

**Parody and Satire in the Medieval Cultural Productions
of the South West Midlands and Anglo-Ireland**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationships between medieval parodic and satiric cultural productions (both literary and pictorial) of the South West Midlands region of England and Anglo-Ireland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The main works examined are: from British Library MS Harley 2253, *Annot and John* and *Satire on the Consistory Courts*, from British Library MS Harley 913, *The Land of Cokaygne* and *Pers of Bermingham*, and Bodleian Library MS Douce 104, the only marginally illustrated copy of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. These works show the artists' adaptations of earlier European forms of parodic and satiric literary expression, as well as the pictorial adaptation of medieval iconographic traditions to express an acute sense of social and political awareness. The corruption of secular and religious institutional authorities, class inequity and colonial oppression are central themes in all of these works.



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NOTES ON EDITORIAL PROCEDURES

In the reproduction of the Middle English and Middle Hiberno-English texts studied in this thesis I have indicated the scribe's use of the "thorn" as a bolded "p" (i.e. "þ") and the "yogh" as a subscript "3" (i.e. "ȝ"). Where the editor of a poem's edition has expanded manuscript abbreviations using italics, I have done the same. All references to the Holy Bible are from *The Douay Version* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1956). The source texts, editions and translations of the poems from MS Harley 2253 and MS Harley 913 explored in this study can be found in the appendix, along with those illustrations of the Douce scribe/illustrator's work discussed in this thesis. All quotations of *Piers Plowman* come from William Langland, *"Piers Plowman": The C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), unless otherwise noted, and will be cited by passus number, followed by line number (e.g. XX.123). Finally, all translations that appear in this thesis are my own.

For my poet, my knight, my angel, my husband – Stephen

“When [he] is glad,
Of al þis world namore y bad
Pen beo wip [him] myn one bistad
Wipoute strif.”

Introduction:

Writers have long employed parody and satire to explore and critique contemporary social, political and cultural institutions, and this was certainly true during the Middle Ages. The traditions of verse parody and satire reflected in the medieval Latin goliardic texts and the works of the French troubadours have been the source of a great deal of scholarly activity in recent years. In the Latin tradition, Paul Lehmann has provided us with his ground-breaking and influential work *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* and recently Martha Bayless has elaborated on Lehmann's findings in her book *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition*.¹ Both Simon Gaunt and Kathryn Gravdal have contributed significantly to the study of parody and satire in the French traditions of the troubadour lyric and the pastourelle respectively.² Likewise, there have been several excellent studies that discuss the unique attributes of medieval English verse parody and satire.³ However, conspicuous by its absence is the lack of study concerning the regional aspects of the medieval parody and satire. I propose to look at the productions of two regions closely associated by geography and culture: the South West Midlands region (hereafter abbreviated to SWM) of England and those in the Middle Hiberno-English

¹ Paul Lehmann, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersmann, 1963). Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

² Simon Gaunt, *Troubadours and Irony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Kathryn Gravdal, *Vilain et Courtois: Transgressive Parody in French Literature of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) and *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

³ For example, Samuel Marion Tucker, *Verse Satire in England Before the Renaissance* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966).

(hereafter MHE) of the Anglo-Irish. Although the influence of the goliards and troubadours on Middle English and MHE poetry is considerable, it by no means entirely delineates or limits the parodic and satiric cultural productivity (both literary and pictorial) of these two groups. The extant corpus of parodic and satiric productions from these two regions contains a treasure trove of insights into the social pressures and paradoxes faced and shared by the members of those two societies, drawing as it does on specific models and traditions, yet infusing them with elements drawn from contemporary local experience - social, political and cultural. An examination of works from three manuscripts – British Library MS Harley 2253, British Library MS Harley 913 and Bodleian Library MS Douce 104 (hereafter abbreviated as Douce) – will show the adaptation of earlier forms of parodic and satiric expression in conjunction with the artists' acute sense of social and political awareness.

The tie between the SWM area of England and the Anglo-Irish community of Ireland is not tenuous; in fact, the tie is composed of a multitude of strands which date back to the late twelfth century and the initial efforts of the English to subdue and colonise Ireland. Ireland had been ruled by warring clan factions; however, the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169 precipitated a largely unwelcome series of events orchestrated towards anglicising the Irish religious, political and social structures and marginalising Irish cultural heritage.⁴ In addition to the handful of Irish abbeys already in existence prior to the conquest, fifteen new Cistercian abbeys were dedicated in the two years following 1169, a trend that continued: by 1230 there were two hundred religious

⁴ For a detailed discussion of Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Irish racism towards the Irish see James Lydon, "A Land of War," *A New History of Ireland: II – Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*, ed. Art Cosgrove (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 240-302.

houses of various monastic orders for men in Ireland.⁵ The Cistercian influx is evidence of an attempt to reform the long-isolated Irish monasteries to orthodox (Roman) Christian practice. However, within half a century the new Cistercian presence boasted huge wool producing estates and exhibited a general moral lassitude that appeared to make a mockery of their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The mendicant orders soon began arriving (the Dominicans in 1224, Franciscans in 1234, and Carmelites and Augustinians in the second half of the century) to “serve the urgent spiritual needs of the people living in the towns and urban centres.”⁶ There was no love lost, here as elsewhere in Europe, between the monastic and mendicant orders. Thus, Ireland became a land of both secular and religious tensions exacerbated by colonialism and oppression. To make matters worse, the administration in England largely ignored the colony, regarding the Anglo-Irish colonists as Irish, just as the native Irish saw them as English.⁷ They were a “middle nation,” caught between allegiances.⁸ However, even the term “middle nation” does not quite accurately describe the social and political situation in which the English in Ireland found themselves. Many had lived in Ireland for generations, and were subdivided yet again into “English by birth” and “English by blood”.⁹ Some of the colonists, as we would naturally expect, became gaelicized, while others openly practised

⁵ See F.X. Martin in Cosgrove Ix.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Lydon in Cosgrove 182.

⁸ The term comes initially from the 1317 remonstrance of Domnall Ó Néill to Pope John XXII, reprinted in part in Cosgrove 349.

⁹ See F.X. Martin in Cosgrove Ixi, and J.A. Watt in Cosgrove 352.

racism against the Irish and still others saw the good and the bad in both communities. This was the diversity that divided the Anglo-Irish community.

As the English embarked on the process of colonising Ireland, a high percentage of the colonists were speakers of West Midlands and SWM dialects.¹⁰ Moreover, “there existed a fairly politically powerful Celtic population in the west of England, to the east of the Welsh border...continuing through the Middle Ages. ...Territories in western England incorporated large and fairly autonomous communities of Celts up to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.”¹¹ Thus, the SWM was an area rich in culture and was evidently interested in preserving cultural heritage, given that the area boasted several monastic centres and large land-owning families with extensive libraries. Several of these religious houses and families (for example, the Mortimers) held extensive lands in Ireland, which made for frequent travel between the two areas. Given the possibilities for cultural exchange between the SWM and the Anglo-Irish community in Ireland, it should not be surprising to us, then, that the literary and pictorial cultural productions from these two regions should exhibit a similar use of parody and satire.

This close cultural connection is illustrated by the three manuscripts whose contents I will discuss in this study. We know, for example, that Harley 2253 was written in Herefordshire in the SWM around 1340. Its binding leaves, however, contain a discarded leaf of the household accounts of the aforementioned Mortimer family, who

¹⁰ See Alan Bliss, “Language and Literature,” *The English in Medieval Ireland*, ed. James Lydon (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1982) 39.

¹¹ A.T.E. Matonis, “An Investigation of Celtic Influence on MS Harley 2253,” *Modern Philology* 70 (1972): 95. Matonis cites the historical and archaeological research described in the O’Donnell series of lectures collected in *Angles and Britons* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1963) and the essays collected in *Celt and Saxon: Studies in the Early British Border* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

owned lands in co. Meath, Ireland.¹² The manuscript is a trilingual (Latin, Anglo-Norman and Middle English) anthology of eclectic composition, containing a large number of Middle English complaints, parodies and satires. Thorlac Turville-Petre comments that the trilingual nature of the manuscript's contents is evidence of

not three cultures but one culture in three voices.
 ...[The contents] demonstrate that the languages were not interchangeable but had different functions, so that certain subjects and styles were more appropriate to Latin than English, or to French than Latin. But they also show that there were considerable areas of overlap, and that distributional patterns depended as much on situation, context, and audience as on subject-matter and style.¹³

The texts selected for study here from the Harley 2253 manuscript represent this delicate balancing act of subjects, styles and language brilliantly in their parodic and satiric adaptation of European poetic traditions.

The body of poetry preserved in Harley 2253 has often been compared in terms of scope and character to the poems in MS Harley 913, believed to have been compiled in the Waterford area of Ireland. Although a much smaller manuscript than Harley 2253, Harley 913 also contains works in Latin and Anglo-Norman, as well as the largest extant body of works in MHE. Together these works probably acted as a source of sermon material for a Franciscan friar, as we shall see in Chapter Two; however, this source

¹² For a summarized account of the manuscript's provenance, see N.R. Ker's introduction to *Facsimile of British Museum MS. Harley 2253* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) xxi-xxiii. I would like to thank Carter Revard for his guidance on this issue. For a more detailed account, as well as a fascinating discussion on the possible identity of the scribe, see Carter Revard, "Gilote et Johane: an Interlude in B.L. MS Harley 2253," *Studies in Philology* 79 (1982): 142, n.32.

¹³ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 212. See also Revard 122-146.

material also includes several poems that are deeply satirical, particularly with respect to monastic corruption and misuse of both secular and ecclesiastical authority.

The third of our manuscripts, Douce, is a small utilitarian manuscript of the C-text of *Piers Plowman*, William Langland's socially and politically charged dream vision poem.¹⁴ The work was originally written in a SWM dialect, yet in Douce we see the poem translated into MHE. Although the translation itself provides us with some interesting points to ponder, Douce is unique in another respect;¹⁵ it is the only extant version of Langland's poem that has been illustrated throughout with a host of marginal images. Here the scribe/illustrator takes care to support and enhance the satire of the original poem; his visual cues provide glimpses into the particular social, religious and political issues relevant to both late fourteenth-century SWM, when Langland is thought to have "finished" the C-text, and (especially) Anglo-Ireland in the 1427, when Douce was written. In this manuscript, then, we see the fullest evidence of the ties between the two regions and the shared sense of SWM and Anglo-Irish fascination with parody and satire.

For the purposes of this study I have chosen two very different poems from each of the first two manuscripts which I feel will clearly exemplify both parodic and satiric technique, as well as illustrate the secular and ecclesiastical concerns of their respective poets. From MS Harley 2253 I have chosen *Annot and John* because earlier scholarship has largely overlooked what is to me the obviously parodic nature of its use of *descriptio*,

¹⁴ "*Piers Plowman*": *A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 104*, eds. Derek Pearsall and Kathleen Scott (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992).

¹⁵ See the discussion in Chapter Three regarding the Douce scribe/illustrator's portraits of the Proud Priest and Trickery and his modifications to the text beside which each figure is placed.

or courtly description of the beloved. In contrast, the second Harley 2253 poem I have chosen, *Satire on the Consistory Courts*, draws on the French and Latin didactic genre of the complaint satire, yet in contrast to the generalized nature of complaint in the European tradition, our poem presents a general complaint in the form of a narration of a supposedly specific incident. In appearances, at least, it is filled with the bile of the common labourer against clerical corruption in the ecclesiastical court system. These poems, I believe, will raise interesting questions about the intended audience for the parodic and satiric poems of MS Harley 2253.

From MS Harley 913 I have chosen the well-known poem *The Land of Cokaygne*, which fuses the humour of parody and the biting critique of satire to create a fanciful, yet didactic work. This poet also uses the goliardic themes of the decadence of the age and the immorality of religious institutions, as well as adopting a goliard-like persona. However, the goliardic conventions are transformed by the poet's use of distinctly Irish mythological material and the visionary traditions of the voyage to the paradisiacal "Otherworld". The last of the four poems is *Pers of Bermingham*. Like *Annot and John* from Harley 2253, *Pers* has been much misunderstood. The poet here draws on the Latin goliardic conventions of the mock-encomium. However, where the Latin mock-encomium is usually characterized by parodic panegyrics on themes of drinking, gambling and womanizing, *Pers* adapts these traditional models to a specific, prolonged and historically detailed attack on an individual.¹⁶ These four poems, then, will illustrate some aspects of the SWM/Anglo-Irish connections in the later Middle Ages. Each poet

¹⁶ Some excellent examples of the mock-encomia can be found in the *Carmina Burana* – "In taberna quando sumus" is just one example of a poem that lauds drinking. B. Bischoff et al, eds., *Carmina Burana* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979) 592.

adopts, yet adapts conventional styles, themes and motifs to his own sense of local social and political issues.

Like *The Land of Cokaygne*, visionary writings also influenced Langland's writing of *Piers Plowman*; however, Langland has also drawn on the visionary prophetic tradition in his work. This tradition includes such characteristics as sudden and unexplained appearances of strange characters or objects,

the belief in a coming chastisement and reform of the clergy, the view that the present time was one of crisis that would eventually lead to spiritual renewal and the belief that the pseudo-prophets, the Church's greatest trial, were to be men in humble attire who would seem to have rejected all worldly possessions,¹⁷

among other traditional hallmarks. The Douce scribe/illustrator obviously knew and understood Langland's visionary and prophetic style well, as we shall see in Chapter Three. Here we will also see how the scribe/illustrator of the Douce 104 *Piers Plowman* draws on the traditions of illustration, as well as those in medieval legal documents, while modifying them in accordance with his own Anglo-Irish cultural experiences to enhance the satire of Langland's original poem. The Douce scribe/illustrator shares Langland's reformist views and employs his own parodic and satiric adaptations of illustrative style to underscore his support of the poet's views.

What remains now is to define the terms "parody" and "satire" as I will apply them to the cultural productions relevant to this paper. Parody, as we shall see, is not necessarily "a sign that certain vogues in handling conventions are getting worn out."¹⁸

¹⁷ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and "Piers Plowman"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 22.

¹⁸ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) 103.

Joseph A. Dane points out, for example, that “literature and literariness are in the medieval period institutionally bound,” which implies that parody as a literary production is not just a form of *literary* criticism (as Northrop Frye would have us believe), but can be a form of *social* criticism as well.¹⁹ In his book, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* Paul Lehmann gives us the definition of parody I will follow in this study:

Ich verstehe hier unter Parodie nur solche literarischen Erzeugnisse, die irgendeinen als bekannt vorausgesetzten Text oder – in zweiter Linie – Anschauungen, Sitten und Gebräuche, Vorgänge und Personen scheinbar wahrheitsgetreu, tatsächlich verzerrend, umkehrend mit bewusster, beabsichtigter und bemerkbarer Komik, sei es im ganzen, sei es im einzelnen, formal nachahmen oder anführen.²⁰

[I understand here under parody only those literary productions, that either fully or partially imitate formally or quote some known text, or in the second place, opinions, manners and customs, events and persons, in a way which is seemingly accurate, but actually distorted, inverted with conscious, intentional and perceptible comedy.]

According to Lehmann, then, parody is not just a form of literary criticism, but it also serves to illuminate response to contemporary “opinions, manners and customs, events and persons.” I will extend Lehmann’s criterion that the work be “literary” to cultural productions generally.

As to the use of parody with satiric intent, Freud has pointed out that the impulse to ridicule through the use of humour “is used with special preference as a weapon of attack or criticism of superiors who claim to be an authority. Wit then serves as a

¹⁹ Joseph A. Dane, *Parody: Critical Concepts Versus Literary Practices, Aristophanes to Sterne* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988) 181.

²⁰ Lehmann 3.

resistance against such authority and as an escape from its pressure.”²¹ Also, Vladimir Nabokov has astutely pointed out, “Satire is a lesson and parody is a game.”²² Making a game out of a lesson, or vice versa, is often the best way to learn, and sometimes the obvious humour of parody can soften or even cloak an intensely controversial satire. Satire, as defined in the *OED*, is a “work or composition in prose or (orig.) verse which (usu. humorously) exposes prevailing vices or follies or ridicules an (esp. prominent) individual; ... the use of sarcasm, irony, ridicule, etc., to expose vice or folly or to lampoon an individual.”²³ In the course of this study we will see that Lehmann’s definition of parody and the *OED* definition of satire are undeniably held together by the glue of Freud’s perceptive deductions concerning a resistance against authority and escape from its pressure.

²¹ Sigmund Freud, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, ed. and trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1917) 153.

²² Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) 75.

²³ *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “satire”, 1993 ed.

Chapter One:

“So lerede vs biledes”: Social Satire in Two Poems of MS Harley 2253

In the use of trilingualism in MS Harley 2253, there is a sense that each language has its own strengths in particular contexts and for particular occasions. The Latin works represent the saints' lives and other works of religious guidance appear in Latin, works for pilgrims are in Latin and French, the indecorous fabliaux are in French and the love poetry is in English. As Turville-Petre points out, “There are, then, senses in which each language is limited, not inherently, but because it is perceived as best fitted to a certain subject, style, and register. What is appropriate in French [or Latin] may sound grandiose in English.”¹ *Annot and John* shows the obvious influences of the French courtly *descriptio*, yet best exemplifies the strengths of English in the particular context of its parody of the genre.² *Satire on the Consistory Courts*, on the other hand, best exemplifies the strengths of English verse for the personalized and particular occasion of a peasant's arraignment in ecclesiastical court on charges of immoral conduct. Turville-Petre has shown that images and references in these poems are “precise, detailed and *local*,”³ and in their precision, detail and localization never quite reach the general transcendent loftiness of their French and Latin counterparts. I would argue that this localization is an essential

¹ Turville-Petre 203.

² In this case, the *descriptio* refers to the rhetorical form taken by the lines describing the unattainable beloved in courtly literature. The traditional characteristics of the beloved are: blonde hair, blue or grey eyes, white skin, rosey cheeks, slim, beautifully dressed, modest and chaste. For a detailed discussion of the *descriptio* in general, see Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 7-10.

³ *ibid* 207 (my emphasis).

element in their satire that rejects the grandiose and forces the audience to concentrate on the ordinary.

This insistence on social leveling is a distinguishing feature of all the parodic and satiric works of Harley 2253. In *The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale*, for example, the poet combines the distinguishing features of the French *pastourelle* with those of the courtly romance. The poem opens with an unusual hypothetical *pastourelle* situation: the speaker *fantasizes* about what he would find *if* he were to ride out through the countryside in search of “wilde wymmen” (l.2).⁴ The fantasy woman he finds, however, is not the conventional dark-haired, dark-eyed, illiterate shepherdess of the *pastourelle*, but the traditional fair-haired, grey-eyed, literate noblewoman of the French courtly romance. She is richly attired (“hire gurdel of bete god is al/...al wip rubies on a rowe” [ll.61, 64, “Her belt is all of beaten gold...all with rubies in a row”]), has the conventional hair colour of “pe sonnebéém aboute nóón (l.14, “the sunbeam about noon”), “hyre ey₃en aren grete ant gray ynoh” (l.16, “her eyes are large and grey enough”), and her “lefly rede lippes” (l.38, “lovely red lips”) read aloud from the French “romaun₃” (l.39, “romance”). Yet, as the speaker’s daydreaming becomes more intimate, it becomes evident that the conventionally chaste fantasy lady of the French romance has allowed him certain liberties more in keeping with the *pastourelle*’s common shepherdess:

eyper side soft ase sylk,
whittore pen pe moren-mylk,
wip leofly lit on lere.
Al pat ich ou nempne noht

⁴ Daniel J. Ransom points out that the *OED* lists a fourteenth-century meaning of the word “wild” as “uncivilized, uncultured, rude;” see *Poets at Play: Irony and Parody in the Harley Lyrics* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1985) 53.

hit is wonder wel ywroht,
ant elles wonder were. (ll.76-81)

[Both her sides are soft as silk,
whiter than the morning milk,
with a lovely hue to her complexion.
All the parts that I have left out
are wonderfully well wrought,
and otherwise are marvelous.]

Ordinarily in the *pastourelle*, the speaker is a nobleman who meets and (usually) has sexual relations with a country girl. The *Ribblesdale* poet's fantastic transportation of the courtly lady into a rural setting, and the speaker's rustic description of her, transgress courtly class boundaries in a new way. The poet intensifies the implicit satire of the *pastourelle* towards the courtly love relationship by combining both in the same poem.

Similarly, *The Poet's Repentance* begins with the lines that prepare the audience for a traditional Latin penitential lyric:

Weping hauep myn wonges wet
for wikked werk ant wone of wyt;
vnblipe y be til y ha bet
bruches broken, ase bok byt.... (ll.1-4)

[Weeping has wet my cheeks
because of my wicked deeds and lack of wit:
I will be sad until I have mended
broken bridges, as the book bids me....]

However, soon the poet tells us that his transgressions are not of a religious nature, but "of leuedis loue, pat y ha let" (l.5, "of ladies' love that I have forfeited"). We are now led to believe that the poem is a palinode, a recantation of the unseemly things the poet has previously written about women. However, the poet has built up our expectation that the poem would have a deeply religious significance, and our deflation on finding that the

contents of the poem will be of less exalted subject matter is calculated irony. Indeed, the poet has peppered the poem with ironic situations and turns of phrase that lead the reader to doubt the contrition of the poet. Here the parody of the penitential lyric effectively satirizes the exalted state of upper class women in the realms of *fin amor*, reducing them to the ordinary. The poets' use of satire in both *The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale* and *The Poet's Repentance* acts as a social leveling device.

The poet of *Annot and John* (see appendix for text and translation) also participates in this deliberate debasement of aristocratic tradition, yet because of this the poem has been the subject of much modern scholarly confusion. G.L. Brook has negatively characterized the poem for its "excessive use of conventional phrases and the lack of a sense of balance and proportion," traits which he asserts are faults common to most of Middle English literature, yet he does not explore why this might be so.⁵ Likewise, Arthur K. Moore laments the poem's "lack of control and lack of a clear concept of unity."⁶ Thanks are due to scholars such as Theo Stemmler, Derek Pearsall and Peter Dronke for their attempts to champion the merits of *Annot and John*; however, none of these scholars presents a convincing case concerning just what those merits are.⁷ More surprisingly, none has commented on the poet's most obvious decision - to use an exaggerated version of the alliterative long line meter in a production that ostensibly

⁵ G.L. Brook, *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of MS. Harley 2253* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1964) 23.

⁶ Arthur K. Moore, *The Secular Lyric in Middle English* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1951) 32.

⁷ See Theo Stemmler's discussion of *Annot and John* in *Die englischen Liebesgedichte des MS. Harley 2253* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1962) 209; Derek Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) 125-127; Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) 119-121.

represents a courtly genre.⁸ I suggest that this myopia is due to a degree of stubborn refusal to consider the poem as an obvious parody simply because it follows the conventions of courtly description rather *too* well. Exaggeration of style and form is often the best clue to the parodic or satiric intention of a work in any genre.

