections about dress norms, which E. Jane Burns describes as “a complex system of fabrications that move constantly between individual bodies and the social sphere, between material objects and various cultural representations of them” (*Medieval Fabrications* 4). Legislative and poetic descriptions of clothing express medieval attitudes about cultural classifications of self and society.

Medieval clothing and sumptuary laws have been explored in depth as attempts to exert control over people, especially anyone perceived to dress outside their social stations. Claire Sponsler, in “Narrating the Social Order,” clarifies that clothing anxieties were often dressed in the language of modesty and morality, but class-based exemptions in the laws themselves indicate a status issue more than moral concern. Legislating fashion against normative behaviors, such as people dressing beyond their perceived station, may function as a reaction to a developing textile industry in England as well as the existing textile markets in continental

¹⁴³ At times, the inclusion of clothing can serve a metadiscursive purpose, which Monica Wright describes as metacommentary on poetics in Philomela's story retold by medieval authors: “The process of making cloth and clothing was indeed the most natural place for writers to demonstrate their own process of creating meaning through manipulation of the existing vestimentary code” (66).

Europe and along the Mediterranean coast.¹⁴⁴ Clothing laws, as Sponsler frames them, work “as narratives responding to pressing social needs by sketching out a vision of society ordered in a particular way” (269). Such laws include the 1363 *Statutes of the Realm* during the reign of Edward III, which constrained diet, apparel, and craft labor through public decree.¹⁴⁵ The concern regarding “the Outragious and Excessive Apparel of divers People, against their Estate and Degree, to the great Destruction and Impoverishment of all the Land” (ed. Raithby 380) does not appear to state that the clothing itself is outrageous but rather that dressing beyond the strictures of one’s social class is an issue (for the aristocratic classes). Clothing culture embeds social ideologies into the seemingly mundane activity of simply getting dressed.¹⁴⁶

Middle English literature provides a venue beyond legislative norms to address social anxieties related to clothing. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries,¹⁴⁷ full garments like the *houppelande* come into fashion, inspiring moral diatribes including the lengthy aside in Thomas Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes*.¹⁴⁸ The old man in the *Regiment* faults novel fashion

¹⁴⁴ See Bell and Ruse “Sumptuary Legislation and English Costume,” Rosenthal “Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” Davis “Market Regulation in Fifteenth-Century England,” Quinton and Oldland “London Merchants’ Cloth Exports, 1350–1500,” and Dyer “Luxury Goods in Medieval England.”

¹⁴⁵ *The Statutes of the Realm* were edited by John Raithby for a reprint in 1963 from a nineteenth-century Record Commission printing; this edition is accessible through HathiTrust, Google Books, and the Internet Archive. Historical reenactor Sarai Tindall summarizes the legislative decrees on her blog, [Clothing the Past](#).

¹⁴⁶ Further reading on this topic includes *Clothing Culture 1350–1650* (ed. Catherine Richardson), John Block Friedman “The Iconography of Dagged Clothing and Its Reception by Moralists Writers,” Heller “When the Knight Undresses, His Clothing Speaks: Vestimentary Allegories in the Works of Baudouin de Conde (c. 1240–1280),” Nicole Smith *Sartorial Strategies, Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth Work, and Other Cultural Imaginings* (ed. Burns), and *Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, Images* (ed. Koslin and Snyder).

¹⁴⁷ Stella Mary Newton’s *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince: A Study of the Years 1340–1365* is the foundational study in fourteenth-century costume. Fernald and Shenton’s *Historic Costumes and How to Make Them* offers a brief overview of shifting silhouettes and iconic garments circa 460–1880.

¹⁴⁸ The *MED* defines *houppelande* as “a loose belted overgown” (21166). See Figures 9–10 in the image appendix for examples of the *houppelande* style worn by men and women.

and assigns responsibility for moral failings to textile workers who make the “gownes of scarlet / tweleve yerdes wyde with pendaunt sleeves” (ll. 422–423) and use a “foul waast of cloth” for sleeves and tippets (l. 450).¹⁴⁹ Hoccleve’s old man further details specific garments most responsible for moral degradation, including wide gowns like the houppelande worn by men and women (ll. 409, 423, 496, 521), hanging sleeves (ll. 423, 450, 466, 473–475, 521, 535–538), and expensive fabrics (ll. 425, 430–431, 532). The vestimentary style denigrated in this passage features prominently in an extant manuscript of *Regiment*: London, British Library MS Arundel 38. Folio 37^r showcases a miniature of Prince Henry with a kneeling man presenting a red book (see Figure 9). Both Henry and the kneeling man wear houppelandes, and the figure of the former features trailing sleeves. Ornate fabrics, hanging sleeves, and long trains also appear on the houppelandes worn by women on the Devonshire Hunting Tapestry (see Figure 10). Hoccleve’s inclusion of an explicit statement against novel fashions functions as an authorizing tool for the old man in the story. By decrying high fashion and expensive styles, the old man legitimates himself as a moral and virtuous authority to the reader. The old man describes the vices of his youth to establish his age and experience: he is an authority because he has already experienced these things. The crux of the old man’s aside appears in lines 414–417: “undir an old poore habyt regneth ofte / greet vertu, thogh it moustre poorely / and whereas greet array is up on lofte / vice is but seelden hid” [under an old, poor style of dress resides great virtue though it is poorly displayed; whereas great array or dress appears lofty though vice is infrequently hidden].¹⁵⁰ For Hoccleve’s old man, an ostentatious display of wealth is a display of vices.

¹⁴⁹ In this moment of *Regiment*, I wonder if the houppelande serves as a stand-in for lengthy narratives written by Hoccleve and his contemporary community of writers. Does Hoccleve view these extended writings as a “foul waste” of paper, parchment, and even one’s time? Are the textile workers of this passage, in part, allegory for medieval writers and their scribes?

¹⁵⁰ Translations are my own, unless otherwise specified.

Because the old man views styles of dress as connected to social behaviors, then social behaviors must demonstrate moral interiority; ergo, for him, dress is aligned with morality. The old man's ongoing fear about failing to differentiate the self from others into the fifteenth century becomes most clear when he declares, "If twixt yow and your men no difference / Be in array, lesse is your reverence" [If there is no difference in array or clothing between you and your men (i.e., servants), then your status and respect are lessened] (ll. 447–448). If dress helps to create an atmosphere of respect, as Hoccleve expresses in the old man's invective, then medieval literary works with detailed clothing descriptions may illustrate the norms of the period while calling forth the embodied social practices of their initial audiences.

Moral allegories about clothing convey a sense of authority and judgment regarding changing fashions.¹⁵¹ In the late fourteenth-century poem *The Parlement of Thre Ages*—simultaneously allegorical estates commentary, moral treatise, and short history—the personification of life stages correlates with critical understandings of behavioral norms.¹⁵² The allegorical representations of life cycles are described through their clothing, especially as

¹⁵¹ As an example, Nicole Smith's *Sartorial Strategies* surveys parallelism between clerical writings on virtues and vice associated with dress and aristocratic romance, where the latter functions as an illustration of moral behavior identified through specific mentions of clothing. Smith's approach could be further augmented through reading texts compilationally, as Arthur Bahr recommends in *Fragments and Assemblages*. Amy Vines's work on *Emaré* and Cotton Caligula A.ii is an example of how to pair medieval romance narratives with other texts in the manuscript to better understand how a specific manuscript might influence audiences, though she does not elaborate the function of textile labor beyond use as "a means of gaining access to and succeeding within prominent social circles" (95). Michael Foster's 2011 article, "Paternal Wisdom and the Social Contest of Fifteenth-Century England in Cotton Caligula A.ii," explores how the manuscript's courtesy poems provide instructional social norms for boys. See also Heller, "When the Knight Undresses, His Clothing Speaks: Vestimentary Allegories in the Works of Baudouin de Conde (c. 1240-1280)" and "Mocking Medieval French Fashion: Troubadours Debating Trade versus Plunder in the Late Twelfth to Thirteenth Centuries;" Richardson's introduction to *Clothing Cultures*; Sponsler "Narrating the Social Order;" Diane Owen Hughes "Regulating Women's Fashion;" and Friedman "Iconography of Dagedged Clothing and Its Reception by Moralist Writers."

¹⁵² Warren Ginsberg, in his edition for the Middle English Text Series, dates loosely *Parlement* in the second half of the fourteenth century (sometime between 1352 and 1390). He notes the *Parlement* appears in British Library Additional MS 31042 and British Library Additional MS 33994, both were compiled in or after the mid-fifteenth century.

specific clothing relates to social behaviors and expectations. Youthe wears the sumptuous clothing of the court, Midel Elde is dressed in the simple but still impressive clothing of the gentry, and Elde is described through his aged body more than the clothing on it. Elde's history of the Nine Worthies serves a didactic, moralizing purpose through which Youthe and Midel Elde might "Makes youre mirroures bi me, men, bi youre trouthe" (l. 290). By offering his own proximity to death through the lives (and deaths) of renowned historical figures, Elde chastises both Youthe and Midel Elde's preoccupations: courtly games and ladies' favors for Youthe and the hard labors of the earth for Midel Elde. Youthe functions as an idealized personification of the chivalric knight, and his clothing descriptions are consistent with descriptions of named knights in romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Awynters off Arthure*. Social norms and (mis)behaviors in the Gawain romances may then be linked to the moral takeaway in *Parlement*: the games of youth do not counter the passage of time or the standards of moral behavior. The lengthy descriptions of the chivalric knight's dress in *Parlement*, as well as in the Gawain romances, provide a useful heuristic for picturing the details of other garments, like Emare's robe (or, as I will call it, tapestry-garment). The moralizing tone in *Parlement* indicates that medieval verse could include allegorized expectations for behavior alongside clothing standards dependent on social status and age.

Performance and ceremony seem central to vestimentary behaviors, often appearing in chivalric romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Awynters off Arthure*.¹⁵³ *Gawain and the Green Knight* exhibits courtly performances of dress as the titular characters are described first through their clothing. Alliterative ekphrasis throughout *Gawain and the Green Knight* and indeed the whole of Cotton Nero A.x, the late fourteenth-century manuscript

¹⁵³ See Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self*.

containing the romance, establishes a dress vocabulary illustrative of the historic period. In a fitted “strayte cote (l. 152), the Green Knight might be dressed in a slim cotehardie preferred by youthful men in the early fifteenth century.¹⁵⁴ In addition to the cote, the Green Knight wears a “mere mantile” with matching hood (coordinated hood and mantle also appeared in *Awynters* for Gaynour), “wel-haled” or tightly laced hose with a silk edging decoration,¹⁵⁵ bright gold spurs but no shoes (ll. 153–160), and a *capados*, which seems synonymous with the mantle, obscuring the upper arms of his garment and fashioned “of a kyngez” across his neck (l. 184).¹⁵⁶ Two arming scenes assemble Gawain as a knight: first, at Camelot before leaving for his adventure; second, at Hautdesert before his rematch with the Green Knight.¹⁵⁷ Gawain’s “doublet of dere tars” (l. 571) evokes an even more contemporary style than the Green Knight’s cote. H. W. Lonsdale and E. J. Tarver write that the fifteenth-century surcote “is now made open in front, showing the doublet underneath” (10). As Gawain wears both cote and doublet, his clothing depicts a more current state of fashion than the Green Knight’s still popular but slightly outdated straight cote. Mary Brooks Picken defines the doublet as “men’s close-fitting garment, similar to jacket, with or without sleeves, sometimes having short, skirt-like section; worn from 15th to 17th century” or as a padded gambeson “undergarment quilted and strengthened with links of mail to be worn under armor” (100). While possible Gawain’s doublet could be an undergarment since it

¹⁵⁴ Fernald and Shenton identify a “straight tunic” developing from the jupon tunic during the reign of Richard II (35), and Lonsdale and Tarver note the popularity of a slim cote for young men during the fourteenth century (7). See also Hayward, “[Jupon](#),” in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles*.

¹⁵⁵ The “silk bordes barred ful ryche” (l. 159) are detailed borders that decorate the upper edge of the hose. They are likely embroidered or braided bands to hold the hose upon his legs.

¹⁵⁶ The “kingly” style referenced here is possibly that of Edward III, as the *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project* asserts that the term *capados* appears in the wardrobe accounts of Edward III.

¹⁵⁷ For a description of Gawain’s arms, see Helmut Nickel “The Arming of Gawain.”

is mentioned during scenes of dressing, the material used (“a dere tars” in l. 571) suggests a garment more fashion-focused than a protective quilted garment like the *pourpoint*.¹⁵⁸ The *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project* (LexP) defines the textile as of Mongol origin, citing Lisa Monnas (“Textiles”) that the “cloth of tars” is figured silk.¹⁵⁹ As figured silk, Gawain’s doublet could be visually linked to the clothing of *Parlement’s* Youthe (ll. 120–129), the Green Knight’s saddlecloths (*Sir Gawain* ll. 164–172), and the details appearing on Gawain’s dress in *Awynters* (ll. 508–510). Monnas, surveying accounts of Edward III’s coronation, identifies *de Tars* and *de Tarsen* as “silks of Eastern origin” contemporarily “classed as ‘Tartar’ silks” (4); the latter description would connect the titular Gawain to *Parlement’s* Youthe.¹⁶⁰ The illustrative specifics in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, especially of the titular characters, showcase the performative function of dress and document clothing norms in the late fourteenth century.

The above examples demonstrate the social and historical role of dress in Middle English verse with attention to masculine dress in the *Regiment of Princes*, *Parlement of Thre Ages*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For the remainder of this section, I turn to descriptions of feminine dress for a breadth of sartorial imagery familiar to medieval audiences, possibly including the audience of *Emaré*. I first survey the details in a vituperative poem about a popular women’s hair accessory (“Lord that lenest us lyf”), followed by truncated vestimentary

¹⁵⁸ The *pourpoint* is a quilted doublet used as a military garment and, in the fifteenth century, as a fashion garment. For more, see Monnas “Pourpoint” in the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress*, Blanc “From Battlefield to Court,” and p. 109 in Newton *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*. Textiles “of tars” might refer to a specific location known for a style of textile preparation. Tars is often taken as indicative of “Tharsia,” and the *Middle English Dictionary* defines as “a kingdom said to border China on the west,” possibly drawn from the *Book of John Mandeville*. Henry Barret Hinckley states *Mandeville* cannot provide authority on the specific location and suggests that “‘Cloth of Tars’ is, according to all accessible evidence, ‘cloth of Tarsus,’ just as ‘damask’ is ‘cloth of Damascus’” (318).

¹⁵⁹ Figured textiles feature decorative patterns occurring in the weave of the textile.

¹⁶⁰ Youthe’s “cropoure was of tartaryne” (l. 132).

descriptions of the women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the wealth of details describing feminine dress in the *Awynters off Arthure*. As you read the following descriptions, I invite you to contemplate how the texts might regulate a late medieval conception of femininity for aristocratic women in England.

The early fourteenth-century poem “Lord that lenest us lyf” in MS Harley 2253 presents caustic sarcasm toward a popular hairstyle of the fourteenth century: braids framing the face and the use of *boces* (a coiled headdress or cauls that hold the braids in nets or cages on the side of the face).¹⁶¹ Specific details in the poem offer material and visual references for the hairstyle, while associating the hairstyle with moral deficiencies (see figs. 3–7).¹⁶² The poem’s premise is that women wearing the boces or hair buns are scurrilous, with the poet using the derogatory *strumpet* (l. 18), *screwe* (l. 21), *gigelot* (l. 27), *shrewe* (l. 29), and *wrecche* (l. 39) to malign women who wear the popular hairstyle. Susanna Fein refers to the poem as “a tour de force of alliterative humor on the trivial subject of how foolish English girls aspire to affect the French fashions of Anglo-Norman noblewomen” (392).¹⁶³ Fein’s statement implies the “English girls” (l. 12) may be non-nobles taking on the style of foreign aristocrats through fashion above their stations. The poem could, therefore, signal anxieties about both class and nationality, wherein the poet critiques both. The women seeking the boce hairstyle are, in the words of the poet, lacking sense, judgment, and knowledge (the “mony wymmon unwis” in line 14). The poet refers to this hairstyle as the cause of decline, with foolish women inviting the devil into their heads with the

¹⁶¹ See Susanna Fein’s introduction to *The Complete Harley 2253* for a description of the manuscript and the Ludlow scribe.

¹⁶² Figure 11 features an effigy bust showcasing braids that appear to match the boce or caul style and a manuscript illustration of women who all wear similar braided styles.

¹⁶³ “Lord that lenest us lyf” is also known as “On the Follies of Fashion” (in Fein’s edition of Harley 2253) and “Against the Pride of Ladies” (in *Multilingual Sourcebook*).

coils as the perfect throne (ll. 34–44). An opening prayer occupying approximately one fifth of the poem frames the need “that monkune / shulde shilde hem from sunne” [that mankind / should refrain from sin] (ll. 10–11, trans. Fein). The gentle implication in these lines precede disparagement against a hairstyle the poet believes reprehensible.

