This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled
"Thou shalt laughen al thy fille": The Comic Body In
Medieval English and Scottish Literature and Culture

presented by

Michael W. George

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

___Ph. D.___ degree in _English_

_____
Major professor

Date _December 8, 2000_

O-12771

```
LIBRARY
Michigan State
University
```

PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.
TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.
MAY BE RECALLED with earlier due date if requested.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE

"THOU SHALT LAUGHEN AL THY FILLE": THE COMIC BODY IN MEDIEVAL
ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

By

Michael W. George

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

August 17, 2000

ABSTRACT

"THOU SHALT LAUGHEN AL THY FILLE": THE COMIC BODY IN MEDIEVAL
ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

By

Michael W. George

This dissertation examines how writers use the comic body—the human body and its functions presented humorously—in Middle English and Middle Scots literature. Medieval writers tend to use the comic body for three interrelated purposes: entertainment, moral instruction, and social criticism. These purposes tend not to exist in isolation. Whenever the comic body appears there is an element of entertainment present, but that entertainment often mingles, to a greater or lesser extent, with more serious purposes. Some works that employ the comic body, like *The Land of Cokaygne*, focus primarily on entertainment. Others, like William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, are predominantly didactic. Medieval drama presents a relatively equal balance of entertainment and instruction. Many of Dunbar's court poems use the comic body predominantly for social criticism.

I approach literary uses of the comic body by way of practice theory as described by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau. Practice is a repeated, semi-conscious way of operating. It is active, not frozen in time but always in the act of becoming. I view literature as one of many social practices. In this it influences and is influenced by social practice. Additionally, literature contains within it representations of practice with which the writer has had contact. By analyzing literature within a social practice context, the scholar can provide a more accurate picture of both the literature and its place in society.

I draw three main conclusions from the uses of the comic body that I describe. First, writers rarely use the comic body for entertainment alone, opting instead to use the comic body both to entertain and to comment on social practices that the writer experienced. Second, the comic body is rarely a subversive social element. Instead, it often upholds orthodoxy. Finally, the comic body tends to exist within a play world, a world-set-apart with its own rules and norms.

For my parents:
My father, who taught me the value of an education,
And my mother, whose strength has always been an inspiration

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1
Introduction

In Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*, two comic climaxes appear in rapid succession. After Friar John seemingly convinces Thomas to contribute to the friar's convent, he secures Thomas's gift, "a thyng that I have hyd in pryvetee" (III.2143). John must grope beneath Thomas's "buttok" to find the treasure he anticipates. As he does, Thomas presents his gift:

> And whan this sike man felte this frere
>
> Aboute his tuwel grope there and heere,
>
> Amydde his hand he leet the frere a fart;
>
> Ther nys no capul, drawynge in a cart,
>
> That myghte have lete a fart of swich a soun. (III.2147-2151)

In this hyperbolic comparison of Thomas to a large horse, Chaucer depicts Friar John's receipt of a gift well-suited to his greed. The second comic climax revolves around this fart, "The wordes of the lordes squier and his kervere for departynge of the fart on twelve" (III.2242a). The lord ponders how a fart can be divided among twelve, as Thomas had Friar John swear to do. Jankyn, a squire, proposes that the twelve friars kneel at the spokes of a wagon wheel. Friar John is then to "holde his nose upright under the nave" (III.2266). Jankyn then proposes his solution:

> Thanne shal this cherl, with bely stif and toght
>
> As any tabour, hyder been ybroght;
>
> And sette hym on the wheel right of this cart,
>
> Upon the nave, and make hym lete a fart. (III.2267-70)

This method will distribute both the sound and smell of a fart equally among the friars. So not only does the audience of this tale laugh at the initial climax, the actual fart, but it also laughs at the explanation of how Friar John's promise can be fulfilled.

The second comic climax in this tale—the court's reaction to Friar John's complaint—might seem slightly odd, for it juxtaposes what we would consider base humor—scatology—with a more or less high rhetorical form, the logical exercise called *impossibilia* (*Riverside* 879, n. 2231). What are we to make of the conversion of typically offensive actions into a parody of a scholastic exercise, the result of which is obviously humorous? This conversion of what twentieth-century readers might consider puerile material into humor is central to this dissertation. More specifically, the comic materials typically considered the basest—drinking jokes, slapstick, sexual jokes, and scatology— are used widely in a variety of genres of medieval writing, and this dissertation will examine some of the uses to which this material was put.

This project began as an exploration of recreation in medieval and early Renaissance literature. In my investigation of play and recreation, I discovered that writers frequently use the human body, its functions, its frailty, and its fallible nature to fuel comedy in recreative literature. For many students and scholars of medieval literature, Chaucer provides an initial glimpse at this type of humor, mixing drinking, slapstick, sexual, and scatological humor in the tales of the Miller, Reeve, Cook, Friar, Summoner, and Merchant. Even some of the relatively "moral" tales—like those of the Pardoner and Nun's Priest—have bodily humor in them. Scholars have studied such humor in Chaucer. However, scholars have been less energized to study this type of humor in other medieval English and Scottish literature. The main question is, then, is there a tradition of bodily humor? If so, what is this tradition and how is it used? These are underlying questions that drive this dissertation.

I take as axiomatic that a tradition of bodily humor existed well before the Middle Ages and well beyond it. Examples are too many to list; we see representations of the

functioning human body portrayed for humorous purposes in ancient plays like Aristophanes's comedies, in many of the poems of Catullus, in the variety of social practices that I highlight in this dissertation, in Shakespeare's and Jonson's work, in Swift, in Twain, and in popular culture today. Because so many examples exist throughout cultural history, a fruitful analysis of individual contributions and alterations to this tradition would be nearly impossible. As a result, I do not intend to analyze the construction or the historical development of bodily humor. Instead, I will look at how particular writers use such humor, and specifically how they use what I call the comic body—the body and its functions presented humorously.

In this dissertation, I explore representative uses of the comic body in medieval literature with special attention to the social environment of those literary uses. I will demonstrate that while the comic body always adds humor to a text, it also regularly deploys that humor for other, social, purposes, and does so in ways that reflect social practice. I base my approach on practice theory as developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau. Literature is one of many social practices, which taken together can better illuminate the culture within which writers work. Writers do not write in a social vacuum; they represent and comment on what they experience, and humorists are often more social than other writers because, as Mary Douglas has shown, humor requires a social context in order to succeed.[1]

I will show that writers tend to use the comic body for three interrelated purposes: entertainment, moral instruction, and social criticism. Writers use the comic body consistently for entertainment, for whenever we find the comic body we find entertainment. However, we often find entertainment mixed with other, more serious purposes. I will concentrate on moral instruction and social criticism, though other serious purposes may exist as well. The interweaving of entertainment with serious

---

[1] See Douglas's article "Jokes" for her ideas on the social aspect of joking.

3

purposes is evident in nearly all of the practices that I address in this dissertation, and often we find entertainment acting as an integral part of moral instruction and social criticism. Writers will frequently use entertainment to further their more serious purposes.

I. Practice and Literature

I begin with practice, a theoretical concept that lies behind my approach to all literature. Practice is a way of operating. It is dynamic; seeing the world from the point of view of practice is seeing a world in motion rather than as a series of isolated, static artifacts. Practice theory as applied to literature, art, history, and cultural studies takes into consideration textual evidence—the artifacts that exist frozen in time and space, but it also includes non-literary phenomena into which a text fits—political events, civic celebrations, social attitudes and behaviors. Humor is not solely a literary phenomenon. Much extant evidence of medieval life is, of course, written. However, texts often document non-literary phenomena and practices. Although this dissertation is a study of literature, it is also very much about non-literary phenomena and medieval society in general, focusing on literature as one of many social practices. The primary method by which I read literature is practice theory, as informed by social scientists like Bourdieu and de Certeau and used by such literary critics as Paul Strohm.[2] I will digress here a bit to explain my use of practice as an approach to literature.

---

[2] The approach of new historicists can also be viewed as practice-oriented. Stephen Greenblatt's "Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion," for instance, looks at the relationship between monuments and rebellions and their aftermath. The monument is a static artifact, but the rebellions and reactions to rebellions are practices that enabled the construction of the monument. For H. Aram Veeser the first key assumption of new historicist inquiry is that "every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices" (xi). Although new historicism tends to be more text-based than the social scientist practitioners that I cite here, new historicism always acknowledges the importance of practice in the formation of culture.

As I use the concept, practice is a partially unconscious, repeated (habitual) reaction to stimuli that we encounter in our everyday activities. It is a way of behaving and operating. It includes not just the primary behavior but also the minute decisions, associated actions, and the surrounding environment, all of which contribute to the behavior. Practice also operates on a larger level; social institutions contain within them practices that help the institution to function and that have become associated with that institution. Methods of scoring in the many sporting events popular the world over (touchdowns, goals, crossing the plate, etc.) can be called practices in that they are essential for the game to be played, are semi-conscious goals (the touchdown is always a goal for a team in American football, but on individual plays that goal is sublimated by the need to perform more focused tasks—running, catching, blocking), and are repeated. Practice is also behavior in action. It is the act of doing rather than the image of what has been done. To illustrate what I mean by practice, I will briefly summarize examples from Bourdieu and de Certeau, and then show how practice can be useful for literary studies.

Both Bourdieu and de Certeau see practice as motion rather than as frozen image. In other words practice is what actually happens in a sporting event, whereas the *Sports Illustrated* photographer's images are one-dimensional images of the event. In a heavyweight title fight, for instance, the photographer captures, frozen in time, images with little relationship to the overall event or what has happened during that event. A photograph of a knockout punch, for instance, captures the precise moment when leather meets face, freezes the event by showing glove padding compressed by the loser's chin, sweat and saliva flying from the head, and grimaces on both fighters' faces. It does not, however, capture how both fighters reached this position, or even everything about that moment: the position of the referee, the fighters' foot position, injuries that may have contributed to the end of the fight, commentators' remarks, or the roar of the crowd, all of which are essential to capture the fullness of the moment. The photograph captures only a single, incomplete, frozen and unmoving moment of the bout from a single point of view.

In their work on practice, both Bourdieu and de Certeau react to this phenomenon of freezing life. Bourdieu uses the study of Saussurian linguistics to illustrate the importance of practice. Saussurian linguistics "constitutes linguistics as a science by constructing language as an autonomous object, distinct from its actualizations in speech" (23). This model of linguistics separates linguistics from spoken communication, which is linguistics in practice. This separation makes linguistics an object of study in itself and not part of human interaction. In Bourdieu's theory of practice, linguistics and communication are always already linked; the former should not and cannot be studied without the latter.

Michel de Certeau approaches practice similarly. A good example of de Certeau's work is "Walking in the City," the seventh chapter of *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Here de Certeau looks at pedestrian practices in New York City. He says, "it is true that the operations of walking on can be traced on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths (here well-trodden, there very faint) and their trajectories (going this way and not that)" (97). What we get with such a map would be a series of lines, heavier ones indicating well-used paths, lighter ones showing roads not or less taken. De Certeau's analysis of such a map merits quotation in full:

> But these thick and thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by. Surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by. The operation of walking, wandering, or 'window shopping,' that is, the activity of passers-by, is transformed into points that draw a totalizing and reversible line on the map. They allow us to grasp only a relic set in the nowhen of a surface of projection. Itself visible, it has the effect of making invisible the operation that made it possible. These fixations constitute procedures for forgetting. The trace left behind is substituted for the practice. It exhibits the (voracious) property that the

6

geographical system has of being able to transform action into legibility,

but in doing so it causes a way of being in the world to be forgotten. (97)

The map of trajectories ignores these aspects of walking, the practice of walking in the city. Both cases—linguistics and maps—offer only a frozen instance of a single moment in the complex interaction of bodies and their surroundings. Both Bourdieu and de Certeau stress the need to step back from these static images and to look at our subjects as practices—interactions of diverse stimuli continually in motion.

Practice in Cultural and Literary Studies

Practice theory can be used in a multitude of ways for literary analysis, most of which fall into two broad categories. First, the production of literature is itself a social practice that combines author, his or her surrounding circumstances (what literary critics might call "background"), audience, and circumstances surrounding the audience in order to form meaning. Looking at literature in this way is similar to a historicist (new and perhaps old) approach in that non-literary practices become nearly as important as literary ones. Second, the formal tools of the writer's craft are themselves practices, such as the Shakespearian sonnet form or the alliterative long line, topoi like the *locus amoenus* or conventions of courtly love and estates satire. A link between these writerly practices and social practices (including the production of literature itself) is the literary representation of those social practices such as the confession scene in *Piers Plowman* or the tournament in *The Knight's Tale*. As de Certeau notes, "the narrativizing of practices is a textual 'way of operating' having its own procedures and tactics" (de Certeau 78).[3] In this dissertation I

---

[3] It might be tempting to apply de Certeau's ideas about strategies and tactics to literary works, especially in light of Bakhtin's ideas about dual ideologies, pulling out representations of strategies and tactics and analyzing how they interact. But we must always remember the subtlety of de Certeau's concepts; rarely are dominance and subversion clear-cut. To use the traditional view of serious as the status quo and comic as the invader, we *could* say that serious material exists on the level of strategy. A set space exists into which strategies of the serious, in medieval literature often didactic, can exist. In this sense, the rhetoric that the writer uses would be accurately called rhetorical strategy. The comic—as the representation of the oppressed—asserts itself as tactics

focus primarily on representations of social practice and their relationship to the practices upon which the writer has based his depiction.

In keeping with this focus, I grant non-literary and literary practices nearly equal time in my chapters. In order to consider *The Land of Cokaygne* as a parodic wish-fulfillment practice, as I do in Chapter 2, a discussion of other parodic wish-fulfillment practices is helpful. My methodology foregrounds non-literary social practices to place literature within a practice context, and to relate the practices that appear in literature to their social counterparts.

A major part of this social practice context is institutional practice. I define institutional practice as behaviors and activities promoted and required by social institutions. Practice theory can be a valuable tool for analyzing social institutions. Although practice refers to the habitual, social reactions of individual humans to stimuli, in a social environment homogeneous reactions to the same stimuli can help to produce social institutions. To use one example that I explore more deeply in Chapters 2 and 3, the regular cycle of harvest plenty and shortage prompted practices that eventually became a feast/fast cycle, with feasts often corresponding to fat times and fasts corresponding to lean times. The institutionalization of practices lies behind much of

---

subtly attacking the dominant position. This is one characteristic of comedy, for comedy does not exist outside of a serious context. The comic depends in large part on surprise, on the violation of expectation, on the reversal of a situation. The comic exists as a counterpart to the serious, as unexpected results that are not harmful, though they might be.

However, though following de Certeau's theory can be helpful in looking at literature and culture, as with all of the theorists I draw upon—Bakhtin especially—there are dangers. Because most of my theoretical models are Marxist, each tends to focus on capitalist struggles between privileged and silent positions (ideologies in Bakhtin). De Certeau explains the difference between strategies and tactics as a power relationship: "strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces" (30). What we have, then, is the subversive tactic undercutting the oppressive strategy. This is the nature of Marxist theory, and though I frequently draw on Marxist critics, my concern here is not so much with the conquest and silence of the oppressed other as it is with the existence of a particular type of comic representation—bodily humor—in its many political and social uses.

what I discuss in the chapters that follow. Institutions sanctioned certain humorous

practices in the Middle Ages, and often institutional practices become the fuel for this

humor.[4]

Because the focus of this dissertation is literary practice, I attempt to analyze

literature in its social context by highlighting practices (many of which were

institutionalized) important for understanding the comic body. These include the role of

food in society (Chapters 2 and 3), performance (Chapter 4), and court culture (in

Chapter 5). Without social context, humorous practices cease to be humorous and

therefore cannot be used for any purpose, even entertainment. Although much of my

evidence is indeed textual, even literary, I am always mindful that literature is a form of

practice, that literature represents and creates practices, and that literary trends are parts

of larger cultural trends.