In their quest to find some method in *Annot and John*'s alliterative excess, the above-mentioned scholars prefer to see in it various tenuous (at best) controlling principles of composition. Dronke, for example, sees Annot as representing *forma formarum*, with the poet attempting to portray his beloved as the fairest in all creation: "Each stanza takes a particular *kinne* [genus], and shows that all the qualities and all the powers of individuals in it are united in the beloved."⁹ Daniel J. Ransom refutes this: "Annot is not said to be the supreme stone or the carbuncle of carbuncles. Rather she is like various gems in one respect or another. ...Moreover, if Annot is *forma formarum*, she is so only by the accumulation of consistent qualities."¹⁰ Additionally, Dronke believes that, although the lengthy lists in each stanza appear to be haphazard, they actually contain links to the five senses. Again, Ransom comments: "True, the gems of the first stanza appeal primarily to sight, but so do the flowers of the second. They are red, white, and pretty – 'ase pou piself sys.' ...Nowhere does the poem mention the fragrance of the blossoms."¹¹ He goes on at some length to similarly overturn Dronke's

⁸ Although the alliterative meter itself had wide popular appeal, the exaggeration of the meter is uncommon in alliterative romance works. As an interesting aside, Matonis (98) notes that the excessive ornamentation in the alliterative Harley poems "may be attributed to the poets' attempts to imitate Celtic models, for the attention of Celtic poets was directed to detail and form rather than to the whole."

⁹ Dronke 119.

¹⁰ Ransom 32-34.

¹¹ *ibid* 33.

arguments for the remaining stanzas. So where does this leave us in terms of defining the structure of *Annot and John*? Ransom argues that *Annot and John* was included in the Harley 2253 manuscript precisely because of its written complexity: “The poet indulges in wordplay, knowing contradictions, non sequiturs, and syntactic cul-de-sacs. What seems to be simpleminded sequence is, in fact, sophisticated disorder, and this [is] a comic device.”¹² Carter Revard’s theory that the works in this manuscript were chosen to deliberately juxtapose styles and themes need not preclude the possibility that a very good parody could serve as an exemplum of, for example, the “courtly” *descriptio*. In fact, because *Annot and John* so exaggerates the characteristics, it should serve as a very good exemplum indeed. It is precisely the dry and subtle wit of the poet that has disguised *Annot and John* and contributed to the controversy surrounding it, for our poem is a parody so subtle that it has taken most of a century of study to discover it. An investigation into the ways that the poem subverts the French courtly conventions for praising one’s beloved will make clear why the SWM Harley 2253 compiler may have thought this poem worthy to be included in his anthology.¹³

Of primary importance to the French courtly tradition was the concealment of the lady’s identity; yet the poet has deliberately built a punning clue into the middle stanza of the poem concerning the lady’s name. He writes, “hire nome is in a not of pe nyhtegale/In Annote is hire nome; nempnep hit non?”(ll.28-29) The speaker is not talking to himself, but to a group of *listeners*. Studies of the contents of MS Harley 2253 have revealed that “the manuscript has a social and recreational function, to offer the

¹² *ibid* 32. For a thorough discussion of this theory, see Revard 122-146.

¹³ For a thorough discussion of the sense of national identity behind the compiler’s choice of works,

household or community material for discussion, more or less serious,” so the poem could have been included for this reason, among others, as we shall see.¹⁴ Worse still regarding the courtly codes of conduct, the poet goes on to invite his audience to guess the lady’s name and whisper it to John like some sort of parlor game: “Whose ryht redeþroune to Iohon”(l.30). Ransom adds, “if the poet were not aware of the code of secrecy, he would not have suggested that his audience whisper (‘roune’) the answer to him.”¹⁵ Additionally, the poet seems to have intended the poem to be “performed” for a group who know the lady and in the presence of the lady herself. The second stanza celebrates the lady’s beauty in comparison to a host of plants and flowers; she is “blosme opon bleo, brihstest vnder bis,/wip celydoyne ant sauge, *ase pou piself sys*”(ll.17-18, emphasis mine). If the last line actually does imply that the lady is physically present during the performance, we must assume that she would not have been too unduly compromised by the expression of love that the poem represents. This fact could point to the poem having been produced perhaps for the entertainment of a household in which everyone would have been in on the jokes (or at least the speaker’s amorous intentions towards the lady in question), and not to ease (or deliberately antagonize) the pains of the traditional secretly thwarted courtly lover.¹⁶ Given the overall style of the poem, however, we could just as easily see this unorthodox use of audience as ironic in itself.

see Turville-Petre 192-217.

¹⁴ *ibid* 212. See also Revard 122-146.

¹⁵ Ransom 37.

¹⁶ An interesting area worthy of future study would be a comparison of Harley 2253 with other household books. For a detailed analysis of similar manuscripts, see Carol Meale, “‘Alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englich, and frensch’: Lay Women and Their Books in Late Medieval England,” *Women and Literature in Britain: 1150-1500*, ed. Carol Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

This is not the only play on words built into the poem; the poet's extensive use of stock alliterative phrases creates multiple opportunities. From its first lines the reader is well aware that there is some validity to Brook's remark that alliteration in *Annot and John* is used to excess. He also states that "the conventional phrases are usually alliterative, and they probably owed their popularity to the ease with which they could be used to satisfy the demands of strongly alliterative metres."¹⁷ However, in the case of our poet, it is distinctly possible that he meant to combine stock phrases so thickly within the poem and in such interesting combinations as to create a parody. Ransom points to the lines "Coynte ase columbine such hire cunde ys,/glad vnder gore in gro ant in gryz" (ll.15-16), and the possible auditory puns which they represent. He points out that "Coynte" comes from the Old French word *cointe*, meaning "pretty", but that its variant Middle English spelling is *queinte*, "which is also the spelling of another word well-known today in certain Chaucerian contexts," in other words, the female genitalia.¹⁸ Although the two words do not suggest each other on sight, they do sound alike and it would have been a simple matter for a performing reader to imply one from the other.¹⁹ This would change the audience's perspective from Annot's lovely face to "vnder [her] gore," or skirt. She is beautiful, we are told in a much-used alliterative phrase, "glad

¹⁷ Brook 23.

¹⁸ Ransom 38.

¹⁹ This oral/aural play was the norm in Irish poetic technique; thus, if the poet were familiar with Irish rhyme techniques it would not be unusual for him to perform just this sort of oral transformation. Matonis (99) points out that in Irish rhyme patterns "alliteration may fall on the same letter or consonants belonging to the same class (e.g., *d* and *t*, *b* and *p*, *g* and *k*). ... Irish rime and alliteration can be effected by a process of lenition or mutation affecting medial and initial consonants." This mutation was brought about by subtly inflecting the *voicing* of the consonants. Therefore, if the poet were aware of this tradition, he could very well be using it in parody of the Irish conventions, or using the Irish conventions to parody the French courtly traditions, as does the poet of *The Land of Cokaygne* (see the discussion in Chapter Two).

vnder gore” – but *literally* beautiful under her skirt.²⁰ Given the much commented on overuse of alliteration in *Annot and John*, it is entirely possible that the poet is also mocking the alliterative tradition,²¹ in which case he could be using the stock alliterative phrases to his parodic advantage. Similarly, “in recitation it would be a simple matter to unvoice the *d* of ‘cunde,’ and this tenders to the ear another variant of *queinte*, i.e., *cunte*.”²² Carrying Ransom’s suggestion to its logical conclusion at the end of the couplet, if the lady in question is “glad vnder gore *in gro ant in grys*,” both kinds of expensive grey fur trim, might she not be an older woman with grey hair?²³ Nothing in the poem directly alludes to the lady’s age, but if the reference to grey fur trim was intended as a play on her hair colour, then her comparison to various spring blossoms, such as the primrose and the periwinkle, could also be seen as ironically humorous. In the line that follows, Ransom equates “brihtest vnder bis” – literally “the fairest under fine linen” – with his interpretation of the phrase “glad vnder gore”; however, it is just as

²⁰ A variant of the phrase (“Geynest vnder gore” [l.37]) occurs in the parodic poem *Alysoun*, also found in Harley 2253. See Brook 33.

²¹ Matonis indicates that the Celtic tradition encompassed “a poetry featuring elaborate rime, both internal and end rime, concatenating (or binding) alliteration, syllabic meters, and, particularly in Irish, though notable too in Welsh, a tendency to divide verses into four-line strophes,” which were often linked together by rhyme (91-108). An excellent example of the use of the concatenating alliteration (or “*dúnad*”) in use by Irish poets would be the poem *Pearl*, written in a North West Midlands dialect. Each stanza is linked to the next by a system of common words; for example, the linking of the first two stanzas depends on the repetition of the word “spot”. The last line of the first stanza, “Of that pryvy perle wythouten spot” (l.12), links to the first line of the second stanza, “Sythen in that spote hit fro me sprange” (l.13). Similarly, the last last line of the poem links back up to the first: “Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye” (l.1) and “ande precious perles unto his pay” (l.1212). *Pearl*, ed. A.C. Cawley and J.J. Anderson (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1976) 1-48.

²² Ransom 38.

²³ Reginald Abbott points out that England’s first sumptuary laws governing dress restrictions among all classes of society were enacted in 1337. These laws specifically forbade the wearing of furs by non-nobles. If the poet were writing *Annot and John* with these “new” laws in mind, and Annot is non-noble, the poet’s inclusion of furs in her wardrobe would be a satiric comment indeed. However, since the date of *Annot and John*’s actual composition has not been definitively ascertained, this point must remain conjecture. See Reginald Abbott, “What Becomes a Legend Most? Fur in the Medieval Romance,” *Dress* 21 (1994):4-16.

likely that the poet has done with the pun on her skirt, picked up the later play on the lady's hair and is referring now to her headdress. It was the custom of older women and married women to cover their hair with elaborate headdresses.²⁴ If Annot is a young married woman and the poem was designed with serious courtly intent, she could be disastrously compromised by the revelation of her name – unless, of course, she were openly attached or already married to the speaker, in which case the use of the courtly framework is lovingly parodic and unorthodox indeed. Additionally, if we are to believe all of the diverse attributes that the poet heaps upon his beloved, she has lived a long enough life to have accumulated a good many, as we shall see later.

There are yet more puns for us to tease out. In stanza three, at the very heart of the poem, Annot is said to be a “faucoun in friht, derndest in dale,/ant wip eueruch a gome gladest in gale” (ll.25-26). J.A. Gibson points out that “gome” could either come from OE *gamen* for “game”, or from OE *guma* for “man,” and that a similar alliterative phrase occurs in *William of Palerne* in the context of “man”: “to glad wip uch gome pat here gle herde” (v.824).²⁵ Ransom states:

Each meaning is possible, and each has both innocent and suggestive connotations. What games, we might ask, are played by someone who is ‘derndest in dale’? And just how discreet is a woman who makes merry with every man? Even with respect to good, clean fun, indiscriminate flirtations and rambunctious merriment are not consistent with refined, courtly behavior. ... Is she elegant or homespun? elevated or earthy? prim or prurient?²⁶

²⁴ For an informative discussion on female headwear of the Middle Ages, see Hilda Amphlett, *Hats: A History of Fashion in Headwear* (Buckinghamshire: Richard Sadler Ltd., 1974) 24.

²⁵ J.A. Gibson, “The Lyrics of MS. Harley 2253,” diss., London University, 1914, n.p., quoted in Brook 75.

²⁶ Ransom 40.

The same ambiguity exists in stanza four, “blipe yblessed of Crist, pat baypep me mi bone/when derne dedis in day derne are done” (ll.35-36). What is the nature of the speaker’s prayer to Christ and just what *are* the “secret deeds done discreetly by day”? Annot, if she *is* listening, had better have a good sense of humour.

However, nowhere in the poem does the speaker assign this particular character trait to Annot. On the contrary, the lapidary list of the first stanza concentrates on her more ethereal virtues. Stemmler points out that beryl, sapphire and jasper are all employed as symbols of purity in the tradition of the “*Marienlyrik*,” as are pearls and emeralds.²⁷ Likewise, the comparisons of the lady with the rose and the lily, which begin the second stanza, are formulaic in descriptions of both the Virgin Mary and the unattainable beloved. The periwinkle is often representative in the medieval context of “greatest in worth”, as it is in the Harley 913 poem *Pers of Bermingham*.²⁸ More problematic, or perhaps of more significance for our purposes, is the poet’s inclusion of “alisaundre” (horse parsley), “ache” (wild celery) and anise (l.16) – none of which have particularly distinctive blooms, but all of which are herbs used in cooking. Stemmler argues that the inclusion of these herbs and others in the stanza represents a “*Medizin-Motiv*” which is summarized in the final line of the stanza: “he is solsecle, to sauue ys forsoht.”²⁹ Ransom, however, notes that the stress in the stanza, exclusive of the last

²⁷ Stemmler 205-206.

²⁸ *MED*, s.v. “peruincke”. Interestingly enough, in *Pers of Bermingham* (line 43), this same description is ironically attributed to a figure of villainy, as we shall see in the following chapter.

²⁹ Stemmler 208-209. These plants are all listed as having medicinal qualities in medieval herbals; however, Ransom (35) points out that medieval lapidaries show that most of the precious and semi-precious

line, is on the *sight* of these plants. Only the marigold is overtly singled out for its healing properties.

Similar ambiguities and inconsistencies are built into the fourth stanza. Mandrake (l.31) is described in the *OED* as: “a poisonous and narcotic Mediterranean plant of the nightshade family, ...which was formerly credited with magical and medicinal properties because of the supposedly human shape of its forked fleshy root, and *reputed to shriek when taken from the ground.*”³⁰ It was commonly used as an anesthetic and soporific; however, mandrake was also reputed to have great powers as a fertility drug for women and as an aphrodisiac and could only be collected after dark at the risk of going mad.³¹ Similarly, the word *licoris* (l.33), used in conjunction with Annot’s powers of leechcraft, is very close to the *MED*’s variant spelling for *likerous* (lechery) – i.e. *licouris*. The double entendre here suggests that Annot is known for her lecherous behaviour from Lyn to the River Lune. There are so many of these ironic suggestions of immoral behaviour in the poem that is difficult to disregard them all. The lists of Annot’s courtly virtues generally seem to suggest her possible vices.

In stanza three Annot is compared to a series of birds, first of which is – contrary to courtly tradition - the parrot. It is not uncommon for the parrot to appear in the settings of courtly poetry; however, in serious contexts, it is not a bird with which the beloved is compared. To be sure, the parrot has always had a reputation as an entertainer and in this

stones listed in the first stanza were also thought to be invested with healing powers, “but it is scarcely pertinent, for example, to point out that coral is said to cure epilepsy.”

³⁰ *OED* s.v. “mandrake,” (my emphasis).

³¹ Margaret B. Freeman, *Herbs for the Medieval Household for Cooking, Healing and Divers Uses* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1971) 26-27.

respect the lady may be said to ease the speaker's troubles. However, in the Middle Ages the parrot also had a reputation as a lecherous bird that "frequently wishes to kiss the man whom he knows. Indeed, when a mirror is put before him, in the manner of Narcissus he is deluded by his own image, and now like one who is happy, now like one who is sad, offering the gestures of a lover, he appears to seek copulation."³² If it is this image of the parrot that the speaker is referring to, then Annot is actually a fickle, narcissistic tease. Likewise, she is compared to the thrush (*l.23*) and "pe wilde lauerok" (*l.24*). The adjective "wilde" is not commonly added, but here may more accurately describe the nature of the lady herself than acting as a redundant description of the bird and, while the lark and thrush were admired for their beautiful songs, both had wanton and libidinous reputations.³³ Additionally, the speaker has characterized Annot as having at once the qualities of songbirds (the turtle dove, the thrush, the lark and, of course, the nightingale) and the birds that prey on them (the hawk and the falcon). Hawks and falcons were considered noble birds, so if the metaphors were meant to depict Annot's nobility of character their existence in the stanza would not necessarily be incongruous to the courtly tradition. However, one does not expect to see such unlikely pairings of timid and aggressive birds within the same stanza, nor is it usual to describe a woman in these terms.³⁴ As Ransom notes, "Their presence underscored the poet's strategy to achieve not

³² Alexander Neckham, *De Naturis Rerum*, ed. Thomas Wright, Rolls Series, 34 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863) 88, quoted and translated in Ransom 42. Chaucer, too, declares the parrot "ful of delicasye" or voluptuousness in "The Parlement of Foules," *l.359*.

³³ Mortimer J. Donovan, "Sir Thopas, 772-774," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 57 (1956): 237-246.

³⁴ Chaucer makes an exception here too. The much courted and sought-after female eagle – the formel – of "Parlement of Foules" declares, "I wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide,/Forsothe as yit, by no manere weye" (*ll.652-653*) and delays her enforced choice of a mate for a year.

an accumulation of complementary similes and metaphors but a pronounced tension in terms of comparison.”³⁵ This tension is why scholars have had such difficulty determining a serious, non-parodic/satiric methodology in *Annot and John*, yet the tension is precisely what helps identify the poem as parodic/satiric.

Finally, the speaker compares Annot to a list of exemplary people, both male and female.³⁶ She is wise, true, beautiful, bold, mighty, noble and gracious, yet “bold” and “mighty” are traits again traditionally reserved for medieval men. The courtly conventions require the lady to be completely feminine, but she is not presented in this stereotypical way. Even in this last stanza Annot is a paradox. Whoever the lady in question is – if indeed she is anyone at all - if “heo ioyep wip Ion” (l.50) and John is the speaker or has commissioned the poem, she has a marvelous sense of humour indeed.

In the course of the poem Annot has been exalted as a beautiful jewel, a lovely flower, a faithful and timid songbird, a healer of life’s ills and a noble and gracious lady – all in strict keeping with the French courtly conventions.³⁷ However, she has also been praised for being wild, bold and mighty, being like horse parsley and wild celery, a hawk, a falcon, a powerful soporific and aphrodisiac, and assorted other things incongruous to the traditional description of the beloved. The opportunities for puns, double entendres and plays on words are manifold. If Annot is a real person, the poet has lovingly teased

³⁵ Ransom 44.

³⁶ Brian Stone lists the following probable sources for the names in *Annot*’s final stanza: “Ragna was a wise woman, and Bjorn a hero, from Orkney saga; Tegeu was a type of chastity from Welsh Arthurian legend; Floris was the hero of a metrical romance, imprisoned by the Saracens with the Princess Blanche fleur; Craddock was an Arthurian character; the identities of Jonas and Wylcadoun have not plausibly been conjectured; Hilde was the heroine of a Germanic saga, and Garwen (if that is the correct identification for ‘Wyrwein’) was one of King Arthur’s three mistresses, according to the Mabinogion.” *Medieval English Verse*, trans. Brian Stone (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 180.

³⁷ Ransom xix.

her; however, in the teasing of Annot he has managed to thoroughly mock many aspects of the courtly tradition. If Annot is a fictional, even generic character, then the poet deliberately develops her wanton, rustic side, again, in defiance of tradition and has managed successfully to overturn our expectations of the courtly genre.

In contrast to the good-humoured parody of *Annot and John*, *Satire on the Consistory Courts* contains nothing that could be characterized as “playful”. Turville-Petre calls the poem both powerful and savage in its description of the workings of the ecclesiastical courts.³⁸ *Satire on the Consistory Courts* owes its structure to the Latin and French models of the complaint genre; however, while the classical Latin complaint satire and its medieval French counterpart were “conceptual, allegorical and impersonal,” and the goliardic and Anglo-Norman satires were characterized by a “roguish wit and gaiety,”³⁹ *Satire on the Consistory Courts* takes complaint to a new level of immediacy and invective.

Complaint satire was originally oriented towards a moral and corrective didacticism intended for the edification of the upper classes and the members of ecclesiastical institutions.⁴⁰ It deliberately avoided the specificity of realism. Poets preferred to condemn vice generally, rather than give titillating detail.⁴¹ However, along with the sense of burgeoning nationalism, the later thirteenth century saw a growing

³⁸ Turville-Petre 201.

³⁹ Raman Selden, *English Verse Satire 1590-1765* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978) 47-48.

⁴⁰ *ibid* 48 and John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956) 10.

⁴¹ Peter 36.

dissatisfaction of the lower classes and a period of social and economic crisis. Out of this the English fashioned a revised genre of complaint satire. Selden describes this new English style of complaint:

The essential tone is homiletic: general and specific abuses of the time in society at large are attacked with Hebraic bitterness. The present is placed against a backcloth of a noble and ideal past and against a foreground of death, judgement and retribution. The style of Complaint is usually racy, vivid and colloquial and is addressed to a popular audience. It has two dominant forms: invectives on behalf of the common people against their oppressors, and religious protest against wantonness and luxury.⁴²

Only the “moral” of *Satire on the Consistory Courts* can be described as “homiletic”, and the past is only obliquely evident in the speaker’s condemnation of contemporary events, implicitly suggesting that times have been better; yet, *Satire on the Consistory Courts* does vividly encompass both of Selden’s “dominant forms”. The poem speaks for the common man in the popular alliterative language, and rails against the corruption and humiliation that was a regular part of the procedures of the ecclesiastical court, under whose jurisdiction fell “crimes” against Christian morality.⁴³

Although the speaker is clearly a common man, the poet’s familiarity with the consistory court’s procedures, along with his poetic facility, indicate that he was probably an educated member of the clergy attached to the consistory in some capacity himself. Although the poet is intimately familiar with the workings of the consistory, as is evidenced by his detailed descriptions of the members of the court, his persona is a

⁴² Selden 48.

⁴³ For a general discussion on the role of the consistory courts, see B.L. Woodcock, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Courts in the Diocese of Canterbury* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

“lewed lued” (l.1), an uneducated commoner and most probably a peasant. The poet describes the common labourer as unlearned, yet “so hauer of honde” (l.2). As Derek Pearsall comments in his notes to *Piers Plowman: the C-text*, honest labour according to one’s station within the Christian community was a common theme of sermons, as it is of *Piers Plowman* itself, as we shall see in Chapter Three, and this theme of the virtues of honest labour perhaps provides us with a brief instance of Selden’s “homiletic” tone.⁴⁴

Out of this “lewed” persona grows one of the theme of the *Satire* – the injustice of corruption. Steven Justice points out that the clerically trained chroniclers of the Middle Ages regarded the embodiment of reason to be writing.⁴⁵ Hence, these literates tended to portray those who could not read or write as lacking all powers of reason, and “their narratives of the rising [of 1381] are black fantasies about the victimization of written culture and its agents at the hands of those who could not coherently speak (much less think or write) and who could look at writing only with a rage for its destruction.”⁴⁶ In actuality, this seeming contempt for books and book-learning was a violent reaction to oppressive authority and books and rolls of an official nature, parchment and pens all became metaphors for corruption. Justice notes that during the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, the rebels did not burn private libraries or religious books as a rule; however, the archives of administrative records from all levels of secular and ecclesiastical government were

⁴⁴ William Langland, *Piers Plowman: the C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994) 146, note 2.