Alongside the censure against hair buns, the poet emphasizes textile objects used for the hairstyle. The textile descriptions provide a useful historic referent for a popular hairstyle in late medieval England in the closing stanza:

The bout ant the barbet
Wyth frountel shule feye.
Habbe he a fauce filet,
He halt hir hed heyne
To shewe
That heo be kud ant knewe,
For strompet in rybaudes rewe!
[The loop and the cloth band
Has to match the forehead piece.
She has a faux-silk headband,
Yet she holds her head high
To show
That she’s recognized and known
As a strumpet in rouges’ company.] (ll. 45–55, trans. Fein)

Women wearing cauls use a barbet or bout that wraps under the chin and a frontlet or filet around the forehead to keep the hair and veil in place (see figs. 5–7).¹⁶⁴ The closing lines to the poem insinuate a curl outside the headband holds shape using lye or urine, whereas each of the textile terms supplies context for the hairstyle: a strip wraps around the head (*bout*), a strip goes under the chin and over top of the head (*barbet*), the band on the forehead (*frontlet*, possibly the same as the *bout*), and band wrapped around the head to keep hair in place (*filet*, possibly the same as *frontlet* and *bout*). Fein translates “fauce filet” as “faux-silk headband” (l. 47), implying that the women emulating a popular hairstyle are using imitative materials of low quality. The *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) defines *fauce* as “intended to deceive” (15201, n. 1b) and “contrary to accepted usage” (n. 9), which is not predicated on a specific fiber, though the *MED*’s representative quotations often include silk as a concatenated term. The falseness identified by the poet carries connotations of imitative materials, as Fein suggests, as well as performative status. The straps are made of “lyn” [linen] (l. 34) to support the decorative coils; it is likely the coils include pearls or other gems. The filet could also be made of linen (hence Fein’s “faux-silk”) and thus demonstrative of the poet’s class-based critique.

Twenty-first-century costumers and reenactors have documented fourteenth-century hairstyles, including boces.¹⁶⁵ Rosalie Gilbert cites extant evidence, whereas Kats Hats displays costumers’ interpretations of the boce style; their work contextualizes how the pieces would be

¹⁶⁴ The image appendix includes manuscript images that showcase the barbet and filet style in Figures 13–15, respectively: Heidelberg Library Cod. Pal. Germ. 848 p. 032^v, Pierpont Morgan MS M.969 fol. 253^r, Beinecke MS 229 fol. 300^v. The marginal illustrations in Pierpont MS M.969 fol. 253^r and Beinecke MS 229 fol. 300^v include a net to restrain the hair, worn by a working woman, whereas Heidelberg 848 p. 032^v does not include a net and the woman wears her hair loose. A reenactor known as Esperanza de Navarra in the Society for Creative Anachronism compiled visual examples of women’s headwear on her blog, [Maniacal Medievalist](#). The post series “On Yer Heade” documents period head coverings, including a description of how to use the barbet and filet to pin a veil, simple, and other headwear in place.

¹⁶⁵ See Kats Hats on the [reticulated Templars headdress](#) and Gilbert on [medieval women’s headdresses](#).

constructed and worn. Kats Hats features photographs of modern reenactors wearing interpretations of the boce style alongside a written description of the materials used to create the boces. Both Gilbert and Kat note the effigy of Philippa of Hainault in Westminster Abbey could be interpreted as wearing boces.¹⁶⁶ If Philippa of Hainault wore this hairstyle, then the poet may have disdained the style worn by the queen consort or, perhaps, viewed the style acceptable only when worn within the royal court. The poem's critique registers an anxiety about the hairstyle, possibly connected to regulating women's behaviors or fashion styles introduced through a foreign consort.¹⁶⁷ The manuscript containing "Lord that lenest us lyf" is dated to the mid-fourteenth century during the reign of Edward III and Philippa Hainault, suggesting a temporally motivated judgment about a style popularized by the royal court.¹⁶⁸

Status, when presented through one's accoutrements, ceases to be mere abstraction. The limited clothing descriptions for women in the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* signal that the few identifiable garments serve an important narrative role, chief among them the lovely belt of Lady Bertilak. At Camelot, Guenore's (Guinevere) clothing is simply "ful gay, graythed in the myddes" (l. 74), and the dais she sits upon is richly arrayed with imported fabrics embroidered and beaded (ll. 76–84). Shifting from Guenore's clothing to other material objects illustrates how a queen can be arrayed as a status symbol. While I focus on descriptions of clothing for Lady Bertilak and Morgan le Fay, the opening narration of Guenore's setting indicates the significance of material objects for aristocratic status. Throughout *Sir Gawain and*

¹⁶⁶ Westminster Abbey hosts [a commemorative page for Edward III and Philippa of Hainault](#) on the website, including images of the effigies.

¹⁶⁷ On this topic, see Hughes "Regulating Women's Fashion" pp. 137–138 and Roze Hentschell "A Question of Nation: Foreign Clothes on the English Subject."

¹⁶⁸ I foreground the anxiety about an imported hairstyle in the Harley poem as a precursor for my analysis, later in this chapter, of Burgundian styling in *Awynters off Arthure* and the cross-cultural Mediterranean context for *Emaré*.

the Green Knight, the poet incorporates elaborate descriptions of courtly goods, including hunting terminology, the architecture of Hautdesert, and the armor worn by the titular characters. While women's clothing is described less than the men, the poet's inclusion of key details warrants mention despite the brevity.

At Hautdesert, Lady Bertilak and Morgan le Fay (as is ultimately revealed) are defined in opposition to each other. Where Lady Bertilak wears a kerchief adorned with pearls as a veil to display her neck and upper chest and not held in place with a barbet,¹⁶⁹ Morgan's throat and chin are wrapped in the "chalkquyte vayles" of a gorget (l. 958) held in place by a pleated silk filet ("hir frount folden in sylk" l. 959) with decorative edges ("toreted and treleted with tryfles aboute" l. 960). Costumer Cathrin Åhlén, who blogs at *Katafalk*, provides tutorials on how to make frilled veils (both [unstarched](#) and [starched](#)), and her work details what a pleated veil might look like as well as how to make one. The description of Morgan's veils with many folds might cause the audience to visualize the facial wrinkles on "an auncian" woman (l. 948).¹⁷⁰ Her chin is covered by a barbet or wimple, possibly in the same manner as a statuette of Blanche of Navarre (see fig. 16). Wrapped in veils, Morgan le Fay is inaccessible as a potential amorous partner in contrast to Lady Bertilak. Morgan's veils invoke the same fabric elements in "Lord that lenest us lyf," though the decorative terms describing Morgan's veils are unique to Cotton Nero A.x.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ On the significance of jewelry in Cotton Nero A.x., see Sarah Sprouse "Lady Bertilak's Pearls" and Helen Barr "Pearl – Or the Jeweller's Tale." Sprouse reads Lady Bertilak's pearls as symbols of intercession linking Gawain and the dreamer in the Pearl poem (p. 34 in "Lady Bertilak's Pearls").

¹⁷⁰ For comparisons of Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the loathly lady in other romances, see Lauren Chochinov, pp. 43–44. Chochinov also notes that, in *Erec and Enide*, Chretien de Troyes positions Morgan le Fay as a textile worker whose love-token is a beautifully ornate chasuble (14–15). Framing Morgan le Fay, often associated with supernatural powers, as a textile worker is another example of what Heller identifies as "fairy embroidery" obscuring a possible Islamic origin for textiles ("Obscure").

¹⁷¹ The *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project* (LexP) entries for "[toret](#)" (4779) and "[treleted](#)" (4812) only feature SGGK as evidence, though both suggest a possible etymological origin in French.

Similar terminology is used for Gawain's armor in *Awyntyrs Off Arthure* as "Trifeled with tranes and trueloves bitwene" (l. 510) and Youthe's appearance as "with trayfoyles and trewloves of full triede perles" (l. 120) in the *Parlement of Thre Ages*, which suggests Morgan le Fay may be dual coded as both an inaccessible loathly lady and a counterpart to the amorous knight.¹⁷² Lady Bertilak, by contrast, wears only her kerchief, possibly made from a lightweight material with a gossamer shimmer. Said kerchief is missing when Lady Bertilak enters Gawain's bedchamber on the third day with "hir thryven face and hir throte throwen al naked / his brest bare bifore and bihinde eke" [her lovely face and throat displayed uncovered / her breast was exposed, and her shoulders bare] (ll. 1740–1741, trans. Winny). The emphasis on the faces and chests of the two women—Lady Bertilak with limited headwear and Morgan le Fay heavily veiled—supports the descriptions of the women's bodily traits as the courtly maiden and the loathly lady: Lady Bertilak's youth against Morgan le Fay's apparent aging; Lady Bertilak's well-shaped physique "wyth chynne and check ful swete / . . . / wyth lyppez smal" (ll. 1204–1207) versus Morgan's repulsive face and stout body.¹⁷³ While both women's head accessories would be made from white or undyed materials, the inclusion of a color-based description for Morgan provides a visual distinction in her "blake browes" and "naked lyppez" (ll. 961–962).¹⁷⁴ The description

¹⁷² The *LexP* notes trifle—as in decorative but of little value—may be conflated with the Middle English trefoil, see entry 4826 on "[truffle](#)." As trifles, trefoils, and true-love knots appear consistently across descriptive passages and due to the simplified shape of a clover with three leaves, the decorative edges of Morgan le Fay's veil could be dagged edges in the shape of a trefoil. Dagging was extremely popular in the late medieval period (see Friedman "The Iconography of Dagged Clothing and Its Reception by Moralistic Writers") and can be documented on sleeves, skirt hems, and the edges of hoods. Further research might discern if decorative dagging occurs on veils in medieval illustrations.

¹⁷³ For further reading on women and gendered norms in medieval romance, see D. S. Brewer "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, Especially Harley Lyrics," chapter one in Dorsey Armstrong's *Gender and the Chivalric Community of Malory's Morte d'Arthur*, and Chochinov's "Distressing Damsels."

¹⁷⁴ It is beyond the scope of my project to consider Morgan le Fay's "blake browes" through the lens offered by Cord Whitaker in his approach to Alison's black brows in *Black Metaphors*; however, I want to note the significance of Whitaker's articulation of the rhetorical and racial othering that occurs when an antagonist or otherwise hostile-to-the-protagonist character is described through dichotomous black/white coloration.

upon first meeting Lady Bertilak and Morgan le Fay illustrate tropes connected to the chivalric maiden and loathly lady topoi. While not as deliberate as “Lord thou lenest us lyf,” the descriptions in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* signal that the poet was familiar with normative dress.

Stylized dress appears elsewhere in another Gawain romance, the *Awynters off Arthure*, often dated to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries. Gaynour (Guinevere) is introduced through her clothing, perhaps even constituted entirely by dress, when Gawain leads her mule into the forest of Carlisle:

Thus Sir Gawayn the gay Gaynour he ledes,
In a gleterand gide that glemed full gay -
With riche ribaynes reversset, ho so right redes,
Rayled with rybees of riall array;
Her hode of a hawe huwe, ho that here hede hedes,
Of pillour, of palwerk, of perré to pay;
Schurde in a short cloke that the rayne shedes,
Set over with saffres sothely to say,
With saffres and seladynes set by the sides;
Here sadel sette of that ilke,
Saude with sambutes of silke;
On a mule as the mylke,
Gaili she glides.

[Thus Sir Gawain leads the gay Gaynour.
In a glittering gown that gleamed full gaily,

with rich ribbons reversed at the edges, whoso rightly reads [her],
 ornamented with rubies that are royally arrayed.
 Her hood of hawthorn's hue, which hides her head,
 with fur, fine cloth, and pearls pleasingly arranged.
 Clothed in a short cloak that protects from rain,
 set over with sapphires truly to say,
 with sapphires and celandines set by the sides.
 Her saddle was of the same,
 fastened with silken saddlecloths.
 On a mule white as milk,
 gaily she glides.] (ll. 14–26)

The brightly colored gown, her “gleterand gide” (l. 15), is not immediately identifiable, though it could be a shade of green because, as Lisa Monnas writes, “‘Gay’ . . . signified not only a light, carefree mood, but also a vivid bright colour, and in this sense was most often applied to green wool” (“Some Medieval Color,” 42). The gown features “ribaynes reversset,” or ribbons at the hems used as borders and slightly turned with a visible reverse side that has been set with rubies (ll. 16–17). While many gowns may have a decorative hem, Burgundian dress often features an opulent contrast neckline, so Gaynour’s ruby-studded “ribaynes” may be at the neckline. Gaynour’s hood is made in a “hawe huwe” and features fur (*pelure*), fine cloth (*palwerk*), and pearls (*perre*). *Hawe* likely refers to hawthorn plants, so her hood is either red like hawthorn berries or a golden-yellow resulting from a dye process using hawthorn berries and flowers.¹⁷⁵ A short cloak, likely made from fulled wool to repel rain, is set with sapphires and “seladynes,” and

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Hahn notes the “hawe huwe” as a shade of aqua, but the color aqua is not present in this phrase.

its sides are “circled” with sapphires.¹⁷⁶ The sapphire, recognized by Marbode of Rennes in *De lapidibus* as a royal gem, may function as a protective charm for Gaynour.¹⁷⁷ Thomas Hahn glosses *seladyne* as “celedonies,” implying an aqua shade of celadon or added chalcedonies, but more likely the hood features an attached capelet embroidered with the yellow celandine poppy. The latter would be a visually appealing contrast atop a red hood the color of hawthorn berries or as a bright tone on tone detail for a pale-yellow hood dyed with hawthorn. Francine Davies, blogging about her experience dying with harvested hawthorn at [Wool – Tribulations of Hand Spinning and Herbal Dyeing](#), found that a combination of flowers and twigs with an alkali bath results in a bright yellow color. Had Gaynour’s hood been blue, the poet likely would have identified it using a dye-based descriptor like *woad* or *pers*, both of which appear frequently for shades of blue during the late medieval period. While possible that woad could produce an aqua shade in the dye process, the poet’s inclusion of *seladyne* rather than *woad*, paired with sapphire beading, suggests a decorative element rather than the color of the overall hood and cloak. *Seladyne* could also refer to chalcedony, a quartz gemstone, but *MED* attestations for *calcedoine* do not include a form similar to *seladyne*, whereas the form *seladyne* for the celandine poppy appears in a medical manuscript, London, British Library, Additional 17866 (*MED* 7056). Costumers [Elin Abrahamsson](#) and [Riku Pasanen](#) have filmed their experiences with woad and other botanical dyes, but further work could be done to compare botanical dyes documentable to late medieval England and the uses of color in literary descriptions. Celandine poppies would also provide a consistency of golden coloring as “al in gleterand golde, gayly ho glides” (l. 27).

¹⁷⁶ See Figures 18–20 for examples of womens’ hoods with mantles.

¹⁷⁷ See Marbode of Rennes, *De lapidibus* (trans. C. W. King): “Sapphiri sepcies digitis aptissima regum” [Fit only for the hands of kings to wear] (l. 103); “Ut saver et merito gemmarum gemma vocetur; / Nam corpus vegetat, conservat et integra membra, / Et qui portat eum nequit ulla fraude noceri” [As gem of gems above all others placed / Health to preserve, and treachery to disarm / And guard the wearer from intended harm] (ll. 112–115).

The celandine poppy offers visual similarity to the trefoil; the latter appears consistently in medieval romance, including on Gawain's dress in *Awynters* (see figs. 13–14).¹⁷⁸ Recreations based on archaeological findings of a hood with a short shoulder mantle have been made by costumers [Morgan Donner](#), [Elin Abrahamsson](#), and [Skredder Punsvik](#), who show how the mantle or short cloak could be an integral part in the structural design of a medieval hood.¹⁷⁹ Connecting Gaynour and Gawain through a matching floral motif illustrates the familiarity with which medieval audiences might identify visual characteristics across different narrative moments. The silken saddlecloths (*sambutes*) on Gaynour's white mule coordinate with the clothing, much like the coordinated knight and steed in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the saddle clothes for her mule are likely silk with the same coloration and ornamentation as her hood and gown. The visual details and ornamentation describing Gaynour would have been easy for medieval audiences to identify and understand, whereas modern audiences are often reliant on editorial glossing which may or may not reflect the historical style and details of dress. As I demonstrate with the example of chalcedony versus celandine, costumers' expertise in recreating medieval material culture can surface knowledge that might otherwise be missing on a purely linguistic level.

In line 30, Gaynour is described as “borne in Borgoyne,” which Hahn takes as a misspelling of Orkney; however, I read *Borgoyne* as Burgundy. Though Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* features the earliest extant mention of Guinevere descending from a

¹⁷⁸ Figure 22 is a photograph of the celandine poppy and Figure 23 is a calendar page from Getty MS Ludwig IX 5 folio 4^r; the latter features yellow flowers reminiscent of a poppy or trefoil on a page for April, within the poppy's growing season.

¹⁷⁹ On extant hoods, see Crowfoot, Pritchard, and Staniland *Textiles and Clothing 1150–1450*, pp. 190–193. Illustrations of hoods can be seen in manuscript illustrations, such as figures wearing hoods in procession on [folio 161v of Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, NAL 3093](#) (see fig. 17 in the image appendix).