With the exception, perhaps, of the *fabliaux* and other purely comic forms, the

comic practices that I address in this dissertation have a strong political or social element

to them. This should not be surprising. As Mary Douglas has convincingly argued, all

jokes contain a social element, and all of the practices that I address in this dissertation

can be called in the broadest sense jokes, extended though they may be.[5] According to

Douglas, a joke cannot succeed outside of its social environment. When we hear, for

instance, "Did you hear the one about..." or "A man walks into a bar...," we react with

specific, socially programmed expectations; we prepare ourselves for a particular type of

joke based upon the identification of the joke formula. Such formulae can be called

---

[4]For example, see my discussion of Dunbar's humorous criticism of courtly love
in Chapter 5.

[5]See Douglas's article "Jokes." Douglas argues, "the joke form rarely lies in the
utterance alone, but that it can be identified in the total social situation" (93). By this, she
means that the audience of the joke must socially be in on the joke. Jokes play on social
structures, and the manipulation of these social structures makes jokes successful. If an
audience is unfamiliar with these social structures, or if it does not accept those
structures, the joke ceases to be a joke and becomes either nonsensical or offensive.

practices; they are social, semi-conscious (the recognition of the formula is not entirely conscious), and repeated each time that sort of joke is told.

As I have already indicated, I use the term practice to refer to any semi-conscious, structured, repetitive or habitual behavior or activity of human beings. It is social in that many of our reactions are, in some way, just like reactions to a joke formula, programmed by and related to society. Literary practice for me is a broad umbrella concept that includes the act of writing literature (literary practice), the way literature is written (the strict rules that govern Middle English alliterative poetry, for instance), the techniques and devices used within literature (the comic body, for example), the activities that surround the ways literature is performed (social, cultural, political, economic events, activities, institutions), and reactions to literature. Writers represent and create practices, react to practice, and contribute to literary and social practice. But I also use the term *practice* to indicate the social institutions of feast, fast, dramatic performance, and court culture because these institutions are actually collections of communal behaviors that have developed into institutional practices.

II. Humor in the Middle Ages

Humor is one form of literary practice, and just like modern people, medieval people liked to laugh. Innumerable comic stories have come down to us from the Middle Ages, and we can reasonably assume that innumerable others have been lost or were never written down. Humor can be categorized as a form of recreation: "whatever their theological or prophylactic justifications, writers and others employed humor because it is an irreducible pleasure, an amoral operation which is intrinsically gratifying" (Bayless 212). Although often neglected as a topic for serious scholarly inquiry, humor as a topic (often as recreation) appears in studies of different issues, and a handful of scholars have

10

addressed entertainment and included humor in their studies.[6] The *fabliaux* are perhaps the best-known medieval humorous stories. We also find humor in parodic texts and other comic tales, of course.[7] However, humor cannot be confined to specific genres or texts that we can label "comic." It exists across genres, in serious as well as comic works.

Martha Bayless's *Parody in the Middle Ages* is an excellent overview of Latin parody, and many of her points are equally applicable to humor in general. In her final chapter, "Religion and Humor in the Middle Ages," she shows "that medieval humor embodies a wide range of attitudes and that to limit the relation of religious humor and the Church to a single configuration is to oversimplify the rich and complex culture of the Middle Ages" (177). In this final chapter, Bayless explores the relationship between humor and religion. Several of Bayless's conclusions are essential for my work on the comic body.

I rely on some of Bayless's ideas for the organizational foundation of my study, for her ideas on religious humor—that is, humor that takes as its subject religious issues and themes—and parody are applicable to the practices that I discuss. Bayless's final chapter is a broad summary of the relationship between religion and humor in the Middle Ages. She asserts,

> religious parody was close to the heart of the Church: the evidence of
>
> authorship, the fact that there is such a large body of the genre in Latin,
>
> and the familiarity with Scripture, theology, and the Church required to
>
> appreciate the jokes suggest that these texts were written by and for

---

[6]See, for instance, Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*; Ernst R. Curtius, "Jest and Earnest in Medieval Literature" in *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages*; V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, especially Chapters 1 ("The Drama as Play and Game") and 7 ("The Invention of Comic Action"); Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (especially Chapter 1); and Laura Kendrick, *Chaucerian Play*.

[7]See Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages*, and Derek Brewer, *Medieval Comic Tales*.

members of the clergy and were not intended primarily, if at all, for lay

consumption. (177)

The texts and practices that I discuss here are similar to the Latin texts forming Bayless's

evidence, the main difference being language; I concentrate on the vernacular. Nearly all

of the texts that are foci for my chapters (*The Land of Cokaygne*, *Piers Plowman*,

medieval drama, and Dunbar's poems) exhibit the characteristics that Bayless ascribes to

religious parody—religious authorship, familiarity with Scripture, theology, the Church,

and even the presence of Latin. The features that Bayless highlights for *religious* humor

are equally applicable to most of the texts that I discuss here.

In her final section—"The Uses of Religious Humor in Literature"—Bayless

highlights three religious uses for humor: humor can further a moral message, be on

equal ground with the moral message, and exist for its own sake. Reviewing these will be

helpful, for these are nearly identical to the uses that I focus on in this dissertation.

Bayless's first use of religious humor serves to "sweeten the pill of doctrine" (208),

making moral instruction more palatable. Humor is "subservient to (rather than inimical

to) overriding didactic concerns" (211). Humor plays a role in delivering a message, but

it never overshadows that message. The humor works with the didactic concerns to

reinforce moral instruction. The second use that Bayless highlights includes both humor

and a moral message: "humor and piety are equal partners, each furnishing the text with

important qualities" (211-12). The humor can contribute to the text's didactic element but

is in no way subservient to didacticism; here humor has its own place in the text. Both

entertainment and instruction have roughly equal status in the text, providing a balance of

sentence and *solaas*. Bayless's last use of religious humor focuses on entertainment: "in

many texts humor has the upper hand, employing religious images and conventions for

entirely profane purposes" (212). This is the use of humor for the sole or primary purpose

of entertaining an audience. The subject, of course, can be religious or moral, as it often

is: "religion was available, like any other motif or comic device, simply to enhance the

12

comic impact of secular literature...here it was not that humor was added to religious texts to sweeten the pill; rather, religion was added to humorous texts to sweeten the fun" (Bayless 211-12). Entertainment, recreation, and pleasure are the primary purposes when humor is used in this manner. The organizational structure of this dissertation generally follows these three uses (though in a different order from Bayless's); I start with practices that use the comic body primarily to entertain, then move to moral instruction, continuing to a balance of entertainment and instruction. To these I add social criticism, which appears in several of the works that I analyze, most notably Dunbar's poetry.

Before moving to a description of the comic body, I should briefly comment on the problem of analyzing humor. To use Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* as an example, since the seventeenth century (when Dryden offered some pejorative comments) this tale has been criticized for the perceived obscenity of its language.[8] Critics have acknowledged that the primary purpose of *The Miller's Tale* is humor—*solaas*. That they begrudge the writing of the tale indicates that they do not believe that such humor is worthy of a writer of Chaucer's caliber; they simply do not get it.

One reason for this lack of understanding is the subjectivity of humor. The success of humor is entirely dependent upon the reaction of the audience. Each audience member will find different aspects of any story funny. Although audiences might react more or less as a whole, the extent of the laughter will vary from audience member to audience member. For the study of modern humor, determining what is generally considered to be funny is simple: observe the reaction of the audience. For humorous practices that do not have recorded audience responses, determining the nature and extent of humor is far more difficult.

---

[8]For a brief survey of negative critical responses to *The Miller's Tale*, see Peter Beidler, "Art and Scatology in the *Miller's Tale*." It is, of course, far more common in Chaucer criticism to celebrate the craft and art of *The Miller's Tale*, though relatively few of those celebrations concentrate their praise on the scatological or sexual elements of the tale.

My approach to determining humor in medieval texts has been to use particular works and critical responses as benchmarks. For instance, we know that the *fabliaux*, including Chaucer's, were humorous tales,[9] and we know that they were written for courtly audiences, which is a good indication of courtly tastes. The *fabliaux* include ingestion, slapstick, sexuality, and scatology, the same types of bodily humor that I discuss here. These stories offer examples of some representations that people tended to find funny. Additionally, I follow critical determinations of comedy. Critics usually characterize Chaucer's *Miller's* and *Reeve's Tales* as funny, for instance. Likewise, critics have characterized *The Land of Cokaygne*, the parts of *Piers Plowman* that I discuss, some medieval drama, and some of Dunbar's poems as humorous. I have taken elements of what we know was considered to be funny from comic tales and critical acknowledgments of humor to help in determining what might have been considered funny in the Middle Ages. However, it is difficult to recognize the extent of the comedy and individual reactions to it. I admit to a certain amount of speculation in my identification of humor, and when I speak of an audience, I mean an audience receptive to what we believe was generally considered funny. We can never be certain exactly how an audience would react to the material that I discuss.

III. The Comic Body: An Introduction

The types of comic representations that critics tend to find objectionable or puerile are the focus of this dissertation, and often people object most to references to the human body and its functions. The comic body, which I define as the body and its functions represented in humorous situations, is one comic device that flourished in the Middle

---

[9]Chaucer's pilgrims, for instance, laugh at his *fabliaux* (I.2855-60). The same is true of the audience in *The Decameron*. After the last story of the third day (where a monk teaches a nun that intercourse is really putting the devil back into hell), the audience laughs: "Dioneo's story made the virtuous ladies laugh a thousand times or more, so apt and clever were his words" (239).

Ages. Yet representations of the functioning body for humorous purposes should come as no surprise, according to David B. Morris, who looks at the relationship between pain and comedy in the fourth chapter of *The Culture of Pain*. According to Morris, "comedy holds an ambivalent position within the world of art precisely because comic writers, like doctors, insist upon viewing humankind from almost the same demystified point of view: as creatures whose fundamental attribute is the possession of a body" (81). The one attribute uniting all of humankind is our corporeal existence, and according to Morris because of this unifying factor, "comedy needs the body in the same way that the sonnet needs fourteen lines and unrequited love" (82). Morris's conclusion about comedy is that "comedy...as distinct from other literary genres, belongs fundamentally and uniquely to the body" (84).

Morris concerns himself primarily with the link between pain and comedy: "pain, however indirectly, usually finds a way to infiltrate the scene of comedy." Comedy, he continues, "finds its implicit subject, technique, and purpose in the unremitting human encounter with pain" (81). Comedy often occurs when situations that would normally result in pain do not: "the situations call for pain, but pain mysteriously turns up missing. Such comedies offer us a vision in which—despite beatings, collisions, and man-eating plants—there is no cost to pay and nothing really hurts" (93). This lack of paying the price for one's actions separates the comic from the serious or (generically) tragic. To take a twentieth-century example, it is the threat of unrealized pain that makes Charlie Chaplin's films so humorous; if the Little Tramp falls to his death, the film would not be comic. His struggles to remain successfully balanced at the edge of a cliff turn the serious threat of danger into slapstick humor.

Although I certainly acknowledge the important role that pain (or its lack) plays in humor, I have a broader view of the link between the body and comedy. First, pain darker than Morris's comic pain frequently appears in comedy. Often we find pain inflicted upon people for humorous purposes; we are meant to laugh at the pain that the

15

character experiences. These characters are represented as deserving pain, and the purpose of this pain is to provoke laughter, but this laughter is directed *at* the smarting character. This pain is inflicted in order to point out folly, to punish transgression and thereby teach an audience to avoid such behavior. So I make a significant expansion to Morris's ideas on the link between pain and comedy. The presence, as well as the absence, of pain is often a significant factor in humor, where the audience laughs *at* the infliction of pain.

Second, restricting the relationship between comedy and the body to pain is too narrow for my purposes. I contend that comedy does not necessitate the experience of pain as much as it does *discomfort*, physical pain but also psychological distress, physical vexation, or sensory annoyance. Many comic incidents involve the body but do not also involve pain. A prime example of the lack of pain in bodily humor is the "pull my finger" joke popular throughout America. The result of pulling the finger is an inevitable fart. However, there is absolutely no risk of pain for the finger-puller. Rather, the risk is olfactory discomfort and, perhaps, public embarrassment, but definitely not pain. So though I agree with Morris that pain is often a major part of comedy, I assert that discomfort, which can include physical pain, also plays an important role in comedy. This discomfort—pain (physical or psychological), offensive odors or sounds, unpleasant sights, or embarrassing circumstances—is essential for the comic body, for the human body and its functions are in some way linked to all of these uncomfortable circumstances.

My focus in this dissertation is the comic body—humor derived from the functioning body. I use the phrase "comic body," which I borrow from Morris (81), to refer to a specific type of physical representation of the human body. At its most basic, the comic body is not metaphoric in any way. It does not represent political relations; it is not necessarily the site of conflict; it does not stand for worldly pleasures. The comic

body is a representation of the human body and its functions in humorous situations. Its primary purpose is to evoke laughter and pleasure.

Four Categories of the Comic Body

I have divided this dissertation into chapters that illustrate the purposes for which the comic body can be used: entertainment, instruction, and social criticism. I also focus on four particular types of bodily humor—ingestion, slapstick, sexuality, and scatology—which I will highlight here.

The first type of bodily humor that I discuss in this dissertation is the ingestion of food and drink. Modern television and film have preserved this type of humor mostly in comic representations of drunkenness, as in the film *Arthur*, but food has also been the source of comedy, as in the food-fight scene in *Animal House*. Both food and drink were used humorously in the Middle Ages, as I illustrate in Chapters 2 and 3. Another type of bodily humor that can stem from overindulgence, especially drunkenness, is slapstick—physical humor characterized by horseplay, mock accidents, mock beatings, and exaggerated physical action. Often when we find representations of drunkenness, we also find an element of slapstick, for humor tends to stem from the behavior of the drunkard, which includes staggering, falling down, and slurred and irrational speech. Slapstick tends to represent the human body as clumsy. From slipping on a banana peel to the wild jumping that results from a hot foot or tack on the seat, the complete focus of slapstick is the body.

The other two types of bodily humor that I discuss tend to be more shocking or offensive than ingestion and slapstick, and in this they are related. Sexual humor plays upon a host of social taboos and ideas about decorum. The medieval misogynist humor that so many scholars comment upon appears in this category. Jokes about gender difference, castration, impotence, and excessive desire—all of which prey upon deep-seated anxieties—fall into this category, as well. Many of the French *fabliaux* use sexual

17

humor, but so too do Boccaccio, Chaucer, medieval drama, and a host of other writers and works. Scatology, the final type of bodily humor that I discuss, is similar to sexual humor in that it can easily offend and shock. By scatology I mean anything dealing with elimination—urination, flatulence, vomiting, and mooning—in addition to references to or images of feces. Fecal matter is the ultimate debasing material, often linked to the diabolic, and prompting a variety of taboos. We find scatology throughout the history of comedy. Scatological and sexual humor are often considered to be shocking and obscene, as the many arrests of comedian Lennie Bruce illustrate.

Writers often intermix these categories. So, for example, drunkenness frequently appears with sexuality or scatology; *The Land of Cokaygne* contains comedic ingestion as well as humorous images of sexuality and scatology, and as I show in Chapter 3, commentators often link Gluttony and Lechery. Slapstick can occur at any time: the tailor and cobbler falling down because of scatological attacks in Dunbar's "Tournament," for instance. The particular images of ingestion, slapstick, sexuality, and scatology are readily identifiable, but they rarely occur alone.

I begin my analysis of the comic body with practices dedicated for the most part to laughter and entertainment. In Chapter 2 I consider *The Land of Cokaygne* as part of a parodic wish-fulfillment tradition that includes parodic festivals, goliardic poetry, and mock masses. Because I see literature as part of a larger social context, I begin by analyzing the comic body as it appears in medieval festivals, parodic masses, and goliardic poetry. I finally look closely at *The Land of Cokaygne* as a parody offering a clerical writer an outlet in which to present wish fulfillment. Cokaygne's abundance of food and sinless sex counter the lack of food and prohibitions against sex that often existed in the medieval world. At the same time the writer gives himself and his audience a good chuckle by playing on literary and social forms that would have been familiar to both poet and audience.