⁴⁵ Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (London: University of California Press, 1994) 17.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

favoured targets.⁴⁷ These documents stood for constraint and hardship. In their rampage, the rebels searched for older charters and documents that might have provided evidence of how they were governed “in the good old days”, convinced as they were that ancient charters would allow them to sweep away the corrupt contemporary influence and return to what they suspected had been a more just society.⁴⁸ The speaker of *Satire on the Consistory Courts* reflects this in his assertion that there are two types of law: the law of the “Ierede” (l.5) and common law (l.10). The poet is not trying to suggest that the peasant is innocent, at least under institutionally recognized laws. The speaker’s use of the subjunctive in lines four to eight suggests a hypothetical situation (perhaps as the peasant acknowledges that the consistory may be justified in summoning him), but line sixteen actually seems to be an admission of guilt. Nor is the poet suggesting that the peasant’s common law is best, merely that the lower classes cannot be expected to abide by the law of a corrupt society.

Thus, the poet brings his speaker’s lack of education to the fore in the man’s obvious contempt for education, books and writing, yet invests him with the ability to eloquently defend himself and to know the difference between right and wrong. The speaker’s emphasis in the first line on his lack of education, combined with the virtues of manual labour implied in the second, sits in stark juxtaposition with his assertion in line three that the “Ierede vs biledes.” More specifically, of the learned members of the court he says,

⁴⁷ *ibid* 45-46.

⁴⁸ *ibid* 47-48.

on alle maner opes pat heo me wullep awe,
 heore *boc* ase vn-bredes,
 heo wendeþ *bokes vn-brad*,
 ant makeþ men a moneþ a-mad.
 (ll. 11-14, my emphasis)⁴⁹

His repetition of the words “*boc*” and “*bokes*”, and “*vn-bredes*” and “*vn-brad*”, with their combinations of hard consonants, effectively conveys his strong contempt. The forty-plus clerks apparently employed simply to write down his sentence “*pynkes wip heore penne on heore parchemyn*” (l.25).⁵⁰ This could be a sign of their contemptuous boredom, but more likely this is how their act of writing would appear to an illiterate person. Meanwhile, the immoral summoners “*recheþ forþ heore rolle*” (l.39, my emphasis); again, a piece of parchment, the writ, declares that he is accused of fornication. In their explanation of the charges against him, they offer as proof of his crime an unnamed book (l.51), but being unschooled he cannot read it. The judicial order (l.71) sealing his sentence is, in one sense, the “merchandise” he buys at the consistory (l.73). The mercantile nature of the bribery in the court system is a negative image for

⁴⁹ It is worth noting here that the repetition of the words “*boc*” and “*bokes*”, and “*vn-bredes*” and “*vn-brad*” conforms to an Irish poetic technique for linking short stanzas. The rhyme pattern of the *Satire* is *aabccbddbeebffgggf*, so that the linking of the individual sections of each stanza – i.e. *eeb* and *ffgggf* in this way can be considered as stanza linking. Matonis (99-100) explains: “Stanza linking, the binding of stanzas together either by the repetition of an alliterative pattern, or by the repetition of a word or words: Though stanza linking was a fairly widespread European feature (cf. the Latin *concatenatio*, and the *capfinidas* of Provençal), the historical priority and the more regular systematic appearance of the device in Irish support the decision to consider Irish the more direct model.” Matonis also points out that the same feature can be found in other poems of Harley 2253, such as *The Poet’s Repentance*.

⁵⁰ Here the poet may resort to hyperbole in his speaker’s assertion that over forty clerks are present for two reasons. The number of clerks present affects the amount of money the speaker will have to pay out in bribes and perhaps, as far as his limited funds are concerned, there might as well be forty as four. Additionally, the number forty usually has dire biblical connotations. God destroyed humankind by sending a flood of forty days and forty nights (Gen. 7:4); the Children of Israel wandered the desert for forty years (Num. 14:33); Christ was tempted by the devil in the wilderness forty days and forty nights (Luke 4:2), and so on. Thus, both the poet and his speaker may be reflecting an apocalyptic outlook in the use of the number forty.

members for the clergy, and the speaker turns this back upon them in his condemnation of their corrupt practices. The speaker's frustration and indignation are obvious; it is enough to make an honest - but illiterate - man insane (*l.14*).

He describes the judge as "an old cherl in a blake hure" (*l.19*) and as "An heme in a herygoud wip honginde sleuen" (*l.22*). The *MED* gives two different meanings for the word "heme": "a symbol of pride or ostentation [OE *hem*]; an inhabitant, villager, churl." Even the judge's garments are, for the speaker, an outward sign of vanity, although they may actually only be the clerical vestments of the presiding bishop. With its dual connotations of "pride" and "churl", the speaker's use of the word conveys the sentiment, "You're no better than I am, for all your fancy clothes." Large sleeves required much more material than ordinary sleeves and hence were only worn by the clergy, the wealthy, or the pretentious.⁵¹ Similarly, "vch fol cler" (*l.43*) who is accused of bankruptcy comes to accounting court "couren in a cope" (*l.46*). He hides behind his clerical garb as he hides behind the legal loophole of the bishop's dispensation. It is a "store-bought" privilege purchased by one who has otherwise failed to meet his financial obligations.

The multitude of clerks present to write down the speaker's sentence express a willingness to speak on behalf of the defendant – if he offers them a healthy bribe first in order to gain their respect. This reinforces the poem's theme of clerical corruption. Again, the line "Such chaffare Y^l chepe at pe chapitre" (*l.73*) suggests that the speaker has paid the bribe, but that the extorted money has had little effect on the severity of the sentence ultimately imposed. Summoners had a reputation for corruption, as the portrait

⁵¹ In *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's Monk's sleeves are "purfiles at the hond/ With grys, and that the fynest of a lond" ("The General Prologue" *ll.* 193-194) as a symbol that he does not observe a vow of poverty.

of Chaucer's Summoner graphically shows us, so it is little wonder that "Hyrdemen hem hatiep, ant vch mones hyne" (l.40).⁵² Summoners were usually members of the laity employed by the clergy and not actually members of the clergy themselves; they had the task of reporting moral infractions to the consistory courts and not infrequently abused their position of power.⁵³ They pressed charges for crimes which came to their notice through informants or by spying on individuals, particularly those who had enough money to bribe their way out of the charges ("atte constorie heo kennep vs care" [l.85]), or through the false witness of others consumed with vindictiveness and jealousy.⁵⁴ Their extortionate exactions quite literally brought many parishes to dire straits, as our speaker tells us (l.41), yet these "fol clerks" were often exempt from prosecution in the secular courts because of their clerical associations, or because of their purchased dispensations. A summoner accused of failure (bankruptcy), when summoned to the secular accounting court, for example, could go to the bishop and purchase a dispensation that gave him the privileges of clergy. This meant that he could only be tried by the consistory courts, and ecclesiastical courts generally passed lighter sentences than their secular counterparts. These tactics for evasion of punishment were not available to the common labourer.

The court accuses the defendant of fornication, and as witnesses they call "Magge ant Malle" (l.57), common rustic diminutives of Margaret and Mary respectively. Their generic names give the reader the impression that the charges may have been trumped up. This is supported by the defendant's repeated claims that he will clear himself of the

⁵² See Chaucer's description of the Summoner in "The General Prologue," *Canterbury Tales*, ll.623-668.

⁵³ Louis A. Haselmayer, "The Apparitor and Chaucer's Summoner," *Speculum* 12 (1937): 51-52.

⁵⁴ *ibid* 53.

charges (l.15), that he has been slandered (l.34), and that the courts trick many people this way (l.68). Maggie and Molly enter as “bymodered ase a mor-hen” (l.58) and “vncomely vnder calle” (l.60), in contrast to Annot who is “glad vnder gore” and “brihtest vnder bis.” He remarks on their filthiness, just as he remarks that the court officials are “swart” (ll.48, 70) and “for-swat” (l.70), their physical appearance being emblematic of their sinful behaviour. Maggie and Molly’s initial comportment seems embarrassed and uncertain; however, the suddenness of the women’s coarse uproar leaves the reader with the feeling that the whole event has been staged and the courtroom is reduced to pandemonium. Because of the difficult poetic syntax of the line in which the witnesses begin to speak, it is difficult to ascertain whether they are accusing the defendant of lying in his denial of guilt, or if they are swearing false oaths. While both options are possible, I tend to agree with Robbins’ decision to punctuate the poem so that “by my gabbyng” (l.62) supports swearing a false oath. This seems best in keeping with the evidence that the charges have been fabricated by the perjured summoners. The final lines of the poem, “Wyde heo worchep vs wo/for wymmene ware” (ll.89-90) intimate that the summoners not only purchase dispensations for themselves, but they have purchased the women as well.⁵⁵ The implication of “wymmene ware” is that the summoners themselves have been guilty of fornication with the women they have called to testify, but have arranged for one of them to be married to the defendant. It is an indelicate mercantile transaction to say the least.

⁵⁵ Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages: An Anthology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989) 31, note to line 90.

Satire on the Consistory Courts, then, is quite definitely a text aimed at exposing the corruption of the clergy and clerical court system and (tangentially) the evil wiles of women. However, in his complaint poem the poet does not simply offer us these didactic points to ponder; he thrusts them into our faces with a force that borders on brutality. The colloquialism of the work in combination with the writer's crusading zeal is its greatest strength, making the speaker's emotional frustration, humiliation and indignation infinitely clear to readers from any level of society. The poor, uneducated, but hard-working labourer is unfairly treated by those whose wealth, station and education have only made them corrupt and uncaring. The poet puts authority on trial in a much more just judiciary act, exposing class inequity and clerical corruption.

If we remember Freud's phrase, the poets of *Annot and John* and *Satire on the Consistory Courts* as well as those of *The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale* and *The Poet's Repentance* aim to "attack or [criticize] superiors who claim to be an authority," whether that authority stems from social situations or cultural traditions. Through his use of parody, the poet of *Annot and John* adapts the French courtly tradition to a broader, popular audience. His satire at once elevates the common woman to noble status and lowers the noblewoman to common. The poet of *Satire on the Consistory Courts* uses a colloquial style and speaker to graphically highlight social and institutional inequities between the classes. For the speaker to live by the common law that he understands is not acceptable to the Church. For the speaker to abide by corrupt ecclesiastical law practices is ruinous to his life. The poet has given his audience a chilling preview of the issues that eventually led insurgents to rebellion in 1381. The SWM anthologist preserves for us

among the first examples of a growing national social, political and cultural awareness, within which parody and satire are integral modes of expression.

Chapter Two:

Poisoned Paradise and the Wedding of Good and Evil:

The Land of Cokaygne and Pers of Bermingham from MS Harley 913

Since 1708 when Humphrey Wanley catalogued the contents of the manuscript we now know as MS Harley 913, scholars have remarked on the manuscript's unusual contents.¹ What makes Harley 913 of such interest to modern scholars is largely the collection of parodies and satirical works it contains. Although these works owe much to the European spirit of parody and satire, all show a distinct concern for the contemporary moral, social, and political issues (both secular and ecclesiastical) arising from the Anglo-Irish presence in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Ireland. Written ca. 1330 in MHE, the small manuscript that is Harley 913 was almost certainly a Franciscan *vade mecum*, containing as it does a collection of memorials to St. Francis and the Franciscan order, as well as assorted preaching materials, meditations, religious lyrics and didactic verse. The use of the book as a source for sermon material does not make the inclusion of parodic and satiric material incongruous to its purpose. Apart from suggesting the sense of humour and eclectic taste of the manuscript's owner, the inclusion of parodic and satiric lyrics shows that sometimes a negative exemplum can provide the suggestion of positive didactic subject matter. If we remember Vladimir Nabokov's definition that "Satire is a lesson; parody is a game," the didacticism of satire when paired with the humour of parody can only make the lesson more memorable. This is

¹ Humphrey Wanley, *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. I (London: G. Eyre and A. Strahan, 1808-1812). Wilhelm Heuser, *Die Kildare-Gedichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965).

particularly true if the Harley 913 poems were meant for public performance, as the poems themselves often suggest.

Social and political change has always created an atmosphere ripe for the production of parody and satire, as is evidenced by the proliferation of goliardic verse. In the era which saw the rise of the university and the dawn of national consciousness in continental Europe, the goliards produced a huge corpus of parodic and satiric verse and prose on such characteristic themes as the decadence of the age, the constraints of the religious life, the immorality of ecclesiastical orders and institutions, and the behaviour of women.² The century following the Anglo-Irish colonisation of Ireland beginning in 1169 saw the introduction of new social and political systems that created mounting tensions. By the fourteenth century these tensions were expressing themselves in the growing frequency of armed conflict between the Anglo-Irish and Gaelic-Irish communities.³ Even though the hostility between the two groups was often bloody, some of the Anglo-Irish colonists and clergy, whose own motherland had conquered the Irish, felt sympathy towards the Gaelic-Irish, especially on social matters, such as poverty.⁴ It is this sense of ambivalent compassion that one feels in reading Harley 913's MHE satires. Perhaps for this reason, where the goliardic verse presents no problems, even to the modern scholar, in determining where the

² For a thorough discussion of the works generally affiliated with "Goliard" and goliardic production, see P.G. Walsh, "'Goliard' and Goliardic Poetry," *Medium Ævum* 52.1 (1983):1-9. For a collection of many of these works, see *Carmina Burana*.

³ See Lydon in Cosgrove 240-274.

⁴ Although Bliss' statement (*The English in Medieval Ireland*, 34) that "practical concern for the poor must have been a spontaneous development among the English of Ireland" oversimplifies the situation to a great degree, to some degree, at least, the statement is essentially correct. The frequency of intermarriage between the two groups would also have contributed to this. See Cosgrove 552.

poet stands on any given issue, MHE satire is much less clear cut in its often ambiguous allegiances with its audience. It should not be surprising that the satire of works such as Harley 913's *Satire, The Land of Cokaygne* and *Pers of Bermingham* is often multi-layered and cloaked to the point of being unrecognisable to those who do not fully understand the difficulties faced by the Anglo-Irish in the fourteenth century.

The poem known as *Satire* will serve as an excellent introduction to the kinds of parody and satire we will be discussing in detail in *The Land of Cokaygne* and *Pers of Bermingham*, since the poet of *Satire* spares no one, religious or lay, famous or ordinary. *Satire* parodies Latin hymns to the Virgin (as do many goliardic works, such as *Si linguis angelicis* from *Carmina Burana*), while the poet ostensibly praises various saints, religious orders and tradesmen for their corrupt practices *and* praises himself for his cleverness of deceptive composition. This theme of emphasis on corruption extends to *The Land of Cokaygne*, perhaps the best known and most widely anthologised poem in the Harley 913 collection. However, the full extent of the cultural and historical context of its creation has seldom been taken into account in relation to the complexity of satirical devices that it employs. While drawing heavily on the goliardic traditions of parody and satire, *Cokaygne* owes much of its humour to its light-hearted parody of Irish mythological and visionary literature. Yet the use of this Irish spiritual subject matter to satirise the supposedly pious Cistercian monastic order provides the poet with the opportunity to juxtapose the Celtic and (Roman) Christian approaches to religious belief and practice. The resulting work provides the modern reader with some valuable clues to the poet's own social and religious convictions, as well as those of the person or persons who owned the collection. The most

controversial of the Harley 913 works, *Pers of Bermingham*, further illuminates the special tensions inherent in MHE parody and satire. Once the satire in *Pers* has been exposed, there can be no doubt as to the poet's enmity towards the subject of his poem, Sir Peter de Bermingham, although, because of the subtlety of the poet's use of parody and ironic hyperbole, the satire of the piece has gone largely unrecognised by scholars ever since Wanley. All of the poems share the same distinct concern for exposing corruption as do the goliardic works, but the poets of the Harley 913 lyrics express their contempt by locating their sympathies with both the Gaelic-Irish and Anglo-Irish poor, who suffered equally at the hands of corrupt officials.

Martha Bayless explains that medieval goliardic parody and satire was directed against generalised and impersonal topics such as drinking, gambling and gluttony, or "groups of which the author was presumably not a member,"⁵ yet the goliard poets were clerically trained and their parodies and satires of both religious and secular material were infused with the language and doctrine of the Church. This does suggest that, although the satire of the goliardic works may have been directed *against* "groups of which the author was presumably not a member," the works were directed *to* other members of the clergy, and the juxtaposition of sacrosanct material with the incongruously profane was a great source of the humour, as well as the satire.⁶ The poet of *Satire* adopts the goliardic tradition of parodying Latin hymn forms, but particularises the groups or individuals under attack, in deviation from the goliardic

⁵ Bayless 11-12.

⁶ The goliardic poem "*Si linguis angelicis*" from the *Carmina Burana* (250), for example, uses the imagery and language of the Church to parody both the "courtly" love lyric and the Latin hymn traditions simultaneously.

tradition. For example, he begins all but three of the poem's twenty stanzas with the word "Hail", a standard opening to a Latin hymn in praise of the Virgin, initially raising the audience's expectation of a serious religious theme. The first person "hailed" is St. Michael, about whom the New Testament says:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought against his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Rev. 12:7-9)

The poet salutes St. Michael as the "best angle pat euer God makid" (l.4); however, when Michael banished Satan from heaven, he cast him "out into the earth" where Satan deceives the whole world. The poet "praises" Michael for banishing Satan from heaven, but in fact the act of banishing Satan to earth has been the source of the world's corruption:

Hail seint Michael wip **pe** lange sper!
Fair bep **pi** winges vp **pi** scholder,
Pou hast a rede kirtil anon to **pi** fote,
Pou ert best angle pat euer god makid. (1-4)

[Hail Saint Michael with the long spear!
Your wings are fair upon your shoulder,
You have a red sash all the way to your foot,
You are the best angel that God ever made.]

In his parody of the "Ave Maria", the poet sets the audience up for a poem that ironically explores the deceptions of a broad range of supposedly exemplary individuals – like St. Michael – institutions and occupational groups.

Additionally, in a rather unusual parody of the “anonymous clerk/poet” of the goliardic tradition, the poet reserves the last two lines of each stanza for praise of himself, for with his use of parody and satire, he is also a deceiver. For example, he writes: “Pis uers is ful wel iwro3t./Hit is of wel furre y-bro3t” (ll.5-6, “This verse is very well made. It has been brought from a great distance” and “Sikirlich he was a clerk/Pat wrochete pis craftilich werke” ll.59-60, “Certainly, he was a clerk who wrote this skilful work”). His deception, though, is calculated to expose the evil deeds that other men do and not to participate in them. In this respect, he is in the good company of the other Harley 913 poets.

The stanzas ironically “praise” St. Michael, St. Christopher, Mary Magdalene, St. Dominic, and St. Francis before moving on to various religious institutions and secular occupations. Perhaps not surprisingly, since Harley 913 seems to have been a Franciscan pocket book, the worst the poet says about St. Francis is, “Mani bold begger siwip pi route” (l.28, “Many a bold beggar follows your company”). The final stanza suggests the speaker has been preaching in a tavern,⁷ just the sort of place one might expect to find a “bold begger”, perhaps preaching for his meal. In the stanza praising St. Francis, the poet also lists among the traditional birds symbolic of the saint a strange exception, a peacock (l.26), a bird traditionally associated with vanity and probably symbolic of the “clever” poet himself.⁸ The

⁷ “Makip glad, mi frendis, 3e sittep to long stille./ Spekip now and gladiep and drinkip al 3ur fille!” (ll.115-116, “Make merry my friends; you sit still too long./Speak now and rejoice and drink your fill!”)

⁸ Although the peacock was held to symbolize vanity in contemporary writings, in Christian iconography the bird “came to symbolize immortality of the soul and resurrection from the analogy that when it sheds its splendid tail this plumage is brilliantly renewed. The eyes in the tail were held to signify foresight and its flesh was held to be incorruptible....” If our “vain” poet is not actually an iconomach, he could be implying that the followers of St. Francis (presumably including himself) hold the key to salvation. We will see this theme repeated in the “Elias and Enoch” imagery in *The Land of Cokaygne*. Heather Child and Dorothy Colles, *Christian Symbols, Ancient and Modern* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1971) 212.

poet's decision to include the group to which he belongs in his diatribe – even as a *mild* contrastive element – deviates from the goliardic tradition and also points to the poet's awareness that his "group" is not perfect, just as he must have recognised that the Anglo-Irish were not perfect either.

In fact, each stanza addresses its subject or subjects personally, showing a personal disdain for the iconography of the clerical authority figures and inventing a mock iconography of corruption for the secular figures. Although the writing of *Satire* pre-dates the Lollard movement by several decades, the poet shares this disdain with the *Piers Plowman* poet, William Langland.⁹ As Margaret Aston notes, "opposition to images can be regarded as one of the most consistent features of the Lollard heresy," a movement primarily concerned with theological reform.¹⁰ The Lollards held "the view that it was idolatry to serve saints' images with pilgrimage or other acts of devotion," a view which seems to have been held by the *Satire* poet. He hails the saintly figures, describing in flat detail the typical contemporary iconography of their depictions; in no case does he actually *praise* the saints for their good deeds, but simply states what they are best known for.¹¹ Following his iconographical

⁹ This is an interesting instance of iconomachic writing which is worthy of further study.

¹⁰ Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984) 136, 2. Lollardy will figure prominently in our discussion of *Piers Plowman* in Chapter Three.

¹¹ In standard iconographic depictions of St. Michael the Archangel, the saint is dressed as "a celestial warrior fighting the forces of evil" (see fig. 14, appendix, from London, B.M. MS. Royal I B xi, fol.6, reproduced in C.R. Dodwell, *The Canterbury School of Illumination: 1066-1200* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945] plate 21b). Ironically to our purposes, Michael is also often shown as the guardian of the souls in the balance of justice after death. According to legend depicted in iconography, the devil pulls at the scales of justice, "but Michael's scales are not to be tipped by falsehood." Beginning the poem with this "image" of St. Michael, then, serves as a dire apocalyptic warning to deceivers. Child 146.

descriptions of the saints, the poet builds a false iconography of commonly observed characteristics in his mock praise of various religious orders and the laity:

Hail be *ȝe* marchans wip *ȝur* gret packes
 Of draperie, auoir-depeise, and *ȝur* wol sakes,
 Gold, siluer, stones, riche markes and ek pundes!
 Litel *ȝiue* *ȝe* per of to *pe* wrech pouer. (*ll.* 61-64, my emphasis)

[Hail you merchants with your great packages
 of cloth, avoir du poids (to have by weight), and your wool sacks,
 gold, silver, gems, rich marks and pounds too!
 You give little of it to the wretched poor.]

This mock praise builds up the merchants for their earthly accomplishments, elevating them to the unwarranted stature of saints, only to ultimately condemn them for their greed and lack of charity towards others less fortunate.¹² For the *Satire* poet, idols are not to be worshipped and Mammon is the worst idol of all. What was begun as a goliardic parody of a *Marienlyrik* has evolved into a satirical challenge issued by the poet to the people of his land to change their image.

The Land of Cokaygne also follows the goliardic model, yet it too differs in its distinct origins in the Anglo-Irish community. Goliardic poetry, although largely Latin and linked to the international intellectual community created by the universities, knows no distinction of individual national origin, especially since its polemics were directed chiefly towards the “supranational” Church.¹³ Also, national identity was only beginning to establish itself in

¹² For a thorough discussion of the criticisms of merchants in sermons, see Jacques Le Goff, “Trades and Professions as Represented in Medieval Confessors’ Manuals,” *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 107-121.