Roman family and draws on earlier Welsh tales,¹⁸⁰ thirteenth-century Arthuriana often assigns to Guinevere a French origin in Brittany or, as in *Awynters*, Burgundy. The fashion styles in the court of Burgundy are easily recognizable by the middle and latter parts of the fifteenth century and the four extant *Awynters* manuscripts are consistently dated to the fifteenth century, so Burgundian dress could be implied (see figs. 15–17 for examples of Burgundian dress).¹⁸¹ In addition to the linguistic evidence, ample manuscript illustrations depict Burgundian style, whereas visual depictions of dress styles in Orkney are limited.¹⁸² If Gaynour’s “riall array” (l. 17) is in the style of Burgundy rather than Orkney, the romance may be aligned with the style and legacy of Philippa Hainault, queen consort to Edward III in the mid-fourteenth century. Hainault becomes culturally associated with Burgundy during Philippa’s regency and politically affiliated through Philip the Good in the 1430s,¹⁸³ so it would be well within reason for Burgundian fashion to have achieved popularity among the English aristocracy by the approximate date of the *Awynters* manuscripts. Much like the commentary on the boce style in “Lord thou lenest us lyf,” dressing Gaynour in apparel reminiscent of the Hainault courts indicates a poetic concern with foreign aristocratic style. Further, the specific detail that Gaynour

¹⁸⁰ In his 2008 translation of Monmouth’s *Historia*, Michael Faltera notes earlier Welsh narratives featuring Arthur’s wife Gwenhwyfar (170).

¹⁸¹ For a brief description of the court of Burgundy under Philip the Good, see the webpage from *Aparences*: <https://www.aparences.net/art-et-mecenat/les-ducs-de-bourgogne/philippe-le-hardi/>. For examples of Burgundian style, see the image appendix for the miniature “[Euryalus Sends His First Letter to Lucretia](#)” in J. Paul Getty MS 68, f. 30; the portrait of Mary of Burgundy in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1857, fol. 14^v; an illustration from Aix-en-Provence, Bibl. mun., ms. 0022 p.007. For a comparison between extant images and modern recreations, see Steel-Mastery “[Burgundian fashion of the XV century](#).”

¹⁸² For an example of Burgundian clothing, see [Atelier Nostaglia’s collection of manuscript illustrations when discerning how the front placket functions](#). On the lack of extant Orkney materials, see Joanna Crawford, “[Orkney: Late Medieval Dress](#)”.

¹⁸³ See Blockmans and Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries Under Burgundian Rule 1369–1530*, including chapters two and three on Burgundian influence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and chapter nine on “The Burgundian Legacy.”

wears a hood rather than the hennins popularized in Burgundian and Anglo-Norman dress signals the assimilation of a foreign queen as she takes on the clothing style of a new geographic home.¹⁸⁴

Imported textiles and fashion styles often became popular (or scorned) through association with a royal consort, so associating Gaynour with a foreign style may carry implications for how the audience can understand the apparition tale in *Awynters*. The romance's narrative structure features three significant sequences: the lead-up to a hunt in the forest; the appearance of a ghost during an eclipse mid-hunt; and Galeron's arrival at Carlisle and subsequent battle with Gawain. As the early section involves the spectral form of Gaynour's mother, the poet might comment on social anxieties developing alongside rapidly changing social circumstances, such as the influence of a foreign court. The hunt and ghost tale seem disjointed from the later joust and, as Hahn notes, the two halves depict "social and spiritual interdependency that reflects common medieval notions of society as a unified political and sacred body" (171). The apparition tale in the first half is a "mekel mervaille" (l. 73). The ghost is a jarring sight, "blak to the bone / al biclagged in claw uncomly cladde" [black to the bone, unattractively clothed in clumps of clay/earth] (ll. 105–106), though she later states she was a beautiful queen even "gretter then Dame Gaynour" (l. 147). The apparition warns Gaynour against misbehavior, exclaiming that sexual misconduct resulted in her own death and grisly spectral presence, and the apparition cries for Gaynour to "muse on my mirrour" (l. 167). The poet draws on the *specula* tradition as social treatise to implore intercessory prayers on behalf of the dead. Because the ghost was Gaynour's mother and compares her beauty while living with

¹⁸⁴ See Figure 24, Aix-en-Provence, Bibl. mun., ms. 0022 p.007 for a mid to late fifteenth-century illustration of Burgundian dress with a hood rather than a hennin.

her daughter's attractiveness (ll. 137–139, 144–150), the poet aligns the two women in aesthetics and behaviors. At Gaynour's request for answers, the ghost identifies pride as the sin that "wrathed God most" (ll. 238–239) and proclaims meekness, mercy, charity, and chastity are the best support for Gaynour's life (ll. 250–255). While the apparition tale does not engage explicitly in descriptions of clothing, the medieval reader may recognize the exhortation against pride as inclusive of one's array.¹⁸⁵ In *Minor Works*, Marbode of Rennes identifies the sapphire as reflective of celestial virtue,¹⁸⁶ and the Awynters-poet may pair lapidary symbolism with the *specula* tradition to reflect ideal behaviors the apparition hopes to see her daughter do. The apparition's final statement urges Gaynour to "Thenke on the danger and the dole that I yn dwell" (l. 318), possibly alluding to the risks of being an aristocratic woman whose marital status necessitates a geographic and cultural relocation. Pairing the languishing ghostly mother with her Burgundian daughter suggests the romance may desire to shape Gaynour to good behavior as befits an English queen in direct opposition to the misbehaviors of her since-dead mother.

The second half of *Awynters* features a joust between Gawain and Galeron, with Galeron's unnamed paramour introduced as "the worthiest wight that eny wy welde wolde" (l. 365) wearing a grass-green dress with a "belle" cloak. If Gaynour dons a red hood, then green dress worn by Galeron's lady provides visual opposition in the same colorway as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where Gawain wears red and the Green Knight wears, to no one's surprise, green. The lady's cloak is either made from undyed wool ([see blanket: MED 5092](#)) or a woad-dyed blue fabric ([see plunket: MED 33806](#) and [LexP](#)); as *blunket* (l. 367) may describe a blue

¹⁸⁵ Further research on the manuscript witnesses containing *Awynters* may clarify whether the romance was read exclusively within royal circles; if not, the apparition's plea against ostentatious clothing could gesture toward clothing laws.

¹⁸⁶ See Marbode of Rennes *Minor Works on Stones*: "In sapphiro spei celestis altitudo" [in sapphire the heavenly heights of hope] (p. 124, trans. C. W. King).

garment for Galeron's lady, it is further likely Gaynour's dress is not blue.¹⁸⁷ The lady's cloak is embroidered with birds in gold with a beautiful clasp.¹⁸⁸ Her hair is adorned with pearls, "fretted" and "in fold" with ornamental nets.¹⁸⁹ The lady wears her *kelle* or caul hairnet opposite a filet headband (*contrefelet*) with a fine crown of gold atop. Her kerchiefs are held in place with pins. *Awynters* mentions the kerchief after the crown, though the former is likely the veil worn beneath the "crowne craftly of al clene golde" (l. 371). The inclusion of the lady's crown is significant because, as noted above, Gaynour wears an ornately decorated hood but no identifiable crown. Galeron's lady donning a crown, whereas Gaynour does not, increases tensions about Gaynour's status as Burgundian queen consort.

Despite certain limitations to full knowledge of medieval dress norms and plausible poetic license in the above examples, verse ekphrasis affords creative details that can help to fill gaps in both material records and experiences of "enclothed cognition." Because extant medieval artifacts are fewer in number than more recent centuries, returning to literary descriptions extends an additional opportunity to imagine the garments and armor that existed in late medieval England and that travelled alongside people and stories across continental Europe and the Mediterranean coast. Middle English commentary on dress, including the expression of

¹⁸⁷ Hahn uses Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 324 as his base-text, with Princeton University Library, MS Taylor 9 (the Ireland Blackburn manuscript) for most variant emendations. As a result, his edition uses *blunket*. However, the *LexP* entry for *belle* notes that Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (the Lincoln Thorton manuscript) features *plonkete*, compared to *blunket* in Douce 324 and *blenket* in the Ireland Blackburn manuscript. Without reviewing scribal orthography in the three manuscripts or the fourth witness of *Awynters*, London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 491, I am unable to affirm a definitive choice though I am inclined to affirm *plunket* because Gaynour's description includes multiple instances of color-based terminology but only one reference to fabric in the silk saddlecloths. Still, the late medieval English wool trade was rapidly growing so the poet could view Galeron's lady as decidedly more English than Gaynour.

¹⁸⁸ The style of Galeron lady's cloak parallels *Parlement's* Youthe and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight's* Gawain and Green Knight.

¹⁸⁹ See also "Lord lenest us lyf" in Harley 2253.

anxieties about fashion styles from other cultures and geographic regions, exhibits rich visual details that draw on an environment of embodied memories and material culture. Closer attention to dress and ornamentation presents an opportunity to explore textile craft and symbolism in the late medieval period. Contemporary readers who relish in the details experience a glimpse of co-temporal material presence; such a glimpse can and is utilized by historical sewists. Recreation and evidence-based expertise offers a method of historical reading that pairs literary analysis with historical material records to recreate plausibly historical garments, which allow the costumer to experience the past in the present.

II. TEXTILE LABOR IN *EMARÉ*

I focus on *Emaré* as a longer case study for two reasons: first, a singular garment is central to the overall plot; second, textile labor moves the narrative. Textiles and textile labor in *Emaré* are neither allegorical nor satirical, and the garment terminology woven into each scene reminds the audience of the importance of dress and textile labor. Analyzing the details in poetic descriptions of clothing allows modern readers to evaluate the texts' historical context, including the clothing objects and textile labor familiar to medieval audiences. The iconic garment in *Emaré* moves through cycles of textile workings, from woven cloth to embroidered and beaded tapestry to worn garment, so I call it her 'tapestry-garment.'¹⁹⁰ Using the term *tapestry-garment* engages textile expertise and attends to material realities presented by the textual representation and historical context for the craft-based production of elaborate textiles.¹⁹¹ The tapestry-garment

¹⁹⁰ The full cycle of fiber-to-textile production is not represented in *Emaré*, as we are not provided a description of spinning fibers into the threads used for weaving; nor does the text describe the process of weaving, though a backformation of the final garment would include both weaving and spinning. The woven cloth as first instantiation is assumed, followed by the craft labor of the Emir's daughter.

¹⁹¹ In the image appendix, Figures 27–29, respectively, showcase London British Library MS Royal 20 C V fol. 75 and BnF NAL 1673 fols. 94^r and 95^r to demonstrate domestic and commercial textile labor. Further, Figure 33 (Met

may lend a sensation of aspirational luxury to both the titular character and the medieval reading audience.¹⁹² Tensions concerning social status, gender presentation, and cultural identity cohere associatively in *Emaré*, though my focus is on the textile labor recurring in the romance and not on the tapestry-garment as an agential object.

Emaré appears in only one manuscript: London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A. ii. The Cotton Caligula manuscript features ten Middle English metrical romances, including *Emaré*, alongside select religious poems and verse texts in English and Latin.¹⁹³ Alfred Gough's 1901 dissertation and subsequent 1902 edition claim an oral history based in folklore for *Emaré* and other Constance stories including Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*; however, Edith Rickert, in a footnote to her introduction, writes "The allusion to an oral source in l. 319 (and possibly in l. 24) if it is not purely conventional, may refer only to the fact that other forms of the tale were being carried about" (xxxii). The similarities between *Emaré* and other Constance stories indicate that some version of this exile-and-return narrative was popular in late medieval

Museum accession no. 46.156.10) and Figure 34 (V&A accession no. 8227-1863) provide medieval textile fragments with visual motifs that may be familiar to the implied visuals of *Emaré's* cloth.

¹⁹² On the appearance of luxury in medieval romance, see Lydia Yaitsky Kertz's doctoral dissertation "Luxury, Aesthetics and Politics: The Social Lives of Medieval Romance." Kertz covers *Emaré* in chapter four and, though our arguments diverge, her consideration of the tapestry-garment as "replacement for [Emaré's] skin, the outer extremity of her body, which others around her attempt to decipher" (232) is a compelling analysis on the intimate relationship between an embodied woman and her clothing. Kertz does not identify a perceived audience for the Cotton Caligula manuscript, which I believe inhibits an understanding of the purpose for including luxury objects in the romance, but I am deeply compelled by her description of the transition from parchment to paper manuscripts: "As paper and parchment became alternatives for each other, often treated interchangeably, cloth became a new type of skin, upon which text is inscribed, ready for reading and interpretation. Moreover, the recycled fibers of this cloth-based paper often came from clothing items that intimately touched the readers (linen undergarments served as the most common base material for cloth-based paper) now in a new form, creating a new kind of tactile and textile intimacy" (224).

¹⁹³ Due to COVID-19 restrictions, I was unable to view Cotton Caligula A.ii in person and rely, instead, on catalogues including [Samuel Hooper's 1777 *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*](#) and [Joseph Planta's 1802 *A catalogue of the manuscripts in the Cottonian Library deposited in the British Museum*](#). Edith Rickert, in the introduction to her Early English Text Society edition of *Emaré*, identifies the Cotton Caligula manuscript as "originally marked Vespasian D8 and Vespasian D21, bound together with the present designation before 1654" (ix).

England, and the expansion of the textile industry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries suggests a political motivation to including textiles in *Emaré*.¹⁹⁴

Emaré's narrative conceit mirrors the Constance story and other romances with exile-and-return cycles. After a brief explanation of Emare's family history, the king of Sicily brings a beautifully decorated tapestry to Emare's father, Artyus. A lengthy description of the cloth follows, starting in line 83 and continuing through line 168. The performance of gifting the cloth plays out multiple times: first, the Emir's daughter makes a gift of love given to the son of the sultan of Babylon (ll. 109–120, 159–172); second, the father of the King of Sicily wins the cloth from the sultan “wyth maystrye and wyth myghth” (l. 174) to then gift to his son, Tergaunte (ll. 172–175); third, from Tergaunte, the king of Sicily, to Artyus (ll. 80–84, 176–180). The fourth gifting of the elaborate cloth is from Artyus to Emare when he has “lette shape a robe swythe” (l. 242), which he uses to propose marriage to his own daughter. The titular character flees her home in exile after learning that her father intends to marry her (and that he requested papal dispensation for the marriage). Upon arrival in the unfamiliar land of Galys, Emare assumes another name, Egarye (a disguise of nomenclature though not of clothing as she continues to wear the tapestry-garment throughout the narrative), and joins the working household of Kadore, the steward to the king of Galys. Later, she marries the king of Galys, and they become

¹⁹⁴ On the growing textile trade and its relation to clothing, see Eleanor Quinton and John Oldland “London Merchants' Cloth Exports, 1350-1500,” David Jacoby “Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West,” and James Davis “Market Regulation in Fifteenth-Century England.”

pregnant.¹⁹⁵ While the king of Galys is away to fight with the king of France against Muslims,¹⁹⁶ Emare gives birth to a son. An exchange of letters between the king of Galys and his steward, in which the king's mother intervenes with forged letters,¹⁹⁷ results in the expulsion of Emare and her son from Galys. Their exile at sea echoes Emare's earlier banishment. Emare and her son Segramour arrive in Rome, where Emare again assumes a disguised persona (though still wearing her tapestry-garment) and joins the household of the merchant, Jurden. Seven years pass while Emare is in Jurden's home in Rome. As they feel guilt and shame at exiling Emare, the king of Galys and Artyus both seek penance in Rome. The former lodges at Jurden's home where he learns that his wife and their son, Segramour, survived; the latter learns of his daughter's survival through her son, as Artyus meets Segramour via the king of Galys. The romance closes with three generations of men reconciled with Emare.

Scholarly approaches often focus on the illustrious robe and how it relates to storytelling, the incestuous impulse or how *Emaré* matches Breton lai or Constance-tales, with a notable exception in Ju Ok Yoon's work on the forgery topos.¹⁹⁸ Approximately one tenth of the

¹⁹⁵ Emare experiences the physical effects of pregnancy, but my decision to assign the act of becoming pregnant to both parties is intentional. Emare's body is changed through the experience of pregnancy but to describe it clinically effaces the agency of Emare together with the king of Galys. Perhaps there is further argument to be had regarding Emare's ability to choose to marry the king, but the narrative states "moch love was hem betwene / and also game and gle" [much love was between them / and also play and pleasure] (ll. 473–474). The second line suggests a mutual pleasure in the game of marital consummation.

¹⁹⁶ The text refers to "Saracens," but I follow Shokoofeh Rajabzedah's call to replace the unqualified use of "Saracen" with Muslim in "The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure." Rajabzedah writes, "Interpretation of a text should choose Muslim over Saracen, mainly because there was and is no such person as a Saracen . . . The Saracen—even when represented as a monster or animal—is (mis)representing a Muslim" (n.p.).

¹⁹⁷ Ju Ok Yoon unpacks the forgery topos in *Emaré* in "Medieval Documentary Semiotics and Forged Letters in the Late Middle English *Emaré*," referencing historical writing practices intersected with narrative evidence to describe speculative components of forged letters based on audience knowledge that is not made explicit in the narrative text. In "La male royne boiteuse," Anne-Hélène Alliot similarly details the surreptitious use of the king's seal by his Valois queen in the 1330–1340s, which results in capital punishment for the queen (129–130). Alliot's work demonstrates the cultural currency of the topos of the 'evil (French) queen' who falsely uses the king's seal.