18

In Chapter 3 I move from entertainment to moral instruction by looking at Langland's use of the comic body in *Piers Plowman*. Langland gives us another look at the abundance of food, this time via Gluton, his personification of the deadly sin. I begin by looking at the sin of Gluttony, which was social as well as spiritual. Then I look at Langland's satirical representations of the sin, which are different from his representation of Gluton, to which I turn at the end of the first section of the chapter. Near the end of the poem, Langland also presents a comic view of sexuality with a joke on Will's impotence. I look at social practices surrounding impotence, the literary practice of creating a self-deprecating narrator like Will, and then the impotence joke. Rather than predominantly entertaining his audience, as the parodic practices from Chapter 2 do, Langland uses the laughter evoked by the comic body to teach his audience lessons about proper living. His humor probably entertained, but the entertainment is incidental compared to the moral message; for Langland the comic body is a powerful didactic tool.

Similar in many ways to *Piers Plowman*, medieval drama has also been considered didactic. In Chapter 4 I explore medieval drama as an example of an equal balance of entertainment and instruction. Entertainment exists in the drama as a purpose in itself and as an important method of instruction. The writer of *The Tretise of Miraclis Pleying* notes that some of his contemporaries call the mystery plays "quike bookis" aimed at teaching the unlearned (380), and modern scholars have long acknowledged medieval drama's didactic nature. As practice, the drama is different from other literary practices; audiences experienced it as performance, a text embodied by actors. I begin with a look at the festive atmosphere of the performance event followed by an analysis of performance as embodied script. I then analyze three male-female relationships (Adam and Eve, Noah and Mrs. Noah, and Joseph and Mary) that through performance illustrate a balance of entertainment and instruction. In these instances the comedy halts abruptly and turns serious. During the time that they are comic, the plays tend to be wholly entertaining. The shift from comedy to sobriety helps to focus attention on the didactic

19

message

by contra

provides

E

William

disguise—

court—a

In the be

realize

think an

Duchar

Duchar

E

necessar

that use

equally

while C

those iss

related p

number

to have a

Please re

attemp

through

provide

destroy

message. The comic body in the drama, then, reinforces the dominant message in the play by contrasting laughter with other, serious emotions. The comic body in this sense both provides entertainment and teaches the audience a lesson.

Finally, I look at the comic body used for social criticism in a specific set of William Dunbar's poems. Dunbar is harshly critical of court practices, particularly disguise—the creation of a personal role to function in and achieve one's purpose at court—and some of the dramatic entertainments that were popular in the Scottish court. In the beginning of the chapter, I focus on court practices, particularly the courtier's creation of a personal courtly role and dramatic entertainments in the Scottish court. Then I look at Dunbar's comic criticism of duplicitous courtiers. I continue to analyze Dunbar's critical stance on courtly love and court tournaments, and I end with a look at Dunbar's parody, which is strikingly similar to the parody that we see in Chapter 2.

Because of my focus on practice, the literary works in my chapter titles are not necessarily the only focus of the chapter. I look at literature as one of several practices that use the comic body in similar ways. Likewise, I do not employ practice theory equally in all of my chapters. Chapters 2 and 5 rely on practice theory most heavily, while Chapter 3, though dealing with social issues and some practices associated with those issues, uses a more traditional literary analysis, and Chapter 4 only explores two related practices associated with drama. Likewise, for the sake of space I have limited the number of literary works that I use. Each chapter uses a single work or selected group of works as an illustration of the purpose that I foreground in that chapter. I have attempted to use representative examples of popular medieval literary forms—parody, didactic writing, drama, and court poetry—as an illustration of what can be found in any number of works. My goal, however, has not been to be comprehensive. I have chosen rather to provide these examples as an introduction to the uses of the comic body in medieval literature and culture.

nvestig

ifficult

lipstick

recogni

We have

present

specific

location

binary p

the dom

ustomiz

This dissertation is just a beginning for what I hope will be a series of investigations of medieval humor. Each purpose that I discuss—entertainment, moral edification, and social criticism—and each category of bodily humor—ingestion, slapstick, sexuality, and scatology—could be the subject of its own volume. Moreover, I recognize that limiting this study to the twelfth through sixteenth centuries is artificial. We have examples of the comic body throughout literary and cultural history to the present day. As I have stated, my aim is not to be comprehensive. Rather, I use these specific instances of the comic body in order to illustrate, first, that the comic body rarely functions as entertainment alone; its uses are diverse. A secondary conclusion is that this literary practice is a tradition that is not necessarily subversive. Instead, it tends to uphold the dominant positions of Church and state. The comic body can entertain, edify, satirize, victimize. But most important, the comic body makes people laugh.

U

Chapter 2
Utopian Wish Fulfillment Practices and *The Land of Cokaygne*

The late-thirteenth-century Anglo-Irish *Land of Cokaygne* presents the modern reader with an interesting scenario. The poet, whom most agree was a cleric, writes a parody of paradise that, without being openly satiric, represents its inhabitants—monks and nuns—indulging in the finest foods and wild sex. The architecture and landscape is made of food, prepared food moves through the countryside, and monks and nuns engage in sex on a daily basis. It is easy to find descriptions of overeating in moral and satirical writing, and condemnations of sex are not rare in medieval documents. This poem is different, however, in that it does not condemn Cokaygne or its inhabitants. Rather, it celebrates the overabundance of and overindulgence in food and sex, and critics have often grasped at straws to make the poem fit their idea of the Middle Ages as a time of strict morality and abstinence. Most often, the poem is called a satire, though the object of satire is uncertain, and both the condemnation and remedy for moral transgression are missing.

I approach this poem differently, by way of literary and social practices to which I believe the poem belongs. In this chapter I will look at what I will call wish-fulfillment practices—Shrovetide festivals, the Feast of Fools, and parodic masses—to help illuminate *The Land of Cokaygne*. Specifically, I argue that *The Land of Cokaygne* is a representative of comic, festive wish-fulfillment literature. As such, it participates in a tradition of wish fulfillment literature and ritual that uses humor in its representation of eating and drinking.

It is important to understand why I have chosen to use *wish fulfillment* rather than the more familiar term *utopia*.[1] I find the term *utopia* problematic in that to use this word

---

[1] In this I differ from A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia* and Hal Rammel, *Nowhere in America*, both of whom use the term *utopia* to describe literature before Thomas More.

o describe any

again to Engl

of Utopia, is to

that idealizes

wrote Utopia,

ad because o

tem to descri

Wish

generation of

paradigm, sc

attention on t

As increase

Beginning L to

may become

always be ha

element of ut

fulfillment. I

is an imagina

Here

Land of Coke

social practi

Land of Coke

periodic mass

thing so. I w

and *The Feas*

these feasts,

to describe anything before Thomas More's *Utopia*, which introduced the notion of *utopia* to English and defined the term according to his sixteenth-century representation of Utopia, is to admit serious anachronism into any discussion of these practices. Notions of an idealized place significantly different from the here-and-now existed before More wrote *Utopia*, of course, but More's work defines the concept and genre as we know it, and because of More's importance in the history of utopia as a genre, I hesitate to use his term to describe earlier works about such idealized places.

Wish fulfillment is a major—though not the only—part of any utopia. The generation of wish fulfillment is predicated on a process of lack and desire. In this paradigm, something needed or desired is missing. The awareness of absence focuses attention on the gap created by this absence, and in many cases the emptiness created by lack increases desire. A. L. Morton describes utopia as being driven by desire: "In the beginning Utopia is an image of desire. Later it grows more complex and various, and may become an elaborate means of expressing social criticism and satire, but it will always be based on something that somebody actually wants" (11). This fundamental element of utopia, desire, creates the circumstances under which one can find wish fulfillment. For wish fulfillment is nothing more than the creative sating of such desire. It is an imaginary filling of the void created by lack.

Here I will consider some parodic wish-fulfillment practices to illuminate *The Land of Cokaygne*. *The Land of Cokaygne* illustrates a conflation of some literary and social practices that themselves use the comic body. I will argue in this chapter that *The Land of Cokaygne* participates in a much larger tradition that includes medieval festivals, parodic masses, and goliardic poetry. I will first look at parody in the Middle Ages. In doing so, I will briefly examine the nature of two popular medieval festivals—Shrovetide and The Feast of Fools. I will then look at an example of a parodic mass closely related to these feasts. From these I will move to wish-fulfillment literature, which includes

prack:

I. Mec

The V

to be

specif

highl

of com

Kula

Provis

U.S. J

WTO

Intern

definir

practic

Medi

Goog

attrip

Feder

Reg

selected goliardic poems. Finally, I will look at *The Land of Cokaygne* in light of these practices to show that it participates in and adds to this comic tradition.

I. Medieval Parody

The Middle Ages was not a time devoid of laughter,[2] although many studies may lead us to believe otherwise, ignoring as they do the humorous elements that infiltrate most aspects of medieval culture. Recent scholarship suggests that medieval people enjoyed laughing just as much as, if not more than, we do. Derek Brewer has edited a collection of comic tales, and he has presented a paper at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan on ethnic jokes in the Middle Ages.[3] The *fabliaux* are perhaps the best-known medieval humorous stories, and for many scholars of English literature, the *fabliaux* in *The Canterbury Tales* are definitive of medieval comic literature. But other texts were humorous as well, and one form that many comic texts take is parody, "an intentionally humorous literary (written) text" (Bayless 3). I extend Martha Bayless's definition to include non-textual practices such as festivals. Here I will focus on parodic practices that I believe are wholly or mostly humorous.

Medieval Festivals

Good examples of medieval comic practices can be found in festivals containing activities that to twentieth-century sensibilities might seem opposed to orthodoxy. Celebrations and holidays were common during the Middle Ages. In addition to what we recognize as holidays—such events as Christmas and Easter—feast days abounded.

---

[2] See my article "An Austere Age without Laughter."

[3] Derek Brewer, ed., *Medieval Comic Tales* and "Englishmen have Ta(i)l(e)s: Ethnic Jokes in Middle and Early Modern English," presented at the 31st International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo), May 9-12, 1996.

Alth

appe

The r

Fin S

may b

Rely

p47 o

men

to ma

Fuon

was in

Wedn

that un

gener

comby

with da

festing

many

Focus
that se
the rep

Early

We car

Although most feasts were serious in nature, a number of them included parodic representations of officials and practices that at first glance might seem to be subversive. The representative festivals that I will discuss are Shrovetide or Carnival and the Feast of Fools, but others existed as well.[4] These festivals—wild, lascivious, and risqué as they may have been—were not nearly as subversive as they at first seem. They used the comic body to have fun and ridicule serious institutions, and as an accepted (and sanctioned) part of society, they also upheld orthodoxy.

The first festival that I will address is also probably the best-known, at least to twentieth-century Americans. This festival is known as Shrovetide in England, Carnival in much of Southern Europe, Mardi Gras in France (and the United States), and *Fastnacht* in Germany.[5] Shrovetide—reaching its festive peak on the day before Lent—was in many ways a preparation for the long fast-season of Lent, which lasted from Ash Wednesday until Easter. According to Anthony Caputi, Carnival began at Epiphany and ran until Ash Wednesday, although the exact duration varied from place to place. It generally included processions, the election of a mock ruler, games, fires, dances, combats, feasting, and drinking.[6] The festival was a final great release before the long, self-denying Lenten season.

The placement and focus of this festival are both important because they tie the festival to the Church. That it was in preparation for Lent makes this revel different from many.[7] Shrovetide is a revel bound to the Christian calendar by its relationship to Ash

---

[4]See E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (especially Book II) for a full discussion of such festivals and how he sees them in relation to drama. Other festivals that seem to have involved similar practices were the May festival, the Feast of St. George in England, Corpus Christi, and Halloween.

[5]I restrict my comments to the festival as it existed in the Middle Ages, though many of my comments apply to present-day Shrovetide festivities like Mardi Gras.

[6]Many of these celebratory practices survive in present-day Mardi Gras.

[7]Granted, Halloween is a preparation for All Saints' Day, but Halloween is only one evening. The festivals I discuss tended to last longer than a single day.

Wednesday, Lent, and Easter. But why would authorities encourage a festival that overtly mocked authority and contained lewd behavior and games normally deemed inappropriate—on the eve of a major Christian ritual at that? One plausible answer associates these revels, especially Carnival, with the Roman Saturnalia.[8] Frederick B. Jonasson summarizes the opinion expressed in Lucian's *Cronosolon*: "If the poor are not properly treated during the holiday, they will steal and rebel. If, however, they are allowed to enjoy the pleasures and gracious hospitality of the rich, even for a day, they will be loyal and docile. A little festive tolerance may go a long way in maintaining social control" (63). This idea of festive tolerance, appealing to the very real need for play that underlies Johan Huizinga's ideas in *Homo Ludens*, is one important reason for permitting this festival and for its continuance to the present day. The importance of a release from the pressures of daily life, for recreation, was fully acknowledged in the Middle Ages.[9] As *The Catholic Encyclopedia* puts it, though rather mildly, "It is intelligible enough that before a long period of deprivations human nature should allow itself some exceptional license in the way of frolic and good cheer" ("Shrovetide").[10] The Church recognized that before such a long period of fasting, both lay and religious people needed a period of release. This release included not only partaking in the practices that would be forbidden during Lent—eating and drinking—but also mocking the establishment that imposed Lent and its season of scarcity upon the people. The long period of Lent and the hardships brought with it seem to be important reasons for this

---

[8]Most scholars see definite similarities. Chambers does not see the Saturnalia as analogous to the Feast of Fools, but he does acknowledge similar elements. Caputi also sees a strong link between *Saturnalia* and Carnival. These festivals included a release of social restraint and the inversion of the normal hierarchy, just as the Saturnalia did.

[9]For some defenses of recreation see Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*, especially his first two chapters, which address the usefulness of recreation during the Middle Ages.

[10]I here use the original *Catholic Encyclopedia* because, strangely enough, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* has no entry for Shrovetide.

festival.[11] But what about revels that are not so closely tied to the liturgical calendar? Can festive tolerance explain such festivities, or might there be other explanations?

Although Shrovetide was an important festival, another, similar festival, the Feast of Fools, is even more extreme in its parody and license.[12] According to E. K. Chambers, this revel was most prevalent in France. Records exist from Sens, Troyes, Paris, Flanders, Lille, Chartres, Burgundy, Dijon, and Provence, but records are scarce for the west and southwest of France. The feast also appears in Germany, Bohemia, and England, most notably at Lincoln and Beverly (Chambers 1: 321). Moreover, the surviving records— which date, albeit in different locations, from the last year of the twelfth century through the eighteenth century—indicate the festival's popularity and official permissiveness toward it.[13]

---

[11]The next major revel was the May festival, celebrated on May 1 and possibly also throughout the month. This festival was associated with fertility and adopted as a major festive event the planting of greenery—in England a hawthorn branch—in front of a girl's house, dancing around Maypoles, and the election of a May King and Queen. In England, the May King and Queen eventually merged with the Robin Hood legend so that the King and Queen became Robin Hood and Marian. After the May festival were the festivals of Pentecost and Corpus Christi, which included feasting, dancing, and processions, but these were not nearly as extreme in their revelry. The Feast of St. John, celebrated in northern Europe on June 24, was another revel festival that included processions, feasting, the election of a mock ruler, and the placing of boughs before the doors of young women. The rest of summer and most of autumn were free from revels, with the notable exception, perhaps, of Halloween. See both Caputi and Chambers for more information on these festivals.

[12]Related to this feast is the Feast of the Boy-Bishop, a festival where a child is elected bishop on St. Nicholas's Day (December 6). The boy-bishop then rules as bishop until Holy Innocents' Day (December 28), blessing people and presiding over all offices and ceremonies (*Catholic Encyclopedia* "Boy-Bishop"). The Feast of the Boy Bishop was relatively tame in comparison to the Feast of Fools and was never subjected to the type of criticism leveled at the latter feast. See Chambers's discussion of the boy bishop feast feast, which merits an entire chapter in his book (336-71).