¹³ See Bayless 11.

continental Europe in the twelfth century and there was comparatively more freedom of movement between nations that bordered on other nations. As an island, Ireland, its literary and artistic culture and its people were distinct and homogenous – until the Anglo-Norman occupation began in 1169. Like the goliards, the *Cokaygne* poet parodies religious material as the “language” basis for his satire; however, what makes the poem different from the goliardic model is the poet’s blend of Celtic folkloric mythical and visionary material with conventionally accepted religious doctrine and language.

The *Cokaygne* poet was a well-read man, as his familiarity with the goliardic spirit of reform and his knowledge of the Old French analogue (“The Order of Fair Ease”) on which *Cokaygne* is loosely based suggests.¹⁴ However, as Juliette de Caluwé-Dor has shown, the Anglo-Irish poet of *Cokaygne* also demonstrates an extensive knowledge of popular Celtic literature in his decision to parody the Irish visionary island “Otherworld” descriptive motifs.¹⁵ In fact, there exists a Middle Irish parody, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* (*The Vision of Mac Conglinne*), which shares many of the characteristics of *The Land of Cokaygne*, and which may have also been known to our poet. Meyer states:

Just as the hymns and the sequence of the church were parodied by the troubadours, so the Irish Visions [of a better land] are the occasion for an extraordinary outburst of fancy and malice in the

¹⁴ “The Order of Fair Ease,” ed. Thomas Wright, *Political Songs of England* (London: Camden Society, 1839) 137-48.

¹⁵ See Juliette de Caluwé-Dor’s excellent and thorough illumination of the origins of the following common Celtic descriptive motifs of the island “Otherworld” paradise: (1) the monk/bird, (2) the island of beautiful women, (3) the absence of sin in sexual encounters, (4) the passage through pig shit, (5) the geographic situation of the magical isle, and finally, (6) Irish apocryphal accounts of Eli and Enoch. “L’Élément Irlandais Dans la Version Moyen-Anglais de *The Land of Cockaygne*(1),” *Mélanges de Langue et Littérature Françaises du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance, Offerts à Charles Foulon par ses Collègues, ses Élèves et ses Amis* (Rennes: Institut de Français, Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980) 89-98.

“Vision of Mac Con Glinne”, which was composed in the twelfth century..., the work of a wandering scholar with a grudge against the church...¹⁶

This knowledge of distinctly Celtic spiritual material of both Christian and pagan sources necessarily indicates the *Cokaygne* poet’s intimate familiarity with Gaelic tradition. The range of his knowledge shows that he had sufficient interest in and knowledge of Irish customs and traditional spirituality to be able to adapt its various motifs easily to parodic use.

In the first fifty lines of the poem, the learned poet intends his audience to laugh only at the speaker he develops and *only* to laugh. As Jill Mann has pointed out, the goliardic poets expressed moral criticism in their use of the immoral persona of the elusive Goliath.¹⁷

In the true spirit of goliardic verse tradition, the clearly well-educated poet invests the speaker with a naïve and awe-struck persona, whose racial allegiance is initially wholly ambiguous – at least insofar as making a distinction between Gaelic-Irish and Anglo-Irish.

As the poem progresses, though, the persona subtly betrays his Anglo-Irishness. It is the speaker who tells the story of the magical land reminiscent of the Irish mythological “Otherworld” in its characteristics, yet there are deeper and darker resonances to his story than those of the fanciful “Otherworld”. The lines concerning “hely and enok” provide us with our first glimpse of this. The speaker says:

bep per [in heaven] no men bot two,
hely & enok al-so;

¹⁶ K. Meyer, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne, The Vision of MacConglinne, A Middle-Irish Wonder Tale* (London: David Nutt, 1892) 143.

¹⁷ Jill Mann, “Satiric Subject and Satiric Object in Goliardic Literature,” *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 15 (1980): 66.

elinglich mai hi go
whar per wonip men no mo. (13-16)

[there are only two men (in heaven)
Elias and also Enoch;
sadly they can go
where no other men live.]

Caluwé-Dor states, “*Le Livre apocryphe d’Enoch* a exercé une influence considérable en Irlande; les références à Elie et Enoch sont fréquentes,”¹⁸ as they are throughout European writings from the Middle Ages.¹⁹ Elias (or Elijah, as he is also known) and Enoch are the only two people mentioned in the Bible as having been bodily transported to heaven without having died first.²⁰ Exegetical interpretative tradition suggests that since they have not died, they exist in an “Earthly Paradise ... neither in heaven with the saints, nor on earth among men.”²¹ Their role in salvation history is to remain in this paradisiacal earthly “Otherworld” reminiscent of Eden until the coming of the Antichrist. Then, as types of Christ, they will return to challenge the Antichrist, be killed and after three and a half days be resurrected and assumed to heaven. The poet’s allusion to visionary apocalyptic prophecy is a warning sign

¹⁸ Caluwé-Dor 95.

¹⁹ Richard Emmerson states: “Of all the legends that were attached to the Antichrist tradition during the Middle Ages, the belief in the appearance of Enoch and Elias was the most popular and widespread in theological discussions, literature, and art.” *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981) 41.

²⁰ The biblical accounts of the assumptions of Elias (‘Elijah’) and Enoch read: “And as they went on, walking and talking together, behold, a fiery chariot, and fiery horses parted them both asunder: and Elias went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Eliseus saw him, and cried: My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the driver thereof. And he saw him no more.” (4 Kings 2:11-12); “All the days of Henoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And he walked with God, and was seen no more: because God took him” (Genesis 5:23-24), *Holy Bible*, Douay Version (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1955).

²¹ Emmerson 98. Additionally, Emmerson (ibid) states that “later Franciscans identified Saint Francis as Elias and predicted that the two witnesses [to the apocalypse] would be Franciscans.”

that Cokaygne may not be the paradise that the speaker makes it out to be. Just as the Antichrist will come to the people in the guise of a saviour, so to reach Cokaygne is to attain a false Eden.

Elias and Enoch's fates underscore the isolation of the pair in contrast with other heavenly denizens; a poor Anglo-Irish friar would have understood the isolation, being of the "middle nation". Elias and Enoch are holy figures, lonely in their sanctity – also something that a poor but virtuous Anglo-Irish friar must have felt finding himself surrounded by corrupt clerics.²² Thus, *The Land of Cokaygne* addresses two distinct issues: national allegiance and true Christian piety. These issues are, however, complicated initially by the poet's decision to parody the Gaelic-Irish visionary traditions in his satirical treatment of the Cistercian monastics. However, in his egalitarian satirisation of both the Gaelic-Irish traditions and the Cistercian order generally, he is only reflecting the equality which he sees in the Cokaygne society: "al is commune to 3ung & old,/to stoute & sterne, mek & bold" (ll.63-64, "all is common to young and old,/ to the arrogant and the strong, meek and bold"). In Cokaygne *everyone* is treated equally.

In the lines concerning Elias and Enoch, the speaker's literal-mindedness is, at first, laughable. However, within the first fifty lines of the poem the speaker gives us our clearest picture of what life in his real world is like. By a process of negation he presents the difficulties of the day to day life of the poor in Ireland. Whether he has lived this way himself or simply observed others, our poet understands the experience. He leaves nothing out;

²² Although a friar who owned a book may not be considered to have been "poor", there is no evidence to suggest that Harley 913 was the personal property of any one friar.

fighting, death, deprivations, anger, predators, the drudgery of tending farm animals and breeding horses, the filth, the vermin, adverse weather conditions and crippling handicaps are all there. However, our speaker does not simply reel off a list of the hardships; had he done so, much of the humour in the poem would be lost at this point, either to pathos from a sympathetic audience or boredom from the unsympathetic. Instead, the poet keeps us centred in the fanciful land of Cokaygne, beginning the verse paragraph with “*Per is mani swete si₃te*” (l.25, emphasis mine) and ending with “ok al is game, Ioi, & gle./wel is him pat *per* mai be” (l.44, emphasis mine), ensuring that we maintain our good humour by sandwiching the negative connotations of the verse paragraph between positive statements. In this respect he follows the visionary tradition of viewing the present time as one of crisis, but also one that holds the promise of better things to come. He may dwell *in* filth, but in thinking of Cokaygne he does not dwell *on* it.

Here the concern of the poem turns to the wealth and immorality of the Cistercian order, as the poet begins to use these Celtic parodies to satirize the behaviour of the inhabitants of the “wel fair abbei/of white monkes & of grei” (ll.51-52). The added irony here is that the Cistercian order originally had the task of reforming the long-isolated Gaelic-Irish monasteries; however, as the Cistercian order became wealthier, it also became more corrupt.²³ The poet goes on to describe the “wel fair abbei” for four verse paragraphs – a full 62 of the poem’s 190 lines – indulging in a series of four long lists categorising rich foods, exotic spices, precious and semi-precious stones and birds. All but the first (and most

²³ Since Irish priests and monasteries had been isolated, their Christian practices at the time of the conquest did not reflect the practices of the rest of Europe. For example, Irish clerics continued to grant dispensations for clerical marriage well after the European Church hierarchy had condemned the practice. After the reform

incongruous) category, the foods, are familiar devices used in courtly literature as well.²⁴ However, like the poet of *Annot and John* from MS Harley 2253, the *Cokaygne* poet deliberately extends his use of lists to parodic proportions. The length of the speaker's courtly lists and the incongruous inclusion of the list of fine foods, "rich met to prince₃ & kinges" (l.60), leaves us with the feeling that our speaker *seems* to aspire to the opulence of the monastic life in Cokaygne, which by his courtly lists and his mention of secular authority figures he seems conspicuously to equate with a secularised style of living. Our speaker, however, for all his employment of pagan visionary material only aspires to this life; the Cistercians actually live it. Like the poet of *Satire on the Consistory Courts*, the *Cokaygne* poet pokes fun at the speaker's ignorance (in this case, religious in nature), but satirically criticises the corruption of the clerics.

Of the following twenty-five lines on the flying brothers of Cokaygne, two of the Celtic visionary "Otherworld" motifs to which Caluwé-Dor makes reference – monks that turn into birds and the absence of sin in sexual encounters – go hand-in-hand, as it were. In Celtic literature, birds represent the souls of the righteous, as well as the souls of the damned who died on a Sunday. This is why these birds typically sing the canonical hours.²⁵ The

movement in the twelfth century only a few "unreformed" monasteries remained, and these only until the sixteenth century. For a full discussion of Irish monastic reform, see Nicholls in Cosgrove 435-436.

²⁴ Christa Maria Löffler, *The Voyage to the Otherworld Island in Early Irish Literature* (Salzburg: Institut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1983). Löffler (136) explains: "All food and drink available in the otherworld islands is inexhaustible and has some magic quality." For another example of "listing" in medieval poetry see the lists of flowers, precious and semi-precious stone and spices employed by the *Pearl* poet in his descriptions of his dreamscape (e.g. ll.97-120). "Pearl," *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1981) 59-60.

²⁵ Caluwé-Dor 89. Löffler (21), too, comments that journeys to the Otherworld typically involve the transformation of the traveller into a bird.

representation of the decadent Cistercian monks as birds, then, is clearly ironic, especially given that these monks/birds do *not* return for evensong when summoned by the abbot, as do the Gaelic-Irish birds; indeed, even when they do return, there is no indication that they go to evensong at all, either before or after their evening meal. The only “work” that the speaker mentions the monks performing is the spanking of the wench’s bare bottom (*l.*142). The double entendre on the word “swinke” (*l.*143), meaning both “work” and “sexual intercourse” hardly needs mentioning. The speaker also presents the congress between the monks and the nuns of the abbey nearby ironically as a *natural* right and not a gift of grace by God (*l.*171). This too is a convention of the Irish vision genre, but in the Irish *vision* this is not a sin – in the Cistercian *reality* it is.²⁶ Again, the poet has parodied the Irish literature, but he has used it to satirize the Cistercians. He is playing Nabokov’s “game” with the Gaelic-Irish, but he is teaching the Cistercians Nabokov’s lesson.

The final description of the poem involves the penance that must be undertaken to attain that earthly paradise and it is perhaps fitting that this penance too comes straight out of the Irish visionary literature: one must wade up to his neck in pig shit for seven years to gain entrance. Apart from the parody on pilgrimage and the mythical and magical powers of pigs, which Caluwé-Dor describes from Celtic literature,²⁷ the reference to excrement must serve as a metaphor for the sinful detritus of an immoral life as much as for the mythical trials of Otherworld voyager.²⁸ It is a comment of the basest kind on the monks of the Cistercian

²⁶Löffler 121.

²⁷ Caluwé-Dor (94) cites as an example *The Voyage of Máel Dúin*.

²⁸Löffler 124.

order (whether these particular Cistercians are Gaelic-Irish or Anglo-Irish) who have forsaken their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, in order to build an empire through greed and immorality. Our speaker ironically prays to God that all who gain entrance to that land “neuer-more turn a-3e” (l.188). The poet may have set the Gaelic-Irish traditional spirituality up to good-humoured ridicule, but the speaker never indicates that he lives in Cokaygne with the monks of its abbey. He is not one of them, but he wishes (tongue in cheek) for the social equality that would make that possible. Apparently the poet thinks that the land will only achieve this social and economic equality “when monks fly.” The final word of the poem, “charite,” is a reminder that *caritas* should have been the word uppermost in the minds of the decadent monks and nuns and not *cupiditas*. This may well have been the subject of the sermon developed from this work by the friar who carried the manuscript with him in his ministrations to the people.

Issues of corruption, this time secular, also inform *Pers of Bermingham*, and like *The Land of Cokaygne*, these issues take the form of Christian moral condemnation. Breaking with the *generality* of the goliardic tradition of the mock-encomium, at a superficial level the poem appears to be an encomium written to pay tribute to the passing of Sir Peter de Bermingham in April 1308.²⁹ Wilhelm Heuser, who published a 1904 partial edition of the manuscript's works and a manuscript description, describes *Pers of Bermingham* as displaying “kein großes poetisches Können und sehr geringe technische Fertigkeit”³⁰ (no great poetic

²⁹ The goliardic tradition of the mock-encomium encompasses lyrics in praise of drinking, gambling and womanizing – all general topics – and does not extend to prolonged “attacks” on named individuals. See Bayless 11-12.

³⁰ Heuser 160.

skill and very limited technical proficiency), a view which until recently has been generally held. Even more recently scholars such as Alan Bliss, Joseph Long³¹ and James Lydon³² have misinterpreted the intent of the poet. As Michael Benskin notes, “Hitherto, it seems, the moderns have ignored the cultural context, and merely glanced at the surface of what they supposed to be there. For the poem is not incompetent heroic, but *mock*-heroic contrived, not a eulogy, but a satirical indictment.”³³ Although the poet appears to praise him, Peter de Bermingham, far from being a noble hero, actually perpetrated the slaughter of thirty members of the O'Connor family.³⁴ However, the poet is able to employ various satirical devices, such as parody and ironic hyperbole, with such subtlety that three hundred years of scholarly interest has, to this point, been unable to uncover them.³⁵

The first seven stanzas of the poem act brilliantly as an introduction to the death and life of Sir Peter, at once setting him up as a Christian exemplar, yet shrewdly and covertly exposing him as the unchristian villain that he was. As Benskin notes, in *Pers* “comparison

³¹ See Bliss and Long in Cosgrove 729: “Whoever the patron may have been, he was motivated by intense hostility towards the Irish.”

³² See Lydon in Cosgrove 267-268: “In a poem eulogising de Bermingham after his death he is praised for being an inveterate foe to the Irish...”

³³ Michael Benskin, “The Style and Authorship of the Kildare Poems – (I) *Pers of Bermingham*,” *In Other Words: Transcultural Studies in Philology, Translation, and Lexicology presented to Hans Heinrich Meier on the occasion of his sixty-fifth Birthday* (Providence, RI: Foris Publications, 1989) 57-75.

³⁴ It should be noted here that this in itself would not make de Bermingham a felon in some Anglo-Irish circles. Lydon (in Cosgrove 243) notes that the Gaelic-Irish were not only legally disadvantaged, but to some it was not even a sin to kill an Irishman: “There was the preacher, for example, who told his flock that it was no more a sin to kill an Irishman than to kill a dog...” This racist attitude is obviously played up by our poet in his satire; however, the intensity of his satire indicates that he did not share this opinion.

³⁵ The one notable exception here is Michael Benskin, who, to my knowledge, is the only scholar to recognize the blisteringly satiric nature of the poem. Although Benskin has discovered the goliard-like mock-encomium aspects of the poem, even he has failed to take into account the biblical parody and the apocalyptically prophetic warnings upon which *Pers of Bermingham* is based.

proceeds from the great to the small, made ridiculous in anticlimax. ...Form reverses the meaning of the apparent content, in a parody of suspense.”³⁶ What the injudicious reader might gloss over as inappropriate wording or lack of poetic skill in the eulogy is actually a cunning disguise for a politically charged attack on the subject. Peter de Bermingham was one of the King of England’s Anglo-Irish officials, but he has also been chronicled as a ruthless bounty hunter who made a tidy sum and a not-so-tidy reputation regularly delivering the heads of Irish “felons” to judiciary officials.³⁷

The presence of this poem in a Franciscan preacher’s handbook necessarily raises questions regarding the intended audience and their political and religious stances on Sir Peter’s actions. If *Pers of Bermingham* were meant for public performance, an interesting modern parallel could be the production of Jean Anouilh’s play “Antigone”, based on the “Antigone” of Sophocles:

This play was produced in Paris in 1942, when France was part of Hitler’s Europe and dictators and stormtroopers were the background of everyday life. ...its theme was nevertheless topical, for in Antigone’s reiterated “NO!” to Creon the French audience saw its own resistance to the German occupation; and the Germans allowed the play to be performed presumably because they found Creon’s arguments for dictatorship convincing.³⁸

³⁶ Benskin 62.

³⁷ O’Neill remonstrance to Pope John XXII in c.1317, quoted in Cosgrove 267.

³⁸ Lewis Galantière’s introduction to Jean Anouilh, “Antigone,” trans. Lewis Galantière (London: Methuen, 1969) 1.

A public performance of *Pers* may have evoked the same reactions from the ethnically divided Anglo-Irish. Those unsympathetic to the fate of the Gaelic-Irish in Ireland would read it – as modern scholars have – as praise for the actions of a fellow Anglo-Irishman, while others sympathetic to the Gaelic-Irish plight would understand the poem as condemnation of Sir Peter’s unchristian behaviour. For the *Pers* poet, consistency in practice of Christian beliefs supersedes national allegiance in importance.

The formal religious opening of the poem points to this importance and sets up our expectation of exalted subject matter, only to later subvert it. The Annunciation to “vre leuedi mari swete/ pat godde wold in hir li3te” marks one of the greatest events of the Christian calendar and belief system and the prelude to the incarnation of Christ, the epitome of goodness in humankind. The poet’s invocation of Gabriel, God’s messenger to Mary, by subtle implication sets up the speaker as an earthly messenger heralding the life of a saintly human being. Additionally, Gabriel’s greeting proclaimed the birth of Christ; our speaker proclaims Sir Peter’s death. The poet moves from the distant past to the present, from the Divine to the human, from life to death and from the cause of joy to the cause of grief.

Following the opening invocation is an elaborate method of dating the event of Sir Peter’s death, reminiscent of dating formulas in vernacular political prophecies. According to Rupert Taylor, Irish political prophecies generally seem to prophesy that Ireland would be “wholly subdued by the English scarcely before the Judgement Day.”³⁹ However, he goes on to say that many of these prophecies “are best regarded as Anglo-Norman and not Irish in

³⁹Rupert Taylor, *The Political Prophecy in England* (New York: The Columbia Press, 1911) 81.

origin.”⁴⁰ Using this kind of formula at the beginning of Sir Peter’s “eulogy” our poet may be playing with a tradition that would see Sir Peter as a man who attempted to fulfil the prophecy of Anglo-Irish domination over the Irish. The complicated dating technique inflates the mystery and importance of the date by shrouding it in word play, and the poet’s attempt to complicate it by the inclusion of repetitive detail is ironically hyperbolic.⁴¹

take twies ten ifere
pat wol be.^{tt}. fulle
Apan pe .xx. dai
of aueril bi-for mai. (ll.8-11)

Benskin describes it as “climactic in the way of the revivalist cheerleader’s ‘Give me a *J* ... Give me an *E* ... What have you got?’ ‘*JESUS!*’”⁴² However, the subject of the poem is not Jesus, but Peter of Bermingham, and the revivalist fervour is utterly misplaced.

By telling us that death “pullid us of on/al irlond makip mon/Engelon ek as welle” (ll.7-9), the speaker artfully invests in the lines a double meaning. Do all Ireland and England grieve over this man’s death or the deeds of the man himself? Given Sir Peter’s contemporary reputation, it is difficult to think that any Christian - Irish or English - would grieve over his passing. The eventual exposition of the man’s identity (“ful wel ye witte his nam/sire pers pe brimingham” [ll.10-11]) is then followed by the seemingly redundant phrase “Non nede hit is

⁴⁰ *ibid* 82.

⁴¹ For example, the following dating formula taken from National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 50, f.126r demonstrates this air of mystery and importance: “When a m xxx & iij yer ar ended/Som cccc haly holden togedre/Pen was told me pe tale pat Y tel schal.” This would put the date at 1433 and since the poet goes on to mention the Council of Basle which took place in 1433, we know the date to be accurate. Cited from Scattergood 391-392.

⁴² Benskin 61.

to telle” (l. 12); however, the verb “to telle” has several meanings, one of which is “to value or esteem”, giving a possible alternate reading to the line: “There is no need to hold it in esteem.” The effect of these lines taken together is very anticlimactic, just as was the poet’s opening invocation, and the satiric reading of the line, albeit oblique, is just the sort of subtle word play in which the poet of *Pers* indulges throughout the work.

In stanza four, the speaker appears to laud the everlasting nature of Sir Peter’s reputation. The currency of “his nam hit was *and isse*” (l. 19, emphasis mine) implies that the memory of his deeds (whether good or bad) keeps Sir Peter alive to the poem’s audience.⁴³

The following three lines (“y sigge 3ou ful i-wisse/pat vppe ssal arise/in felle flesse and bone” [ll. 20-22]) are suggestive of Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dried bones.⁴⁴ The vision brings hope to Ezekiel when the exiled people of Israel begin to think that there is no possibility of ever having their own homeland, free of oppression:

And I saw, and, behold, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them [the dried bones], and the skin was stretched out over them ... and the spirit came into them, and they lived: and they stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army....⁴⁵

The prophecy concludes with God’s promise that the Israelites shall “no more be two nations: neither shall they be divided any more into two kingdoms” (Ezek. 37:22), again an irony,

⁴³ It is also possible that the poet, in his comparison of Sir Peter to God, is playing with the name, “I Am”, by which God tells Moses He is to be known. See Exodus 3:14.

⁴⁴ Ezekiel’s vision is the only place in the Bible where the three words “skin”, “flesh” and “bones” appear together.