¹⁹⁸ For work on the robe as an object, see Donovan "Middle English *Emaré* and the Cloth Corthily Wrought," Robson "Cloaking Desire," Scala "The Texture of *Emaré*," and White "Textile Logics." On *Emaré* and incest, see

romance is a lengthy description of the tapestry.¹⁹⁹ The cloth and its subsequent garment prove irresistible to scholars, including myself. Much can be read about the robe as an object, perhaps even one with its own agency given the continual references to fae-like mysticism, though reading *Emaré* through historical material cultures is less common.²⁰⁰

Scholars examining the complex social milieu encompassing cross-cultural textile exchange in the Middle Ages might read *Emaré* as indicative of cultural appropriation.²⁰¹ However, material goods travelling between different geographic regions may not necessarily indicate conquest.²⁰² *Emaré* features a heroine who would suit “the silk-clad bodies of courtly heroines in Old French literary texts” which, as Burns posits,

often point to a larger cultural world of the Mediterranean, a world of trade and travel, crusade, and mercantile exchange, showing that the East was not a defining

Laskaya “The Rhetoric of Incest in the Middle English *Emaré*” and Riddy “Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy.” See John Beston for the categorization of Breton lai versus Constance tale. Scholarly approaches centering on the tapestry-garment include Mortimer Donovan’s “Middle English *Emaré* and the Cloth Worthily Wrought” and Tom White’s “Textile Logics of Late Medieval Romance.” The former ascribes to the belief of the cloth’s magical abilities without much textual evidence. The latter relies on an object-oriented ontological framework ascribing agency to the object (i.e., the cloth) while flattening the agencies of the people interacting with it. White also cites Jonathon Gil Harris on nonlinear connections but does not adequately demonstrate how stitching might function as nonlinear connection due, I imagine, to the way object-oriented ontology obscures the labor of stitching, sewing, and weaving performed by agential people. Neither satisfies my interests in the textile *labors* of this medieval romance.

¹⁹⁹ One would be hard-pressed to find scholarship on *Emaré* not referencing the lengthy description of the tapestry cloth. Laskaya, Donovan, and Scala are examples which do; Yoon is an example which does not.

²⁰⁰ Though Scala and White both understand *Emaré* through connection to material object histories, each focuses more on the connection between textile labor in *Emaré* and textual objects such as the Cotton Caligula manuscript. Both articles, as well as Burge and Kertz “Fabricated Muslim,” could be strengthened through inclusion of medieval material culture and textile histories.

²⁰¹ As Amy Burge and Lydia Yaitsky Kertz do in the 2020 article “Fabricated Muslim Identity, Female Agency, and Cultural Complicity: The Imperial Project of *Emaré*.” Jones and Stallybrass also perceive women’s needlework in early modern England as appropriating the techniques and styles of the Islamic world.

²⁰² See Janet Snyder “Cloth from the Promised Land,” Kinoshita “Almeria Silk and the French Feudal Imaginary,” and Heller “Fashion in French Crusade Literature.”

opposite for depictions of gendered subjects in the medieval West but a necessary and integral part of them. (“Saracen Silk” 376)

Sharon Kinoshita similarly states that “the treasured place accorded [Islamic] silks in vernacular French culture squares poorly with the assumption that medieval Christian-Muslim relations during this age of crusades were exclusively, or even predominantly, conflictual” (“Almeria Silk” 167). Material objects can be battle-won but they may also be markers of prestige and status.²⁰³ When the king of Sicily gifts the tapestry to his son, Tergaunte, the cloth carries a dual tension of aesthetically pleasing status symbol and possibly stolen object of conquest. Likewise, Tergaunte’s gift to Artyus imbues the tapestry with social power. Rickert, in her edition of *Emaré*, notes Islamic textile gifts given to Richard I by Tancred of Sicily in 1191 (xxx) and suggests that the gift of Islamic cloth in *Emaré* could have been modelled on a historical exchange. Figure 33 (V&A accession no. 8227–1863) displays a Sicilian tapestry fragment circa 1000–1299, providing a similar visual possibility for the textile gifted by Tancred. Perhaps the poet or commissioner of the Cotton Caligula manuscript had seen or been gifted a cloth in a similar style?

Given the late medieval manuscript context and shifting mercantile economy, the growing gentry is a likely audience for *Emaré*.²⁰⁴ Harriet Hudson notes romance manuscripts often exclude explicit references to named court poets of late medieval England, suggesting familial romances featuring social mobility may reflect the tensions of a gentry audience.²⁰⁵ If

²⁰³ See Kinoshita “Almeria Silk” and David Jacoby, “Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West.”

²⁰⁴ For more on *Emaré*’s audience, see Hudson, Scala, Riddy, and Yoon.

²⁰⁵ British Library Cotton Caligula A.ii includes excerpts attributed to John Lydgate, so Hudson’s statement that the manuscript excludes named court poets is not entirely accurate.

Emaré were written for a mercantile audience, as Elizabeth Scala and Hudson both state, then weaving textiles into an existing Constance framework makes sense, and Emaré's tapestry-garment would carry a sense of aristocratic luxury to please an aspirational reader.²⁰⁶ The assumption from Kadore that Emaré is "an erles thowghtur of ferre lande" [an earl's daughter from a distant land] (l. 422) could have been believable to both characters and medieval audiences because she is dressed the part! In Galys, Emaré takes on textile work within Kadore's home. In Rome, the "glysterynge" garment reflects Emaré's physical beauty (and, as scholars have argued, an inner or spiritual beauty²⁰⁷) but does not lift her social status as it did in Galys. In a merchant's home, Emaré's tapestry-garment may function as a commercial object rather than a prestige item, despite the same heightened language describing it in both circumstances. The tapestry-garment provides an identity trait to Emaré as she takes on textile labor within two gentry households.²⁰⁸ Emaré's decision to continue wearing the tapestry-garment in Kadore's and Jurden's homes may signal an awareness of class identity or a desire to regain an aristocratic class status linked to the narrative's depiction of her physical body.²⁰⁹

Emaré's cloth-turned-garment highlights cultural exchange between Christian Europe and the Islamic Mediterranean. I specify Islamic Mediterranean rather than Islamic Middle East to recognize the complex geography and social politics of the Mediterranean coast during the late

²⁰⁶ To review ideas of social status and luxury garments, see Christopher Dyer "Luxury Goods in Medieval England," Lydia Kertz "Luxury, Aesthetics and Politics: The Social Lives of Medieval Romance," and Nicole Smith *Sartorial Strategies*.

²⁰⁷ See Vines "Domestic Foundation for Social Success in the Middle English *Emaré*" and Donovan "Middle English *Emaré* and the Cloth Worthily Wrought."

²⁰⁸ For images of commercial textile work, see Figures 18–21 in the image appendix.

²⁰⁹ Joanna Crawford writes clothing "was a strategic and self-conscious identity," in part, performed by people's clothing and social connections (164).

medieval period. *Emaré* refers to “the Emerayle dowghter of hethenes” [the Emir’s daughter of heathendom] (l. 109) but does not further clarify where the Emir and his daughter are from, nor a more specific region other than that the region is under Muslim rule. Readers may infer she could be from the Middle East because she loves the son of the sultan of Babylon; however, it is difficult to assert definitively that the Emir’s daughter would be from the same region as her beloved. The Emir’s daughter could be from what is now referred to as al-Andalus, the Muslim-ruled Iberian Peninsula, for two major reasons: she is familiar with French romances about courtly love, and Islamic Spain was a leading producer of fine silk in the Middle Ages (see fig. 32).²¹⁰ The Emir’s daughter creates an embroidered tapestry illustrating French romance tales likely through Islamic decorative styles. The cloth is later transformed into a garment representative of cross-cultural exchange that could but may not necessarily symbolize residual conflict across the Mediterranean. Amy Burge and Lydia Yaitsky Kertz are right that “the internal boundaries between autobiography and romance iconography, between sacred and secular, between Christian and Muslim, are collapsed and reconfigured” in the form of the cloth (47). Co-presence in the tapestry appears because the poet may intentionally conflate Islamic and Andalusian decorative motifs implied in the Emir’s daughter’s work with the English *opus angelicanum* style better known to English audiences (see fig. 34).

The decorative cloth-turned-garment illustrates the stories and tropes of continental romances about French lovers. The cloth depicts four couples whose stories date roughly to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: Amadas and Ydoine, Tristan and Iseult, Floris and Blancheflor,

²¹⁰ On silk in Spain, see Snyder “Cloth from the Promised Land.” Figure 32, Met Museum accession no. 46.156.10, is a thirteenth-century silk fragment produced in Spain.

and the son of the sultan of Babylon.²¹¹ In the introduction to his English translation of *Amadas and Ydoine*, Ross Arthur notes the *Amadas*-poet references well-known literary characters, including Tristan and Iseult as well as Floris and Blancheflor, likely through “the common store of knowledge available to anyone who has read or heard romances in the early thirteenth century” (10). The love, loss, and returned love is a common cycle to the romance plots referenced in *Emaré* as well as the titular character’s story, so the *Emaré*-poet may reference common tales in much the same way as the *Amadas*-poet. Each of the scenes on the tapestry may feature visual cues representing each of the stories (for example, *Floris and Blancheflor* showcases a cup and magic ring), or the tapestry may include names woven in a superscript caption.²¹² Perhaps the audience for whom the Cotton Caligula manuscript was created had other codices with the four romances referenced in *Emaré*. The focus on tales of two lovers emphasizes the familiarity of the love-narrative for medieval audiences.²¹³ Because medieval narratives were not static stories set in easily identifiable temporalities, an approach interested in transtemporality may illuminate the non-linearity assumed by medieval storytellers.

The exquisite details of the tapestry cloth are depicted at length, each drawing on the language of craft as a reminder the cloth was made by the Emir’s daughter.²¹⁴ Despite an exclamation from Artyus that “Sertes thys ys a fayry / Or ellys a vanytye” [Surely this is from a

²¹¹ In narratives centered on Tristan and Iseult, the titular characters fall in love (by potion) and are embroiled in a love triangle (predating the Arthurian love triangle, though Tristram, Iseult, and their love triangle do appear in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*). Tales concerning Firumbras, the son of the sultan of Babylon (so named in the *Sultan of Babylon* though left unnamed in *Emaré*), are French in origin.

²¹² Jacoby, in “Silk Economics,” references name inscriptions on Byzantine silks (202–203).

²¹³ Further work is yet to be completed on the relation between these specific romance tales and *Emaré*.

²¹⁴ Consulting a lapidary, such as the fourteenth-century *London Lapidary*, to better understand the history and significance of specific gemstones on the cloth is outside the realm of my current study but would provide a compelling addition to *Emaré* scholarship. See the entry on “[Gemstones](#)” in the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Dress and Textiles*.

fairy, or else an illusion] (ll. 104–105), the tapestry does not exist as an illusion created by a supernatural force. The narrative dispels the possibility of mystic origin when Tergaunte reminds Artyus and, by extension, the audience that the tapestry simply comes from outside the realm of Christian textile arts. References to otherworldly features elevate the status of Islamic textiles while disguising their origins: “when fairies are represented as responsible for cloth, the methods of embellishment and indeed the workers themselves are taken out of the mortal realm, creating a marvelous effect. . . [and] the nature of the worker is effaced, along with the method” (Heller “Obscure” 15). Yet *Emaré’s* tapestry is described through its maker, even as characters (Artyus and the queen-mother of Galys) attempt to obscure its origin. In the opening description of the cloth, each stanza features craft-based verbs, including *made* (ll. 110, 118, 121), *wroght* (ll. 83, 111, 160, 169), *dyght* (ll. 88, 133, 177), *portrayed* (ll. 112, 125, 149, 164), and *sette* (ll. 95, 129, 143). These terms remind the audience of the craft process involved in making the cloth which is, as Tergaunte says, richer than every jewel in Christendom (ll. 106–108). Using active verbs for the making of the cloth indicates the significance of textile labor: in this case, the labor of the Emir’s daughter.²¹⁵ The Emir’s daughter places herself and her beloved in the fourth frame of the embroidered scenes, alongside three French love stories, which suggests a shared narrative continuum between the Christian West and the Islamic Mediterranean.²¹⁶ Despite an attempted obfuscation of the Emir’s daughter, the fairy motif appearing in *Emaré* does not subsume the significance of textile labor performed by woman. The audience is reminded, in both Tergaunte’s

²¹⁵ See Lisa Cooper’s *Artisans and Narrative Craft* for further research on how late medieval authors and scribes invest narratives with the language of craft production.

²¹⁶ On the production and movement of silk textiles, see Jacoby “Silk Economics” and Veronika Gervers “Medieval Garments in the Mediterranean World.” On textile production by Muslim women, see Kinoshita “Almeria Silk and the French Feudal Imaginary,” Snyder “Cloth from the Promised Land,” Burns “Saracen Silk and the Virgin’s ‘Chemise,’” and Heller “Obscure Lands and Obscured Hands.”

gentle chiding of Artyus and the semi-omniscient description of the cloth, that the cloth was made by a Muslim woman.²¹⁷ When the queen-regent of Galys refers to Emare as “a fende / in thys wordy wede” [a fiend in noble apparel] (ll. 446–447), the tapestry cloth signifies an othering of Islamic textile workers and their magnificent products, but the demonization derives from the queen-mother and not inherently from the poem. Further, the poem’s elaboration of the cloth’s beauty and an inclusion of the Emir’s daughter as the cloth’s explicit maker demonstrate the reverence of the cloth and its maker.

Textile labor appears during distinct stages of Emare’s life.²¹⁸ Amanda Hopkins refers to Emare’s needlework as “a recurring motif, an active skill which is gradually developed to express the heroine’s individual nature” (75), and Elizabeth Scala views the cloth as “an allegory of medieval literary production” whereby the inclusion of craft labor is aligned with storytelling (227). Medieval audiences would be familiar with the language of craft and of embroidery developing into a commercial craft, which Margaret Wade Labarge describes as “both a popular and approved pastime, not only in convents but also in royal and noble households, since it was considered a suitable way for ladies, whether lay or religious, to spend their leisure” (84). The *opus angelicanum* tradition illustrates the luxury status attained by English embroidery in the later Middle Ages.²¹⁹ As a child, Emare learns textile arts alongside court manners from Abro (ll.

²¹⁷ Elizabeth Sklar posits a unique argument that Tergaunte may have been a variant for “Tervagant” or “Termagant” (150), which western European literature situates as a mythical Muslim deity. References to “Termagant” and linguistic variants appear in various romances, including *Guy of Warwick*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and *Richard Coeur de Lyon*.

²¹⁸ See Figures 25–28 in the image appendix for extant illustrations of various forms of textile labor.

²¹⁹ See *English Medieval Embroidery* and Glyn Davies’ chapter on “Embroiderers and the Embroidery Trade.” Figure 34, the Butler Bowdon Cope, is one example of *opus angelicanum*.

55–69). Linking courtesy with textile labor is present across various literary tales when defining the courtly maiden.²²⁰ Felicity Riddy writes,

Emare's skill as an embroiderer is a female equivalent to the knightly skill at arms: it is a status attribute. Embroidery in late medieval England was not only a lady-like pastime but a household craft in which women of good family could serve apprenticeships. It mediated the worlds of the urban elites and the gentry.
(n.p.)

Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass similarly distinguish between an impoverished woman's fiber and textile labors as necessity compared with the somewhat hobbyist nature of gentry and aristocratic women called "to fill their spare time attending to texts," largely by way of embroidery (135). Under the alias Egare in *Galys*, Emare teaches textile arts, including embroidery, to Kadore's family. Emare is less her mother's daughter once she leaves her home, taking on the same labor that Abro once did for the child Emare.²²¹ Readers learn Emare is "curteys yn all thyng" (l. 379) and that she knows how to make quality garments for aristocratic society (ll. 382–384). Kadore names her as "an erles thowghtur of ferre lande" [an earl's daughter from a distant land] (l. 422) and Emare later refers to herself as "a sympull lady" (l. 632). Her use of *sympull* draws a connection between innocence (a constant for the Constance group) and an understanding of estate. *Sympull* carries simultaneous connotations of humility and destitution during the late medieval period, so the poet's inclusion of the term as self-referential plays with categorization of personal behavior and social strata. Emare, cast out from

²²⁰ For courtesy as social behavior in *Emaré*, see Vines "Domestic Foundations for Social Success in the Middle English *Emaré*" and Riddy "Middle English Romance: Family, Marriage, Intimacy." On embroidery as behavioral action, see Labarge "Stitches in Time: Medieval Embroidery."

²²¹ See Abro's work in lines 55–69; Emare's work in lines 373–384, 730–732.

her home country, may recognize her own precarity through the associative meanings of the descriptor *sympull*.