[13]In Provence, for instance, the feast lasted at least until 1645 (Chambers 1: 317) and until 1721 in Amiens (Chambers 1: 303). Although it was possible to halt the festival outright, which all communities eventually did, several chose to regulate it for many years, which may indicate that authorities considered the festival mostly harmless.

This festival included the comic body in its parody of orthodoxy. A fascinating glimpse at the practices occurring during this festival survives in a letter from Eustace de Mansil on behalf of the Faculty of Theology at Paris On March 12, 1445:

> What man of feeling among Christians, I ask, would not call those priests and clerks evil, whom he sees at the time of divine office bewitched, with monstrous visages, or in the clothing of women or panders, or leading dances of actors in the choir, singing wanton songs, eating fat sausages above the horn of the altar during the mass of the celebrant, practicing that play of dice, censing with stinking smoke from the leather of old shoes, and running through the whole church, dancing, not blushing at their own shame, and then being led in shameful spectacles through the village and theaters in carts and vehicles, making shameful gestures with their bodies and rehearsing scurrilous and unchaste verses for the laughter of their fellows and bystanders? (Chambers 1: 294, my translation)[14]

The reaction of the observers, who see a show of sorts, indicates that one of the feast's purposes was to evoke laughter (*risu*) from the audience. The *verba impudicissima ac scurrilia*, we can assume, succeeded in provoking laughter. Indecent gestures also provoked laughter, gestures that in the Latin passage are described with the words *suis corporis*, highlighting the role of the body in the evocation of laughter. The comic body is at work in this festival.

---

[14]Quis, quaeso, Christianorum sensatus non diceret malos illos sacerdotes et clericos, quos divini officii tempore videret larvatos, monstruosis vultibus, aut in vestibus mulierum, aut lenonum, vel histrionum choreas ducere in choro, cantilenas inhonestas cantare, offas pingues supra cornu altaris iuxta celebrantem missam comedere, ludum taxillorum ibidem exercere, thurificare de fumo fetido ex corio veterum sotularium, et per totam ecclesiam currere, saltare, turpitudinem suam non erubescere, ac deinde per villam et theatra in curribus et vehiculis sordidis duci ad infamia spectacula, pro risu astantium et concurrentium turpes gesticulationes suis corporis faciendo, et verba impudicissima ac scurrilia proferendo? (Chambers 1: 294 n.2)

Due to its practices, the scandalous Feast of Fools became the site of contention for ecclesiastical authority. The Paris letter mentions many but not all of the practices typical of the Feast of Fools. In addition to the monstrous visages, costumes, dances, wanton songs, censing with base objects, and obscene gestures and verses, the feast usually included the election of a mock ruler (often a bishop or pope) and a parodic service during which the *baculum* was transferred to the feast bishop.[15] Another practice of the Feast of Fools was the recitation of poetry. According to Paul Gerhard Schmidt, "hymn-like songs in praise of the baculum were recited, and poetry was composed for the feast" (44). The feast itself was the responsibility of the lower clergy—sub-deacons and below. However, ecclesiastical authority sanctioned it—in both senses of the word. The local religious establishments supported the feast with money, while at the same time attempting to control the parodic, burlesque ceremonies of the feast.[16] The Feast of Fools became a legislative battleground, one that neither side won until very late.[17]

One reason for this condemnation may be linked to its celebrants, who differed from those of the Shrovetide festival. Shrovetide involved all of the people, both lay and clerical, in a series of revels that would prepare them for the long season of Lent. The Feast of Fools, which incorporated many of the same practices as Shrovetide, included mostly lower clergy in its practices, though it attracted many gleeful observers from the lay community. Participation in the practices was limited to clergy because of its subject; it was a revel that turned the clerical world on its head, elevating the low and toppling the

---

[15]Although the letter is from 1445, both Chambers and Caputi indicate that these activities occurred more or less across chronological and geographical boundaries.

[16]See Chambers 1: 289-297 for an example of attempts to control the festival at Sens. He mentions that "the chapter paid a subsidy towards the amusements of the 'pope' and his 'cardinals' on the Sunday called *brioris*" (1: 302), and at Sens it would seem that the chapter paid for the entire feast (1: 291).

[17]Chambers sees the clash as Christianity vs. paganism, while Bakhtin sees the conflict as the dominant, serious ideology battling the subversive, humorous ideology.

high. The Feast of Fools parodies and mocks ecclesiastical rituals and hierarchy from within the Church. Both of these festivals use the comic body, as illustrated by Mansil's letter, in their revelry, promoting feasting, wanton songs, dancing, and in some cases sexual license, but the Feast of Fools was a clerical feast, which tied it and its practices to the Church, making its participants subject to Church scrutiny.

What interests me most with these festivals is their license in parodying orthodoxy. All feasts, of course, involved eating and drinking, often to excess. The revels are no exception. However, in addition to indulgence in food and drink, these festivals openly mocked official culture. Characteristic not only of the above-mentioned revels but also of many minor "folk" feasts was the election of a mock ruler. In many instances, this mock ruler was elected, led a procession, and then was either killed in combat or tried, found guilty, and executed (dramatically), thus returning the revelers to the official order.[18] The mock rulers and feast officials parodied the duties of their counterparts in the real world, censing with puddings and shoe leather, acting in an official capacity and mocking the establishment. This mockery was encouraged and permitted, indicating that the parody of official order, within certain limits, was believed to serve a positive social function.

One reason for allowing these festivals could be the fact that they were contained within a set time and place, a play world. Festivals like Shrovetide and the Feast of Fools were predominantly recreational. In fact, Chambers claims, "Much in all these proceedings was doubtless the merest horseplay" (1: 325-26). Celebrations like these conform to Johan Huizinga's idea of the playground. According to Huizinga, "All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or

---

[18]See Caputi for a detailed account of these festivals in Italy. He sees elements of sacrifice in the killing of the feast lord. Chambers sees in the Feast of Fools elements of the folk festivals, which included sacrifice and were, in Chambers's view, of pagan origin.

ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course" (10). Douglas L. Peterson refers to this in

Tudor comedy as a "world-set-apart," a place where the normal rules of society cease to

exist, a place to which characters escape, such as the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*.

The play world is an alternative world set off in time and space, with its own rules, and

for the purpose of recreation. The preset boundaries separating the play world from

reality is of paramount importance, for the play world nearly always returns its

participants to the world of earnest (Peterson, "Lilly, Green" 84). These festivals establish

a world-set-apart, a place where the dominant ideology of king, bishop, or pope is turned

on its head, where unlikely figures assume the roles of rulers, perform mock deeds, and

finally are removed from office. The controlling factor in this cyclical pattern of rule is

time, which separates these festivals from the "real" world. They have specific time

constraints, typically dictated by the calendar.[19] This chronological element forms the

frame for the play world.

I contend that this play world is one of the elements that make all parody possible.

The play world gives parody a safety zone where the parodist can test his ideas. It is a

prophylactic defense against allegations of sedition or heresy, for without the play world

and its boundaries, the ideas and practices represented in parody can easily be confused

with serious attack and criticism. As a safety factor, setting off parody from the world of

earnest is important. In order to be effective, parody must have a set beginning and end;

those participating in the parody must return to a non-parodic world. What we find in

these festivals is parody with a set beginning and end that delimit it from the world of

earnest. Since the condemnatory evidence is sporadic, at least through the early

fourteenth century, it would seem that such parodic festivals were, at least in part, an

accepted element of society, perhaps considered a healthy expression of and safety valve

---

[19]Some authorities also set the place for the festival, as in the Feast of Fools at
Sens. See Chambers's discussion of the regulation of the feast at Sens (1: 291 ff.).

for socially unhealthy feelings and thoughts that, taken a step further, could lead to subversive behavior.[20] Such a safety valve, Olson has shown, was a major defense of recreation; it offered a release of the tension that accumulates with earnest life.[21] This release is carefully scripted at a set time, with an actual script, at least in some instances of the Feast of Fools.[22]

In the practices common to most of these festivals, much of the parody and burlesque is bodily in nature. The revels mock the texts and practices of church and state, but they also involve large quantities of food and drink, procreation rituals, and even, in the case of the *Officium* from Sens and one from Beauvais, a drinking bout and censing with puddings and sausages (Chambers 1: 288). Here we find the comic body used as a direct parody of orthodoxy. At first glance censing with puddings and sausages may not appear to be as directly related to the comic body as drinking bouts (or the death of the mock rulers, for that matter), but we must keep in mind that the comic body involves the body and its functions for humorous effect. Eating, of course, is a bodily function. People must eat to maintain health and to survive. To eat, one must have food. So food can refer to the body, as I believe it does here.[23] Censing with puddings and sausages is not necessarily an eating image, but because food is used this practice brings censing to the

---

[20]Samuel Kinser has developed a theory that such festivals were healthy expressions of "unexpressed or politely suppressed thought and feelings" (148).

[21]See, for instance, Olson's analysis of the bent bow story (91-93)

[22]Chambers discusses an actual document from this feast—the *Officium circumcisionis in usum urbis senonensis,* which contained the words and music of the special chants used at the feast (1: 280). These documents are actually a script for what will be done during the feast.

[23]Martha Bayless says that "Food was the *locus classicus* for comedy of debasement" (197). So when we see images of parodic ritual that involve food rather than what is used in the model form, we at least have a comic element, one that by extension involves the body.

level o

humor

were n

and th

play w

festiva

is a-e

with

world

existin

every d

Parod

I will

masse

text fo

mass p

——————

b... ter

abstra

Howev
Kirling
that A
and wa
flowes

Per 4:9

level of the body. It involves food within a parodic ritual, and this festival uses food for a humorous, parodic effect.[24]

As I will argue for all of the practices presented in this chapter, these festivals were not a subversive threat to orthodoxy. Built into the festivals is support for orthodoxy and the rules it establishes. By placing the activities of these festivals in a firmly-defined play world, the organizers have created a tool that in fact upholds orthodoxy. These festivals are merely an interlude, a brief, well-regulated time and space where the world is up-ended, where low becomes high and high low. Nevertheless, there is always an end to it.[25] Mock rulers are dethroned or killed, and the festive community exits the play world to return to the world of orthodoxy. These practices are not viable alternatives to existing social and political structures. Rather, they are merry escapes from the rigor of everyday life, escapes from which the participants must return.

Parodic Masses

I will now turn to a series of texts that are similar in function to these festivals: parodic masses.[26] We have evidence of several parodic masses—texts that alter the general mass text for parodic purposes. These include drinkers' masses, gamblers' masses, and even a mass for an ass.[27] I want to look here at a drinkers' mass, not because it is particularly

---

[24]And there is also the blatantly phallic nature of puddings and sausages to contend with, which could add a fertility element to the parody.

[25]This is in sharp contrast to the beliefs of heretics, who saw their beliefs as viable alternatives to and replacements for orthodoxy.

[26]Bayless rejects the argument that these texts have any direct link to festivals. However, she implies that they are related in their parody and general tone, and other scholars have made the link between the festivals and these masses (125). Bakhtin states that "All medieval parodical literature is recreative; it was composed for festive leisure and was to be read on feast days" (83), and this would seem to include the parodic masses.

[27]Bayless prints one English drinking mass and several fragments. This type of parodic mass, it would seem, was popular.

better th...

because ...

find be...

substitu...

conrepo...

These w...

becaue ...

sinetis ...

The D...

morph...

pulatio...

which...

"Domi...

Bacch...

end of...

We fir...

guins...

Proba...

better than others but, first, because it appears in more than one manuscript; second, because it appears in MS Harley 913, the same manuscript as *The Land of Cokaygne*; and third, because the elements added to the original Latin mass are bodily and comic.[28]

This text is a clever parody of the Latin mass. From the beginning the writer substitutes drinking terms for words in the mass. The mass begins "Confiteor reo Bacho omnepotanti, et reo vino coloris rubei, et omnibus ciphis ejus, et vobis potatoribus."[29] These words replace those of the Latin Mass, which begins "Confiteor Deo omnipotenti, beatae Mariae semper Virgini, beato Michaeli Archangelo, beato Joanni Baptistae, sanctis Apostolis Petro et Paulo, omnibus Sanctis, et tibi Pater." Although the opening of "The Drinkers' Mass" is shorter, the writer has kept the same general syntax and morphology, including the dative *vobis* (though he changes the vocative *pater* to a dative *potatoribus*). Likewise, the parodist retains the syntactic structure just before the *oremus* (which he renders *potemus*): "Dolus vobiscum. Et cum gemitu tuo," a close parody of "Dominus vobiscum. Et cum spiritu tuo." He also replaces individual words. Usually *Bacchus* replaces *Deus*. At other times, nonsense words replace those of the mass. At the end of each section, rather than the typical *amen*, this text has *Stramen*—straw. Likewise, we find a curious string of words that seem to be nonsense: "Asiot, Ambisasiot, treisasiot, quinsiot, quinsasiot, sinsasiot, quernisiot, quenisasiot, deusasiot."[30] These words are probably dicing terms, which would be appropriate, since dicing was a game associated

---

[28]This particular parodic mass also appears in MS Harley 2851, where it is entitled *Missa Gulonis*. Other drinkers' masses exist as well. For some texts and translations, see Bayless's Appendix 2, items 10, 11, and 12. She analyzes parodic masses in her fourth chapter.

[29]Appendix A reprints the parodic mass along with my translation.

[30]Ace, two aces, three-ace, five, five-ace, six-ace, four, four-ace, two-ace. I am indebted to M. Teresa Tavormina bringing the possibility of a link between these words and dicing to my attention.

with the

'exuber

omnip

these m

textboo

syntax

words.

is much

pleasur

openin

Rough gr

emerg

reduce

polite

fully g

Milde

the te

with
Pr'en

with

she p
was p

with the tavern.[31] Additionally, the parodist creates compounds, which Bayless calls "exuberant puns" (102). The deity, often Bacchus, is called *ciphipotens*, cup-potent, or *omnepotanti*, all-drinking, rather than the typical *omnipotent* used in the mass.[32] All of these mock adjectives replace words describing God in the mass. This is nearly a textbook example of parody. The writer retains the structure of the Latin mass, even the syntax and grammar in many places. He achieves the desired effect by changing key words, which give the mass a comic subject and meaning.

These masses are much like the parodic festivals I described earlier. The overtone is mocking, perhaps disrespectful, but also fun, evoking if not laughter then at least pleasure. And again we find a place set aside for playfulness. The parody begins with the opening words of the mass and ends with a play on the closing words (*Ite bursa vacua: Reo gratias* for *Ite missa est; Deo gratias*); it has a set beginning and end—a play world emerges where the holy words said during solemn occasions are lampooned and God is reduced to wine. This is mock ritual set off from other activities.[33]

The humor here is predominantly bodily. For this work imbibing is not a matter of polite sipping, the mode of drinking that Chaucer ascribes to his Prioress.[34] This is the fully gluttonous binge drinking that is characteristic of literary characters like Chaucer's Miller and Langland's Gluton. Bacchus and Decius are the deities in this parody, and they

---

[31]Cowell, for instance, says that wine, women, and dice are "three leitmotivs of the tavern" (111).

[32]Bayless points out that in other parodic drinking masses, *omnipotent* is replaced with a variety of parodic compounds: *ventripotens*, stomach-potent; *vinipotens*, wine-potent; and even *bellipotens*, battle-potent (102).

[33]And as Huizinga says in *Homo ludens*, ritual itself is a form of play requiring its own set space and time (14 ff.).

[34]Chaucer's description of the Prioress's manners would lead one to believe that she was proper at all times: "Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene / That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene / Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte" (I.133-35).

are gods of inappropriate behavior.[35] Eating and drinking are basic bodily needs. By changing the subject of the mass from God and spiritual development to alcohol and drunkenness, the parodist refocuses the mass on the body.