⁴⁵ Ezekiel 37:8, 10.

since Sir Peter's idea of one nation under one king included the expedient extermination of the more troublesome of the original inhabitants, not peaceful coexistence as the prophecy suggests. The poet's choice of Ezekiel's vision may also reflect the medieval custom of reading the Old Testament as prefiguring the New.⁴⁶ With this in mind, the prophecy of Ezekiel is an Old Testament type for the resurrection of the dead in the Book of Revelations. Certainly, the poet must have been convinced that Sir Peter's deeds would live on in memory after him and follow him right to the Last Judgement, where presumably the line between his fame and infamy would not be so ambiguous in the memory of God.

For the next seven stanzas the poet continues to inflate Sir Peter's knightly qualities, only to deflate them again through incongruous comparison. The technique is reminiscent of Chaucer's later parodic portrait of Sir Thopas. Both Chaucer and the *Pers* poet parody the jog-trot rhythm and "romance sixes"⁴⁷ verse form of the early English metrical romances to lend a mock nobility of bearing to someone unsuited to it. Chaucer the pilgrim intends this to inflate Sir Thopas the knight with noble virtues, but the portly pilgrim only makes both the tale and the teller look ridiculous. Stanza five of *Pers of Bermingham* is perhaps the best example of this technique within the poem. The speaker tells us that Sir Peter was a noble warrior, that he had a fine castle and that he would ride heavily armed throughout the countryside and not even a common thief dared to stand against him. The portrait is more

⁴⁶ See William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 101.

⁴⁷ The "romance sixes" verse form consists of six-line stanzas rhyming *aabaab* or *aabccb*. Chaucer's narrator is actually a shy, portly pilgrim, but when asked to tell a tale he recounts a metrical romance he has heard and centers it around a knight named Sir Thopas. The Host eventually stops the tale, complaining that Chaucer pilgrim's "rymyng is nat worth a toord!" Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, l.2120.

than faintly reminiscent of Langland's portrait of the perfect knight in Passus Eight of *Piers*

Plowman:

‘Sikerliche, sire knyhte,’ sayde Peris thenne,
 ‘Y shal swynke and swete and sowe for vs bothe
 And labory for tho thow louest al my lyf-tyme,
 In couenant pat thow kepe holy kerke and mysulue
 Fro wastores and fro wikked men pat pis world struyen,
 And go hunte hardelyche to hares and to foxes....’
 (ll.23-29)

[‘Certainly, sir knight,’ said Piers then,
 ‘I shall work and sweat and sow for us both
 And labour for you for then you will praise me all my life,
 In covenant that you keep Holy Church and myself
 From wasters and from wicked men that tax this world,
 And go hunt hares and foxes boldly....’]

Yet Sir Peter did not perform these knightly activities for the good of the Church and his fellow human beings, as does the *Piers Plowman* knight, but for his own amusement and profit.

The speaker advises in stanza six, “do penchip al in him/wip weepin who wol win/hou gode he was to nede” (ll.31-33); Sir Peter’s fealty was often the cause of much weeping.

According to James Lydon:

a more ominous development in the second half of the thirteenth century ... [is] the growth of the indenture system, by which men entered the service of a lord, accepted his fee and wore his livery, and promised to follow him into battle when the demand came. The earliest Irish military indenture of this type to survive comes from 1289. It involved John fitz Thomas of Offaly, who at that time was building up his military strength. On 26 April he and Peter de Bermingham mutually sealed an indenture by which Peter became a member of John’s household, received his robes, and promised him service against

all men, [excepting only the king]. ... The factions thus formed were to be a permanent threat to the peace.⁴⁸

In 1294, John fitz Thomas allied himself with the Irish against William de Vesci, the recently appointed justiciar, who was attempting to mobilise royal troops ostensibly against Irish rebels, but in actuality against fitz Thomas. Peter de Bermingham fought with fitz Thomas, along with various members of the ill-fated O'Connor family, and was implicated with them in the robbery of the town of Kildare and the capture of its castle.⁴⁹

By stanza seven, the poet abandons the pretence that “al irlond makip mon” at Sir Peter’s death, and now “al *englis* men pat bep/ sore mow wep is dep/pat such a kni3t ssold fall” (ll.37-39, emphasis mine). All of “pos kni3tis” (l.40) may eulogise him as the paragon of them all, but if Sir Peter was a paragon, what must the other English knights have been like? The irony is that he was, in fact, among the worst of them all. Stanza eight bears this out. Sir Peter is raised above all other knights in that “to yrismen he was fo”(l.50) and he would hunt them down as the hunter does the hare. Sir Peter preferred to stalk the Irish to their “nests,” wait until they were asleep, then awaken them and kill them in the universally accepted mode of a coward as they tried to escape. Benskin points out that the poet’s play on the word “wedde” – meaning both “stake” in the gaming sense and “gage” in the sense of pledging oneself to battle – involves formalities which Sir Peter did not observe when dealing with the Irish. In fact, in aligning himself with John fitz Thomas, he pledged himself to serve

⁴⁸ Lydon in Cosgrove 185.

⁴⁹ *Cal. justic. rolls Ire., 1295-1303*, 190, cited by James Lydon in Cosgrove 186.

against *all* men, except the king.⁵⁰ The image of Sir Peter accepting the “hire” of their heads in return for their beds is more mercantile than knightly – a condition frowned upon as base in courtly circles. He is, quite obviously, no paragon.

The poet gives an account of the final device that raises Sir Peter above all other knights in his description of the murder plot. Stanzas twelve through fourteen are an historically accurate account of what happened. Here the poet ceases his word play, his incongruous metaphors, his ironically misapplied biblical allusions and all other satirical devices in favour of a straightforward narrative style, which has an even more sobering effect than the satire he has previously employed. The poet briefly resurrects the gaming imagery in stanza fifteen with the line “to 3ild pe cuntre-pane” - the “surety” indicating Sir Peter’s intention of turning in the heads of the conspirators for money, the way he did in stanza eleven with the common thieves. The conspirators would be punished, but the punishment would conveniently yield extra money for those involved in their capture.

When Sir Peter’s fellow Englishmen leave him alone in the poem once more, the gaming imagery returns. That the poet depicts Sir Peter as “on ernist and agam” in his plan to kill the conspirators paints an ugly picture of a man who is about to enjoy himself. It is only when he looks out on the number of Irish nobles present that he finally realises “hit nas no game.” These are not common thieves, after all, but powerful men in their own right, numbering among them the “O konwir pat was king”. Mentioning O’Connor’s rank in Irish society could be a mark of the poet’s respect for his position, indicating that his sympathies

⁵⁰ *Red Book of Kildare*, no. 11, cited in Cosgrove 185.

lie, not with Sir Peter, but with the Irish. It is also possible that the mention of O'Connor's rank ironically underscores the importance of Sir Peter's deed. Had he killed O'Connor in battle the feat would have been praiseworthy indeed; however, Sir Peter's murder of the O'Connor king at the dinner table was more barbaric than noble in the deceptive way it was carried out. Sir Peter finally has noble adversaries and the only way he can conquer them is through subterfuge – the only way he can win the game is to cheat.

The poet chronicles the day of the murder as “right on the Feast of the Holy Trinity,” as Benskin notes, “a point of high celebration in the social and ecclesiastical year.”⁵¹ As the poet comes closer to the actual murders, he carefully reintroduces the religious element as an ironic juxtaposition to the events that later transpire. The poet returns to the irony begun in the opening annunciation as the time of the murders draws near; once again he equates Sir Peter with God, beginning with the lines, “no3t on nas for-sake/bot al he did ham grace.” The scene that follows is a macabre and ironic parody of the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22: 1-14, placing Sir Peter de Bermingham in the dual role of God and king.

Gregory the Great, in his discussions of the allegory in the biblical parable, “unites the Incarnation and the wedding of Christ and the Church, and likens the Virgin's womb to the wedding chamber....”⁵² The poet's use of the annunciation imagery in the poem's opening now clearly ties to the parable of the Wedding Feast in a most ironic way. Additionally, the word “wedde” now carries the further sly reference to the Wedding Feast. The Irish members of the O'Connor clan have all been invited to the dinner, just as the king in Jesus' parable

⁵¹ Benskin 64.

⁵² Stephen L. Wailes, *Medieval Allegories of Jesus' Parables* (London: University of California Press, 1974)

invited as many people, both good and bad, to his son's wedding feast as he could find. Sir Peter makes sure that they all have garments – hoods - appropriate to the liturgical season; however, the play on the word “hodes,” meaning both hoods and the leather bags made to carry the heads of the conspirators to the bank, as it were, is more sickening than humorous. Just as in the parable, only one anonymous man is turned away for lack of an appropriate “garment.” Gregory also suggests the significance of the wedding garment as being *caritas*; and just as a fabric contains both warp and woof, the wedding garment is woven of love for God and love for one's neighbour, yet Sir Peter, in “playing” God apparently has neither.⁵³ In the parable, the man is cast into “outer darkness” when he does not reply to the wedding host's question regarding his garments for the feast, which in spiritual terms means that he did not have *caritas* in his heart, yet it is not the Irish guest, but Sir Peter who clearly knows no *caritas*.

In the poem, the man escapes because “he cup no₃t red in place/no sing,” meaning cryptically that he could not “read his part or chant where he was to come in” or “celebrate mass for someone,” perhaps meaning that he was a member of the Gaelic-Irish clergy who was not permitted to preach – at least to Sir Peter.⁵⁴ As Benskin points out:

His ignorance was perhaps excusable, though, for he was of the race of Cain, and so out of favour with the Lord. For Cain, it will be recalled, was the first murderer, who thereafter bore a mark to show that he was reserved for God's justice, and immune from

157-158.

⁵³ *ibid* 158. I am grateful to Father Donald Hatfield for suggesting the significance of the symbolism to me.

⁵⁴ *MED* s.v. “reden” v.[1], 2.b[a] & [c], and 3.c.

man's (Genesis 4:8-15); it was entirely fitting that his Irish descendent should be spared, and go unhooded home.⁵⁵

Certainly, although the poet brands the sole Irish survivor as being of Cain's race (the Irish being branded by the Anglo-Irish like Sir Peter as outcasts in their own land), the audience is unable to feel anything but kinship with him because of the black comedy that has gone before. Sir Peter is not God, yet he has prepared the banquet. He cannot give his guests grace, yet he can give them garments – hoods, not made of *caritas*, but of avarice and hatred. At the time of the allegorical annunciation (Sir Peter's death), he will not be united with Holy Church and go to heaven, for Sir Peter has re-enacted a horrible mockery of the parable and in so doing has mocked God.

In the final stanza, the poet cannot resist one final round of word play. He tells us that the person who commissioned the writing of the song for Sir Peter's sake has had some difficulty, but has managed to procure an indulgence good for two hundred days and more. Has he had difficulty in obtaining the indulgence because it was for himself or for Sir Peter? If the indulgence were for Sir Peter, then the difficulty may have been because all of the nearby vendors of the indulgences did not feel that Sir Peter merited one. If the indulgence were for the patron of the poem, then he either felt guilty of the sin of satirising Sir Peter through the parodic parable or, what is more likely, he was ostracised for (ostensibly) supporting a eulogy of the man. In any case, whether the indulgence is for the poet or his subject, the poem ends as it must, moving from Sir Peter's death to the climax of his

⁵⁵ Benskin 65.

barbarous life, from the climactic annunciation of the Saviour's conception to a final act of Divine redemption made possible by His own death.

We have seen how the poets of the Harley 913 poems use parody of other genres of literature as the frameworks for their satirical commentaries. These commentaries vividly realise the poets' own attitudes towards contemporary social and political conditions, both ecclesiastical and secular. The *Cokaygne* poet draws extensively on the goliardic techniques, while deliberately employing parody of a rival and supposedly inferior system of religious belief and practice to satirize his fellow ecclesiastics. He does so, not so much to critique the Gaelic-Irish Christian and folkloric beliefs, but very definitely the practices of the Cistercians. The *Pers* poet also relies heavily on religious language and allusion to create satiric effect and to condemn Sir Peter, in essence using Jesus' own words from the parable of the Wedding Feast. The underlying and distinct similarity of both poems, as indeed may be said of all of the Harley 913 satires, must be the poet's own awareness of social and political inequity and corruption drawn from the experience of being Anglo-Irish in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This resistance to corrupt authority is an active agent in forming the region's cultural identity.

Chapter Three:

Political Pictures in *Piers Plowman*: MS Douce 104

Just as the poets of the earlier two manuscripts direct their talents towards equalising the social imbalance between classes and exposing the corruption of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities, so too does the scribe/illustrator of MS Douce 104.¹ He can have no more fertile soil in which to plant the seeds of his satiric commentary than the margins bordering the text of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. Throughout the history of book production the margins surrounding the text have traditionally been a "free space" available for commentary on the text itself. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries this marginal space became the testing ground of the textual authority it enclosed, and the commentary - especially in pictorial form - either added weight to or questioned that authority. Most manuscripts illuminated in this way were commissioned by wealthy patrons owing to the high cost of such artistry. However, as Kerby-Fulton has shown, some more modest illustrated manuscripts were also produced for non-noble purchasers (as opposed to "patrons" of individual artisans), and among these purchasers were legal clerks and civil servants.² These manuscripts were often marginally illustrated in a manner familiar to both scribes and owners; marginal illustration was a common feature of, for example, Exchequer documents, where the

¹ For evidence that the Douce scribe and illustrator were the same person, see Kerby-Fulton and Despres, *Iconography and the Professional Reader: The Politics of Book Production in the Douce 'Piers Plowman'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming). I would like to thank Dr. Kerby-Fulton for allowing me access to the unpublished manuscript of this book.

² Kerby-Fulton (ibid) cites, for example, James le Palmer's creation of the *Omne bonum* "encyclopedia" saying that "the book was apparently created with a coterie of Exchequer clerks in mind because in some of his annotations he admonishes individual colleagues by name."

scribes “were required to do a surprising amount of casual drawing for the production of documentary *signa* used for the storage and retrieval of documents in pictorially marked chests.”³ From this “casual drawing” of documentary *signa* evolved a more or less standard iconography of mnemonics designed to aid the reader in finding important passages.⁴ It is to this comparatively casual tradition that Douce is, perhaps, the most indebted; however, even with this tradition of manuscript illumination, the marginal illustrations of Douce 104 are unique.⁵ As Kathleen Scott notes, “The Douce images are, in fact, a type of visual interpretation that is rarely transmitted to the modern reader.”⁶ The scribe/illustrator adapts conventional illustrative techniques of both lavish manuscripts and legal documents, so that his marginal figures interact with the text in unconventional ways. The gestures and postures of his marginal figures, their positioning next to the text and their style of dress all serve to indicate that the Douce scribe/illustrator has a more complicated agenda in his illustration than simple mnemonic ease of passage location. He creates, in essence, a pictorial parody of the pictorial marginal commentary in lavish manuscript production. Douce's illustrations of William Langland's controversial dream vision poem *Piers Plowman* then emerge as a social commentary on the actions of the wealthy and the corrupt.⁷ They react at once to the text

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ For an excellent discussion of the relationship of Douce's marginalia to the text of the manuscript, see Kerby-Fulton and Depres *Iconography*.

⁶ Scott in *Douce Facsimile* xxvii.

⁷ Langland's dream vision is not what one would term a “reader friendly” work; therefore, the use of mnemonics to find one's way through the poem to key passages of interest would not be unwelcome. For a thorough discussion of the mnemonic tradition in legal documentation, see Kerby-Fulton and Depres *Iconography*.

and to the contemporary social climate of class inequality in fifteenth-century Ireland. Because of the interrelationship between these pictures and Langland's text, even the marginal drawings which the scribe/illustrator chooses to portray sympathetically add to the satiric thrust of the illustrative cycle as a whole. The Douce scribe/illustrator uses a working man's social and occupational experience to create a parody of the satiric marginalia from more lavish manuscripts to effect his own satiric commentary. The pictures support and enhance the reformist authority of Langland's text even as they embellish it.

The Douce manuscript was translated in 1427 into a Middle Hiberno-English dialect, indicating that the themes of extreme poverty and unrest in Langland's poem had special meaning for the Anglo-Irish patron.⁸ Conditions in Ireland were similar to those that sparked revolt in England half a century earlier; however, Ireland's problems were exacerbated by colonialism.⁹ Forty years after the *Piers Plowman* C-text was "finished" the sentiments of the poem found an eager audience in Ireland as that country underwent its own social and ecclesiastical upheaval and the crippling poverty of the people was of foremost concern to its inhabitants. "From being a source of revenue at the beginning of the [fourteenth] century, from the 1360's Ireland became a charge on the English exchequer. After some real but ineffective attempts to halt that trend, the English government became less and less inclined

⁸ The colophon for the manuscript gives us the date of the book's production: "Explicit liber de Petro Ploughman/ Anno regni regis henrici secti sexto Et fir' Iouis/ante festum Michaelis Incept' trassup'" ["Here ends the book of Piers Plowman, in the sixth year of the reign of Henry VI, translation having been begun on the Thursday before Michaelmas' (i.e., it was begun Thursday, 29 Sept., and finished sometime during that same regnal year of Sept. 1, 1427-8)."] Kerby-Fulton and Despres, *Iconography*. For a discussion of *Piers Plowman*'s circulation in Ireland, see Kerby-Fulton and Justice, "Langlandian Reading Circles and the Civil Service in London and Dublin, 1380-1427," *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1998): 80.

⁹ For an excellent description of the events of the Revolt, as well as the conditions that led to it, see Steven Justice,

to devote scarce resources to the defence of the colony.”¹⁰ As the English exchequer devoted less money to the colony and recession set in, the settlements began to flounder economically. Because of his colonial environment and the economic difficulties generated by the English bureaucracy, the Anglo-Irish Douce scribe/illustrator has an even more controversial response to issues of authority in the poem than even Langland could have hoped for.

While a few of the other extant manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* were obviously commissioned by wealthy patrons, Derek Pearsall describes Douce 104 as "a fairly plain, workaday volume, regularly and clearly written, economically though not cheaply produced. It is not necessarily a manuscript undertaken for commercial reasons."¹¹ Douce is the second smallest of all extant *Piers* manuscripts and at 31-36 lines of writing per page shows considerable economy of written space. The Douce scribe also used a very poor grade of vellum for the work; however, it is the *only* extant copy of the poem whose margins are illustrated throughout with elements from the work itself. Obviously, the patron could have had a manuscript of much higher overall quality had he not chosen to have the work illustrated; yet the inclusion of a unique and sophisticated illustrative cycle points to a deep appreciation of Langland's poem and the issues of work ethic it embodies. It is perhaps no coincidence that most of these illustrations place an emphasis on the characters' relationships - for better or worse - with their work. This particular scribe/illustrator's work provides us with a strikingly original and emphatic commentary, not just on the text itself, but on medieval

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

¹⁰ Watt in Cosgrove 376. See also R.E. Glascock in Cosgrove 239.

¹¹ See Pearsall in *Douce Facsimile* xxi-xxii.

work ethic. Clearly then, Douce's illustrations with their emphasis on occupational performance were always important for its Anglo-Irish patron.

Samuel Tucker has defined literary parody consisting "in the selection of characteristic features of an original and the exaggeration of those features to ludicrous effect,"¹² yet these criteria also apply to the pictorial parody in Douce. Many of Douce's pictures conform to this definition, either by gestural interaction with the text or by parodic representations of occupational and social dress codes. One need not be surprised that Douce's margins are not replete with the same grotesques familiar to us from other illustrated volumes of the Middle Ages. As Michael Camille points out, "Gothic marginal art flourished from the late twelfth to the late fourteenth century by virtue of the absolute hegemony of the system it sought to subvert";¹³ therefore, by the time the Douce volume was written, marginal illustration was becoming largely passé. Our scribe was trained in the tradition, yet clearly is at odds with its original intent. However, in Douce he is not working strictly with the intention of illustrating and commenting on the poem, although certainly the care he takes with the figures and the deliberate addition of illumination are evidence that this is an important aspect of his work. His illustrative style actually owes much to the tradition of mnemonics from legal documents and devotional books and it is this interesting blend of mnemonics, illustration and social commentary that gives Douce's illustrations a powerful satirical force. If earlier forms of marginalia were fantastic and elaborate in their textual commentaries, Douce's marginalia act as reverse parodies of the fantastic, bringing grotesquery back down to the level of the

¹² Samuel Marion Tucker, *Verse Satire in England* (New York: AMS Press, 1966) 18.

¹³ Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) 160.

ordinary, while the commentaries are forcefully effected through the scribe/illustrator's simplicity of composition. Camille adds:

If during the Middle Ages patrons had shared the margins with the monkeys, jongleurs and peasants they in reality lorded it over, in later centuries the forms of representation split to demarcate distinct class positions.¹⁴

Douce's mnemonic marginal illustrations become the final manifestations of the phenomenon of the grotesque, but from the margins these grotesques critique *each* "distinct class's" abuses of authority.

Langland too is at odds with his own traditions of authority. In his quest for the path to salvation, the *Piers Plowman* dreamer searches for the meaning of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, implying that entrance to Heaven must be gained through actively participating in good works here on earth.¹⁵ Steven Justice points out "that Langland imagined and presented his writing as *work* analogous to agricultural labour, a notion that would seem to imply that the text not merely is the result of, but is in some sense constituted by, the history of the poet's activity."¹⁶ Langland's work, then, is not just his probable occupation of

¹⁴ *ibid* 158.

¹⁵ Derek Pearsall states: "...Dowel is the life of obedience to the law and honest labour in one's vocation; Dobet adds to this a greater degree of humility and active charity towards one's neighbour; while Dobest puts all these qualities to the active service of the organized Church, which has power over sin. ...But essentially they are inseparable, being no more than the degrees of progress towards understanding the *law of love* as the basis for a good life; and inseparable too in that Dowel and Dobet must always be inspired by the possibility of Dobest, not only for those who seek perfection in the contemplative life, but for all men" (my emphasis). See William Langland, *'Piers Plowman': The C-text* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994) 182 n.78-98. Future references to Pearsall's notes to the text of *Piers Plowman* will be notated "Pearsall *Piers*" followed by the page and note (line) number.

¹⁶ Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Written Work* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) 2.

unbeneficed cleric,¹⁷ but also the enumeration in writing of the corruptions and inequities in society - the aspects of society which by their nature imply that some members are not working hard enough for the "common profit."¹⁸ Many of the figures illustrated in Douce emphasise the concerns of the working man - and one who is particularly concerned with the contemporary problems of Ireland (most notably poverty and what feels like the betrayal of the common man by the clergy of all ranks). Considering the social conditions of Ireland at the time and the seemingly rampant corruption at all levels of society, it should come as no surprise that the Douce manuscript, copied, translated and illustrated by a member of that society, creates an entirely unique tradition in the transmission of Langland's poem largely based on the benefits and evils of performing one's work.