Emaré ambiguates textiles as craft labor and as aristocratic leisure. Emare teaching “all maner of sylkyn werke” (l. 377) in Kadore’s home implies a conflation between labor and leisure. As silk working was “an almost exclusively female craft during the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries” (McIntosh 223), medieval audiences of *Emaré* would understand the multivalent implication of “sylken werke” as describing both aristocratic women’s opulent embroidery and a commercial activity through which women could be craft artisans in their own right (see figs. 17–20). In the 1363 *Statutes of the Realm* governance on artisan craft, working women are exempted from restraint to a single craft and “may freely use and work all Handy Works as they have done before this Time” (ed. Raithby 380). Likewise, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh describes women-run embroidery shops employing additional women as laborers during the fifteenth century (233). Because the manuscript containing *Emaré* dates to the mid-fifteenth century, it is within the realm of possibility that medieval audiences would recognize textile acts occurring simultaneously as leisure and commercial activities dependent on social status. Taught “golde and sylke for to sewe” as a child by the lady Abro (l. 59), Emare embarks in textile craft to sustain her own life later in the narrative, illustrative of shifting social norms. Emare does not do any silk work or other textile labor after her marriage to the king of Galys and prior to her expulsion by the queen-mother of Galys, thus Emare’s textile labors are most visible as craft labor outside the realm of the aristocracy.²²² The inclusion of craft language for the

²²² Sklar juxtaposes moral behaviors along class lines as well, noting the bad behaviors of Artyus and the queen-mother of Galys against the positive treatment of Emare by Kadore and Jurden (154–155).

leisure work of the Emir's daughter in making the cloth also emphasizes discontinuity of rigid social hierarchies.

III. THE CRAFT OF GETTING DRESSED

Due to the lengthy description of a singular garment and the recurrence of textile labor throughout the romance, *Emaré* is a touchstone romance for considering the importance of habituated knowledge and “enclothed cognition” as textual experience. Knowledge of material culture enriches the reading experience, so recovering textile labor in *Emaré* provides an opportunity to speculate on how dress and textiles may inflect the past and refract in the present through evidence-based expertise. The following review of garment terminology in *Emaré* develops from my own experiences with historical costuming, as my interest in medieval dress history predates my work on medieval literature. Wearing an ornate garment and creating “sylke werke” textiles are central motifs in *Emaré*, so historical garments and textile production techniques supply a lens for viewing the past through the experience of presence, though lengthy passages describing the details of Emaré's robe do not, in any meaningful way, indicate how the embellished and embroidered cloth could be made into a wearable garment. While “poets boast of color, splendor, and exotic provenance, but do not catalogue specific stitches or materials” (Heller “Obscure” 35), medieval audiences’ textile literacies would allow them familiarity with materials and construction processes. Harvey Eagleson states that “slight descriptive details are enough to arouse the desired visual image, because the reader is familiar with such a costume in contemporary society” (339–340). The cloth in *Emaré* features four embroidered scenes from other romance narratives before it is made into a wearable garment, thus readers are invited to envision how the cloth might be cut and constructed into a garment simultaneously recognizable and wearable. While recreating the tapestry-garment would be purely speculative, insight from

costumers and dress historians grants additional context for the material details depicted in *Emaré*.

Unlike modern stretch-knits or bias-cut clothing, garments constructed in the medieval period (and today by historical costumers) frequently rely on geometric shapes for economical use of fabric, but the embroidered tapestry would not have been intended for later reuse as a garment. The tapestry cloth is described as four cornered panels, so it is not likely the sequential framing of a linear depiction (like in a fifteenth-century tapestry from the V&A, accession number [4025-1856](#)) but could perhaps be cut into four distinct pieces like the Susanna tapestry (V&A accession number [546-1872](#)) with a decorative border from the close of the fifteenth century. While possible the ornamental scenes could be strategically cut and applied to the garment like a figured orphrey on a chasuble or cope, I have not found evidence of worked scenes like orphreys on non-ecclesiastical garments, though narrative fiction can depict non-standard designs by referencing familiar dress. A fifteenth-century chasuble (fig. 30, V&A accession number [T.27-1992](#)) is an interesting example of a highly decorated red silk brocade with figured orphreys applied to the front. The vertical paneling of an orphrey would likely necessitate premeditated construction rather than reuse adapted from a textile not originally meant for garment construction.²²³ Because the figures' legs are missing in a fourteenth-century orphrey at the V&A (fig. 29, V&A accession number [828-1903](#)), maintaining the exact frame of the scene is not a requirement for reuse. More likely, *Emaré*'s tapestry cloth may be affixed to an existing garment like an applique, similar to the technique used on a Spanish dalmatic from the sixteenth century that features four embroidered panel scenes stitched onto the front and back

²²³ A two-piece orphrey (V&A accession number [T.14&A-1937](#)) provides an example of solitary figures well-framed.

below the knee and at each sleeve hem (fig. 31, V&A accession number [T.759-1919](#)). The speculative nature of discerning garment construction, which I argue is central to reading *Emaré*, makes visible the otherwise obscured labor of textile work and garment construction.

Emaré's garment is described as [kurtull](#), [robe](#), [serke](#), [surkote](#), [palle](#), [wede](#), and [gore](#). While likely some terms appear for metrical or poetic purposes, I contend that the specific evocation of garment styles draws on the habituated knowledge of medieval audiences.²²⁴

Robe is the second most-used garment term after *cloth* and appears five times in *Emaré*. While the use of *robe* may refer to “a long, loose outer garment worn by men or women; a robe, gown; also, clothing” (*MED* 37044, n. 1), the term more likely refers to a full ensemble comprised of multiple garments.²²⁵ *Robe* implies that Emaré possesses a full set of clothing even if only the top layer was made from the tapestry cloth, further supporting the dress terms used for Emaré's clothing. Kristen Burkholder and Odile Blanc have both identified the *robe* as more than a single garment. Burkholder writes “The term “robe,” as used in the medieval era and in wills, referred to an entire suit of clothing, not a single garment” (138); Blanc identifies the shift, cote, surcote, with cape, mantle, or cloak as “the wardrobe components of a nobleman of which the layers of garments (and by consequence their number) indicate the rank and wealth of the wearer” (162). Medieval clothing (and most dress prior to the twentieth century) was generally worn in layers, beginning with an undergarment layer worn next to the skin. Where twenty-first-century people might wear a slip or undershirt, most people in the medieval period would wear a linen shift closest to the body (also referred to as a smock, chemise, or the Middle English *serke*).

²²⁴ For a detailed description of headwear and accessories, see Thursfield *Medieval Tailor's Apprentice* or Wagner *Medieval Costume, Armour, and Weapons*. Rosalie Gilbert has an extensive documentation of historic garments and accessories alongside sewing tutorials on her website.

²²⁵ This approach calls to mind Robert Henryson's survey of women's dress in the “Garmont of Gud Ladeis,” which I described in the introduction to the dissertation.

As Abby Cox articulates in a video on eighteenth-century dress (though relevant to historic costuming transtemporally), the linen underlayer wicks away sweat and protects outer garments, meaning the outer garments need not be laundered as frequently.²²⁶ Prior to the fourteenth century (and surely continuing into it), most people in England wore a loose-fitting cote over a shift; the cote could be pulled over the head and might be a similar shape to the shift. Fitted dresses with lacing or buttons, like the kirtle and cotehardie, came into fashion in late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, replacing the cote as the second layer worn. An overdress might be worn atop the smock and kirtle. The style of the overdress depends on what is fashionable and might include the sideless or open surcote, buttoned cotehardie, fitted gown, or flared gown (like the fifteenth-century Florentine and Burgundian styles).²²⁷ As *robe* could be interpreted in a variety of ways—including modern connotations of dress that do not adequately represent a medieval garment—and *Emaré* does not specify beyond a description of the tapestry cloth, I use tapestry-garment in place of *robe*. Three instances of *wede* for *Emare* and two for *Segramour* suggest this term, defined in the *MED* generically as “a garment, an article of clothing” (51971, n. 1) may function as a synonym for *robe*.

The tapestry-garment is not likely a kirtle by itself. The *MED* defines kirtle as “a garment for women or girls, often an outer garment, sometimes worn over a smock or under a mantle, gown, or pilch” (24354, n. 2a). Perin Westerhof Nyman has documented her experiences making a fourteenth-century [kirtle](#) and [cotehardie](#) on her costuming blog, Isabel Northwode Costumes. [In](#)

²²⁶ I intentionally cite a dress historian’s YouTube video, “[I Wore 18th-Century Clothing Every Day for 5 YEARS & This Is What I Learned \(Corsets Aren’t Bad!\)](#)”, in place of a traditional monograph, because my project intends to privilege voices which do not typically find a way into academic scholarship.

²²⁷ In addition to my own experiences with medieval costuming and ongoing conversations with historical costumers, more information on medieval layers of dress can be found in Francoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane *Dress in the Middle Ages* (trans. Caroline Beamish), Sarah Thursfield *Medieval Tailor’s Assistant*, Rosalie Gilbert [Medieval Women Website](#), and Morgan Donner’s [historical recreation blog](#).

[her recreation portfolio](#), Nyman features images of a hand-stitched late-fourteenth-century gentlewoman's gown, partially inspired by an illustration on folio 212^r in the *Belle Heures of Jean de Berry* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Cloisters Collection, 54.1.1). Nyman wears both the grey kirtle separately as an exterior garment and as an interlayer beneath her pink gown, illustrating that a kirtle can be worn as the topmost layer but may also function as an interlayer between the underlayer (smock) and overdress. Emare's garment is not likely the internal layer since she is described only once "in kurtull" (l. 392). In that instance, Emare serves the king of Galys during a feast at Kadore's home. The full passage is "The lady that was gentyll and small / In kurtull alone served yn hall, / Byfore that nobull kyng" (ll. 391–393). Whether *alone* functions as adjective or adverb impacts the readerly experience because either Emare wears kirtle alone (i.e., no overdress) or she is the lone server in the hall. Since the lines that follow characterize Emare through "The cloth upon her shone so bryghth" (l. 394), I am inclined to read *alone* as modifying the verb where *cloth* implies she still wears the tapestry-garment. If she is wearing the tapestry-garment, then she is not dressed "in kirtle alone" by simple fact that the tapestry-garment is never defined as a kirtle beyond this instance, while it is labelled *cloth* twelve times throughout the narrative (including here). *Kirtle* appears twice: once in the above instance for Emare and once when describing her son's clothing.

Like *kirtle*, *surcote* appears only once for Emare's garment, during her second exile at sea when "her surkote that was large and wyde" (l. 652). One visualization might be long and full sleeves, like a bliaut or houppelande, so that Emare could gather the excess fabric to hide her face.²²⁸ Wide, hanging sleeves on a fitted surcote are another possibility. Eagleson identifies the

²²⁸ The funerary robe of Jon of Gorlitz is a surviving fourteenth-century houppelande at Prague Castle. Tasha Kelly, on [La cotte simple](#), documented her trip to see the extant garment and cites a translation of Melina [Bravermanová's 2005 conservation report into English](#). Rosalie Gilbert's documentation on the [houppelande](#) provides a good visual differentiation from the [surcote](#).

popularity of mid-fourteenth-century trailing sleeves appearing in *Kyng Alisaunder* and *Morte Arthure* (344–345); while *Emaré* does not use the same dress terminology, medieval audiences could infer the detail. This moment in *Emaré* might call to mind the long draping sleeves despised by Hoccleve’s old man or the ongoing debates about use of fabric in the upper classes, which Kimberly Jack explores in “What Is the Pearl-Maiden Wearing, and Why,” or it could be a simple description of full skirts common in the period. Emare may gather the fabric of the skirt pulled up, since she would likely wear a kirtle beneath the surcote. While possible Emare had both a surcote and the tapestry-garment, she is portrayed wearing “that robe of ryche ble” when she is sent off in the preceding lines (ll. 640–648).

The *serke* appearing in line 501 is not an exploration of the tapestry-garment, but a consideration, through dress, of the embodied racial characteristics that suggest Emare is an idealized medieval romance heroine.²²⁹ The *MED* defines *serke* as “a garment worn next to the skin, an undergarment; a shirt, shift” (39539, n. 1). The deference to a garment here serves not to focus on dress, but as metacommentary on women’s bodies and their purpose. Emare is *semely*, or beautiful, underneath her garments. The narrative purports that she is *semely* for two reasons: her white skin and her pregnant body. The two traits would seem to draw a distinction between Emare and the Emir’s daughter, and both traits are obscured and revealed through the garments that Emare wears. Similarly, *gore* appears once in the same alliterative approach: Emare is “goodly unthur gore” (l. 937). A *gore* can be defined as “a wedge-shaped piece of cloth forming part of a garment; esp., a triangular insertion” or “a woman's skirt, the lower part of a gown” (*MED* 19088, n. 2a), so I reason *gore* is used in the same method as *serke* to depict Emare’s physical body in terms beneath the garments. If the manuscript and *Emaré* were for a mercantile

²²⁹ On the ideal courtly maiden, see Brewer “The Ideal of Feminine Beauty.”

or gentry audience, as is believed by many scholars, then dress and craft labor in *Emaré* is further understood through the relation to social status and mobility.²³⁰ However much the romance seems to separate *Emaré* from the cloth (as Hopkins suggests), dress in the Middle Ages could not be quite so easily disentangled from the self.

Connecting medieval textiles and modern constructions of historical pieces with the garment terminology appearing in *Emaré* is an approach that values transtemporal, material knowledges not readily accessible when reading a modern edition. A closer examination of textile labor and the tapestry-garment illustrates women's labor in the late Middle Ages, and my reading of *Emaré* contends with heretofore unacknowledged elements of textile labor in romance. The fragile nature of surviving medieval textiles limits accessibility to the public. However, historic costumers and reenactors, including those cited in this chapter, create reproductions that could serve as surrogate or simulacrum for such fragile artifacts. Reproductions of historic garments can provide object biographies and historical craft labor, as well as an embodied experience in both making and wearing historical garments across periodized time.

IV. CONCLUSION

A deeper engagement with embodied knowledge is a unique way to understand literature across time, especially in works emphasizing feminized labor and female subjectivity. As I hope to have shown, descriptions of garments in Middle English poetry resonate with the textile literacies of medieval audiences for present and future audiences, including women past, present,

²³⁰ Amy Vines, for example, suggests that a compilational reading of romance narratives alongside conduct materials (e.g., the Cotton Caligula manuscript includes *Emaré* and courtesy manuals) can reiterate behavioral lessons meant for social advancement.

and future who do and have done all manner of silk work. Kathryn James writes that “Work and time are the threads of stories about textiles: labor and distraction; agency and necessity; meaning and failure of meaning” (53). I emphasize the importance of textile labor and sewists’ knowledge beyond the academy to underscore that the distinction between scribal knowledge production and textile research is one of position, not rigor. Contemporary dress historians and historical sewists experience this tension in recreating historic clothing or using historic techniques. Garment-focused recreation offers an avenue through which to experiment and experience texts through textiles.

Reenactment and material recreation are a speculative form of history as a bridge across the temporal divide of ‘then’ and ‘now.’ The joy of embodied textile labor remains unspoken here, but the act of remaking the past and experiencing a text through material culture can be pleasurable, reclaimed against a harsh divestment of the body. Creative projects, often drawing on habituated knowledge like textile arts, propose a valuable method of engaging various kinds of knowledge to experience textuality. Experimentation with textile arts can extend, for contemporary readers of a text like *Awynters off Arthure* or *Emaré*, accumulative historical-material context (thus speculatively uniting contemporary and medieval audiences) and the ability to clothe the textual experience in a textile experience. The collision of medieval and contemporary dress occurs in historical costuming and reenactment projects to invite transtemporal play: existing in one time while draped in another, accumulating the layers of both. Tactile and textile histories invite a transtemporal reading process that embraces the material histories that underly a contemporary fascination with the medieval.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I document the process of creating a medieval garment inspired by a passage of literature. Materiality is not simply accessible as a historical

artifact to be examined but as a meaning-laden, interactive experience. Through the craft of stitching, I document the sensory knowledge that may have been relevant to medieval reading audiences but has since been lost to twenty-first century audiences.

V. CHAPTER 3 APPENDIX: CLOTHING AND TEXTILES



Figure 7. London, British Library, MS Arundel 38, fol. 37^r (cropped). Made available online through the British Library's [Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts](#).

Miniature of Prince Henry circa 1411–1432 in Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*. Prince Henry and the kneeling man both wear houppelandes. Henry's gown features trailing dagged sleeves lined with ermine. This style of dress is criticized by the old man in *Regiment*.



Figure 8. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, accession no. T.204–1957 (cropped). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The Devonshire Hunting Tapestry: Boar and Bear Hunt (detail), circa 1425–1430. Two women wearing elaborate houppelandes with ornate fabrics. The woman on the left wears a blue gown with long pendant sleeves; the woman on the right wears a red gown with a long train and attached cape. View the full tapestry in the [V&A's digitized collections](#).



Figure 9. Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no. 41.100.132, Tomb Effigy Bust of Marie de France (1327–41). Made publicly available through the Met's Open Access collection.

Marie's effigy demonstrates the popular side braids with a filet that was worn throughout the fourteenth century.



Figure 10. Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bodley 264, fol. 108^v (cropped). © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, made available by the Digital Bodleian under CC-BY-NC 4.0.