One might well imagine such masses being written for one of the festivals that I have described. The texts that Chambers uses to illustrate the practices of the Feast of Fools include parodies of the *conductus*, a "chant sung while the officiant is conducted from one station to another in the church" (Chambers 282), the *alleluia*, and other textual material. No direct link between these parodic masses and the revels has been posited, but a link does exist nevertheless. Both the festivals and the mock masses parody church ritual in order to produce pleasure and laughter. Liturgical parody is part of festivals like the Feast of Fools, which turns ritual upside down. The same is true, obviously, of the parodic masses, which parody a full liturgical text. These two practices—the feasts and parodic masses—are members of a genre, liturgical parody. Both draw upon the comic body (as well as verbal wit) to effect laughter, and both were not only tolerated but also popular.

Parody and Satire: Some Distinctions

These practices, like *The Land of Cokaygne*, have frequently been called satire. My concern in this chapter is with parody, but the line between parody and satire is a fine one. For the purposes of this chapter, I wish to set satire aside. Satire is a socially constructive form and, hence, has a strong moral element to it. According to *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, "A 'satire' is a poem, or in modern use sometimes a prose composition, in which prevailing vices or follies are held up to ridicule" (867-8), following the *OED* definition. *The Oxford Companion* goes on to say that "In English

---

[35]Bacchus is the god of drinking, while Decius, though technically meaning dice, can also be a god of gambling, since the die is personified in some poems, and in *Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis* there is a reference to a *secta Decii*, suggesting a divinity with followers.

literature satire may be held to have begun with Chaucer, who was followed by many 15th-cent. writers, including Dunbar" (868).[36] An important aspect of medieval satire is that it is corrective, clearly showing that a certain behavior is morally wrong. According to Laura Kendrick,

> The purpose of didactic satire is to convince the intended audience not to do something the satirist considers, for whatever reason, wrong. The purpose of polemical satire, on the other hand, is to convince the audience that what a third party or group (the poet's opponent or enemy) does is wrong and, implicitly, that what the poet or his partisan group does is right. *In either case, the satirist criticizes deviation from a standard of behavior, more or less clearly defined and generally accepted by his audience.* (341, my emphasis)

Both types of medieval satire identified by Kendrick, whose study of the topic is perhaps the deepest general study of medieval satire to date, clearly indicate that the actions being satirized are wrong.[37] Because "all satirists try to persuade their audiences that certain behavior is wrong," most, if not all, satirists openly condemn the satirized behavior. They attempt to "make the wrong behavior seem ridiculous or repulsive" (Kendrick 340). Invariably, works attempting to satirize offer open condemnation of the criticized behaviors and activities.

Although parody can be used in conjunction with satire, parody often lacks a moral element. The term *parody* is difficult to pin down. I define *parody* along the lines sketched by Bayless, who simply says that parody is "the imitation of form" for humorous purposes (9). Medieval parody, in her words, is "above all, popular literature,

---

[36]Interestingly, *The Oxford Companion* contains no entry for *parody*.

[37]For another view of medieval satire along the same lines, see Paul Miller, "John Gower, Satiric Poet."

written for simple entertainment as much as for artistry" (12). It is a recreative form that takes a model—textual, verbal, or gestural—and humorously imitates and mocks it. And though Bayless at one point claims that parody can be considered a sub-genre of satire (5), she acknowledges, "on the whole—and there are some important exceptions— medieval parody is not the tool of the reformer, literary or social. It is more often entertainment than polemic" (7). To put it in simpler terms: "Satire is a lesson, parody is a game" (Vladimir Nabokov, quoted by Appel 30).

Three aspects of parodic practices are important for the rest of this chapter. First, writers create parodic practices to entertain by means of laughter and literary pleasure. Second, parodic practices, including texts, establish a play world. This alternate world usually has a distinct point of entry, a set of rules and an order that are often the complete opposite of those of everyday life (turning the world of the established order on its head), and a clearly-marked return to the world of earnest. Finally, parodic practices are not nearly as subversive as we might first believe. The very institutions that they parody often authorize and organize these practices, and through the sanction of such practices, they uphold that order. Although the activities within the inverted play world may be completely unorthodox and, to an extent, blasphemous, the return to the world of earnest with its orthodox rules actually upholds the status quo as the proper place to exist, the inverted play world being a place to which one may escape only for a short time.

II. Food Food Food—Eating, Drinking, and Wish Fulfillment

I now turn from parodic practices to some texts that, though not always parodic, tend to use bodily functions as their comic element. We saw in the previous section that the parodic masses and festivals achieve much of their humor via the body. The texts to which I now turn also focus on the body, and these texts have been loosely associated with the parodic masses, festivals like the Feast of Fools, and *The Land of Cokaygne*.

38

There is a group of Latin poems from the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries that often focuses on eating and drinking; this is the poetry of the goliards, or vagabonds, as some would prefer to call them.[38] But before discussing vagabond verse, we need to consider humor in representations of food and drink.

Bakhtin and the Upper Gastrointestinal Tract

The combination of eating, drinking and humor should bring to mind the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin devotes the fourth chapter of *Rabelais and His World* to banquet imagery, but much of his discussion of the grotesque centers on eating and drinking. According to Bakhtin, the *Cena Cypriani*, or *Cyprian's Supper*, "marks the beginning of the banquet tradition in medieval literature" (288).[39] It is "free play" and involves sacred events and persons. Because it brings together some of the most notable persons from scripture, "The banquet acquires a grandiose, universal character" (288). Bakhtin distinguishes between banquet images from the "popular, festive tradition" and private images of eating and drinking (301). While private images of eating and Gluttony focus on the individual, festive banquet images focus on the triumph of social man against the world (302):

> In the oldest system of images food was related to work. It concluded work and struggle and was their crown of glory. Work triumphed in food. Human labor's encounter with the world and the struggle against it ended in food, in the swallowing of that which had been wrested from the world.

---

[38]Not all goliardic poems are concerned with food and drink. Several studies have focused on the differences between the *goliardi*, *vagantes*, and other categories of poets who wrote similar poetry. See, for instance, Edwin H. Zeydel, "Vagantes, Goliardi, Joculatores: Three Vagabond Types." On the other hand, Helen Waddell tends to use the term *goliard* to refer to all wandering poets.

[39]Bayless sees this work as one of the earliest and most popular of medieval parodic texts.

As the last victorious stage of work, the image of food often symbolized

the entire labor process. (281).

He continues to stress that both food and labor were collective and social rather than individual or animal in nature. Banquet is a collective celebration of the end of the labor process, where the fruits of victory over harsh nature are consumed in a festive atmosphere.[40]

Taken to an extreme, such banquet imagery easily becomes grotesque. As Bakhtin asserts, "Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style" (303). But such exaggerations are not always satiric or negative. Instead, they are ambivalent (307).[41] And they do not focus on just food and drink. Rather, they can focus on any aspect of the body. However, much of the grotesque, as well as many instances of the comic body, centers on the gastrointestinal tract. Here we find not only humorous banquet images—eating and drinking to excess—but also scatological representations—urination, defecation, and flatulence. A major question is why popular humor focuses so often on the gastrointestinal tract.

The Importance of Food in the Late Middle Ages

One possible answer to this question is the visible importance of food. In the early Middle Ages, for example, feudalism—the dominant political structure—was geared toward food production. Food was a primary medium of exchange in the non-monetary economies of lord and peasant. As Robert S. Gottfried puts it, "Because most of Europe's

---

[40]An example of this triumphant feast, perhaps, is the scene in *Piers Plowman* where, after tending the half acre, Piers's followers harvest the food. The banquet scene that follows, with Hunger eating all of the food, perhaps deviates from Bakhtin's idea in illustrating how hunger can ravage a food supply, but the banquet is still there as a post-harvest celebration.

[41]Contrary to what Bakhtin says, these exaggerations are not always humorous, as Aron Gurevich has pointed out. See *Medieval Popular Culture*, Chapter 6, "'High' and 'Low': The Medieval Grotesque" (176-210).

wea...

nd t...

Duri...

rent...

Afte...

Popu...

prod...

the...

thin...

his...

put...

edu...

cap...

eff...

Wors...

Indi...
Dr. A...
Man...
deve...
Chil...
Arch...
Chi...
Popu...
Sing...

Georg...

Caro...

wealth came from the produce of the land, even after the urban expansion of the twelfth

and thirteenth centuries, aristocrats and rural workers occupied special positions" (17).[42]

During the twelfth century, rent was paid with food.[43] According to Gottfried, after 1200

rent was paid increasingly in cash, which was obtained from the sale of surplus food.

After 1250, though, many lords stopped accepting cash for the payment of rent.

Population was increasing at this time, placing a heavier burden on peasants not only to

produce enough food for their own families but also to produce food from the *demesnes*,

the tracts of land that were worked to pay rent. Demand for food was high by the late

thirteenth century.

A series of events that eventually led to the great famine of 1315-17 exacerbated

this demand. The late thirteenth century saw a series of bad harvests caused mostly by

poor weather. All crops suffered at one time or another (see Table 1), and even livestock

endured hard times.[44] During the latter half of the thirteenth century (the same period that

crops were periodically failing) diseases, in epizootic proportions in the 1270s and 80s,

afflicted the sheep population, and as the thirteenth century drew to a close, conditions

worsened. The fourteenth century ushered in an age of want, for a series of crop failures

---

[42]Evidence of this special position can be seen in the special place the plowman holds in *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer. Chaucer makes his plowman and parson brothers, a link, according to Jill Mann, between the Christ-like virtues of their estates. According to Mann, the image of the holy plowman is traditional (67-69). Part of this image, no doubt, derives from the knowledge that without such laborers food production would halt, a fact that seems to be reflected in the common exhortations for peasants to continue their work. Mann also says that estates writers "are united on the subject of the peasant's subjection to the demands of knight and clergy, and his miserable dependence on the vagaries of weather and harvest" (72-3). See Mann 242 n.96 for a list of texts that tend to sympathize with the peasant's lot in life.

[43]For a concise description of the general system of lord-peasant relations, see Gottfried (18) and Postan (233 ff.).

[44]See Christopher Dyer's *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* and *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Vol. 1.

Table 1

Bad Harvests, 1208-1323

All Grains	Wheat and Barley
1224-5	
1226-7	
	1246-7
	1247-8
	1256-7
	1257-8
	1274-5
1283-4	
1290-1	
	1293-4
	1294-5
	1295-6
1310-11	
1315-16	
1316-17	
	1321-22
	1322-23

Source: Adapted from Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages:*
Social Change in England c. 1200-1500, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989, 262.

42

and bad harvests in the first decade and a half led to a complete failure of most crops in 1315-17, which is considered to be one of the worst famines ever to afflict England.

Scholars tend to ignore the psychological effects of the crop failures of the thirteenth century.[45] Although bad harvests always loomed on the horizon, the people did seem to get by, as illustrated by Dyer's chart and a late nineteenth-century series of charts compiled by Cornelius Walford, based on the accounts of John Stowe and earlier chroniclers. But this situation was not one of security: "what caused prices to shoot sky-high in the early 1320s, for grain in 1315-1317 and for grain and livestock in the early 1320s, were the famines and cattle murrains of the decade 1315-25, which shows just how precariously balanced in relation to productive resources the population was" (Bolton 78). Dyer's chart shows that such a precarious balance seems to have been in existence in the thirteenth century as well, as bad harvests offset good harvests throughout the century.

These adverse conditions, combined with high taxation, placed an immense burden on agricultural workers.[46] Such an atmosphere would naturally create tension and increase both the monetary and psychological value of food. Although, according to Gottfried, the death rate only rose by perhaps 5% during this period, this is not necessarily an indication that shortages had no psychological effects. The constant reminder of scarcity, I suggest, probably kept the threat of a failed harvest on the minds of everyone who depended upon agriculture for their livelihood—which means nearly

---

[45]One reason for this dismissal is probably the more severe crop failures and famine conditions of the fourteenth century. Gottfried, Dyer, and almost all scholars who study medieval agriculture focus on the fourteenth century as a period of extreme scarcity. Although the fourteenth century was definitely much worse than the thirteenth, the earlier century still saw its share of scarcity, perhaps enough to keep people continually mindful of how precarious their situation was.

[46]In *The Medieval English Economy, 1150-1500* J. L. Bolton says, "Between 1294 and 1350 personal taxation was continuous and heavy and imposed a particularly severe burden on the peasantry" (181).

everyone in the Middle Ages. By the last decade of the thirteenth century, food was probably the most important commodity in England. Farmers and landlords could sell surplus food for cash. Shortage meant attempting to make the existing stores last until the next harvest, and at times that did not happen.[47] And during the early fourteenth century, this situation became worse, with bad harvests occurring repeatedly throughout the first quarter of the century. Placing a heavy emphasis on food, on eating, and on the entire gastrointestinal tract was natural, because food was so important in ways that we in industrialized nations of the twentieth century can hardly conceive. Food is life. And in a society where food is scarce, life is uncertain. The importance of food, then, is one major reason that we find food and drink, eating and drinking, and banquets and feasts so commonly portrayed in the literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Anxiety over this important commodity is displayed subtly in a variety of instances; one way to alleviate this anxiety is through humor, and one vehicle for humor is literature.

Eat, Drink, and Be Merry—Goliardic Poetry and Food

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there appeared poetry written from the point of view of a vagrant, a vagabond wandering from noble patron to noble patron, writing verse in exchange for basic necessities as well as some of the finer things in life—life in a noble court.[48] The topics of this poetry varied. These prolific "vagabond scholars," as Helen Waddell calls them, wrote poetry ranging from songs celebrating spring, to love

---

[47]For instance, writing in the eighteenth century, John Penkethman notes that around 1258 "A great Dearth followed the wet year past, for a quarter of Wheat was sold for 15s. and 20s. but the worst was in the end, there could be none found for money where-through many poore people were constrained to eat Barks of Trees, and horse flesh, but many starved for want of food, twenty thousand (as it was said) in *London*" (65).

[48]I use the term *goliard* here to include all vagabond poets. Some historians and literary scholars have problems with applying this term to all wandering poets, but my argument does not rest on which poets were actually goliardic. All wandering poets seem to have written verse dealing with food, drink, and patronage.

44

poems, to drinking songs, to complaints.[49] The one constant is the narrator's vagrant

existence, though even this is not entirely clear in some individual poems.

We do not know much about the individual goliards. Some were literal wanderers,

moving from patron to patron. Many, however, had influential and important roles in the

Church (Bayless 180).[50] Some, like Hugh Primas or Walter of Châtillon, were associated

with universities and courts.[51] What is clear, at least from Waddell's point of view, is that

these poets were a special group of people. They were highly educated, and most, if not

all, had taken at least minor orders. Well versed in the Latin classics as well as in

university curricula, they were thoroughly familiar with the Bible and biblical exegesis

(Bayless 180). And they disturbed some in the Church. Waddell prints excerpts from

thirty-six thirteenth-century documents—councils, decretals, rules—that attempt to

control the activities of these clerics.[52] Some of these documents simply attempt to

reinforce the existing statutes prohibiting the religious from wandering. Others prohibit

churchmen from various activities associated with the goliards: dicing, keeping women,

drinking to excess, and speaking in an overly jocular manner.[53] Still others address the

---

[49]The *Cambridge Songs* (Cambridge MS UL Gg.5.35) contains a number of
poems that have largely or completely been erased probably by Augustinian monks, who
were presumably offended by the content. Its editor describes one as "a poem of
passionate longing" (95). This manuscript also contains a paschal hymn, poems on the
resurrection, and poems to Mary.

[50]For more information on the professions of these poets, see Helga Schüppert,
Kirchenkritik in der lateinischen Lyrik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts.

[51]Walter, for instance, studied at Paris and had a distinguished career in the court
of both Henry and William, father and son Archbishops of Rheims. Hugh seems to have
been influential at Orléans.

[52]This number is in sharp contrast to those she prints from the twelfth century—
three.