Occasionally the scribe/illustrator leaves a pencilled-in rough sketch incomplete; however, in the majority of cases, such as the angel on fol. 80v, the incomplete pictures illustrate more or less standard religious iconographic subject matter, if not standard iconographic pictorial technique. Pearsall notes, "The style of the Douce miniatures indicates that the artist had been trained twenty to twenty-five years before he illustrated Douce 104, that is, during the high period of the International Style in England."¹⁹ He would, therefore, also have been trained in the conventional religious iconographies, as well as the standard marginal treatment of pictorially glossing a text. Apart from his sympathetic treatment of society's poor, if the choice of miniatures were originally left up to this artist, he would almost

¹⁷ See Kerby-Fulton and Despres *Iconography*.

¹⁸ The "comune profyt" (Pro.167) was "a term often significantly used in political writings of the period," and was of significant concern in Langland's poem as well. Pearsall *Piers* 38 n.167.

¹⁹ See Pearsall in *Douce Facsimile* xxxiii-xxxiv.

certainly have chosen to include *some* form of standard iconography, even though he passed up the illustration of such obvious scenes as the Crucifixion (XX); however, like the poet of Harley 913's *Satire*, the Douce scribe/illustrator seems to have an aversion to conventional iconography.²⁰ He was trained in the conventional iconographies, but deliberately decided to use them sparingly in this unconventional manuscript, perhaps in reaction to the thorny reformist issues that have striking Lollard parallels that *Piers Plowman* illuminates. This choice was then probably modified even further by the patron.²¹ Because of the controversial nature of the issues Langland raises, it is unlikely that the patron did not exercise some control over the artist's choice of subject and iconographic rendering. The resulting effect is that the illustrator's overall rejection of standard iconographic images in order to favourably depict, for example, lower socially-ranked individuals such as lunatics, beggars and wanderers gives a visual slant to the reading of Langland's already controversial poem; in other words, the marginal images do not just support Langland's original authority, they quite literally embellish it.

Although *Piers Plowman*'s marginalized wandering figures traditionally have no "job" in society, and for all that Langland's poem concerns to a great degree occupational competence, the Douce scribe/illustrator treats these poor subjects the most sympathetically.

Kerby-Fulton notes that the scribe/illustrator "is a great champion of the laity and the lower-

²⁰ Kerby-Fulton (and Despres *Iconography*) notes: "The Douce artist, then, has a Lollard-like distaste for iconic images of the divine or saintly or any one else of official spiritual repute (only an angel (folio. 80v) manages to pass muster – and even this angel was never painted – perhaps suppressed at the patron's request; he has a Bernardian dislike of grotesquery, frivolous bestiary and frivolity generally; this looks like a 'puritanical' streak a mile wide."

²¹ For a discussion of patron visits *in medias res* and the effect this had on manuscript illustration, see J.J.G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 32.

order secular clergy, perhaps confirming his links to the underpaid curates and unbeneficed 'piece-workers' of the clerical world."²² Being an "underpaid cleric" perhaps taking on piece work to make ends meet, combined with experiencing the everyday presence of the Irish poor would have added a certain poignancy to the Douce scribe's depiction of the society's poor.

Similarly, as Maidie Hilmo has pointed out, only a few of the illustrations have been illuminated through the application of gold dust or silver. These figures are almost never figures of nobility, as we would expect, but include, again, figures such as the Lunatic Lollar on folio 42r and the Beggar on folio 51v.²³

Langland refers to lunatics as God's "priue disciples"(IX.118, "intimate disciples"), sent forth "To profecye of pe peple, pleyinge, as hit were"(IX.114, "To prophesy about the people, playing, as it were"). The Douce scribe/illustrator places the picture of the "lunatyk lollar" (IX.107, fig. 1, appendix) directly beside the lines of the text which read:

For a sent hem forth seluerles in a somur garnement
 Withoute bagge and bred...
 Barfoot and bredles, beggeth they of no man.
 And thauh a mete with the mayre ameddes pe strete,
 A reuerenseth hym ryht nauht, no rather then another.
 (IX.119-123)

[For He (Christ) sent them forth silverless in a summer garment
 Without bag and bread...
 Barefoot and breadless, they beg from no man.

²² Kerby-Fulton and Despres *Iconography*.

²³ Maidie Hilmo, "Retributive Violence and Reformist Agenda in the Illustrated Douce 104 MS of *Piers Plowman*." *Fifteenth Century Studies* 23 (1997): 20.

And though he [the lunatic] were to meet with the mayor in the
middle of the street,
He shows no more respect to him than to any other man.]

The figure is dressed in a tattered saint-like garment and gestures dismissively towards the text's mayoral authority.²⁴ The artist could have chosen to place the figure mnemonically directly beside the lines that introduce him; however, he eschews this in favour of the added impact of social commentary achieved by the Lunatic Lollar's dismissal of the mayoral authority figure in Langland's text. The Lunatic Lollar is illuminated with gold dust, yet there was apparently only a limited amount of money available for the volume in the first place, since some of the later illustrations appear to only have been coloured with the rubricator's colours - presumably because the volume was going over budget. We must ask ourselves, why would the scribe/illustrator go to the obvious expense of illuminating these poor figures such as the Lunatic Lolar at all? Surely this is the sort of planning which the patron would necessarily have to have been involved in. On the one hand, illuminating society's poor honours them; on the other, gold and silver illumination of such unwashed subject matter serves to parody the tradition of lavish text production and satirises the value system which places more emphasis on worldly possessions than on fellow human beings. Dowel, after all, involves charity, yet significantly within Douce no marginal figure is to be seen receiving

²⁴ For an example of the iconographic dress code for depicting saints, see fig.15 in the appendix. The miniature depicts St. Matthew from Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 4, fol.168v, and can be found in C.R. Dodwell, *The Canterbury School of Illumination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954) plate 34.

charity.²⁵ Again, this illustrative technique serves not only to support, but also to intensify Langland's original sentiment.

Kerby-Fulton astutely notes, "In Douce images of authority are strikingly absent, or diffident, and the illustrator seems intent on emphasising the marginalised and socially inferior at the expense of conventional authoritative subjects."²⁶ This should not be surprising since Langland's poem has, not a king or a pope, but a plowman, Piers, for its ultimate authority figure. It is Piers who "exemplifies and encloses within himself the trilogy, Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, and who finally reveals Truth in human form."²⁷ Douce does, however, include two standard portraits of secular authority figures – a king on fol. 18r. (who sits enthroned and who stares conspicuously mutely at the reader) and a knight on fol. 35v (fig. 2). Both figures have been sympathetically (yet politically cautiously) rendered; however, the artist has used only subdued coloration for the king and has not completed the illustration of the knight beyond the preliminary sketch stage. It is most likely that the Douce volume's patron vetoed the knight's completion at an early stage, since the other pictures for the most part show signs of having been sketched out and coloured as the scribe/illustrator went along, instead of colouring them all at once. In Passus VIII, the knight volunteers to help Piers plough the half acre, but Piers refuses his help at the plough since it is not the knight's social station to do so.

²⁵ C.f. fig. 16 from James le Palmer's *Omne bonum* encyclopedia (British Library MSS Royal 6 E VI and 6 E VII), fol.211. The miniature, which illustrates le Palmer's entry for the word "*caritas*", shows a layman at a castle gate giving bread to barefoot men. Reproduced in Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Omne bonum: A Fourteenth-Century Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge*, vol. 2 (London: Harvey Miller, 1996) 79.

²⁶ Kerby-Fulton and Despres *Iconography*.

²⁷ Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 146. See also Mann *Chaucer* 67-74.

Instead, (as we have seen in Chapter Two in our discussion of *Pers of Bermingham*) Piers directs the knight to protect him and Holy Church from those who would undo their work. The passage is, in effect, a politically correct job description for a knight; yet it ends with an admonition to the knight not to misuse his authority by indulging in corrupt practices: "And when 3e mersyen eny man late mercy be taxour/And mekenesse thy mayster, maugre Mede chekes"(VIII.37-38, "And when you fine any man let mercy be the assessor and meekness your master, despite Meed's movements"). The passage goes on to advise the knight against all manner of corrupt and uncharitable practices and the unfinished knight looks in from the margins with his arms folded in a potentially inflammatory gesture reminiscent of bemused defiance, one possible reason why the picture was never completed.²⁸ It is also entirely possible that the picture was not completed because it illustrates a passage in which a noble takes advice from a common man and the democratisation of the image would have set a dangerous visual precedent in socio-politically troubled Anglo-Ireland. Thus, the knight stands incomplete in the margins, a mere shadow of secular authority.

Clerical figures of authority receive, perhaps, the most scathing treatment by the artist. For example, in the blackly comic portrait of the schoolmaster on folio 52r (fig. 3), the artist (or possibly the rubricator) has taken care to outline the bared bottom of the schoolmaster's young victim. Kathleen Scott points out that this is a standard religious penitential iconography, though not common in English manuscripts.²⁹ In the lines beside

²⁸ It should be noted that Langland's knight shows no such defiance, only deference to Piers.

²⁹ Scott in *Douce Facsimile* lxii. For an example of the conventional marginal iconography of this scene, see fig. 17, from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS fr. 95, fol.355. The scene depicts both students and master as apes in a satiric commentary on the educational system. Douce's scribe/illustrator transmogrifies the scene back to realism in an act of inverse parody for a more directly satiric statement concerning larger issues.

which the scribe/illustrator places the picture, Study lists those whom she has taught. She says, “Gramer for gurlen y gart furste write/And beet hem with a baleyse bute yf pei wolde lerne” (XI.123-124, “I had first written grammar for children and beat them with a stick if they would not learn”); however, Study goes on to complain that theology has troubled her and the more she thinks about it, the more shrouded it seems. Although the portrait appears to represent a clerical schoolmaster ruthlessly thrashing a recalcitrant child (and this in itself would be a satiric social commentary), the annotator has added “nota de peology” (“note concerning theology”) across the student’s bared bottom, satirically changing the force of the picture from the schoolroom to life in general. Now the social satire becomes a religious satire as well. Ironically, Study says that theology teaches men to *love* in order to please Dowel (XI.133-135). This does not seem to have been the experience of the scribe/illustrator (nor the annotator).

In the artist’s depiction of the Proud Priest (fol. 109v, fig. 4) who follows Sloth in the attack on Conscience we see a combination of the pictorial attributes of Pride (fol. 24r, fig. 5) and Lechery (fol.26v, fig. 6).³⁰ The text reads:

Sleuthe with his slynge an hard sawt he made.
 Proute prestes cam with hym – passyng an hundred
 In paltokes and pikede shoes and pissares longe knyues
 Comen a₃en Consience; with Couetyse they helden.
 (XXII.217-220)

Reproduced from Randall, plate CXXXIII.636.

³⁰ Compare the Proud Priest’s style of dress with that of Pride and the placement of his suggestively protruding sword handle with that of Lechery.

[Sloth made a hard assault with his sling.
 More than a hundred proud priests came with him
 In cloaks and pointed shoes and the long knives of common men
 to assault Conscience; they held with Covetousness.]

The Priest's hand touches the word "Proute" ("proud") and his eyes appear to be reading the words "That with Auntecrist helden harde a₃eyn Consience" (XXII.216, "That held boldly with Antichrist against Conscience"). The handle of his "pissare" stands erect between his legs. This Proud Priest appears to be a faithful representation of Langland's character, except that in translating *Piers Plowman* from the SWM dialect of the original poem the scribe/illustrator seems to have run across something in the written portrait of the priest that displeased him (and presumably his patron as well). The lines that follow the above quotation in Langland's original read:

'By pe Marie,' quod a *mansed* prest, was of pe march of *Ireland*,
 'Y counte no more Conscience, bi so y cache suluer,
 Then y do to drynke a drauht of goed ale!
 And so sayde syxty of pe same contreye....
 (XXII.221-224, my emphasis)

['By the Mary, said a cursed priest, who was from the march of Ireland,
 'I don't hold Conscience important any more - as long as I make money -
 Than I do to drink a draught of good ale!
 And so said sixty of the same country....']

The Douce scribe/illustrator, however, has changed Langland's original text to read: "By mary quode a *mased* prest: was of pe march of *wales*" (my emphasis). Apparently, the Anglo-Irish scribe (and patron) took exception to Langland's derogatory comment about the Irish priests, and decided to expatriate the corrupt clergy to Wales. As Kerby-Fulton points

out, “the Gaelic Irish clergy had a Europe-wide reputation for concubinage and nepotism, but the Anglo-Irish were fiercely proud of their history as the reformers and ‘civilizers’ of Ireland. This suggests both why Langland would have chosen Ireland as the home of his Proud Priest, and why the Anglo-Irish scribe would have been so sensitive to it.”³¹ Similarly, he has changed the word “mased”, meaning “cursed”, to read “mased”, “confused” or “frustrated”. Again, Kerby-Fulton notes, “If this latter change is deliberate (and not merely the paleographical loss of a minim abbreviation), it fits a recurring pattern in this scribe-illustrator’s treatment of the poem – a diffidence about the Church and about orthodox attitudes on a variety of subjects, and a sympathy for those who oppose it.”³² Here is one instance where the scribe/illustrator cannot support the textual authority as a matter of national pride. By altering Langland’s text, he is asserting his own authority as a commentator on corruption in his own country and in others.

The Douce artist has portrayed several of the allegorical characters sympathetically in his ethical concern for the poor working man; these characters often champion situations in which the common man would be disadvantaged in the medieval social system of Ireland, either in their disdain for corruption or in their physical appearance. Conscience (fig. 7), for example, is placed in the margin of fol. 15r beside a long list of occupations that, Mede argues, justly receive payment for their services. The king is swayed by Mede's reasoning, but Conscience is not. The artist has portrayed Conscience, dressed in the flowing robes of a saint, as looking away from the list of occupations which he believes receive improper

³¹ Kerby-Fulton and Despres *Iconography*.

³² *ibid.*

reward for services rendered. This list of occupations will seem familiar after the territory covered in the first two chapters of this study: servants, the pope and all prelates, beggars and bondsmen, minstrels, teaching masters, priests, craftsmen and merchants (III.274-280). Conscience is the conscience of the honest working man, and emblematic of the path to salvation which Will seeks. Hunger on fol. 38r (fig. 8) is dressed similarly to Conscience, again in the dignified robes of a saint. His diet of root vegetables (resembling radishes) - to which the poor were reduced while waiting for the harvest - would be extremely hard on an empty stomach and would in all probability make hunger pains even worse.³³ He glares across the page at Wastor (folio 37v, fig. 9) who flippantly walks away with “What lele land-tilynge men leely byswynken” (VIII.140, “what faithful land-tilling men lawfully work for”).

The Statutes of Kilkenny, enacted in 1366 and repromulgated in 1402 to stem cultural assimilation among the Anglo-Irish and to halt corrupt practices, forbids the keeping of henchmen who go about plundering food.³⁴ This is how the Anglo-Irish scribe has portrayed Wastor, who glares menacingly at the lines of the text that read “And to Peres pe plouhman: profrede to fyhte” (VIII.150, “And pointedly offered to fight Piers the Plowman”). The many examples such as these just mentioned have a common emphasis on exposing corruption to the benefit of all levels of society - in short, on “doing” or working well.

In the tradition of pictorial marginal commentary lewd gestures act as signals of negative social commentary and like *Annot and John, Satire on the Consistory Courts* and

³³One remembers Scarlett O'Hara's reaction to a meal of radishes on an empty stomach!

³⁴ See Cosgrove 542 and 551.

The Land of Cokaygne, the Douce illustrations do have their share of lewd gestures and implicit sexual innuendo;³⁵ however, unlike the fanciful grotesquery of earlier, more lavish volumes, the pictorial humour in Douce - like Langland's own - is generally more sober and sobering.³⁶ For example, scholarly debate persists as to whether Gluttony (fol. 29r, fig. 10), in his tailored coat and trousers, is exhibiting his bared penis or his navel. This may have been a built-in ambiguity on the part of the illustrator; however, it is more likely that the picture reflects a "not uncommon ailment among the very obese" - a herniated umbilicus.³⁷ As in pregnancy, excessive fat can put unnecessary strain on the abdominal wall causing the umbilicus to rupture, broaden and protrude noticeably. Douce's illustrator has gone to much more subtle lengths with characters such as Lechery (fol. 26v), whose sword handle projects provocatively into the text as he confesses his sexual sins. Similarly, the artist has gone to much more overtly sexual lengths with the devil on fol. 96r, who has been defaced, but who originally boasted a large erect penis. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the scribe/illustrator had the artistic capability and the sensibility to make a penis look like a penis when it suited him. Additionally, gluttony is not likely to be a sin participated in by the very

³⁵ For example, Lechery's suggestively protuberant dagger handle compares with the kind of sexual innuendo Michael Camille (*Image* 32) finds on fols. 160v and 161r of Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen MS G.K.S. 3384. "A marginal image of a knight dropping his sword at the sight of a snail perched on the tendrils of a minute Flemish Psalter suggests in this instance an erotic encounter being juxtaposed with the drooping drone of the testicular bagpipe above and a woman's 'basket' being attacked by a ram on the right page."

³⁶ For example, see fig. 18, from New York, William S. Glazier MS 24, fol.93, which depicts a Templar in a phallus-shaped hat kissing the behind of a cleric. Reproduced from Lilian M.C. Randall, *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966) plate CXI.536.

³⁷ Dr. David Clinton-Baker also notes that "when a man is obese the penis, in effect, disappears - that is, it is not as obvious as in thinner men." Telephone interview Nov. 28, 1997. In addition, it does not make sense to portray Gluttony with a bared penis in order to make him an object of ridicule when other figures in the manuscript have only suggestive dagger and sword handles (like Lechery, fig.6). The only other figure in Douce to display a bared penis is the devil on fol. 96r, and he has been defaced at some point in the manuscript's long history.

poor; therefore, to someone who obviously had sympathy for the starving poor, a person rich enough to be so obese as to have ruptured their navel would indeed be a grotesque commentary on the inequities of social class and occupational corruption.

The poor working figures in Douce, however, have little time to play. In Passus VIII, the scribe/illustrator has placed the figure of a Digger (fig. 12) in the margins beside the text of Hunger's speech on the virtues of labour that reads, "And lo, what þe sauter sayth to swynkares with handes:/'Yblessed be al tho that here bylyue biswynketh/Thorw eny lele labour as thorw lymes and handes'" (VIII.259-261, "And see what the psalter says to those who work with their hands: 'Blessed be all those that labour for their livelihood through any true labour as through limbs and hands'").³⁸ The Digger's eyes strain towards the text with exertion in the effort of his digging, his spade emblematic of penitential labour.³⁹ Yet the character's face pathetically betrays the back-breaking nature of honest manual labour, to which, judging by his relatively middle class attire, he is unaccustomed, leaving the viewer with the feeling that the poor but honest members of society work harder than others for the "common profit."

We see the same work ethic in the scribe/illustrator's portrait of *Activa Vita* on fol. 69r (fig. 13). *Activa Vita*, as his name suggests, is emblematic of the "good and proper" life of the Christian in the world, "as contrasted with the Contemplative life, essentially that of the

³⁸ See the discussion in Chapter One regarding *Satire on the Concistory Courts'* defendant, who is "so hauer of hondes."

³⁹ Adam, for example, is often illustrated digging with a spade as penance for his disobedience to God. See for example (fig. 19), New Haven, Yale University Library MS in Randall, plate II.6, which portrays Adam in just this manner.

cloistered religious.”⁴⁰ *Activa Vita* holds a bread spade, used in his occupation of baker of communion wafers (XV.199), and a plough pote with which he works “Fro mihel-masse to mihel-masse [to] fynde mete and drynke” (XV.216, “from Michaelmas to Michaelmas to find food and drink”). Although Langland’s *Activa Vita* thinks only of earthly reward (XV.209), the scribe/illustrator has illuminated his bread spade with an application of silver, ennobling the character and showing his approval of at least the spiritual *intent* of the active life. Douce’s *Activa Vita* is dressed in loose, formless garments, his shoes are broken and his face is gaunt as he stares grimly towards the lines that initially identify him as a minstrel (XV.191), as well he might. The Statutes of Kilkenny had outlawed minstrelsy.⁴¹ He looks haggard and stooped from his difficult labours, in contrast with the rather feisty literary portrait Langland paints. In short, the Douce illustrator seems to have endowed *Activa Vita* with an expression and posture that suggests the depressing nature of the lines of Patience’s discourse with him that read, “For if thow lyuest aftur his (God’s) lore the shortere lyf þe betere” (XV.260, “And if you live according to His (God’s) teaching, the shorter life the better”). *Activa Vita* asks Patience what perfect patience is (XV.274), and Patience answers saying:

‘Meeknesse and mylde speche and men of o will,
 The whiche wil loue lat to oure lordes place,
 And pat is charite, chaumpion, chief of all vertues;
 And pat is pore pacient, alle perelles to soffre.’ (XV.275-278)

[‘Meekness and mild speech and men of one will,
 Those same who will love lead to our Lord’s place,

⁴⁰ Pearsall *Piers* 255 n. 194.

⁴¹ See Cosgrove 540.

And that is charity, champion, chief of all virtues;
And that is the patient poor, to suffer all perils.’]

Langland’s *Activa Vita* is still learning; the Douce scribe/illustrator’s *Activa Vita* seems to have already learned through hard-gained experience. The portrait evinces “a reformist agenda which quite outstrips the *social* imagination of most medieval visual artists, and springs from a ‘democratizing’ tendency quite eloquently Anglo-Irish.”⁴²

In the ultimate act of subversion, the Douce scribe/illustrator makes the consummate statement with his treatment of Lyf on folio 108v (fig. 13). Kathleen Scott notes:

... the artist (etc.) chose to focus solely on the imagery in this single line [line 152] and to ignore earlier descriptions concerning his dress and attributes. ... The artist apparently did not notice or his instructions did not state that Lyf had ‘lette dagge his clothes’(22.143) or that he had been granted a chivalric banner (22.91); and although twice called ‘lord’ in the poem (22.71,90), Lyf is dressed in the manner of a labourer.⁴³

Given what we have already seen of the Douce scribe/illustrator’s interpretation of Langland’s poem, the depiction of Lyf as a labourer should not seem accidental at all. However, this miniature occurs at a point in the text where the scribe/illustrator has changed the original from “Sleuth” (“Sloth”) to “Slei₃th” (“Trickery”), just as he did with the passage next to the portrait of the Proud Priest. This time the manuscript’s corrector has actually deliberately erased the “u” in “Sleuth” and replaced it with “₃”. As Kerby-Fulton points out, “the reason for the renaming is not far to seek: the line “Sleuth was sley

⁴² Kerby-Fulton and Despres *Iconography*.

⁴³ Scott in *Douce Facsimile* lxxvii-lxxviii.

of werre” [“Sloth was sly at war”] in Langland’s version tempted the Anglo-Irish illustrator to portray a Gaelic-Irishman.”⁴⁴ The marginal figure is Douce’s one identifiable Gaelic-Irishman, wearing the bare feet and hairstyle outlawed to the Anglo-Irish in the Statutes of Kilkenny. In addition, the character carries a stick that looks very much like a “hurling” stick. This game, too, was legislated against in the Kilkenny Statutes because of its violent nature. This is the Douce scribe/illustrator’s perception of the Irish Everyman, who is sly, violent, poor and identifiably “different” from the Anglo-Irish. Thus, the scribe/illustrator changes not just the text itself, but also the focus of the text’s imagery to illuminate the social and political difficulties of the land.