A portion of a scene from the *Romance of Alexander* by illuminator Jehan de Grise, circa 1344. Note the braids framing the faces of the women, similar to the cauls referenced in “Lord thou lenest us lyf.”



Figure 11. Heidelberg University Library, Cod. Pal. germ. 848 p. 032^v (cropped). Available online in the Heidelberg Library’s digitized historic literature under Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Woman in blue wearing a barbet and frilled filet. The barbet goes under the chin.



Figure 12. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.969 fol. 253^r (cropped). © The Morgan Library & Museum.

Woman churning butter while wearing a barbet, filet, and wimple with hairnets.



Figure 13. New Haven, Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 229 Arthurian Romances fol. 300^v (cropped). Available online through the [Beinecke's digitized manuscripts](https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/digitized-manuscripts).

In this marginal illustration from Beinecke MS 229 Arthurian Romances, a woman wearing a barbet, filet, and cauls appears to be churning butter.



Figure 14. Met Museum accession no. 17.190.388. Made publicly available through the Met Museum's Open Access collection.

This statue is from a selection of figures circa 1350, possibly depicting Philip VI Valois, Blanche of Navarre, and one of their sons. The wimple has been pulled up to cover the chin, like the description of Morgan le Fay's gorget in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAL 3093

Figure 15. *Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAL 3093 fol. 161^v (cropped). Made available online by the [Bibliothèque nationale de France](https://gallica.bnf.fr/) under Public Domain.*

In this scene from the late fourteenth century, note that the men's hoods appear connected to a full cloak, whereas the women's hoods button at the neck (though are worn unbuttoned in this scene) and feature a short shoulder mantle. Some hoods match the dress, such as the light blue lady's apparel second from the left, whereas others do not. The women in the light blue and red cotehardies both feature a hem ribbon in a contract color.



Figure 16. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264 fol. 59^r (cropped). © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, made available by the Digital Bodleian under CC-BY-NC 4.0.

In the marginal scene, a woman presents her heart to a man. The woman wears a green gown with miniver lined tippets and a red hood. The hood features a decorative edge and has been pulled entirely behind her shoulders. The man wears a red cote with miniver lined tippets and a particolor hood with similar decorative edge details. This image illustrates the use of hoods with mantles and decorative features.



Figure 17. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264 fol. 171^r (cropped). © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, made available by the Digital Bodleian under CC-BY-NC 4.0.

This illustrated scene from the *Romance of Alexander* showcases a woman in a blue dress with a pink hood and mantle on her horse; the chest portion of the hood features buttons which have been left open and the hood is secured by a small section at the neck. Two men wearing hoods without buttons ride a second horse next to her.



Figure 18. *Celandine poppy, photographed by user Bff for Wikimedia Commons in May 2010.*

The celadine poppy—also known as greater celandine, swallow wort, and *chelidonium majus*—is a yellow flowering plant native to Europe and western Asia. It is kept in The Cloister’s gardens and documented on their blog [The Medieval Garden Enclosed](#). The celandine referenced in *Awynters* could also be the lesser celandine, *ranunculus ficaria*, of the buttercup family, which is also kept in The Cloisters (see the [Medieval Garden](#) post on lesser celandine).



Figure 19. J. Paul Getty Museum Ms. Ludwig IX 5 (83. ML.101), fol. 4^r. Made available under The Getty's Open Content Program.

The calendar page for April 1410 showcases golden flowers ready to be picked. The yellow flowers in spring are reminiscent of the celandine poppy during its growth season (March to May). The shape of the gold leaf flower is a trefoil, which appears in the descriptions for Morgan Le Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain in *Awynters Off Arthure*, and Youthe in *Parlement of Thre Ages*.



Figure 20. J. Paul Getty Museum MS 68 fol. 30^r, Euryalus Sends His First Letter to Lucretia.

Made available under The Getty's Open Content Program.

This miniature of Euryalus and Lucretia provides a wonderful example of Burgundian dress in the mid-fifteenth century. Note the women's contrast hems, collars, and cuffs.



Figure 21. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 1857, fol. 14^v. Available to view online through the [Österreichische Nationalbibliothek](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:5:1-63862-p0101-9).

Mary of Burgundy reading from her Book of Hours (1477). This portrait is demonstrative of late fifteenth-century Burgundian dress. Note the v-shaped collar, high waist, and pointed hennin in the foreground and background scene.



Figure 22. Aix-en-Provence, Bibl. mun., ms. 0022 p.007.

Illustration from a Book of Hours circa 1460–1470. The woman wears a Burgundian dress with a short hood, which indicates that Gaynour could be dressed similarly in *Awynters*.



Figure 23. New Haven, Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 229
Arthurian Romances fol. 253^r (cropped). Available online through the [Beinecke's digitized manuscripts](#).

This marginal scene from MS 229 features a woman spinning with a distaff in her left hand and thread being spun in her right hand, with a spindle trailing on the ground behind her.



Figure 24. London, British Library, Royal 20 C V fol. 75^r (cropped). Made available online through the British Library's [Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts](#).

This scene from Giovanni Boccaccio's *Des cleres et nobles femmes*, *De claris mulieribus* showcases Gaia Cecilia at a large horizontal loom. Three women in the foreground are spinning and carding, preparatory tasks before the fibers can be used for weaving or embroidery.



Figure 25. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAL 1673, fol. 94^r.

Made available online through the [BnF's Archives and manuscripts](#).

A scene from an early fifteenth-century manuscript demonstrates textile work. BnF NAL 1673 fol. 94^r depicts fabric being measured and cut. Note the woman in the lower right stitching a small piece of fabric.



Figure 26. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des Manuscrits. NAL 1673, fol. 95r.

Made available online through the [BnF's Archives and manuscripts](https://archives.manuscripts.bnf.fr/).

Fol. 95r showcases garments being sewn and sold. In the foreground, a woman in a green gown is sewing a white textile; a man in a blue cote and brown hood is stitching a green hood while seated on the cutting table. A man in a reddish cote measures pendant sleeves on a woman's blue gown. In the background, garments hang on a pole: hoods, hose, cotes.



Figure 27. *Victoria and Albert Museum, accession no. 828–1903, Orphrey. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*

An orphrey is an embroidered band (usually vertical) typically applied to the front of clerical vestments. This orphrey, housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, features two detailed vertical panels with scenes featuring saints; the bottom of the panels has been cut so the saints' feet are missing. The two panels are on linen and do not appear to have been applied to any vestments.



Figure 28. *Victorian and Albert Museum, accession no. T.27–1922, Chasuble. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*

The chasuble is an exterior ecclesiastical garment often heavily detailed. This chasuble from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century features a center panel of embroidery atop red silk with elaborate brocade details.



Figure 29. *Victoria and Albert Museum, accession no. T.759–1919, Dalmatic. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*

The dalmatic is a sleeved tunic, often featuring applique details. The Victoria and Albert has two sixteenth-century Spanish dalmatics made from velvet with rectangular scenes. The four scenes applied, on the lower front, lower back, and one on each sleeve, could be a possible style in *Emaré*.



Figure 30. Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no. 46.156.10, Textile Fragment from the Dalmatic of San Valerius. Made publicly available through the Met's Open Access collection.

This silk fragment comes from a thirteenth-century Spanish dalmatic. In an entry for *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Olga Bush writes, “In the tapestry-woven fragment of the dalmatic (this fragment), the delicate geometric interlace is created by fine lines of white silk. The simple, minute secondary motifs—executed in brilliant blue, green, and pink threads and embedded in the interstices of the interlace against the shimmering gold brocade—recall the jewel-encrusted surfaces of gold-work. An epigraphic band in vivid red against the gold ground repeats an auspicious phrase” (n.p.).



Figure 31. *Victoria and Albert, accession no. 8227–1863, Woven Silk Fragment. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.*

The Sicilian tapestry fragment circa 1000–1299 is likely similar to the textiles that were gifted from Tancred to Richard I in 1191 (see Edith Rickert’s introduction to *Emaré*). This visual style may have been evoked in the tapestry woven by the Emir’s daughter in *Emaré*.



Figure 32. Victoria and Albert Museum, accession no. T.36–1995, Butler Bowdon Cope. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The Butler-Bowdon Cope is an excellent example of English *opus angelicanum* embroidery done on Italian velvet. It is possible that the *Emaré* poet expected medieval readers to visualize familiar *opus angelicanum* embroidery when describing the beaded scenes of the tapestry-garment.

CHAPTER 4

MAKING A MEDIEVAL HOOD



Image 1. Embellished Hood Front, Close.

Integrating the insights supplied by modern practitioners presents an opportunity to recover a simulacrum of the material and textile literacies presumed by authors of medieval texts. Reproductions of historic garments can provide object biographies and historical craft labor, as well as an embodied experience in both making and wearing historical garments across time.

Stitching Time: Making a Medieval Hood focuses on the sensory experience and skills-based practice of making medieval garments. I use historic techniques to create a physical object representative of my close reading experience. Due to the labor-intensive processes involved, the garment construction component of this dissertation is process-oriented rather than product-

oriented. The medieval hood documented here is based on London hood no. 246 with an extended shoulder mantle to mimic the length of the woman's hood on folio 171^r of MS Bodley 264. The creative details and embellishments are inspired by the description of Guinevere's clothing at the opening to the fourteenth-century *Awynters off Arthure*.

The sewing project was documented in an online Omeka exhibition: <
<https://caitlinpostal.ds.lib.uw.edu/stitchingtime>>. The materials present here include the text and images that were organized on the Omeka instance. The garment was constructed in 2021 with the generous support of the Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, the University of Washington Office of the Provost, and the PSB Fund—the family foundation of Barclay and Sharon Simpson—as part of the inaugural cohort for the Barclay Simpson Scholars in Public program.



Image 2. Constructed Hood Flat Lay.



Image 3. Embellished Hood Down, Facing Forward.



Image 4. Embellished Hood, Profile Left.

I. INSPIRATION

When I first read *Awynters off Arthure*, I was struck by the visual details provided, primarily in descriptions of clothing. Because I am a medieval reenactor, cosplayer, and hobby sewist, I have experiential knowledge with clothing and textiles that enticed me to pay close attention to clothing. Researching the terminology and surviving medieval artifacts for my dissertation chapter on dress in Middle English verse provided an opportunity to think about embodied labor and the amount of time that material crafts can take. To experience the craft, I opted to make a medieval hood using historic techniques and based on the description that appears in *Awynters off Arthure*:

Thus Sir Gawayn the gay Gaynour he ledes,
In a gleterand gide that glemed full gay -
With riche ribaynes reversset, ho so right redes,
Rayled with rybees of riall array;

Her hode of a hawe huwe, ho that here hede hedes,
Of pillour, of palwerk, of perré to pay;
Schurde in a short cloke that the rayne shedes,
Set over with saffres sothely to say,
With saffres and seladynes set by the sides;
Here sadel sette of that ilke,
Saude with sambutes of silke;
On a mule as the mylke,
Gaili she glides.
[Thus Sir Gawain leads the gay Gaynour.
In a glittering gown that gleamed full gaily,
with rich ribbons reversed at the edges, whoso rightly reads [her],
ornamented with rubies that are royally arrayed.
Her hood of hawthorn's hue, which hides her head,
with fur, fine cloth, and pearls pleasingly arranged.
Clothed in a short cloak that protects from rain,
set over with sapphires truly to say,
with sapphires and celandines set by the sides.
Her saddle was of the same,
fastened with silken saddlecloths.
On a mule white as milk,
gaily she glides.] (ll. 14–26)

Sewing can be labor-intensive, so the project is process-oriented rather than product-oriented. The first step is thinking creatively about the garment and how to make it. I did etymological research in the *Middle English Dictionary* and *Lexis of Cloth and Clothing Project* on just about every clothing-related term that appears in this romance, which led me to identify a few visual interpretations that develop from my experiences with historic clothing:

- a) The hood could be red, the color of hawthorn berries (Lisa Monnas elaborates on the use of costly kermes insects for high quality dye).
- b) The hood could be yellow, the color of material dyed with hawthorn berries, leaves, and twigs (see Francine Davies's dye experimentation).

Likewise, I read for embellishment details since, after all, Guinevere is a queen, which led me to:

- a) The "short cloke" could be a mantle attached to the hood, like various archaeological examples and manuscript illustrations.
- b) The hood and cloak could be separate pieces, where the hood is made of satin weave with fur and pearls, and the cloak is wool with sapphires.

Thomas Hahn, in his edition, glosses "seladynes" as "celedonies," implying the celadon stone. After much research, I opted to read "seladyne" as "celandine," i.e., a yellow celandine poppy, due to its appearance in London, British Library, Additional 17866 (*MED* 7056). Celandine poppies would also provide a consistency of golden coloring as "al in gleterand golde, gayly ho glides" (l. 27). From there, I visualized a hood with beading and embroidery that would showcase these details.

My primary extant inspirations for the hood project were London Hood no. 246 in *Textiles and Clothing* (pictured right) and the woman's hood on the woman's hood on folio 171^r of MS Bodley 264 (pictured left).

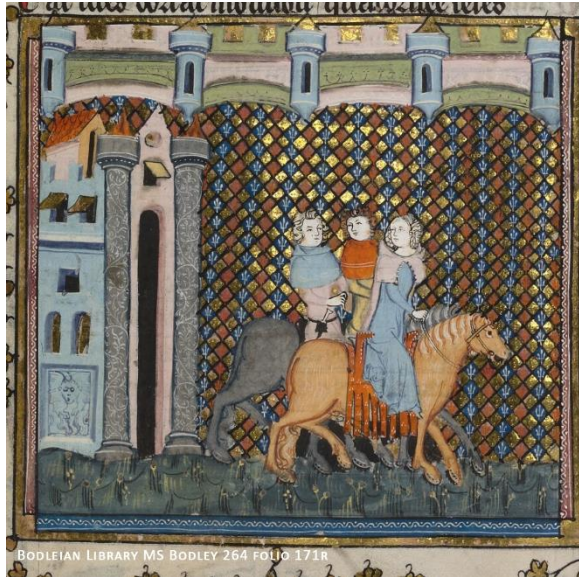


Figure 34. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264 fol. 171^r.

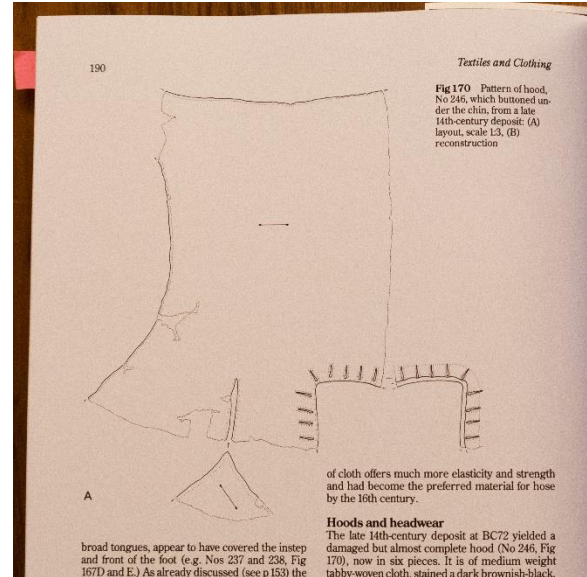


Figure 33. Textiles and Clothing Illustration of London Hood no. 246 (page 190).

II. PATTERNING



Image 4. Mockup.

In addition to the London hoods featured in *Textiles and Clothing, 1150-1450* and the details in Sarah Thursfield's *Medieval Tailor's Apprentice*, contemporary costumers' work recreating medieval hoods aided my construction process, especially that of [Morgan](#)

[Donner](#), [Elin Abrahamsson](#), [Cathrin Åhlén](#), and [Perin Nyman](#). I relied on costumers' blogs and vlogs of the making process, paired with information from archaeological finds. Much of the archaeological research does not describe how to *do* the making, so it was helpful to put myself into community with other craftspeople—both contemporary costumers and medieval textile workers.

The first mockup, made from light purple fabric, did not fit well and could not be worn. The second mockup, pictured above, is made from cotton scraps. Seams were basted with temporary thread to ensure the fit before transferring the flat pattern to paper.

The first gore drafted was too small for the shoulder gusset, so I expanded the width and length in successive versions. Visible lines mark measurements; also visible are disregarded lines that did not suit the pattern.

My hood is based on London Hood no. 246, though I extended the shoulder mantle to be match the length of the woman's hood on folio

171^r of MS Bodley 264. Wool broadcloth was a primary textile export from England in the fifteenth century and was considered a high-quality material that replaced many imported luxury fabrics. Wool dyed bright colors, such as red like the broadcloth I use, indicated affluence.

The hood features a skinny tail or liripipe, which is commonly seen on extant hoods and in manuscript illuminations (including hoods throughout MS Bodley 264). Long liripipes on hoods were popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. One possible reason is that the additional fabric required to make a liripipe could be a sign of wealth (similar to the use of fabric



Image 5. Shoulder Gore Pattern Draft.

in hanging sleeves, tippetts, houppelandes, and other garments that were frequently criticized). The tail could also be wrapped around the head for warmth or security, which aids in wearing a hood styled as a fifteenth-century chaperon.