[53]One states that improper games are forbidden in the "domibus clericorum"
(Waddell 282).

gallar

shallsi

denoun

into th

gallan

somet

relate

to die

angeli

interio

impo

that h

──────

283

that p

such
clerg
be an

the p
Gosp
Lang

Tun
set s
Trans

goliards by name.[54] In such statements, the goliards are often defined as "clerici ribaldi"—indecent clerics (Waddell 283).[55] In spite of the many and various documents denouncing the goliards and wandering scholars, these clerics continued to thrive well into the fourteenth century.[56]

I begin my analysis of goliardic literature with perhaps the most famous of goliardic poems, the Archpoet's *Estuans intrinsecus*, or *The Confession of Golias* as it is sometimes called. This poem is interesting to me because the narrator confesses sins related to drinking,[57] and he takes great joy in his bad habits. He asserts, "My intention is to die in the tavern so that the wines are nearest to the mouth of the dead. Then choirs of angels will sing more joyfully: 'May God be gracious to this drinker.'"[58] The Archpoet intends to leave his drinking not a bit. The poem continues to explain that wine is important for the Archpoet, since it is under the influence of wine (but only good wine) that his poetic genius flourishes.[59] At the end of his poem, the Archpoet offers two

---

[54]See, for instance, one from the Council at Château Gonthier, 1231 (Waddell 283).

[55]Interestingly enough, one of these is from a 1239 council at Sens, the same place that produced so many documents concerning the regulation of the Feast of Fools.

[56]This is not the place to speculate on what benefit Church officials thought that such people lent to society as a whole (if any), but that they were permitted to continue as clergy suggests either that the Church considered the activities of these *clerici ribaldi* to be uninfluential on orthodoxy or that these practices could not be controlled.

[57]Most scholarship on goliardic poetry tends to conflate the poetic persona with the poet, and I will follow that trend here, though I realize that in reality the two are distinct. For more on this see George Kane's *Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies*.

[58]"Meum est propositum in taberna mori: / ut sint vina proxima morientis ori. / Tunc cantabunt letius angelorum chori: / sit deus propitius huic potatori." (12). All quotations from *Estuans intrinsecus* are from Penelope Rainey, *Medieval Latin Lyrics*. Translations are my own.

[59]"Mihi sapit dulcius vinum de taberna, / quam quod aqua miscuit presulis pincerna." [*The wine of the tavern tastes sweeter to me / than that which the wine steward of the prelate mixes with water.*] (13).

defenses

they can

is a belat

his sins

be.

show lit

poet's p

claims t

Archpo

detracto

them fa

early as

rework

narrato

church

Intrigu

tongue

Petca

of sin

m[

evamp

still su

defenses for his behavior. First, he admonishes his detractors to cast the first stone only if they can claim freedom from sin, a direct parody of the biblical text.[60] His second defense is a belated recoil from his sin-filled life.[61] However, in comparison to the celebration of his sins that dominates this poem, such a vow holds little water, or wine, as the case may be.

This poem is powerful in that the poet admits his transgressions but seems to show little or no real remorse. It subtly ridicules those who would attempt to turn the poet's patron against him, and rather than offer a defense, the poet admits his vices, claims that he enjoys them, and pleads for mercy. The implication is that at least the Archpoet can be honest about his vices and not hide by condemning others. His detractors, he indicates, are not so self-aware. He makes no excuses for his vices, admits them freely, and gaily at that.

This poem was well-known. According to Fleur Adcock's notes, it was known as early as the thirteenth century as a "confession." It was popular enough to have been reworked numerous times.[62] One such rewriting is entitled *Confitemini Dolio*, where the narrator claims, "Magis quam ecclesiam diligo tabernam" [*I love the tavern more than the church*], an assertion that the Archpoet's original does not include (Bayless 106).[63] Intriguing here is that we have numerous comic rewritings of what was originally a tongue-in-cheek, parodic confession that used the body for its humor. The existence of

---

[60]"Mittat in me lapidem neque parcat vati, / cuius non est animus conscius peccati." [*Let him cast stones at me and not spare the poet / whose soul is not conscious of sin.*] (21).

[61] "Novo lacte pascor / ne sit meum amplius vanitatis vas cor." [*I am fed on new milk, / lest my heart be any more a vessel of emptiness.*] (23).

[62]Bayless (105-107) lists eleven variations of this poem in addition to the four examples given by Lehmann (164-67). No doubt others existed, some of which probably still survive.

[63]See Bayless (105-9) for a discussion of these parodies.

47

these

body

and t

contin

appea

descri

the d

The p

inclu

Appe

life a

reas

mou

the p

the p

Chara

the n

situ

Orig

Wom

the p

these copies that not only use the comic body but that use the same aspect of the comic body as their model—alcohol and its effects—speaks to the popularity of both this poem and drinking jokes in general.[64] The poem was popular in England, as well as on the continent. It was attributed to Walter Map in one manuscript.[65] More interestingly, it appears in abbreviated form in an English drinkers' mass very similar to the one described above.[66] These two otherwise separate texts—the Archpoet's confession and the drinkers' mass—are combined for a unified purpose—to evoke laughter.

Other goliardic poems use the upper gastrointestinal tract humorously as well. The poems of the *Carmina Burana* deal with a wide variety of subjects, and several include eating and drinking. One takes the point of view of a swan ready to be eaten (See Appendix B.1).[67] It is a lament with the narrator—a swan—first looking back upon its life and then to what it is now, a roasted meal. Although from the point of view of a roasted swan, the song relishes the cooking of the swan, as if to start the audience's mouth watering in anticipation of an upcoming meal. It is an amusing poem, told from the point of view of the meal.

More interesting than the amusement the poem provides are the implications of the point of view. To be cooked, "modo niger / et ustus fortiter!" [*now black and well-charred*], means that the swan must have already been slaughtered, presumably before the roasting process began. What does it mean for not only a dead swan but also a roasted swan, waiting before the salivating mouth of its devourer, to be cognizant of its present

---

[64]Bayless asserts that drinking and its associated activities were good fodder for comedy, "rich with potential forms of comic degradation: beguilement by tricksters and women of dubious reputation, vomiting, urinating in public, falling into dung-hills" (94).

[65]See *The Latin Poems Attributed to Walter Mapes*.

[66]Bayless prints and translates this mass (346-53).

[67]Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the *Carmina Burana* are from the Hilka and Schumann edition.

predicament in contrast to its previous happiness—"Olim lacus colueram, / olim pulcher extiteram, / dum cignus ego fueram"? The purpose of this absurd point of view is humor and literary pleasure; it is fun to imagine. This situation is important for my analysis of *The Land of Cokaygne* and a similar situation presented therein, to which I will turn shortly.

Another poem takes a different direction in using food and drink. It is a description of the activities in a tavern and contains an interesting *bibit* litany:

> The mistress drinks, the master drinks
>
> The soldier drinks, the priest drinks,
>
> He drinks, she drinks
>
> The manservant drinks with the maid. (196.5)[68]

The litany continues for twelve more lines, telling us exactly who drinks. Just before this litany, the poet has exclaimed, "They all drink without restraint" (bibunt omnes sine lege).[69] This poem is a celebration of overindulgence, ending on a note similar in tone to the Archpoet's about his detractors: "May those who slander us be cursed / And may their names not be written in the book of the righteous."[70] Another poem, "Bacche, benevenies," is similar in tone. This is a celebration of wine, a prayer of sorts to the god of wine:

> That wine, good wine,
>
> noble wine

---

[68]"Bibit hera, bibit herus, / bibit miles, bibit clerus, / bibit ille, bibit illa / bibit servus cum ancilla" (my translation).

[69]Waddell calls this "the greatest drinking song in the world" (233).

[70]"qui nos rodunt, confundantur / et cum iustis non scribantur" (197.7).

makes a man courtly,

honored, bold.[71]

The poet addresses Bacchus as "deus inclite," which may be an allusion to an occurrence of this phrase in Psalm 88:8: "Deus inclitus in arcano sanctorum nimio et terribilis in cunctis qui circum eum sunt."[72] The association of these two occurrences of this phrase is too provocative to overlook. The Psalm verse refers to God as the supreme power, great and terrible. If there is a relationship between the two verses, then the god of this poet, Bacchus, is supreme in greatness and terror.

All of these poems use the body—implied by the use of food and drink—if not openly comically then at least playfully, having food speak, celebrating overindulgence, and setting Bacchus up as the supreme god. The establishment of an alternate god is characteristic of both parodic masses and goliardic poems dealing with drink. As with festivals and parodic masses, these poems establish an alternate world. In this world, Bacchus reigns as the supreme god. Bayless asserts that "an entire mock religion was constructed around this god, incorporating into the holy rites the stock elements of inebriation, debts, loss of clothes, vomiting, shrewd tavern keepers, and, above all, the drunkard's fervent devotion to his lord" (94). She calls this world a "drink-world" (98), but it should be understood as a variation of the play world of Huizinga and Peterson.[73]

---

[71]"Istud vinum, bonum vinum, / vinum generosum / reddit virum curialem, / probum, animosum."

[72]"God who is glorified in the assembly of the saints: great and terrible above all them that are about him." All quotations from the Latin Vulgate are from the Stuttgart edition. All translations are from the Douay-Rheims edition.

[73]In addition to mock religions, mock orders and fraternities were constructed through such literature. Waddell indicates that some sort of order may have existed, basing her conclusion on the fact that Church councils speak of goliards collectively as both *ordo* and *secta* (203). One Middle English poem from a late fifteenth-century manuscript describes the foundation of a "fraternite" (6), with specific requirements for entry ("a potell of good ale"), dress ("toryn gown ...a pach at the kne"), and other specifications. See Rossell Hope Robbins, "The Fraternity of Drinkers" for an edition and discussion of the poem.

Taken together, these and many other poems establish concentrated scenes of excessive eating and drinking representations in Latin, educated, perhaps clerical poetry. At the beginning of this chapter, I concentrated on some instances of medieval parody— masses and festivals—in which folk elements such as exaggerated images of food and drink are pervasive.[74] These practices establish the equivalent of Huizinga's play world, limiting the time and space of their activity. They parody established practices by using bodily humor for the purpose of entertainment.[75] These poems indicate that such techniques were powerful elements in folk, courtly and clerical circles. From this evidence, we can safely say that the comic body is used in what might be considered three main areas of medieval social life: folk, court, and church. But it was not limited to Latin, and *The Land of Cokaygne* is an excellent example of these poetic practices at work in a vernacular language.

III. *The Land of Cokaygne's* Comic Perspective

To review: throughout the Middle Ages a strong tradition of comic, sometimes parodic, practices focusing on ingestion existed. These practices existed across the continuum of medieval social life. At one end are the parodic masses and the mock liturgical elements present in festivals like Shrovetide and the Feast of Fools. All of these practices seem to have been created with entertainment (via humor) as a primary purpose.[76] Moreover, the

---

[74]Chambers devotes much of his discussion in volume 1 of *The Mediaeval Stage* to these and related folk elements, especially as they contribute to the development of medieval drama.

[75]Bayless sees the parodic masses as purely recreational: "religious ideas, phrases, and images were exploited by humorists with no underlying moral or ideological motivation. In other words, religion was available, like any other motif or comic device, simply to enhance the comic impact of secular literature" (211).

[76]The reason that these practices continued to be permitted was probably the recognition that they were needed in order to ensure social order, but they were primarily created for humor and pleasure.

humor here was often bodily in nature, focusing on eating and drinking. These practices are often referred to as folk traditions, and many critics ascribe at least some pagan elements to them. At the other end of this continuum are the drinking songs of the goliards, a group of highly-educated poets who wrote almost solely in Latin, sometimes parodied scriptural Latin, and cast their narrators as vagrants, wandering from patron to patron, begging for food, shelter, clothing, and especially wine. All of these practices present images of ingestion humorously. Since food was scarce and difficult to produce in the Middle Ages, it was a highly-desired commodity. The parodic masses, feasts, and goliardic poetry relieve the anxiety about scarcity through humor that stems from the functions of the upper gastrointestinal tract—eating and drinking.[77] Food and drink are central elements in these practices, and the focus on these commodities in poetry leads to wish-fulfillment literature, where a person may eat and drink without worrying about ideological interference, scarcity, or labor.

Against this backdrop I now turn to a Middle English poem that participates in this same tradition. It has been called the first English utopia by some,[78] a bitter anti-clerical satire by many.[79] What I deem to be its true nature—parody—has been embraced by only a few, though the strongest support for viewing the poem as parody comes from two of the poem's most important editors: "*The Land of Cokaygne* is first and foremost not, as it is commonly called in handbooks and elsewhere, a satire or (still less) a *fabliau,*

---

[77]I focus here on the upper gastrointestinal tract because the practices I have discussed deal solely with eating and drinking. The only mention of the lower gastrointestinal tract—scatological humor—in *The Land of Cokaygne* is the penance one must endure to enter Cokaygne—seven years of wading in pig dung. It is important to note here that, though a reference to dung, this is not a reference to the human gastrointestinal tract.

[78]See A. L. Morton, *The English Utopia*; Hal Rammel, *Nowhere in America*; and the edition from which all of my *Land of Cokaygne* quotations are taken, Robbins's *Historical Poems of the XIV and XV Centuries*, where it is entitled "The First Utopia."

[79]See, for example, Dunn and Byrnes, *Middle English Literature* and P. L. Henry, "The Land of Cokaygne: Cultures in Contact in Medieval Ireland."

but a parody" (Bennett and Smithers 137).[80] I am not concerned with parodic elements of the poem or even the parodic model—descriptions of paradise. Rather, I am concerned with a device that the writer uses for parody: the comic representation of and focus on food and drink.

The poem has been called a utopia, but as I have already asserted, to use the term *utopia* of any work earlier than Thomas More's is to saddle that text with more meaning than is appropriate. *The Land of Cokaygne* is better labeled a wish-fulfillment poem, parodying in many ways practices associated with orthodoxy and inviting laughter at antics that focus on the body. The wish-fulfillment elements that so closely link the poem not only to goliardic literature but also to mock festivals and parodic masses are also those elements that provide material for humor—the body. I contend that the vehicle for humor—the comic body deployed in a parody of orthodox ritual and descriptions of paradise—places this poem firmly within a tradition that includes not just the poems of the Cokaygne tradition but also the parodic practices described above. Moreover, *The Land of Cokaygne* adds to this tradition elements of the overt sexuality that appear in the *fabliaux* and other later works. *The Land of Cokaygne* is a humorous poem that parodies existing literary and ritualistic structures to elicit laughter from its audience, and in this sense it is not nearly as satiric as many have supposed. In the final analysis, *The Land of Cokaygne* belongs to a long and varied tradition of humorous literature that uses the comic body as wish fulfillment.

Before I analyze *The Land of Cokaygne* in this light, a few words of general information may be helpful. The poem appears in a unique manuscript, MS Harley 913, fols. 3v-6v. This manuscript is a true miscellany, containing works in English, French, and Latin on a variety of topics—from satire to devotional texts. Among the English

---

[80]Although most scholars recognize that a parodic element does exist, very few consider this poem primarily a parody. See for example Rossell Hope Robbins, "Political Poems in the Kildare MS."

53

works are *Fifteen Signs before the Judgment*, *The Fall and Passion*, *The Seven Sins*, and *the Ten Commandments*. There are also topical poems, such as one that has been entitled "A Satirical Poem" or "Satire on the People of Kildare," a standard estates satire. The Latin texts are similar, with works on the mystical meaning of the alphabet, moral maxims (which also appear in a number of other manuscripts), a poem on the flagellation of St. Paul, one entitled "Responsa Dei ad B. Franciscum," a work entitled "Superbia: Lucifer antiochus" (also found in other manuscripts), and *The Abbot of Gloucester's Feast* and *Missa de potatoribus*, both parodic works.

The manuscript environment of this poem is particularly interesting, for many of the works in Harley 913 contain themes similar to those found in *The Land of Cokaygne*, and several use the comic body. "The Satire on the People of Kildare," for instance, ends on a celebratory note:

> Makith glad, mi frendis, ȝe sittith to long stille;
>
> Spekith now, and gladieth, and drinketh al ȝur fille;
>
> Ȝe habbeth I-hird of men lif that wonith in lond;
>
> Drinkith dep, and makith glade, ne hab ȝe non other nede.
>
> This song is y-seid of me,
>
> Ever I-blessid mote ȝe be! (*Reliquiae Antiquae* 177)

After satirizing the estates of Kildare, the poet acknowledges that his poem has been long and that the audience should now drink its fill, be glad, and make merry. It is a celebration of drink, a party song of sorts.[81] Moreover, this poem almost immediately follows *The Land of Cokaygne*, the only work separating the two being a seven-line poem called "Five Evil Things," a poem on the abuses of the age. The parodic *Missa de potatoribus*, which I have already addressed, appears a mere seven folios further into the manuscript.