We have examined the motives behind Langland's poem and the element of subversion which the corrupt wealthy would have read into it, the social situation of both Douce's patron and its scribe/illustrator and we have seen something of the production mentality at work in the book. While earlier and more extravagant books contained a sumptuous display of marginalia designed to critique at once the reader and the text, Douce's simple illustrations take on a pseudo-nobility - a moral superiority - as they grant dignity to the lower classes and expose the corruption of nobles and clergy.⁴⁵ They share the same interplay with the text and

⁴⁴ Kerby-Fulton and Despres *Iconography*.

⁴⁵ On marginal illustrations critiquing both reader and text simultaneously, Camille (*Image* 134) comments on the portrait of the Duke, the Virgin and the destitute in the *Petits Heures of Jean, Duc de Berry*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. MS lat. 18104, folio 97v: "...one page juxtaposes a portrait of the Duke kneeling to the Virgin and Child in the centre with the marginal image of a beggar, accompanied by a barefoot boy, carrying a child. The bearded old beggar in this image has the hindquarters of an animal. He is less than human. This group stands exposed on the spiky emptiness of vellum as opposed to the Duke framed in his lush blue and gold interior. On a velvet cushion is the Duke's little lapdog, a hint at the vast amounts he spent on his pets - far more, according to chroniclers, than he gave to the poor. Yet what function did the marginal image serve here? Did it remind the Duke of his Christian duty of charity, or did it not rather serve to distinguish the haves from the have nots, inverting the usual priorities of access to Divinity?"

with each other, as they do with the reader, and they act as commentary on the text and - most importantly - on the greater social and spiritual conditions which the text embodies. While Langland reformed the B-text into what he hoped would be a less controversial C-text, the scribe/illustrator of Douce 104 has reinjected controversiality with his marginal illustrations.⁴⁶ This artist deliberately supports Langland's work ethic with his own and relies upon his own understanding of the text in its relationship to his society. These figures are not merely allegorical to him, but are born out of his own experience. They satirise corruption from all levels of Anglo-Irish society, both lay and clerical, giving the reader a distinctly Anglo-Irish take on Langland's poem. The artist eschews the frivolous symbols of status and aristocratic luxury in favour of highlighting the simple nobility of the honest working man. With no apologies necessary to his patron, his "grotesques" are drawn from Anglo-Irish life.

⁴⁶ For the use of *Piers Plowman* as propaganda in the 1381 Peasant's Revolt, see Justice 102-139. Langland apparently revised the text and subdued its militantly reformist tone after the uprising because of the dangerous connotations of the poem's use.

Conclusion:

In our exploration of the poems of Harley 2253 and Harley 913 and the work of the Douce scribe/illustrator of *Piers Plowman*, we have seen that the cultural productions of the SWM and Anglo-Ireland share a common distrust of authority and a disdain for corrupt practices at all levels of society, both lay and clerical. The works all draw on different, long established traditions of cultural production, yet they satirize these traditions with a strong emphasis on the democratisation of social practices. The SWM poet of Harley 2253's *Annot and John* parodies the French courtly *descriptio* traditions of the nobility and in so doing satirizes the authority of cultural tradition by insinuating that the "lady" is no lady at all, while the poet of *Satire on the Consistory Courts* parodies the European "complaint" genre to satirically attack the unjust authority dispensed by the ecclesiastical court system in its proceedings against the common man. The Anglo-Irish poet of Harley 913's *The Land of Cokaygne* parodies the visionary and prophetic traditions of the Gaelic-Irish to satirize the traditional Gaelic-Irish spirituality in general and the corruption of the Cistercian monastic foundations in particular. The *Pers of Bermingham* poet parodies the European panegyric and the biblical parable of the Wedding Feast in his satirical and apocalyptic indictment of Sir Peter de Bermingham's slaughter of the O'Connors. Finally, the Douce scribe/illustrator draws on the mnemonic tradition of illustration in medieval legal documents which works as an inverse parody of the commentative marginal illustration of more lavish manuscripts. In so doing, the artist satirically supports the attack on social and political inequities in William Langland's

SWM poem, *Piers Plowman* and adapts them to an Anglo-Irish audience. The parody is the game by which these artists produce the satirical lesson.

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Appendix:

I have chosen the editions of the poems I have used in this study from the following sources: *Annot and John* from Brooks (31); *Satire on the Consistory Courts* from Robbins (24); *Satire* from Heuser (154); *The Land of Cokaygne* from Robbins (121) and *Pers of Bermingham* from Benskin (68). I have attempted to translate the poems as closely as possible, giving relevant alternate meanings for the Middle English in footnotes; one realizes that in translating these poems, as with poetry from completely different languages, that much of the original nuance is lost. For this reason – particularly with *Annot and John* – I have adopted a somewhat freer mode of translation to recapture some of the playfulness of the original.

Of the illustrations, I have taken figures one through thirteen from '*Piers Plowman*': *A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Douce 104*, Derek Pearsall and Kathleen Scott, eds. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992). I have taken the other illustrations from the following sources:

fig. 14 – St. Michael slaying the dragon, London, B.M. MS. Royal I B xi, fol.6, reproduced in Dodwell.

fig. 15 – Evangelist portrait (St. Matthew): an example of saints' dress, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS 709, fol.48v, reproduced in Dodwell.

fig. 16 – Beggars receiving bread, James le Palmer's *Omne bonum*, British Library MSS Royal 6 E VI – 6 E VII, fol.211, reproduced in Freeman Sandler.

fig. 17 – Ape schoolmaster and students, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS fr. 95, reproduced in Randall.

fig. 18 – Templar kissing the bare behind of a cleric, New York, William S. Glazier Collection MS 24, fol. 93, reproduced in Randall.

fig. 19 – Adam delving, New Haven, Yale University Library MS, fol. 169, reproduced in Randall.

Annot and John – MS Harley 2253

Ichot a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht,
 ase saphyr in seluer semly on syht,
 ase iaspe **pe** gentil **pat** lemep wip lyht,
 ase gernet in golde ant ruby wel ryht;
 ase onycle he ys on yholden on hyht,
 ase diamound **pe** dere in day when he is dyht;
 he is coral ycud wip cayser ant knyht;
 ase emeraude amorewen **pis** may hauep myht.

Pe myht of **pe** margarite hauep **pis** mai mere.
 ffor charbocke ich hire ches bi chyn ant by chere. 10

Hire rode is ase rose **pat** red is on rys;
 wip lilye-white leres lossom he is;
pe primerole he **passap**, **pe** peruenke of pris,
 wip alisaundre **pareto**, ache ant anys.
 Coynte ase columbine such hire cunde ys,
 glad vnder gore in gro ant in grys;
 he is blosme opon bleo, brihtest vnder bis,
 wip celydoyne ant sauge, ase **pou** **piself** sys.

Pat syht vpon **pat** semly to blis he is broht;
 he is solsecele, to sauue ys forsoht.

He is papeiai in pyn **pat** betep me my bale;
 to trewe tortle in a tour y telle **pe** mi tale;
 he is prustle pryuen in **pro** **pat** singep in sale,
pe wilde laueroc ant wolc ant **pe** wodewale;
 he is faucoun in friht, dernest in dale,
 ant wip eueruch a gome gladest in gale.
 ffrom Weye he is wisist into Wyrhale;
 hire nome is in a note of **pe** nyhtegale.

In Annote is hire nome; nempnep hit non?
 Whose ryht redep roune to Iohon.

Muge he is ant mondrake pourh miht of **pe** mone,
 trewe triacle ytold wip tonges in trone;
 such liquorice mai leche from Lyne to Lone;
 such sucre mon sechep **pat** sanep men sone;
 blipe yblessed of Crist, **pat** baypep me mi bone
 when derne dedis in day derne are done.
 Ase gromyl in greue grene is **pe** grone,
 ase quibibe ant comyn cud is in crone,

I know a maid in a bower as bright as beryl,
 as fair to the sight as sapphire in silver,
 as jasper the fair gleams with light,
 as garnet in gold and genuine ruby;
 5 she is like onyx held on high,
 like costly diamond in daylight when she is set;
 she is coral, famous with emperor and king;
 as emerald in the morning, this maid has power.

This maid has more power than the pearl.
 I take her for carbuncle, by chin and by face.

Her complexion is as a rose that is red on its stem;
 she is lovely with lily-white skin;
 she exceeds the primrose, the periwinkle in worth,
 also horse parsley, wild celery and anise.

15 Proud¹ as a columbine, such is her kind,
 beautiful among women in her grey fur;
 her face is a blossom, the fairest under fine linen,
 with buttercup and sage, as you yourself see.

20 He who looks on her beauty is brought to bliss;
 she is marigold, sought out for its healing.

She is a parrot on a perch² that cures my torment;
 to a faithful dove in a tower I tell you my tale;
 she's a thrush, great in strife, that sings in the hall,
 the wild lark and the hawk and the woodpecker;
 25 she's a falcon in the woods, most secret in the dale
 and with every man,³ the most glad in merriment.
 From the Wye to Wirral she is the wisest;
 her name is in a note of the nightingale.

30 In Anote is her name; will no one mention it?
 Whoever guesses it correctly, whisper to John.

She's nutmeg and mandrake, through the moon's might,
 esteemed as faithful medicine by tongues in heaven;
 such liquorice may heal from the Lyn to the Lune;
 one should seek out such sugar that heals men quickly;
 35 happy blessed of Christ, that grants me my prayer
 when secret deeds are done discreetly by day.
 As gromwell in a thicket, green is the seed,
 As cubeb and cumin are famous in the tonsured head,

¹ The MED lists the following alternate meanings for the word "coynte": adj. - wise, famous, fashionable and vain; n. - trick, pudendum.

² The phrase "in pyn" can also mean "in hairpins" or "in feathers".

³ A variant meaning for "gome" is "game".

cud comyn in court, canel in cofre,
wip gynyure ant sedewale ant pe gylofre.

He is medicine of miht, mercie of mede,
rekene ase Regnas resoun to rede,
trewe ase Tegeu in tour, ase Wyrwein in wede,
baldore pen Byrne pat oft pe bor bede;
ase Wylcadoun he is wys, dohty of dede,
ffeyrore pen Floyres folkes to fede,
cud ase Cradoc in court carf pe brede,
hendore pen Hilde, pat hauep me to hede.

He hauep me to hede, pis hendy anon,
gentil ase Ionas, heo ioyep wip Ion.

40 famous cumin in court, cinnamon in a casket,
with ginger and valerian and the clove.

She is a mighty medicine, the mercy of reward,
ready as Regnas to teach wisdom,
true as Tegeu, as Wyrwein in weeds,
bolder than Byrne that often challenged the boar;
45 she is as wise as Wylcadoun, mighty of deed,
more pleasant than Floris in comforting people,
famous as Craddock when carving the bread in court,
more gracious than Hilde, that has me to take care of.⁴
50 She has me to take care of from now on, this fair one,
gracious as Jonas, she has fun with John.⁵

⁴ The phrase “hauep me to hede” can also be read “has me to account to”.

⁵ The word “ioyep” can also mean “to have sexual intercourse with”.

Satire on the Consistory Courts – MS Harley 2253

Ne mai no lewed lued libben in londe,
 be he neuer in hyrt so hauer of honde,
 so lerede vs biledes;
 3ef ich on molde môte wip a mai,
 y shal falle hem byfore & lurnen huere lay,
 ant rewen alle huere redes.
 al bote y be pe furme day on folde hem byfore,
 ne shal y nout so skere scapan of huere score;
 so grimly he on me gredes,
 pat y ne mot me lede per wip mi lawe,
 on alle maner opes pat heo me wullep awe,
 heore boc ase vn-bredes,
 heo wendeþ bokes vn-brad,
 ant makeþ men a moneþ a-mad;
 of scape y wol me skere,
 ant fleo from my fere;
 no rohte he whet yt were,
 boten heo hit had.

ffirst per sit an old cherl in a blake hure,
 of alle pat per sitteþ semep best syre,
 ant leyp ys leg o-lonke.
 An heme in a herygoud wip honginde sleuen,
 & mo pen fourti him by-fore my bales to breuen,
 In sunnes 3ef y songe.
 heo pynkes wip heore penne on heore parchemyn, 25
 ant sayen y am breued ant y-broht yn
 of al my weole wlonke.
 Alle heo buep redy myn roupes to rede,
 per y mot for menske munte sum mede,
 ant ponkfulliche hem ponke.
 shal y ponke hem per er y go?
 3e, pe maister ant ys men bo.
 3ef y am wreint in heore write,
 penne am y bac-bite;

May no unschooled person living in the land,
 so skilful of hands, ever be in the assembly
 as the learned lead us astray;
 if I may sleep with a maid,
 5 I shall fall before them and learn their law,
 and feel remorse for all of their judgements.
 Even though I am before them in court the next day,
 I shall not escape completely from their charge;
 they cry out at me so grimly
 10 that I must not guide myself there with my law
 in all kinds of oaths that they would have me esteem,
 as they insult me with their book,
 they meddle with obscure⁶ books
 and make men go mad in a month;
 15 I will clear myself of the charge
 and will run from my mistress;⁷
 She doesn't care what it [the crime] was
 unless she had it [a formal betrothal?].

First, there sits an old villain in a black skull-cap -
 20 he seems the best of all lords that sit there -
 and stretches out his leg,
 a churl in a cloak with hanging sleeves,
 and more than forty before him to announce my misery,⁸
 in sins if I lamented.⁹
 They stab with their pens on their parchment,
 and say I am summoned and brought in
 in all my splendid wealth.
 They are all ready to believe my contrition,
 where I might attempt some bribe for respect,
 30 and gratefully thank them.
 Shall I thank them before I go?
 Yes, the magistrate and also his men.
 If I am accused in their writ,
 then I am slandered;

⁶ An alternate reading for “vn-brad” is “unstudied”. Similarly “vn-bredes” can mean “to censure or reproach”.

⁷ Also “companion or friend”.

⁸ The phrase “bales to breuen” can also mean “to write down my sentence”. This reading would also support the speaker’s distrust of the written word.

⁹ The verb “singen”, as well as simply meaning “to sing”, can also figuratively mean “to bray like an ass”. Justice (17) comments that the clerical chroniclers of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, for example, generally portrayed those who could not read as barely human, often communicating to each other through animal noises.

for moni mon heo makep wyte
Of wymmene wo.

3et per sittep somenours syexe oper seuene,
mys-motinde men alle by here euene,
ant rechep forp heore rolle.
Hyrdmen hem hatiep, ant vch mones hyne,
for eueruch a parosshe heo polkep in pyne,
and clastrep wyf heore colle.
Nou wol vch fol clerik pat is fayly,
wende to pe bysshop ant bugge bayly –
nys no wyt in is nolle –
come to countene court, couren in a cope,
ant suggen he hap priuilegie proud of pe pope –
swart ant al to-swolle.
aren heo to-swolle, for-swore?
3e, pe hatred of helle beo heore!
for per heo beodep a bok,
to sugge ase y folht tok;
heo shulen in helle on a hok
honge pere-fore!

per stont vp a 3eolumon, 3e3ep wip a 3erde,
ant hat out an heh pat al pe hyrt herde,
ant cleopep Magge ant Malle.
ant heo comeþ bymodered ase a mor-hen,
ant scrynkep for shome, & shomep for men,
vncomely vnder calle.
heo biginnep to shryke, & scremep anon,
ant saip, “by my gabbyng, ne shal hit so gon,
ant pat beo on ou alle;
pat pou shalt me wedde & welde to wyf.”
ah me were leuere wip lawe leose my lyf
pen so to fote hem falle.
shal y to fote falle for mi fo?
3e, monie byswykep heo swo.
of pralles y am per prat,
pat sittep swart & for-swat;
per y mot hente me en hat
er ich hom go.

Such chaffare y chepe at pe chapitre,
pat makep moni pryue mon vn-peuful to be,
wip ponkes ful punne;

35 for they lay the blame on many men
for the misfortunes of women.

Yet there sit six or seven summoners,
misjudging all men by their peers,
and bring out their roll.

40 They hate herdsman, and each man’s servant,
for every parish they bring to dire straits through taxes,
and enslave with their lack of sympathy.
Now each foolish clerk that is a failure¹⁰ will
come to the bishop and buy office -
45 there is no sense in his head -
come to accounting court, lurking¹¹ in a long cloak,
and say he has privileges designated by the pope -
wicked and all swollen with pride.
Are they arrogant, perjured?
50 Yes, the hatred of hell should be theirs!
For there they offer a book,
to say that I committed fornication;
they should, on a hook in hell,
hang for it!

55 There a bailiff stands up, going with a rod,
and commands aloud so that all the assembly heard,
and calls “Maggie” and “Molly”.
And they come as covered with dirt as a moorhen,
and draw back for shame and are abashed before men,
60 ugly¹² under their hats.
They immediately begin to shriek and scream,
and say, “it shall not go on this way, by my lies,¹³
and that is up to all of you;
that you shall marry me and win me to wife.”
65 Ah, I would rather lose my life to the law
than fall at their feet in these circumstances.
Shall I fall at their feet for my foe?
Yes, they trick many this way.
I am threatened there with slavery,
70 [by those]that sit wicked and stinking with sweat;
there I might receive a judicial order
before I go home.

Such is the merchandise I buy at the chapter-house,
that makes many a worthy man vicious,
75 with very thin thanks;

¹⁰ Meaning “failed to meet one’s financial obligations, as in bankruptcy”.

¹¹ Also “kneeling, crouching or squatting”.

¹² Also “indecent”.

¹³ The word “gabbyng” has only one other usage in Middle English: “to swear an oath”.

ant **seppe** y go coure at constory,
 ant falle to fote vch a fayly –
 heore is **pis** worldes wyne,
seppen y pleide at bisshopes plee,
 ah me were leuere be sonken y **pe** see,
 In sor wipouten synne.
 At chirche ant **pourh** cheping, ase dogge y am dryue,
pat me were leuere of lyue **pen** so forte lyue,
 to care of al my kynne.
 atte constorie heo **kennep** vs care,
 ant whissh**ep** vs euele & worse to fare.
 a pruest proud ase a po
seppe wed**dep** vs bo;
 Wyde heo wor**chep** vs wo
 for wymmene ware.

and since I go kneel at Consistory court,
 and fall to the feet of each failure -
 this world's pleasure is theirs,
 since I played at the bishop's game -
 80 ah, I would rather be sunk in the sea,
 in grief without sin.
 I'm driven like a dog at church and through the market,
 so that I would rather die than live this way,
 to be the cause of concern to my family.
 85 At Consistory they know our trouble,
 and wish us evil and worse to come.
 A priest proud as a peacock
 has since married us both;
 out and about they work us woe
 90 for womanly wares.

Satire- MS Harley 913

Hail seint Michael wip **pe** lange spear!
 Fair bep **pi** winges vp **pi** scholder,
 Pou hast a rede kirtil anon to **pi** fote,
 Pou ert best angle pat euer god makid.
 Pis uers is ful wel iwro₃t,
 Hit is of wel furre ybro₃t.

Hail seint Cristofre wip **pi** lang stake!
 Pou ber ur louerd Iesus Crist ouer **pe** brod lake,
 Mani grete kunger swimme**p** abute **pi** fete.
 Hou mani hering to peni at West Chep in London? 10
 Pis uers is of holi writte,
 Hit com of noble witte.

Seint Mari bastard, **pe** Maudlein is sone,
 To be wel iclopid wel was **pi** wone!
 Pou berrist a box on **pi** hond ipeintid al of gold,
 Woned pou wer to be hend, ₃iue us sum of **pi** spicis.
 Pis uers is imakid wel
 Of consonans and wowel.

Hail seint Dominik with **pi** lang staffel!
 Hit is at **pe** ouir end crokid as a gaffe;
 Pou berrist a bok on **pi** bak, ich wen hit is a bible:
 Po₃ pou be a gode clerk, be pou no₃t to hei₃.
 Trie rime la, god hit wote;
 Soch an opir an erpe inote.

Hail seint Franceis wip **pi** mani foulis,
 Kites and crowis, reuenes and oules,
 Fure and .XX^u. wildges and a poucok!
 Mani bold begger siwip **pi** route.
 Pis uers is ful wel isette,
 Swipe furre hit was ivette.

Hail be ₃e freris wip **pe** white copis!
₃e habbip a hus at Drochda, war men makip ropis.
 Euir ₃e bep roilend **pe** londis al aboute;
 Of **pe** watir daissers ₃e robbip **pe** churchis.
 Maister he was swipe gode,
 Pat **pi**s sentence vnderstood.

Hail be ₃e gilmins wip ₃ur blake gunes!
₃e leuith **pe** wildirnis and fillip **pe** tunis,
 Menur wip oute and prechur wip inne;
₃ur abite is of gadering, **pat** is mochil schame.
 Sleilich is **pi**s uers iseid,
 Hit wer harme adun ileiid.

Hail Saint Michael with the long spear!
 Your wings are fair upon your shoulder,
 You have a red sash all the way to your foot,
 You are the best angel that God ever made.
 5 This verse is very well written,
 It has been brought from very far away.

Hail Saint Christopher with your long staff! You bore
 our Lord Jesus Christ over the broad lake; many great
 conger eels swim about your feet. How many herring
 to the penny at West Cheap in London?
 This verse is from Holy scripture,
 It comes from a noble wit.

Saint Mary's bastard, the Magdelene's son,
 It was always your custom to be well dressed!
 15 You carry a box in your hand all painted over with
 gold; you were accustomed to be courteous – give us
 some of your spices. This verse is well made
 of consonants and vowels.

Hail Saint Dominic with your long staff!
 20 It is crooked at the upper end like a gaffe;
 You carry a book on your back – I believe it is a bible:
 Although you are a good clerk, you are not too exalted.
 Ah, an excellent rhyme, God knows;
 I know of no other such on earth.

25 Hail Saint Frances with your many birds:
 kites and crows, ravens and owls,
 Twenty-four wild geese and a peacock!
 Many a bold beggar follows your company.
 This verse is put very well;
 30 it was sought for from very far away.

Hail you friars with the white copes!
 You have a house at Drogheda where men make ropes.
 You are forever roving all about the land;
 you rob the churches of the holy water sprinklers.
 35 The master that understood this sentence was very
 good.

Hail you Williamite Hermits with your black robes!
 You leave the wilderness and fill the towns,
 Friar Minor on the outside and preacher within;
 40 your custom is to collect money – that is a great
 shame. This verse has been sagely said.
 It would be harmful to put it down in writing.

Hail 3e holi monkes wip 3ur corrin,
 Late and rape ifillid of ale and wine!
 Depe cun 3e bouse, pat is all 3ure care,
 Wip seint Benet is scourge lome 3e disciplinep.
 Takep hed al to me!
 Pat pis is sleche, 3e mow wel se.