Before cutting the wool broadcloth, I checked the fit of the pattern with a third mockup (Images 6 and 7). I wore my hair in a fourteenth-century style. After three mockups, I transferred the pattern to grid paper and laid it out on the wool broadcloth to find an economical use of fabric.



Image 6. Mockup #3 Test Fit Unhooded.



Image 7. Mockup #3 Test Fit Hooded.



Image 6. Paper Pattern.



Image 7. Pattern Traced.



Image 8. Pattern Cut.



Image 9. Thread Marking Shoulder Gore.

III. SEWING



Image 10. Sewing Tools.

Each stitch is done by hand—my hands.



Image 11. Preparations.



Image 12. Stab Stitch Back Seam.



Image 13. Stab Stitch Back Seam 2.



Image 14. Center Back Seam Felled.

CONSTRUCTION

I initially planned to use a running back stitch for the seams to save time, but the wool broadcloth was too thick. Instead, I used a stab stitch with waxed linen thread for the center back seam and liripipe, which took much longer than a running stitch because each stitch must be stabbed through the fabric at a right angle.



Image 6. Stab Stitch Macro.

My sewing tools for base construction include a needle, straight pins, small scissors, a puck of beeswax, and thread. The base construction uses linen thread (white and red), and the buttonholes are made with silk thread.



Image 15. Materials.



Image 16. Liripipe and Back Seam.



Image 17. Liripipe Tip.



Image 18. Constructed Hood Shoulder Gore.

SHOULDER GORE



Image 19. Pinning Shoulder Gore.

The shoulder gore is pinned in place from the front, like on the Herjolfsnes finds, to be whipstitched from the front with waxed linen thread. Stitching from the right side of the fabric aids in proper placement of the triangular gore.



Image 20. Back Seam and Shoulder Gore Exterior with Liripipe.



Image 21. Stitch and Fell Shoulder Gore.



Image 22. Pinning Fill Thread.

FILL THREADS

On the inside of the garment, the shoulder gore seams are graded down and felled in place with a coordinating fill thread. Fill threads are also found on the Herjolfsnes garments.

The center back seam (excluding liripipe) and hem are felled with whip stitches over handspun fill thread to minimize fraying at the edges of the fabric. Many extant medieval hoods are missing their edges, which may have featured a decorative facing or tablet weaving.

The fill threads were spun by hand (by me) using a wooden drop spindle and dyed-in-the-wool roving.

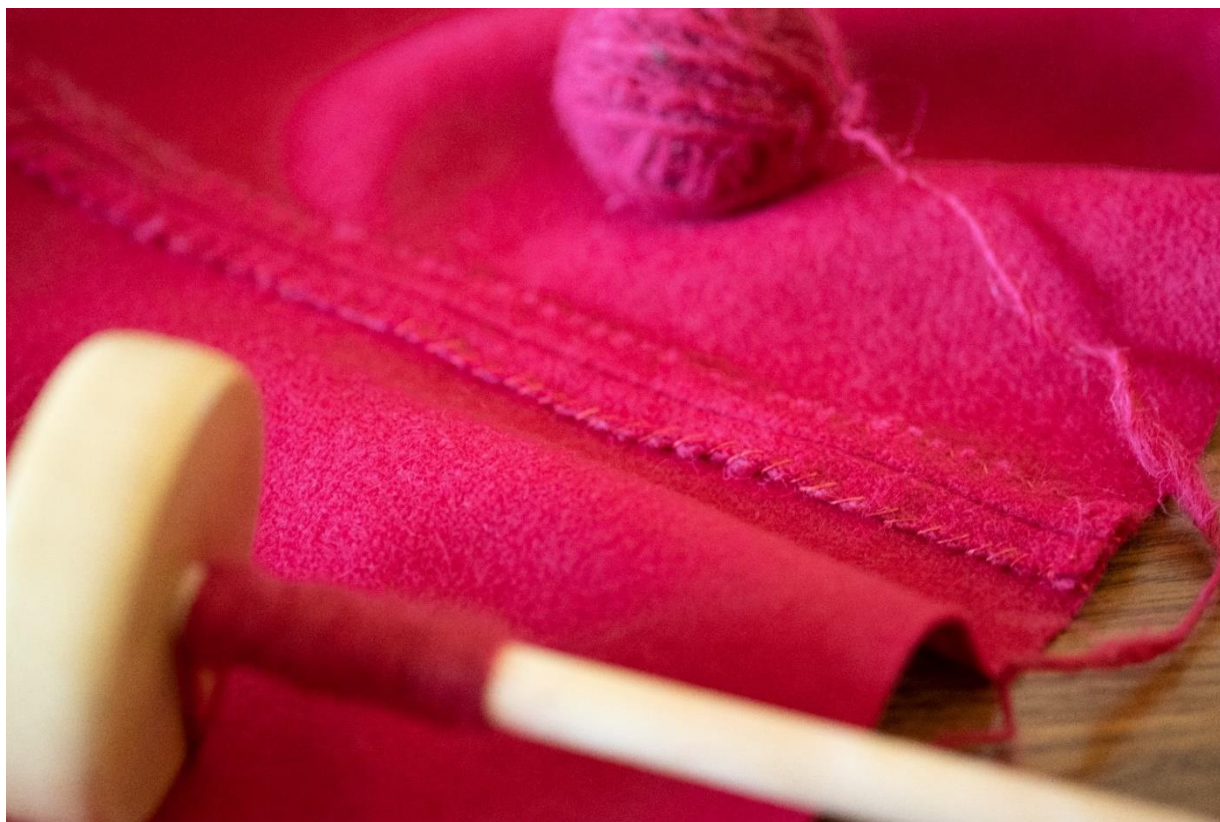


Image 23. Fill Thread Close Up.

CRAFT MATTERS

The first-person experience of sewing allowed me to embrace the passage of time and intensity of a different type of labor. While my hands worked, my mind shifted in and out of focus: paying careful attention to stitch type to avoid mistakes, thinking about the medieval artisans who have made a garment like this, determining how my experience making this garment might impact my understanding of the literary passage that inspired it. Sitting with sewing, rather than the computer screen, sustained my spirit as I considered how the garment construction project might inform the chapter draft on dress in Middle English verse. Interpretation can move in multiple directions and the experience of making a historical garment

informs my close reading of the passage from which I envisioned this hood. Varied methodological approaches offer multiple directions of study on medieval society and literature.

I also experienced frequent reminders that sewing is a skill and, despite my experience, one that I still need to practice. While artisans of the past (and perhaps even present!) could make a hood in a day (see p. 151 in *Textiles and Clothing*), it took me much longer. Then again, I was working on the construction alongside dissertation writing and research!



Image 24. Hood Down, Smirking.



Image 25. Profile, Hood Down.



Image 26. Profile, Hood Up.



Image 27. Hood Up, Facing Forward.



Image 28. Hood Up, Back.

IV. BUTTONS AND BUTTONHOLES



Image 29. Buttons Macro.

CLOTH BUTTONS

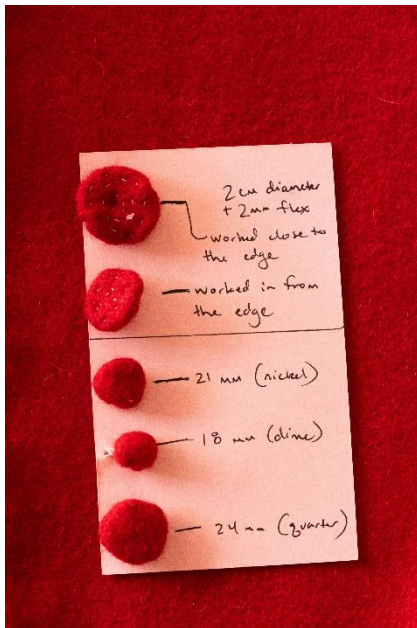


Image 30. Button Sampler.



Image 31. Button Sampler on Edge.

The buttons were tricky to determine. I referred to *Textiles and Clothing* primarily, but [The Medieval Tailor](#) and [Rosalie Gilbert](#) provide useful tutorials for beginners.

To make cloth buttons, I began with circular button blanks with a 24mm diameter (roughly the size of a quarter). I traced a quarter on an off-cut scrap from cutting out the hood multiple times, cutting out the circles to have a bank of button blanks. With a long thread, I made a series of concentric running stitches, pulled tightly to form an oval, and secured with many stab stitches through the base. The remaining thread is used to attach the button to the hood and wrapped around the attached threads to form a shank.

Based on images and information about extant buttons in *Textiles and Clothing*, I experimented with buttons in various sizes using two techniques. The button sampler card showcases five different buttons. I tucked it under the edge of hood to determine which size

would look best. I chose the 24mm diameter (approximately the diameter of a quarter) without topstitching for my hood.

Each button was attached approximately an inch apart, and there are 24 buttons on the hood. Two spare buttons are sewn into the liripipe opening. The buttons were made with waxed linen thread.



Image 32. Button Blanks.



Image 33. Attaching Buttons.



Image 34. Buttons Stitched On.



Image 35. Spare Buttons.

HANDWORKED BUTTONHOLES



Image 36. Buttonhole Back.

Because each buttonhole is sewn from the front, the stitches on the lining do not always catch in the same place. Each buttonhole is unique, stitched close to the edge one at a time. First, measure the distances between buttons and place temporary pins. Mark each buttonhole length and cut, then use a buttonhole edge stitch to secure the raw edges of outer and lining fabrics. The buttonhole stitches are sewn with silk thread.

Buttonholes need a facing to strengthen the stitches so that they don't pull out of the garment. A linen facing is whipstitched to the edge where the buttonholes will be stitched. The linen facing is cut on the straight of grain because bias cut fabric (cut on the diagonal and easily stretched around curves) was not a norm in garment-making until Madeline Vionnet's success in the 1920s and 1930s. To curve the facing around the neck and chin section of the hood, the linen had to be carefully folded and pinned in place.



Image 37. Buttonhole Facing in Linen.



Image 38. Buttonhole Facing in Linen Macro.

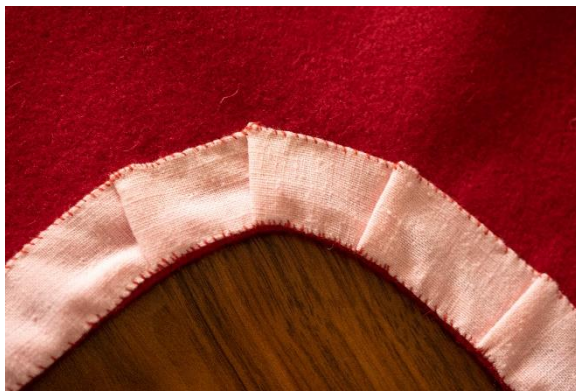


Image 39. Buttonhole Facing in Linen Curve.



Image 40. Buttonhole Stitch.

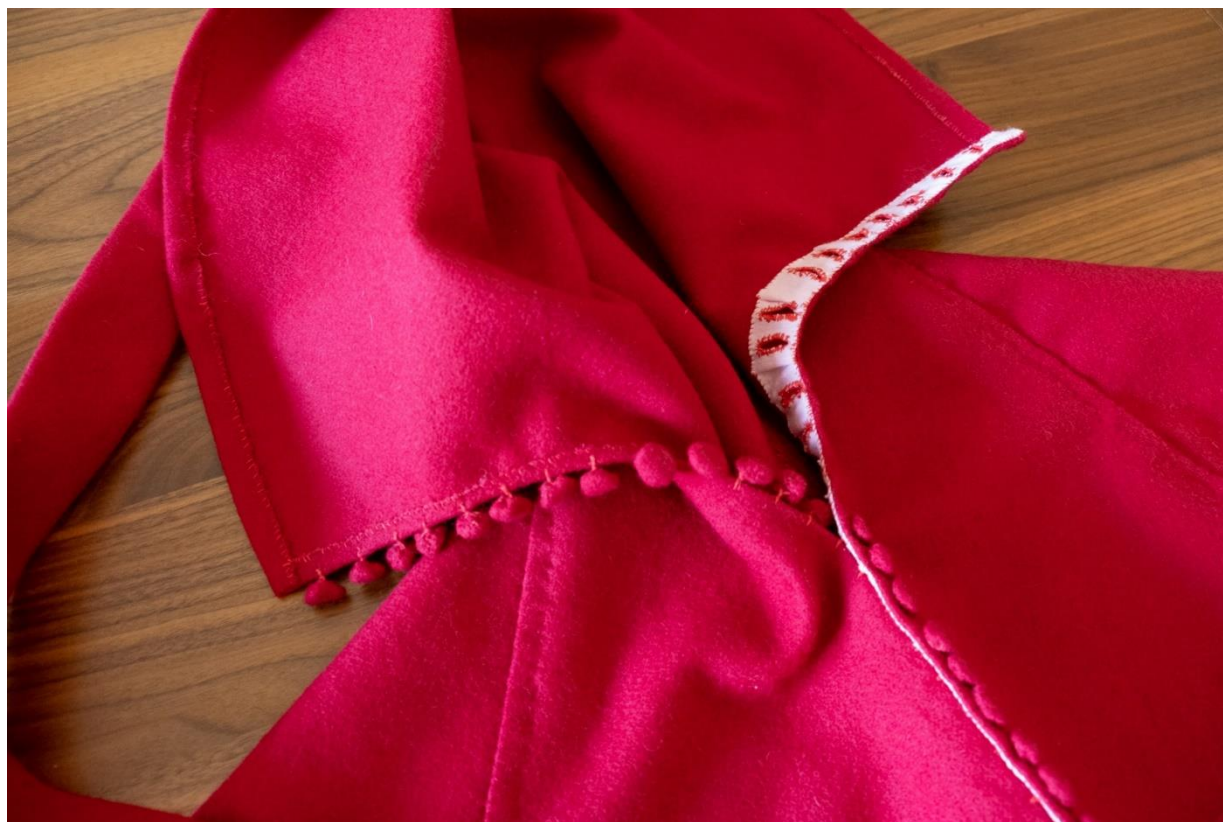


Image 41. Constructed Hood, Buttons.

V. EMBELLISHMENT



Image 42. Embroidery Sample.

DESIGN MOCKUP

Once the hood itself started taking shape, I did a quick mockup of my embroidery design idea in Adobe Photoshop. I reviewed *English Medieval Embroidery* (an exhibition book from the V&A's exhibit on the opus angelicanum embroidery style) for stitch types and possible designs. While my end result may not be entirely medieval, I'm really pleased with the visual cues based on my interpretation. The Photoshop mock-up helped me

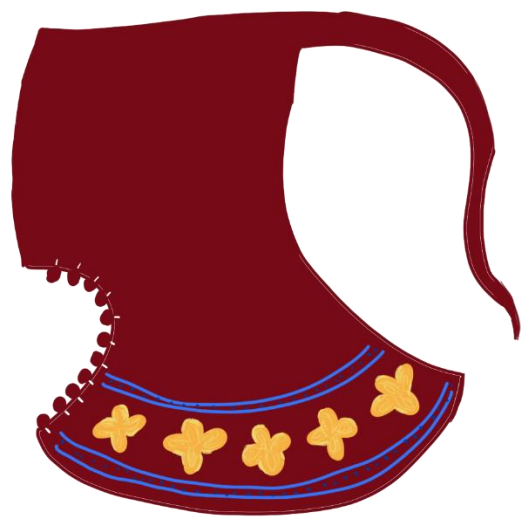


Figure 35. Embroidery Mockup.

to conceptualize shapes and colors before purchasing yarn to use for embroidery (I purchased yarn in natural fibers rather than acrylic embroidery floss).

EMBROIDERY SAMPLER

The embroidery sampler tests various stitches on a square of red wool, including three types of stitch for the blue decorative element (stem stitch, couched thread, and split stitch) and various techniques for filling each petal. I compared french knots with a single blue bead from my stash to represent the sapphires described in the passage. I opted to use stem stitch for the blue threads and stem stitch as fill stitch for the flowers with couched threads to outline each petal.



Image 43. Embroidery Sample Square.



***Image 44.** Stem Stitch Embroidery on Hem.*



***Image 45.** Stem Stitch Embroidery.*



***Image 46.** Stem Stitch Embroidery, close.*

THREAD TRACING

To manage the process, I first measured and marked each line that would be embroidered, one at a time, with pins. The lines are blue yarn in a stem stitch. I then used a stencil to chalk mark the approximate shape and placement of each flower within the sets of blue lines. Because chalk rubs off the wool broadcloth easily, I thread traced each flower with linen thread.



***Image 46.** Floral Thread Trace on Gore.*

FLORAL EMBROIDERY



Image 47. Floral Macro.

Guinevere’s hood features “saffres and seladynes set by the sides” (l. 22). I interpreted *seladyne* as the celandine poppy because that spelling variation appears in a medical manuscript, London, British Library, Additional 17866 (*MED* 7056).

Each petal is filled with two shades of yellow yarn to create a gradient. An outline thread in the darker shade is couched by the lighter thread to define the edges of the petals. While crewel weight thread would be most effective, I sourced my yarns from Seattle Yarn, a local shop.