---

[81] *The Abbot of Gloucester's Feast* is similar, for it presents a sumptuous feast with plenty of food and drink.

Although unique to its own manuscript, *The Land of Cokaygne* is not isolated in its poetic subjects. It belongs to a tradition of poems dealing with Cokaygne, an imaginary paradise where leisure rules and food is readily available. The earliest-known instance of the word *Cokaygne* used for this place is in a twelfth-century goliardic poem from the *Carmina Burana* (see Appendix B.2). Although not establishing a set location for Cokaygne, this poem does give it a religious setting. The first line reads "Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis" (222), establishing Cokaygne as the house over which the narrator is abbot. An Old French poem from the thirteenth century, *Le Fabliau de Cocagne*, offers a full description of Cokaygne, complete with architecture made of food and rivers of milk and beer. A Dutch analogue from the fifteenth century exists as well, *Dit is van dat edele land van Cockaengen*.[82] Although elements similar in all of the Cokaygne poems have been analyzed, the relationship of these poems to other wish-fulfillment practices has not, as far as I know, been fully explored. In the remainder of this chapter, I will look at the comic uses of food in the English poem and the relationship of this poem to the parodic practices that I have already discussed.

Food *in* The Land of Cokaygne

The Land of Cokaygne contains a multitude of references to food and drink. A focus on obtaining food and the architecture and landscape made of food appears in a number of episodes that have Irish analogues. Additionally, prepared food moves through the landscape and makes itself available to the inhabitants. These representations of food clearly fulfill the wish of readily-attainable food, making the poem a pleasure to read, even funny.

Obtaining food effortlessly is what has given critics like A. L. Morton reason to call *The Land of Cokaygne* a utopia; this situation appears near the beginning of the

---

[82]Veikko Väänänen ("Le 'fabliau' de Cocagne") prints the French and Dutch analogues.

poem, where the poet begins describing food in Cokaygne: "In cokaigne is met & drink / wiþ-vte car, how [trouble], & swink" (17-18). Food in Cokaygne is obtained without effort or even a second thought. This aspect of Cokaygne is a condensed version of a larger tradition in wish-fulfillment literature, one that appears in at least one Irish analogue to *The Land of Cokaygne*—"Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise."[83] Cormac pursues a warrior who has abducted his wife and finds himself in a castle. A pig is being boiled for a meal, but the pig cannot be prepared until a truth is told for every turn of the spit. The first truth explains the pig, the log that cooks it, and the axe that split the log. After returning a man's lost cows to him, the warrior received three gifts: "He gave me a pig and an axe and a log, the pig to be killed with the axe every night, and the log to be cleft by it, and there would then be enough firewood to boil the pig, and enough for the palace besides. And, moreover, the pig would be alive the next morning and the log be whole" (505). The warrior tells another truth, this one about plowing time.

> When we desired to plough that field outside, it was found ploughed,
> harrowed and sown with wheat. When we desired to reap it, the crop was
> found stacked in the field. When we desired to draw it into that side out
> there, it was found in the enclosure all in one thatched rick. We have been
> eating it from then till today; but it is no whit greater nor less. (506).

Here we find elements central not only to *The Land of Cokaygne* but also to most wish-fulfillment literature involving food and drink. Food is available freely. In fact, it is perpetual. In the Land of Promise, the pig is reborn every morning to provide food for the coming evening, and the wheat stores never run out. Moreover, the necessities of life are to be had without toil. The pig must be slaughtered, but not raised or even fed. The wheat does not need to be planted, reaped, or gathered. It is simply wished for, and the wish is

---

[83]Both this story and *The Vision of Mac Conglinne* are printed in Tom Peete Cross's and Clark Harris Slover's *Ancient Irish Tales*.

fulfilled. In the Land of Promise food is readily available in abundance and without work, exactly what we see in *The Land of Cokaygne*.

But *The Land of Cokaygne* goes a bit further in its representation of food. In Cokaygne, "Þe met is trie, þe drink is clere, / to none, russin, & sopper" (19-20). The food at all meals is the best, and the drink bright. The poet contrasts food in Cokaygne with sustenance in paradise, where "þer nis met bote frute" (10), and "bot watir, man-is þurst to quenche" (12). The poet establishes a land where the food is superlative, attained without toil, even without a thought. It is a contrast to both paradise, where there is only fruit and water, and medieval Europe, where the most meager harvest of mundane food requires endless toil.

The Land of Cokaygne contains another description with an analogous description in an Irish tale. The poet describes the landscape as being made of food: "Þer beþ riuers gret & fine, / of oile, melk, honi, & wine" (45-6). The geographical features themselves provide human beings with the necessities (and niceties) of life. The "wel fair abbei" (51) in Cokaygne contains architecture completely composed of food:

> þer beþ bowris & halles;
>
> al of pasteiis beþ þe walles,
>
> of fleis*, of fisse, & rich met,   meat
>
> þe likfullist þat man mai et.
>
> fluren cakes beþ þe schingles alle,
>
> of cherche, cloister, boure, & halle;
>
> þe pinnes* beþ fat podinges—   pinnacles
>
> rich met to princeȝ & kinges. (53-60)

This description perhaps reminds the modern reader of Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel*, where the architecture is edible as well. This type of description, however, is not unique to *The Land of Cokaygne*. In fact, it belongs to the same tradition as "Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise." Another Irish analogue, *The Vision of Mac*

Conglinne, uses food similarly. This tale is absurd, funny, and lies completely in the wish-fulfillment tradition.[84]

The story is full of food references, which even take on allegorical aspects. At one point Mac Conglinne, the hero, comes to a well named "Ever-full" (559). Later, a phantom tells Mac Conglinne that the chieftains of the Tribe of Food are to be summoned. When Mac Conglinne asks their names, the phantom replies, "they are Little Sloey son of Smooth-juicy-bacon, Cakey son of Hung Beer, and Hollow-sides son of Gullet, and Milkikin son of Lactulus, and Wristy-hand son of Leather-head, and young Mul-Lard son of Flitch of Old-Bacon" (576). At one point, Mac Conglinne enters a fort. The doorkeeper, whose name is Bacon-lad son of Butter-lad son of Lard, is wearing some interesting clothes: "smooth sandals of old bacon on his soles, and leggings of pot-meat encircling his shins, with his tunic of corned beef, and his girdle of salmon skin around him, with his hood of flummery about him, with a seven-filleted crown of butter on his head ..." (579). The descriptions are entirely of food. Even the prayers are food-related. Uttering a litany of protection, the phantom wishes that "smooth juicy bacon," "hard yellow-skinned cream," and a "cauldron full of pottage" protect Mac Conglinne (577).

Most similar to *The Land of Cokaygne* is the actual vision that Mac Conglinne has. After offending the inhabitants of a monastery (over the poor food and lodging he has received, interestingly enough), Mac Conglinne is sentenced to be crucified. During his ordeal, he has a vision. He sees a place "Within a port of New-milk Loch" (562). He sees a fort, the outworks made of custards, the bridge of butter, the palisade of bacon. The door is dried meat, the threshold bare bread with cheese curds as sides. Pillars of old

---

[84]Its editor says of it that "This story stands almost alone as perhaps the only extended piece of vernacular narrative from the earlier Middle Ages that was composed expressly for humorous purposes" (551). Although I disagree with the special place this story is given regarding humorous stories (that it is the *only* early piece written wholly for comedy), it is interesting that its editor considers it to have been composed specifically for humorous purposes.

cheese, mellow cream, and curds support the house. Beer flows in streams. He sees a forest of leeks, onions, and carrots. The people in the house wear necklaces of cheese and bits of tripe. In this vision we see the loch (or other large body normally composed of water) of milk and the architecture composed of food that is so prominent in *The Land of Cokaygne*. In *The Land of Cokaygne* we see in the cloister walls of "pasteiis," "fleis," "fisse," and "rich met" (54-55). It has "fluren cakes" for shingles, and "þe pinnes beþ fat podinges" (57, 59). The poet does not stop with the architecture of the abbey, however. He continues to describe the tree outside, which has roots of rare spices (ginger, mace, cinnamon, and clove). All of these Irish poems foreground food and drink by using food and drink as architecture, clothing, personal names, and landscape. If not funny, these descriptions are at least entertaining.

The Cokaygne poet goes beyond his Irish analogues in many places. Food not only forms the architecture and landscape, but it also moves through the landscape, apparently of its own volition. While describing the abbey, the poet says:

> þe Gees irostid on þe spitte
>
> fleeȝ to þat abbai, god hit wot,
>
> & grediþ*, "gees, al hote! al hot!" (102-4)   cry out

But this is not all that these roasted geese do. They "bringeþ garlek gret plente, / þe best idiȝt þat man mai se" (105-6). Other birds act similarly:

> þe leuerokes*, þat beþ cuþ,   larks
>
> liȝtiþ adun to man-is muþ,
>
> idiȝt* in stu, ful swiþe* wel   prepared, very
>
> pudrid* wiþ gilofre and canel*. (107-10)   powdered, cloves and cinnamon

Birds in Cokaygne fly to the abbey, advertising themselves in ways similar to medieval street cries or, to use a modern analog, food vendors in sports' arenas. The appearance of these birds is not what we would expect from flying birds in nature. They have been prepared for the table—the geese roasted and still on the spit, the larks in a stew. The

geese advertise themselves, tempting the monks with their goodness and even providing spices; the larks fly into the monks' mouths.

This passage is similar in many ways to the goliardic poem from the *Carmina Burana* mentioned above—*Olim lacus colueram*. Although the swan is at the time of the poem cooked, prepared, on the plate, and ready to be eaten ("Now I lay on the platter"[85]), it is fully aware of and laments its situation ("miser! miser!"). Each poem presents poultry aware of its situation as food. *Olim lacus colueram* is a comic lament, while *The Land of Cokaygne* is a comic celebration of food. This contrast—variations on a similar theme—is interesting. In Cokaygne, food animals do not fear being eaten. In fact, they seem to take great pleasure in existing to provide the inhabitants of this island paradise with food. Here, the natural world exists solely to provide human beings with what they need to survive comfortably.[86]

The Land of Cokaygne clearly shares a tradition of wish fulfillment with both "Cormac's Adventures in the Land of Promise" and *The Vision of Mac Conglinne*. As in Grimm's *Hansel and Gretel*, everything in sight in both of these Irish stories is made of food. But one difference does exist in the descriptions. Nowhere in *The Vision of Mac Conglinne* does the writer mention that the architecture or landscape can actually be eaten, even though the clothing, jewelry, architecture, and landscape are made of food. *The Land of Cokaygne* does indicate that the landscape and architecture is edible. Immediately after the full description of edible architecture, the poet says "man mai þer-of et inoȝ, / al wiþ riȝt & noȝt wiþ woȝ" (61-2). Presumably *þer-of* refers to the architecture just described, which would explain the line following—that eating from this

---

[85]"Nunc in scutella iaceo."

[86]This aspect of Cokaygne was painted by Peter Brueghel the Elder in the sixteenth century. The painting shows a cottage with a roof of cakes, a tree out of which a table grows, three men lying under the tree with sausages hanging on it, a walking egg with a knife in its broken shell, a walking hog with a knife stuck in it, and a goose on a plate.

archit

famil

eating

Cook

been

poem

is ove

their

air."

The t

swin

Poem

fablia

the ri

With
Livi,

25 Tr

P.

architecture is a right and is not viewed as wrong. Here we find the poet presenting a familiar tradition—the land composed of food—and adding to this a logical extension: eating from that landscape.

In addition to extending the edible architecture/landscape topos, *The Land of Cokaygne* adds some completely new material to its sources and analogues. The first has been noted by a number of scholars—the so-called monastic satire at the end of the poem.[87] This passage is absent in other Cokaygne poems. Moreover, this part of the poem is overtly sexual, a form of bodily humor that we rarely see in goliardic poetry.[88] After their meal, the young monks go to "plai" (122). This play involves flying through the air.[89] Unable to recall the monks, the abbot

...takeþ a maidin of þe route*	population
and turniþ vp har white toute*,	rump
& betiþ þe taburs* wiþ is hond	small drums
to make is monkes liȝt to lond! (135-38)	

The flying monks land and "þakkeþ al hir white toute" (142), an activity referred to as *swinke* in the next line.

Risqué as this scene is, it is but an introduction to the remaining section of the poem, containing sexual activity of the sort that we might more commonly find in the *fabliaux*.[90] The poet describes a nunnery on a river of milk. Daily the nuns swim naked in the river, and upon seeing this the monks fly to them:

---

[87]Yoder asserts, "The only other medieval story combining a glutton's paradise with such an attack is the twelfth-century Irish tale *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, or *The Vision of Mac Conglinne*" (231). P. L. Henry agrees with Yoder on this point (134).

[88]Granted, much goliardic verse deals with love, but it does not focus on sexuality as *The Land of Cokaygne* does.

[89]For one idea of the meaning of this flight, see Hill (57).

[90]In fact, *The Land of Cokaygne* has been linked to the *fabliaux*. See, for instance, Robbins's discussion in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English* (5.1408-09).

& euch monke him takeþ on,

& snellich* berriþ forþ har prei   quickly

to þe mochil* grei abbei,   great

& techiþ þe nunnes an oreisun*   prayer

wiþ iambleue* vp & dun. (162-66)   raised leg

This is a scene of intense sexuality, the pun on the up and down *oreisun* presented with a wit similar to Chaucer's. A short section about the taking of wives follows:

Þe monke þat wol be stalun* gode   stallion

& kan set ariȝt is hode,

he schal hab, wiþ-oute danger,

xii wiues euche ȝere,

al þroȝ riþt & noȝt þroȝ grace,

for to do him-silf solace. (167-72)[91]

This sexual play is vastly different from revel practices and parodic masses or what goliardic poets do with love, and it is definitely different from the rest of this poem. But is it anti-clerical satire, as almost all critics claim?

I believe that this part of the poem is far less satiric than an extension of the wish fulfillment that dominates the description of this land. It seems to me that the only reason scholars have been so quick to lob the term satire at this part of the poem, and as a result often at the poem as a whole, is that these lines describe the sexual activity of monks and nuns. From a perspective that would expect a sharp separation of the sexual from the spiritual in monastic life, this representation might appear to be shockingly inappropriate. However, this poem presents a special situation. The setting of the poem is not medieval

---

[91]The Old French Cokaygne poem has a description on the taking of wives as well; in Cokaygne one can have a new wife each year (Väänänen 12), but the inhabitants in the Old French version are not monks.

Europe

be min

the po

on its

versio

accep

Lund

invers

fulfill

any m

creatir

fulfill

conse

set of

---

the la
islanc
additi
de C
pre-C

See a

nuns
been
Oper
Cany
love
conte
and

Europe, or any known location.[92] In fact, Cokaygne surpasses even paradise: "þo3 peradis be miri & bri3t / cokaygn is of fairir si3t" (5-6). As in the festival world described above, the poetic world here is an alternative world, one that turns the world of everyday reality on its head. In such a world, the rules, customs, and even natural phenomena are inverted versions of what the poet sees as he looks out his window. The poet asks his audience to accept this world for *its* standards, not to judge it based upon everyday standards. *The Land of Cokaygne* presents a very clear world-set-apart—in this case an island—with an inverted set of rules and customs.[93] Since this is a wish-fulfillment poem setting its wish fulfillment in a play world, the sexual activity should not necessarily offend our tastes any more than overabundance of food does. The monks' and nuns' sexual encounter is a creative fulfillment of a wish. It acknowledges sexual desire and offers the imaginative fulfillment of that desire. This is a land where every desire can be sated without negative consequences.[94]

The second addition that this poet makes to his sources and analogues is a curious set of eight lines that depicts the monks fulfilling at least some of their religious tasks.