Hail be 3e nonnes of seint Mari house,
 Goddes bourmaidnes and his owen spouse!
 Ofte mistredip 3e 3ur schone, 3ur fete bep ful tendre:
 Dapeit pe sotter pat tawip 3ure lepir!
 Swipe wel 3e vnderstode,
 Pat makid pis ditee so gode.

Hail be 3e prestis wip 3ur brode bokes!
 Po3 3ur crune be ischaue, fair bep 3ur crokes.
 3ow and oper lewidmen delep bot abouue;
 Whan 3e delip holibrede, 3iue me botte a litil.
 Sikerlich he was a clerk,
 Pat wrochete pis craftilich werke.

Hail be 3e marchans wip 3ur gret packes
 Of draperie, auoir-depeise, and 3ur wol sakes,
 Gold, siluer, stones, riche markes and ek pundes!
 Litil 3iue 3e per of to pe wrech pouer.
 Sleis he was and ful of witte,
 Pat pis lore put in writte.

Hail be 3e tailurs wip 3ur scharpe schores!
 To mak wronge hodes, 3e kittip lome gores.
 A3ens midwinter hote bep 3ur neldes;
 Po3 3ur semes semip fair, hi lestip litil while.
 Pe clerk pat pis baston wrow3te,
 Wel he woke and slepe ri3te now3te.

Hail be 3e sutters wip 3our mani lestes,
 Wip 3our blote hides of selcup bestis,
 And trobles and treisuses, bochevampe and alles.
 Blak and loplich bep 3ur tep, hori pat route.
 Nis pis bastun wel ipi3te?
 Euch word him sitte ari3te.

Hail be 3e skidders wip 3ure drenche kiue!
 Who so smillip perto, wo is him aliue,
 Whan pat hit ponnerip, 3e mote per in schite.
 Dapeit 3ur curteisie, 3e stinkep al pe stret,
 Worp hit wer, pat he wer king
 Pat ditid pis trie ping.

Hail be 3e potters wip 3ur bole ax!
 Fair bep 3ur barmhatres, 3olow bep 3ur fax,
 3e stondip at pe schamil, brod ferlich bernes;

Hail you holy monks with your mugs,
 late and early filled with ale and wine!
 45 You can swig deeply – that is the sum of your care;
 with Saint Benedict's scourge you discipline regularly.
 Everyone pay attention to me!
 That this is clever you may well see.

Hail you nuns of Saint Mary's house,
 50 God's handmaidens and his own spouse!
 Often you set your shoes improperly, your feet are very
 tender: misfortune to the shoemaker who tans your
 leather! You understood very well
 the person who made this ditty so good.

55 Hail you priest with your broad books!
 Although your crown is shaved, your curls are
 handsome. You and other laymen distribute alms
 parsimoniously; when you distribute the host, give me
 only a little. Surely he was a clerk
 60 that made this artful work.

Hail you merchants with you great packs
 of fabric, avoir du poids, and your wool sacks,
 gold, silver, gems, rich marks and also pounds!
 You give little of that to the wretched poor.
 65 He was clever and very intelligent
 who put this learning into writing.

Hail you tailors with your sharp shears!
 You cut wedge-shaped gores to make hoods
 incorrectly. In preparation for midwinter your needles
 70 are hot; though your seams seem good, they last only a
 little while. The clerk that wrote this stanza stayed
 awake and didn't sleep at all.

Hail you shoemakers with your many lasts!
 With your soft hides of strange animals
 75 and troubles and plaiting tools, leather-cutting tools and
 awls. Your teeth are black and horrible, dirty was that
 company. Wasn't this stanza well written?
 Each word of it is just right.

Hail you skidders with your poisonous vat!
 80 Woe to anyone alive who smells it;
 when it thunders you could shit in it.
 Misfortune on your courtesy – you stink up the whole
 street. He who wrote this true thing is worthy to be
 made king.

85 Hail to you potters with your wood-splitting axe!
 Your aprons are fine, your hair is yellow;
 You stand at the stall, broad terrible men;

Fleis ₃ow folowithe, _{3e} swolowip ynow.
Pe best clerk of al **p**is tun
 Craftfullich makid **p**is bastun.

You pursue the flesh – you swallow enough of it.
 The best clerk of all this town
 90 skilfully made this stanza.

Hail be _{3e} bakers wip _{3ur} louis smale
 Of white bred and of blake, ful mani and fale!
_{3e} pinchep on **p**e ri₃t white a₃ens g[o]ddes law,
 To **p**e fair pillori, ich rede, _{3e} take hede.
Pis uers is iwrow₃te so welle,
Pat no tung iwis maie telle.

Hail you bakers with your small loaves
 of white and black bread, so very plentiful!
 You drive a hard bargain of the right grain, against
 God's law; I advise you to take heed of the fine pillory.
 95 This verse is written so well
 that I believe no tongue can tell it.

Hail be _{3e} brewesters wip _{3ur} galuns,
 Potels and quartes ouer al **p**e tounes.
_{3ur} powmes berrip moch awai, schame hab **p**e gyle;
 Bep iwar of **p**e coking-stole, **p**e lak is dep and hori. 100
 Sikerlich he was a clerk
Pat so sleilich wro₃te **p**is werk.

Hail you brewers with your gallons,
 half-gallons and quarts over all the towns.
 Your thumbs carry much away – shame on your
 dishonesty! Beware the cucking-stool; the lake is deep
 and horrible. Certainly he was a clerk
 that so craftily wrote this work.

Hail be _{3e} hokesters dun be **p**e lake,
 Wip candles and golokes and **p**e pottes blak,
 Tripis and kine fete and schepen heuedes!
 Wip **p**e hore tromcheri hori is ₃ure inne!
 He is sori of his lif,
Pat is fast to such a wif.

Hail you peddlers down by the lake,
 with candles and bowls and black pots,
 105 tripes and cows' feet and sheep heads!
 With the dirty liver your stall is filthy!
 He who is saddled with such a wife is sorry
 to be alive.

Fi a debles, kaites, **p**at kemip **p**e wolle,
 Al **p**e schindes of **p**e tronn an hei₃ opon ₃ur sculle. 110
_{3e} makid me soch a goshorne ouer al **p**e wowes;
Per for ich makid on of ₃ou sit opon a hechil.
 He was noble clerk and gode,
Pat **p**is dep lore vnderstode.

Fie on devils, wretches that comb the wool,
 All the shames of the pillory of public weigh scales be
 on your head. You make me such an appalling noise
 over the howl; therefore I made one of you sit on a
 flax comb. He was a noble and good clerk
 that understood this deep lesson.

Makip glad, mi frendis, _{3e} sittip to long stille,
 Spekip now and gladiep and drinkep al ₃ur fille!
_{3e} habbep ihird of men lif **p**at wonip in lond;
 Drinkip dep and makip glade, ne hab _{3e} non oper nede.
Pis song is yseid of me,
 Euer iblessid mot _{3e} be.

115 Make merry, my friends – you sit still too long;
 speak now and make merry and drink all your fill!
 You have heard of men's lives who live in the land;
 Drink deep and make merry – you have no other need.
 This song has been recited by me.
 120 May you be blessed forever.

Explicit.

The End.

bot to si₃t & to waiissing.
per is mani maner frute;
 al is solas & dedute.

50

except to look at and to wash with.
 There are all kinds of fruit.
 All is comfort and delight.

Per is a wel fair abbei,
 of white monkes & of grei.
per bep bowris & halles;
 al of pasteis **bep pe** walles,
 of fleis, of fisse, & rich met,
pe likfullist **pat** man mai et.
 fluren cakes **bep pe** schingles alle,
 of cherche, cloister, boure, & halle;
pe pinnes **bep** fat podinges –
 rich met to prince₃ & kinges.
 man mai **per**-of et ino₃,
 al **wip** ri₃t & no₃t **wip** wo₃.
 al is commune to ₃ung & old,
 to stoute & sterne, mek & bold.

55

There is a very fair abbey
 of white monks and of grey.
 There are bowers and halls;
 the walls are all of pasties
 of meat, of fish and rich food -
 the most pleasing that a man may eat.
 The shingles are all of wheaten cakes,
 on the church, the cloister, bower and hall;
 the nails are fat sausages -
 rich food fit for princes and kings.
 There a man may eat his fill,
 all in the right and not with woe.
 All is common to young and old,
 to the arrogant and the strong, meek and bold.

Per is a cloister, fair & list,
 brod & lang, of sembli si₃t;
pe pilers of **pat** cloister alle
bep iturned of cristale,
wip har bas & capitale
 Of grene Iaspe & rede corale.
 In **pe** praer is a tre,
 swi**pe** likful forto se:
pe rote is gingeuir & galingale,
pe siouns **bep** al sedwale,
 trie maces **bep pe** flure,
pe rind canel of swet odor,
pe frute gilofre of gode smakke.
 of cucubes **pe** nis no lakke.
per **bep** rosis of rede ble,
 & lillie likful forto se –
pai falow**ep** neuer dai no ni₃t;
pis a₃t be a swet si₃t.

65

There is a cloister, fair and light,
 broad and long, a seemly sight;
 all of the pillars of that cloister
 are of turned crystal,
 with their bases and capitals
 of green jasper and red coral.
 In the meadow is a tree,
 very pleasant to look upon:
 the root is ginger and sweet cypress,
 the shoots are all of valerian,
 the flowers are choice nutmegs,
 the bark sweet-scented cinnamon,
 the fruit cloves of good savour.
 There is no lack of cucumbers.
 There are roses of red hue,
 and lilies, beautiful to see -
 they never fade, day or night;
 this must be a sweet sight.

70

75

80

Per **bep** iiij willis in **pe** abbei,
 of triacle & halwei,
 of baum & ek piement,
 euer ernend to ri₃t rent;
 of **pam** stremis al **pe** molde,
 stonis preciuse, & golde.
per is saphir & vniune,
 carbuncle & astiune,
 Smaragde, lugre, & prassiune,
 beril, onix, topasiune,
 ametist & crisolite,
 calcedun & epetite.

85

90

There are four wells in the abbey,
 of medicine and healing waters,
 of balm and honeyed drink,
 forever running to right profit;
 the beds of those streams
 are of precious stones and gold.
 There is sapphire and pearl,
 carbuncle and star sapphire,
 emerald, ligure, and peridot,
 beryl, onyx, topaz,
 amethyst and chrysolite,
 chalcedony and ruby.

<p>Per bep briddes mani & fale¹⁴ – prostit, pruisse & ni₃tingale, Chalendre & wodwale, & oper briddes wip-out tale, pat stintep neuer bi har mi₃t. miri to sing dai & ni₃t. ₃ite I do ₃ow mo to witte: pe Gees irosted on pe spitte flee₃ to pat abbai, god hit wot, & gredip, “gees, al hot! al hot!” hi bringep garlek gret plente, pe best idi₃t pat man mai se. pe leuerokes, pat bepe cup, li₃tip adun to man-is mup, idi₃t in stu, ful swipe wel pudrid wip gilofre and canel. nis no spech of no drink; ak take ino₃ wip-vte swink.</p>	<p>95</p> <p>100</p> <p>105</p> <p>110</p>	<p>There are a great many birds - blackbird, thrush and nightingale, lark and oriole, and other birds without end, that never cease through their energy. They sing merrily day and night. I will tell you yet more to know: the geese, roasted on the spit fly to the abbey, God knows it, and cry out “Geese, all hot! all hot!” They bring with them plenty of garlic, the best prepared [birds] that man may see. The larks, which are renowned, land right in a man’s mouth, prepared in a stew pan extremely well, seasoned with cloves and cinnamon. There is no talk of prohibition of drinking; but take enough without work.</p>
<p>Whan pe monkes geep to masse, al pe fenestres pat bep of glasse turnep in-to cristal bri₃t, to ₃iue pe monkes more li₃t. whan pe masses bep iseiid, & pe bokes up ileiid, pe cristal turnip in-to glasse, in state pat hit raper wasse.</p>	<p>115</p> <p>120</p>	<p>When the monks go to mass, all the windows that are of glass turn into bright crystal to give the monks more light. When the masses have been said, when the books have been put away, the crystal turns into glass, into the state it was before.</p>
<p>Pe ₃ung monkes each dai aftir met gop to plai; nis per hauk no fule so swifte bettir fleing bi pe lifte, pan pe monkes hei₃ of mode wip har sleuis & har hode.</p>	<p>125</p>	<p>Each day the young monks go out to play after their meal; there is no hawk or bird so swift, flying faster in the sky, than the monks in high spirits,¹⁵ with their sleeves and their hoods.</p>
<p>Whan pe abbot seep ham flee pat he holt for moch glee; ak napeless al per amang he biddip ham li₃t to euensang. pe monkes li₃tip no₃t adun, ac furre fleep in o randun.</p>	<p>130</p>	<p>When the abbot sees them fly that he counts it great sport; but nevertheless, he calls the entire company home to come down for evensong. The monks do not light down but fly further away in hurried succession.</p>
<p>Whan pe abbot him iseeep pat is monkes fram him fleep, he takep a maidin of pe route and turnip vp har white toute,</p>	<p>135</p>	<p>When the abbot sees for himself that his monks are flying away from him, he takes a maiden from the company and turns her white bottom up</p>

14 The “& fale” here acts as an intensifier, also meaning “many”.

15 The play on words here is multi-layered. The phrase “hei₃ of mode” can literally mean “intellectually elevated”, but also “in a good mood”, with a pun on “high”, since the monks are flying.

& betip **pe** tabur wip is hond
to make is monkes li₃t to lond!

Whan is monkes **pat** iseeþ,
to **pe** maid dun hi fleep,
& **geþ** **pe** wench al abute
& **pakkeþ** al hir white toute.
& **sip** afir her swinke
Wendip meklich hom to drinke,
& **geþ** to har collacione
a wel fair processione.

Anoper abbei is **per** bi,
for-sop a gret fair nunnerie,
vp a riuier of swet milke,
whar is plente gret of silk.
whan **pe** someris dai is hote,
pe ₃ung nunnes takip a bote
And **dop** ham forþ in **pat** riuier,
bope wip oris & wip stere.
whan hi **bep** fur fram **pe** abbei,
hi makip ham nakid forto plei,
& **lepip** dune in to **pe** brimme
& **dop** ham sleilich forto swimme.
pe ₃ung monke₃ **pat** ham seeþ,
hi **dop** ham vp & forþ hi fleep,
& **commip** to **pe** nunnes anon.
& each monke him takeþ on,
& snellich berrif forþ har prei
to **pe** mochil grei abbei,
& **techip** **pe** nunnes an oreisun
wip iambleue vp & dun.

Pe monke **pat** wol be stalun gode
& kan set ari₃t is hode,
he schal hab, wip-oute danger,
xii wiues euche ₃ere,
al **pro**₃ ri₃t & no₃t **pro**₃ grace,
for to do him-silf solace.
& **pilk** monke **pat** slepip best,
& **dop** is likam al to rest,
of him is hoppe, god hit wote,
to be sone uadir abbot.

Whose wl com **pat** lond to,
ful grete penance he mot do:
Seue ₃ere in swine-is dritte
he mote wade, wol ₃e iwitte,
al anon vp to **pe** chynne,
so he schal **pe** lond winne.

Lordinges gode & hend,
mot ₃e neuer of world wend,

and beats the drum with his hand
to make the monks come down to land.

140 When his monks see that
they fly down to the maid,
and go all around the wench .
and they all spank her white bottom.
And then after their toil
145 they meekly make their way home to drink,
and go to their evening meal -
a very fine procession.

150 There is another abbey nearby,
truly, a very nice nunnery,
beside a river of sweet milk,
where there is plenty of wonderful silk.
When the summer's day is hot,
the young nuns take a boat
and row out in that river,
both with oars and with rudder.
155 When they are far from the abbey,
they take all their clothes off in order to play,
and leap down into the water
and stealthily go for a swim.
The young monks that see them,
160 they get up and away they fly,
and come straight to the nuns.
And each monk takes one for himself
and quickly carries off his prey
to the great grey abbey,
165 and teaches the nuns a prayer
with legs lifted up and down.

170 The monk that would be the best stallion
and can set his hood to rights,
he shall have, without opposition,
twelve wives every year,
and by right, and not by grace,
to give himself pleasure.
And that same monk who sleeps the best,
and gives his body entirely over to rest,
175 he may hope, God knows,
soon to be Father Abbot.

180 Whoever would come to that land,
he must do great penance:
Seven years in pig shit
he must wade, you should know,
right up to his chin
so that he shall reach the land.

Good and gracious lords,
may you never depart from this world,

fort 3e stond to 3ure cheance
& fulfille pat penance,
pat 3e mote pat lond I-se;
& neuer-more turn a-3e.
prey we god so mote hit be,
Amen, pur seint charite.
finit.

185 until you risk your luck,
and perform that penance,
so that you might see that land;
and nevermore return again.
We pray to God that it might be so.
190 Amen, for holy charity.
The End.

- 8 *peruink* he mi₃t be
and pat for pinges *pre*
he vssid oft *and* lome
pat was one of *pe* best
he ne leet no *pef* hab rest
in no stid *per* he come 45
- 9 an *oper* ping al so
to yrismen he was fo
pat well wide whare
euer he rode aboute
wip streinp to hunt *ham* vte
as hunter dop *pe* hare, 50
- 10 for whan hi wend best
in wildernis hab rest 55
pat no man ssold *ham* see
pan he wold driue aquest
anon to har nest
In stid *per* hi wold be. 60
- 11 of slep he wold *ham* wake
for ferdnis hi wold *quake*
and fond to skulk awai.
for (*pe*) hire of har bedde
he toke har heuid to wedde. 65
and so he ta₃t *ham* plai.
- 12 pos yrismen of *pe* lond
hi swor *and* tok an hond
pe englis men to *trai*
and seid hi wold quelle 70
as fale as i°₃ou telle
Al apon o dai.
- 13 *pe* erl of vluester
Sire emond *pe* botiler
Sire Ion le fi₃ tomas 75
algate al bi name
Sire pers *pe* *brimghame*
pis was har *compas*
- 14 *pis* *compasment* com vte
fram kni₃t to kni₃t abute 80
hit nas no₃t lang ihidde
pos kni₃tis *preid* al
pat meschans most *ham* fal
₃if scap(e) hi ssold *per* midde
- 15 *and* swor bi god is name 85
to ₃ild *pe* *cuntre-pane*
whan hi mi₃t com to.
and pat *wip*-vte lette
- Paragon he might be
and that because of three things
he employed often and the tool
that was one of the best:
he let no thief have rest
in any place where he was.
- Also, another thing:
he was a foe to Irishmen
that were far and wide;
he always rode about
with strength to hunt them out
as a hunter does the hare.
- For when they had to go
into the wilderness to take rest
so that no man should see them,
then he would drive them shouting
at once to their nest,
in the place where they would be.
- He would wake them from sleep;
they would quake for fear
and attempt to skulk away.
For the payment of their beds
he took their heads as surety
and this way he taught them to play games.
- Those Irishmen of the land,
they swore and took an oath
to lay a trap for the English men
and said they would kill
as many as I tell you
all in one day.
- The Earl of Ulster
Sir Edmund Butler,
Sir John fitz Thomas,
and greatest of all in reputation,
Sir Peter de Bermingham -
this was their plan.
- This plan was uncovered;
passed about from knight to knight,
it was not a secret long.
Those [English] knights all swore
that misfortune must befall them
if they [the Irish] should escape from their midst
- and swore by God's name
to yield the surety
when they might come
and without delay

- to certein dai isette
pis ping ssold be do. 90 to set a certain day
that this thing should be accomplished.
- 16 Lang er pis dai was com
hit was for-₃it wip som
pat neisse bep to nede
alas what ssold hi i-bor
pro₃ ham pis lond is ilor
to spille ale and bred. 95 Long before this day came
it was forgotten by some
that were faint-hearted in times of need.
Alas, what should they have born?
Because of them this land is lost
to put an end to ale and bread.
- 17 Sire pers pe bringham
on ernist and agam
pis dai was in is po₃t .
he po₃t orderes to make
what time he mi₃t ham take
of trauail nas him no₃t. 100 Sir Peter de Bermingham
was half in earnest, half in jest
in his thoughts this day.
He was thinking up plans
for a time when he might apprehend them;
it didn't seem like work to him.
- 18 O konwir pat was king
his keperin he gan bring
pe maister heet gilboie .
ri₃t at pe trinite
whan hodes sold best be
to pers in totomoye. 105 O'Connor who was king
began to gather his retinue
(the master was named Gilla Buidhe)
right on the Feast of the Holy Trinity
when hoods should be their best
[to go] to Peter in Tethmoy.
- 19 and ₃ite of oper stooore
com epe m'malmore
and oper fale bi name.
sire pers lokid vte
he seei such arute
him po₃t hit nas no game. 110 And also from other people
came Aedh MacMaelmordha
and many others of reputation.
Sir Peter looked out,
he saw such a number,
it didn't seem a game to him [now].
- 20 Sire pers sei ham com
(he) receiuid al and som
no₃t on iwernd nas .
sip hoodis he let make
no₃t on nas for-sake
bot al he did ham grace. 115 Sir Peter saw them come.
He received every one of them;
not one was warned.
Afterwards he had hoods made;
not one was forgotten,
but to all he gave grace, 120
- 21 Saue o wreche pat per was
he cupe no₃t red in place
no sing whar he com .
he was of caym is kinne
and he refusid him
he wend vnhodid hom. 125 except one wretch that was there;
he was not able to read his part
nor chant where he was to come in.
He was of Cain's race
and he refused him.
He turned home unhooded.
- 22 he pat pis sang let mak
for sir pers is sake
wel wid hap igo
wid whar i-so₃t
and god pardon (i)-bro₃t
two hundrid daies and mo. 130 He who caused this song to be written
for Sir Peter's sake
has gone far and wide,
has sought far and wide,
and has brought an indulgence good for
two hundred days and more.

Explicit

The End

fig. 3 - Schoolmaster



fig. 2 - knight



fig. 1 - Lunatic Lollar





fig.4- Conscience



fig.6 - Wastor



fig.5- Hunger



fig. 7 - Proud Priest



fig. 8 - Pride



fig. 9 - Lechery



fig 10 - Gluttony



fig. 11 - Digger



fig. 12 - Activa Vita



fig. 13 - Lyf/Trickery



fig 14 - St. Michael slaying the dragon



fig 15 - Evangelist portrait (St. Matthew):
an example of saints' dress

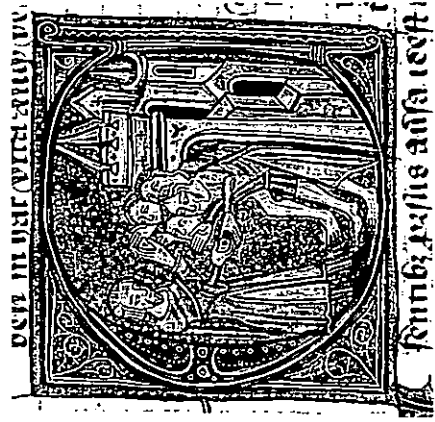


fig. 16 - Beggars receiving bread



fig. 17 - Ape schoolmaster and students



fig. 18 - Templar kissing the bare behind
of a cleric



fig. 19 - Adam delving

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