While the yarn is all modern, avoiding acrylic and synthetic yarns was important to me. The dark yellow is from Queensland Collection (55% lambswool, 45% cotton). The light yellow

is lace weight yarn from Swans Island, hand dyed with natural dyes (50% fine merino wool, 50% tussah silk). The blue is hand-painted from Araucania Yarns (75% merino wool, 25% silk).



Image 48. Floral Embroidery and Button Edge.



Image 49. Floral Embroidery without Beading.



Image 50. Floral Embroidery without Beading, Liripipe.

BEADING



Image 51. Hem Embellishment.

My embroidery sampler initially showcased beading between the blue stem stitch lines but I was not sure if that would capture wholly capture the description of “saffres and seladynes set by the sides” (l. 22), so I started with cluster sets of beads between each flower. The shape of the cluster mimics the shape of the flower petals. However, excluding the beading between the stem stitch lines felt incomplete, so I added the additional beads.

Plastic beads fill in for gemstones. The beads are from my existing craft supplies, purchased from Beads Factory in the Los Angeles fabric district years ago.



Image 52. Floral Embroidery and Loose Beads Macro.



Image 53. Loose Beads.



Image 54. Hem with Beads.



Image 55. Buttonhole Edge with Embellishment.



Image 56. Bead Cluster Macro.



Image 57. Constructed and Embellished Hood.



Image 58. Stitching Beads.



Image 59. Hem Embellishment with Liripipe.



Image 60. Hem Embellishment in Sunlight.

VI. CONCLUSION



Image 61. Embellished Hood Back, Close.

While medievalists often dismiss when cultures of the past might be invoked in recreation, the exclusion of hobbyist medievalists limits the ability for conversations beyond the academy. *Stitching Time* provides an opportunity to move laterally between traditional scholarly discourse and public communities which remake the past. The popularity of historic reenactment indicates that there are many people who make and find meaning in material objects of the past, even those which must be remade for personal use.



Image 62.
*Embellished Hood
Up, Liripipe.*



Image 63.
*Embellished Hood
Up, Direct.*



Image 64.
*Embellished Hood
Up, Back View
Looking Down.*



Image 65.
*Embellished Hood
Up, Profile
Unfolded.*



Image 66.
*Embellished Hood,
Down and Partially
Buttoned.*



Image 67.
*Embellished Hood,
Down.*



Image 68.
Buttoning the Hood.



Image 69.
*Embellished Hood,
Profile Right.*



Image 70. Embellished Hood, Profile Looking Down.



***Image 71.**
Unbuttoned.*



***Image 72.**
Unbuttoned, Side
View.*



***Image 73.**
Unbuttoned, Hood Up.*



***Image 74.**
Unbuttoned, Hood
Up, Side View.*



Image 75. Chaperon.

EPILOGUE

Throughout the process of writing this dissertation, I focused on craft in Middle English texts as it appears in traces of authorial and editorial labor. The project develops from and responds to my personal experiences as laborer, chiefly in the editorial labor performed in the digital edition-making process and the craft labor involved in sewing a historically inspired garment. The intertwining strands of visible and invisible labor led me to different threads that each complement the framework I have called *transtemporality*. Each thread in “Stitching Time” explores authorship and craftsmanship through a transtemporal lens. With transtemporal labor at the center, the makers and mediators of the past are documented in readings of Middle English verse. This approach structures a reading practice that considers time as accumulative, layered onto and into textual artifacts.

Recognizing that modern readers never access a text in its original or pristine format, my dissertation offers an approach to transmission, reception, and material histories that recognizes labor in all forms. The preceding chapters are compiled into one dissertation representative of transtemporality as a reading methodology. Chapter 1 expands authorship to incorporate a communitarian *auctoritas* that unites storytellers across time. This transtemporal community, which in Chapter 1 extends backwards in time for Lydgate, implicates modern translations and reimaginings of medieval stories. In new translations and narrative reworkings, current writers and translators leave residual marks of their labor alongside the authorial laborers across time. As Chapter 2 illustrates, editors of medieval texts likewise sign texts with their labor, especially in the encoded mark-up of digital editions. The spectral presence of makers also appears in Chapter 3, which pulls an embodied experience from sensory descriptions of textiles. Experiential processes lead the making project of Chapter 4, which turns spectral into speculative

as I engage similar textile practices as medieval artisans. My intention in this dissertation has been to illustrate how Middle English verse accumulates traces of labor. Transtemporal labor illuminates the labor of both medieval artisanship and modern intellectual work, both of which are made less visible through temporal mediation. The concept to which I am most committed is a transtemporal approach that recognizes the labor of making texts and textiles in late medieval England, because it is precisely craft labor that brought me to the study of Middle English literature.

When I first read Middle English verse in my undergraduate literature survey, I swore that I would never return to it. And yet, representations of the past through poetic verse, descriptive imagery, and textual mediation have become my primary area of study over a decade after that first interaction with Geoffrey Chaucer's General Prologue. Over time, I became fascinated by Middle English literature's nonstandard orthography, the prosody requisite for oral and communal reading environments, the fantastical imagery and storytelling which comprises many of the most well-known works of Middle English literary verse, and the textual objects containing such works, but it was recreational, amateur engagement with historical material culture that first revived the Middle Ages for me.

Among the many threads discarded on the way to this dissertation was an intervention into the logic that structures reenactment communities, clustered around living history experiences, renaissance faires, pop medievalism, and contemporary medieval reenactment (such as the Society for Creative Anachronism and Historical European Martial Arts). Questions of embodiment, affect, attachment, temporal experience, and lived identity are missed by scholarly discourse removed from transtemporal communities like reenactment spaces. The politics of remaking the past that subtend both communities require an analysis of how ideologies of time

are constructed and enacted. While I was not able to incorporate that aspect of my larger project, I look forward to those scholars who will analyze contemporary popular culture that draws from medieval stories and aesthetics, as well as ethnographic surveys documenting reenactors' experiences as living history performers or amateur medieval hobbyists.²³¹

Those who examine the craft present in Middle English literature will find that there are traces of labor that call attention to themselves, whether by way of metadiscursive authorial statements or in loving descriptions of textile artisanship. Adjusting the reading framework slightly—in this project, by taking a *transtemporal* communitarian view—extends an invitation to see traces that perhaps would be left alone: in writing, in editing, in making. My project is only one of many that considers how we read and what emerges when we read anew. Each thread present in my case studies could lend itself to a larger project. If there were time enough, I would weave a tapestry representative of all the possible directions for a transtemporal approach to medieval studies. What follows in the remainder of this epilogue are threads that surfaced in my conception of transtemporality and that offer possibilities for future research.

One thread finds medieval drama as a space in which historical dress, extant records, and embodied performance converge. Staging the past relies on an uneasy negotiation across temporal boundaries while simultaneously engaging embodied performance. The movement across and between various temporal moments and geographic spaces is a key feature for dramatic performance, especially prevalent in staging medieval drama from the British Isles, such as the York Corpus Christi Cycle. A transtemporal assessment of the cycle plays might

²³¹ On cultures and communities of medieval reenactment, see Ryan Hatch's 2015 thesis on "American Medievalism," Michael Cramer *Medieval Fantasy as Performance: The Society for Creative Anachronism and the Current Middle Ages*, and Elizabeth Emery on "Medieval Times" in *Medieval Afterlives*. On "living history" as a form of cultural tourism, see Kerstin Barndt "Fordist Nostalgia," Anders Greenspan "A Look at Colonial Williamsburg," and Scot Magelssen *Living History Museums* (2007).

anticipate the significance of embodied materiality and ritualized performance. Performance contexts offer a highly localized experience of time and place. Reimagining theatrical performance through film may capture the transtemporal textual experience of performing medieval drama in the present moment. Considering the cycle plays through live performances and filmic registers supplies another mode of seeing the past. A thread on medieval drama might explore four plays from the York cycle put on by guilds that still exist: the Cordwainers' *Agony in the Garden*, the Butchers' *Death of Christ*, the Tailors' (now Merchant Taylors) *Ascension*, and the Scriveners' *Incredulity of Thomas*. Another direction may examine the Listers' *Christ Before Herod* for internal references to clothing and historical settings, which aligns with the thematic life and death of Christ presented in the other four plays. Though the Listers are not an active, contemporary guild, examining the Listers' play within the larger Corpus Christi cycle extends the concept of transtemporal accretions while drawing on histories of costumed performance. Attending to the guild and material histories around these specific plays provides an opportunity to consider how the literary text is performed and presented through those avenues. As these four guilds are still in existence and the York plays continue to be staged on behalf of the city's guilds, examining the plays would enfold time onto itself by navigating across a spectrum of performative time: first, Christian religious history; second, localized performance in medieval York; third, contemporary performance in York and elsewhere. Any performance of the plays carries with it a materially situated context which makes accreted history legible across different moments in time and invokes a transtemporal audience experience.

A tactile resurgence in book history and manuscript studies aligns with the embodied nature of accumulative labor articulated by transtemporality and, as such, becomes another

possible thread to spin in a larger project. Medieval bookmaking processes and the craft labor involved might extend the spectral presence of the long-dead medieval bookmakers whose labor is recorded in perpetuum. Such an approach could connect contemporary book artists and text-makers with scholars, as was the purpose of the collection *Scraped, Stroked, and Bound: Materially Engaged Readings of Medieval Manuscripts*. That collection, edited by Jonathan Wilcox, developed from an experiential seminar and workshop series at the University of Iowa Center for the Book. Because the process of bookmaking in the Middle Ages required physical labors, scholars of medieval studies can become more knowledgeable about their objects of study through an experiential learning process where they engage in a multisensory scribal *habitus*. This approach would connect medieval manuscript studies with the experiential scholarship engaged in “Chapter 4: Making a Medieval Hood.”

If not for the COVID-19 pandemic suspending archival research,²³² I would have engaged more directly with traditional manuscript studies. Examining the physical manuscripts referenced in “Stitching Time” would enable me to speak more directly into the conversations on physical versus digital in medieval manuscript studies. In the future, I may still travel to Oxford, U.K. to analyze Bodleian Library, Christ Church MS 152 (which features Lydgate’s *Thebes* alongside the *Canterbury Tales*)²³³ and St. Johns College, MS 266 (which pairs a *Thebes* manuscript with Caxton’s *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*).²³⁴ I hope, as well, to find

²³² In-person archival research was not possible for the majority of 2020–2021, during which I wrote the bulk of this dissertation. While some in-person archival research began to return in late 2021 and early 2022, I was unable to travel to the places that hold the manuscripts most relevant to my research.

²³³ For a description of the Bodleian’s manuscript collection, see *A catalogue of Western manuscripts at the Bodleian Libraries and selected Oxford Colleges*.

²³⁴ Identified by Aditi Nafde for Newcastle University’s Medieval and Early Modern Studies research blog. See Nafde’s entry on “[Manuscript prints](#).”

my way to the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library in New Haven, CT to examine Beinecke Library MS 661 [*olim* Mostyn Hall 258], one of few domestic copies of John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*,²³⁵ and the Takamiya *Polychronicon* (MS 43) for its depiction of garments in portrait roundels and marginalia. I suspect that the garments in the Takamiya *Polychronicon* would complement a survey of clothing relative to geographic spaces,²³⁶ and I would enjoy pairing my analysis in "Chapter 1: Metadiscursive Textual Construction in John Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*" with codicological evidence of use in surviving *Thebes* manuscripts.

Pairing codicological evidence with metadiscursivity would invite further conversations between literary studies and paleographical studies in which both textual evidence and codicological evidence might illuminate new readings. In his work on Thomas Hoccleve, especially in his 2020 dissertation "Troubled Signs: Hoccleve's Objects of Absence" and his contributions to the "Rereading the Medieval Miscellany" symposium in April 2022, J. Eric Ensley illustrates how traces of use and editorial behaviors can shape entire areas of study (including that of Thomas Hoccleve's corpus). For Ensley, studies on Hoccleve misunderstand the *Series* in fragmentation, and he offers that reading Hoccleve's *Series* compilationally would invite a clarified understanding of bookmaking in the fifteenth century.²³⁷ As many medieval manuscripts exist in partial records and digital fragments, Ensley's call responds to an ongoing conversation on the opportunity for a digital rebinding of fragmented manuscripts.²³⁸

²³⁵ Per the *Digital Index of Middle English Verse (DIMEV)*, other US-based *Thebes* manuscripts are held by the Pierpont Morgan Library, Boston Public Library, and Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas-Austin. I may consider travel to one of these locations if the Beinecke remains closed through 2022.

²³⁶ J. Eric Ensley directed my attention to the clothing represented in the Takamiya *Polychronicon*.

²³⁷ Reading compilationally is the invitation given by Arthur Bahr in *Fragments and Assemblages*.

²³⁸ On fragmentology and for a digital catalogue project focused on bringing medieval manuscript fragments together, see *Fragmentarium*.

A consideration of physical manuscripts directs attention toward ongoing debates in digital humanities—and especially digital medieval studies—regarding the physical and the digital. The relationship between the digital and the physical is inextricably tied in the year 2022. Digital medieval studies, or what Michelle Warren calls “Tech Medievalism,” often envisions a twenty-first century approach to medieval studies that is rooted in media studies and digital infrastructure design. New publications in digital medieval studies, such as Warren’s *Holy Digital Grail* and Whearty’s *Digital Codicology*, reimagine scholarly frameworks that begin in the digital rather than viewing digital manuscripts as an offshoot or surrogate to physical manuscripts. So, too, does James Harr’s 2021 dissertation, “Networked Artifacts: Materiality, Medieval Texts, and the Digital Response,” find compelling approaches to digital medieval studies via network frameworks as a cataloguing system to meet the codicological needs. Each of these examples illustrates an ongoing conversation between medieval studies, digital humanities, and technical infrastructure. “Stitching Time” only briefly touches on that connection in “Chapter 2: Digital Editing as Authorial Collaboration across Time,” so my future work might further my knowledge of the ways that literary analysis might incorporate technological tools and the labor of digital humanists who create such tools.

“Stitching Time” may still become “Stacking Time,” applying technical expertise by way of the development stack. For comparative digital editions, I might elaborate on the arguments in “Chapter 2: Digital Editing as Authorial Collaboration Across Time” to describe further how digital infrastructures construct meaning. That meaning can be analyzed through development documentation, such as the editorial procedures and XML mark-up, or it may be conducted through other digital approaches, such as network visualizations like Angela Bennett’s comparative corpus studies on the *Piers Plowman* corpus, computational analysis on premodern

texts like Scott Kleinman’s *Old English Annotation Project* for applying natural language processing to Old English, and experiments in Middle English topic modelling similar to those performed by David Mimno, Laure Thompson, and Anna Fore Waymack.²³⁹ I hope to continue my work on comparative XML editions through the development of a Python API tentatively called *PyViz*, short for *Python Visualizer*. *PyViz* would pull multiple XML files from a bucket container and render them in one browser for comparative analysis. This tool would complement features offered by *Digital Mappa* or the *Versioning Machine*. However, the existing browser-based software does not achieve my goal of maintaining standalone editions that can be viewed together as *Digital Mappa* is a platform that offers linked data and visual annotation on digital images and texts, whereas the *Versioning Machine* requires a base-text with parallel segmentation for all textual variants. Neither provides a simple method for comparative analysis in the browser, which a tool like *PyViz* could enable. Applying contemporary methods to medieval texts is another way to read across time.

Other threads are wisps of fiber, neither spun to thread nor even processed to the roving that might be later spun. Bookish culture in the modern era. Object histories that document provenance metadata. Gemstone symbology in extant lapidaries read into Middle English romance. A history of garment terminology across the *long durée* of literary studies. The *long*

²³⁹ Bennett presented on her linked data set for the *Piers Plowman* manuscripts during the University of Washington’s Textual Studies Program Material Texts Colloquium in May 2019. “Aggregate reading,” as she defines it, connects Arthur Bahr’s call toward compilational reading with the interpretive data that supports digital manuscript catalogues. Linked data projects, like those conducted by Bennett and Barr, draw on the language of networking infrastructure to read connections between medieval manuscripts. At the Studies in the History of the English Language conference in 2022, Kleinman will present on his work to bridge natural language processing models and Old English computational analysis through open-source data. At the 2019 International Congress on Medieval Studies, a panel series on “Big Data” documented digital humanities methodologies applied to medieval studies. In their talk on “Medieval MALLET Mishaps, Mimno, Thompson, and Waymack described the difficulties in processing Middle English orthography for computational analysis. They offered that computation provides a moment for defamiliarization from the text, though with a caveat that processing for computational analysis in orthographically complex morphologies can result in diluted data inputs.

durée juxtaposed with *short durée*. The development of an authorial persona building continuities between literary periods. A new materialism that incorporates objects imbued with labor, but which does not ground itself in object-orientations. A comparative reading of object-oriented ontology and object-oriented programming. More still without words to match them.

We want to understand something of the past, so we read it. We want to understand something of the present, so we read it. We want to understand something of the future, so if only we could read it. It is because we do not know that we read; it is because we know so deeply that we read. In the fibers of our being, beyond the chromosomal histories and the skin cells that shed themselves every seven years, we carry in our bodies, as in our minds, the memories of everything we have learned.

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