---

[92]For ideas on the location of this island, see Yoder, who sees similarities between the land of plenty in *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* and Cokaygne (both of which place the island paradise in the west) (237-38). Juliette de Caluwé-Dor cites Brendan's paradise in addition to two other analogues—*Le Voyage de Húi Corra* and *Les Aventures des Clercs de Columbcille* (95). A. L. Morton sees this western location of the island as indicating a pre-Christian, Celtic element (13).

[93]The notion of inversion plays a key role in Bayless's argument about parody. See also Howard, "The Folk Origins of *The Land of Cokaygne*" (75).

[94]I should also note that literature depicting sexual activity between monks and nuns was, if not popular, at least prominent in the Middle Ages. There seems to have been a literary tradition where a monk and knight debate over who is the better lover. Often, the monk wins the debate. Additionally, of the several amorous poems in *The Cambridge Songs*, one seems to depict a monk praying his beloved, a nun, to return his love (27). Much of this poem was blotted out, however, probably due to the erotic content. In English examples are numerous. See for example "A Cleric Courts his Lady" and "Jankin, the Clerical Seducer" (Davies 59, 162).

Immediately before the flying scene, the poet writes about the ease of a monk's duty in Cokaygne:

> Whan þe monkes geeþ to masse,
>
> al þe fenestres þat beþ of glasse
>
> turneþ in-to cristal briȝt,
>
> to ȝiuve þe monkes more liȝt.
>
> whan þe masses beþ iseiid*,   said
>
> & þe bokes up ileiid*,   laid
>
> þe cristal turniþ in-to glasse,
>
> in state þat hit raþer* wasse. (113-120)   before

In order to make mass easier, the glass—presumably stained glass, which would have lessened the amount of light in the church—turns to crystal, allowing the monks to see better. Curious as this scene is, I have found no studies that have attempted to address it at all, let alone reconcile it with the general trend of classifying this poem as anti-clerical satire. As much as this poem is earthly, this scene brings the spiritual into the earthly, making Cokaygne an earthly paradise in terms of physical desires and of doing one's spiritual work on earth. The monks here have the best of both worlds; Cokaygne fulfills the wishes of monks, providing culinary, sexual, and spiritual ease.

At nearly every turn, we find references to the body and its functions used for humorous purposes. The inclusion of buildings made of food, food that advertises itself, and the river of milk all refer to the upper gastrointestinal tract of the human body. The flying monk episode indicates a desire to surpass the limitations of the human body, humorously of course, while the almost slapstick summoning of the monks—by the abbot beating on a young girl's bottom like a drum—saturates the human body with humor. The sexual activity at the end of the poem, as well as the mock penance required for entry into Cokaygne—standing up to one's chin in pig dung for seven years—reinforces the comic

body element in the poem. Humor in this poem is frequently derived from the comic body.

The Land of Cokaygne, then, is very much a wish fulfillment poem. Similar in many ways to other poems in the Cokaygne tradition, it adds to that tradition the sexual delights of the monks with their nuns on the milk river. Throughout, the depiction is absurd, from Bakhtinian banquet images to food that literally flies into the mouth. These representations reach the point where they become humorous early in the poem, and the humor is wholly derived from absurdity revolving around the body and its functions. As we find in festivals like the Feast of Fools and Shrovetide, parodic masses, and some goliardic poetry, this poem brings to the forefront food and drink, two necessities of life that during the Middle Ages were both scarce and difficult to produce. It presents a land of physical delights and acknowledges, through the glass turned to crystal, that even spirituality must begin with the human body.

Like the mock festivals and some goliardic poems, *The Land of Cokaygne* parodies the idea of paradise, mocks ritual, and is meant to delight, entertain, and relieve the daily worries about food, drink, and the survival of the species. It looks ahead to Chaucer's *fabliaux*, parts of *Piers Plowman*, medieval drama, and some of Dunbar's poems in its use of the comic body. In a way it begins a comic journey through the human body via the gastrointestinal tract, capitalizing on our appetite for fine food and drink, and adding a different kind of appetite along the way—sex.

Chapter 3
Oral Excesses and Genital Deficits: Appetites as Humor
in *Piers Plowman*

The Land of Cokaygne and its parodic kin provide an excellent introduction to the use of

the comic body in the Middle Ages. Parody is itself a comic form, meant in part to

provoke a laugh at the model or practices it mocks. As such, the literature and practices

highlighted in Chapter 2 are obvious places to look for the comic body. They are comedic

by genre. However, representations of the comic body exist in various genres and styles.

And these representations are used for a wide range of purposes.

In this chapter I will look at the comic body used for edification, using *Piers*

Plowman as a representative example. Often considered the most difficult of Middle

English poems to understand,[1] *Piers Plowman* is, critics might agree, a moral poem

aimed at teaching its audience (as well as its narrator) about scriptural truths. As one

editor of the poem describes it, "Langland's poem exists not as a story, but as an

exploration of Christian truth and its implications for someone who wishes to follow it. It

is…basically an account of how the soul might get to God, its final resting place, in spite

of difficulties and detours" (Trapp 350). Unlike the material discussed in the last chapter,

Piers Plowman is not overall a comic work. Yet Langland uses humor to meet his needs.

In this chapter I will look at the same two subjects that I presented in the previous

chapter—ingestion and sexuality. However, whereas *The Land of Cokaygne* and its

parodic relatives use the comic body for entertainment, Langland adopts it to edify. The

comic body in *Piers Plowman* appears in satirical episodes, where it certainly educates,

but it also appears in episodes less satiric than didactic; these instances, like sermon

---

[1] See Alford, "Design of the Poem" (1) for some opinions on the difficulty of the
poem.

even

more

poin

for p

repr

that

adj

sour

liter

Glu

four

repr

of 3

glu

con

cha

pro

one

———

Lar
cha
con

righ
Per
Pap
the
glu
dep
Sep

exempla, often illustrate situations that an audience should avoid. In *Piers Plowman* the moral element reigns supreme as Langland uses the comic body to reinforce his moral points. *Piers Plowman* is an excellent example of how a writer can adopt the comic body for purposes other than laughter and entertainment. Langland's use of humorous representations of the body in the two incidents that I discuss here supports his message that the search for spiritual love should supersede corporeal concerns. Langland's use and adaptation of the comic body shed light on some of the poet's hitherto unrecognized sources, indicating that even a moral writer like Langland was familiar with comic literature and practices.[2]

My discussion of *Piers Plowman* begins with a look at a social aspect of Gluttony: overconsumption of scarce supplies. I first look briefly at food shortages in the fourteenth century, followed by an analysis of the sin of Gluttony, particularly representations of gluttonous behavior as wasting important sources of sustenance. Most of the scenes where Langland mentions Gluttony are satiric, condemning the activities of gluttonous characters. I then move to Langland's comic representation of the sin: the confession of Gluton. This scene conflates two tavern traditions, the tavern as Devil's chapel and as *locus classicus* of comedy, to present a comic picture of Gluton.[3] Langland provides a comic narrative of Gluton's actions within a tavern setting that is a common one for comedy. The practices represented in the tavern are funny and corporeal.

---

[2]Anne Middleton suggests that there has been a shift in source studies of Langland from the identification of quotations to how Langland uses his sources. This chapter contributes to that shift not by identifying a particular source but by identifying a common literary practice with which Langland was familiar.

[3]The scenes with Hunger and the doctor of divinity are humorous in their own right, but they are more satiric than the confession of Gluton. Hunger's entry into the poem—being summoned (an odd event in itself) to punish wasters and then afflicting the population until lulled into sleep by over-feeding and drunkenness—is darkly comic, the uneasiness about famine and food shortage barely covered by the humor. Will's verbal gluttony—his inability to keep his mouth shut and the humorous ramifications of those actions—surpasses the excesses of the doctor, gluttonous as they are. Neither of these scenes, however, is as comic as Gluton's confession.

Although not openly condemned, the practices represented as laughable in this scene set up such behavior as ridiculous to teach the audience; Langland prompts the audience to laugh *at* such activities.

I then move to a sexual joke that appears at the end of the poem. In Passus 20, Will has an unfortunate encounter with Elde, during which he grows old and as a result becomes impotent. I begin with an analysis of medieval opinions on impotence and then move to a look at self-deprecating narrators, some of whose representations the *senex amans* tradition. Then I show how these practices combine in Langland's impotence joke and how he uses this joke to teach his audience a lesson about the futility of earthly concerns.

These incidents illustrate a use of the comic body that deploys entertainment for moral instruction. Langland portrays Gluton and Will humorously to illustrate their folly. His purpose is to make his audience laugh *only* if laughter helps his moral point. Gluttony directs a person away from the proper path to salvation, and excessive sexuality interrupts the search for spiritual love that should occur near the end of life. Both incidents provide scenes of comedy as an example of how not to act. In a manner similar to preachers, Langland uses the comic body to illustrate laughable behavior, to ridicule such behavior and practices, and to direct his audience's attention to what he believes should rise above all other appetites—the search for divine love.

I. Ingestion as Sin—The Oral Excess of Gluttony

As I illustrated in the last chapter, medieval people were well aware of the precarious balance between satiety and hunger. Almost every year, as Frank has shown, there was a time when the food stores ran low.[4] A bad harvest would alert the population to an impending time of belt-tightening, and anxiety over food production must have been

---

[4]See Frank's "Hungry Gap" for his full argument.

frequer

humor

develop

Glutton

represe

lessons

and ric

discus

follow

finally

Famir

As ba

not ha

Altho

in 13

Engl

word

wors

The

espe

Famp
Cris
1)

frequently if not always present in the Middle Ages. I indicated in the last chapter that

humor was one way of coping with this anxiety. Here, I suggest that another way had also

developed and continued to be used: the representation of over-consumption—

Gluttony—as ridiculous and laughable, behavior not to be emulated. Langland frequently

represents Gluttony this way. However, though funny, these representations are still

lessons in how to behave. As the poem progresses, we begin to see exactly how harmful

and ridiculous gluttonous behavior, in all of its manifestations, really is. I will begin my

discussion of Gluttony with a brief overview of fourteenth-century famine conditions,

followed by discussions of Gluttony, Langland's satirical representation of the sin, and

finally an analysis of the confession of Gluton.

Famines in the Fourteenth Century

As bad as food shortages were in the thirteenth century (see Table 1 above), they could

not have prepared the population for the severe conditions of the fourteenth century.[5]

Although the first decade of the fourteenth century was relatively free from bad harvests,

in 1310 all grains suffered lower than average yields (see Table 2), and from 1315-1323

England and most of Europe suffered famines of epic proportions. In Christopher Dyer's

words, "The episode of 1315-18 is rightly infamous because it seems to have been the

worst famine in England and indeed in northern Europe in the last millennium" (265).

The cause of this famine was a series of bad years dominated by excessively wet weather,

especially in 1315 and 1316.[6] According to Dyer, even though the bad weather ended

---

[5]On these conditions, see Postan, Ladurie, Gottfried, and Dyer.

[6]For more details on this particular famine, see H. S. Lucas, "The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316, and 1317," and I. Kershaw, "The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315-1322," as well as Dyer's comments on it, particularly in Chapter 10.

Table 2.

Bad Harvests in the Fourteenth Century

All Grains	Wheat and Barley
1310-11	
1315-6	
1316-7	
	1321-2
	1322-3
	1331-2
1339-40	
1343-4	
1346-7	
1349-50	
1350-1	
1351-2	
1362-3	
1367-8	
1369-70	
1374-5	
1381-2	
	1390-1
1396-7	

Source: Adapted from Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages:*

Social Change in England c. 1200-1500, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989, 262.

in 1316, grain supplies did not rebound until an exceptionally good harvest in 1318 (266). However, even that boon harvest did not completely relieve famine conditions in England; a severe cattle plague occurred in 1320. Additionally, between 1321 and 1323 England experienced bad harvests of both wheat and barley.

The ramifications of such widespread famine cannot be over-stated. Records from the Middle Ages being what they are, estimating the hardship caused by such catastrophes is difficult, at best. But Dyer estimates that up to ten percent of the tenants on the Winchester episcopal manors and up to fifteen percent of males on some Essex manors died during this famine. Moreover, the fourteenth-century famines differed significantly from their thirteenth-century counterparts in that famine conditions in the fourteenth century were continental as well as insular. During the thirteenth-century agricultural crises the wealthy could purchase food from sources abroad. However, since this early fourteenth-century famine afflicted both England and the continent, the purchase of food would have been difficult and *very* expensive. As a result, this famine touched nearly all levels of society.

Table 2 illustrates that bad harvests were relatively common throughout Langland's lifetime. The 1340s, 1350s, and 1360s saw a number of bad harvests, and the Black Death visited England in 1348 (and periodically thereafter), killing by some estimates up to one half of the population in some locations.[7] The death and hardship caused by the great famine, the bad harvests afterward, and the plague were bound to leave a lasting impression on the inhabitants of England, regardless of social class. Part of that impact is reflected in coping practices—the stockpiling of food, promoting abstinence and fasting, eating atypical food items as a last resort, and representing waste unfavorably in literature and art.

---

[7]George Huppert says that in the first half of the fourteenth century "there were too many mouths to feed" and that "they [medieval people] had been helpless against famine and disease" (cx).

The Many Faces of Gluttony

Gluttony plays a significant role in *Piers Plowman*, but in order to understand how

Gluttony functions in this poem, we must first understand what, exactly, it is.[8] It is, to

quote Chaucer's *Parson*, "unmesurable appetit to ete or to drynke, or elles to doon ynogh

to the unmesurable appetit and desordeynee coveitise to eten or to drynke" (X.817-18).

This definition speaks to the idea of the belly as a god, replacing the proper god and

leading the sinner to damnation.[9] But this is only the most obvious meaning of the term

Gluttony, and it is, as I will show, a much larger concept than overindulgence in food and

drink, though this is a major aspect of the sin. As Bloomfield has shown, Gluttony and

Lechery, the so-called carnal sins, were emphasized in the early monastic tradition, since

these were the sins most likely to afflict monks.[10] In the fourteenth century Gluttony

again plays an important role, perhaps as a social response to the anxiety caused by

agricultural crises. Both Gower and Chaucer utter pronouncements against it, as do

numerous preachers.[11]

---

[8]A full analysis of the sin of Gluttony is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Such a project would fill a book along the lines of Siegfried Wenzel's *Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature*.

[9]The idea of the belly being a god was common in the Middle Ages, especially in conjunction with the cardinal sin of Gluttony, thanks to Paul's classic dictum: "quorum deus venter" (Philippians 3.19). Waddell quotes a poem attributed to Walter Map that criticizes some churchmen: "Their God is their belly: and they obey that which is written, *Seek first the Kingdom of God*" (205). As Langland puts it, "hir god is hire wombe: / Quorum deus venter est" (Kane-Donaldson ed., B.9.62). See also Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* (VI.529-35).

[10]In his discussion of the various orderings of sins, Bloomfield explains one reason why John Cassian placed *gula* first in his list of sins, even though he probably considered *superbia* the chief sin. *Gula, fornicatio*, and *acedia* were "all especially monastic vices" and "he was probably not thinking of applying his list of sins specifically to the lay world" (71). Still, Cassian was deemed an *auctor*, and as such, his words were available for later writers to use.

[11]Chaucer's Pardoner and Parson both attack gluttons, as does Gower in *Mirour de l'Omme*, and Owst prints numerous attacks on this sin from sermons.

knev

amo

you

caug

Para

reali

conc

desc

Gov

fir

glo

soci
sou
lang
ma

me
cus
bes
deg
dise

Gluttony can be considered a social as well as spiritual sin, and medieval writers knew well and acknowledged the sin's social impact. Gluttony was held to be supreme among sins by, among others, John Gower, who laments "Ah Gluttony, cause of all evils, you are the infernal fisherman who, with your subtle hook in the deadly apple, cruelly caught Lady Eve and dragged her basely along with Adam (our first parents) from Paradise unto this vale, where there are only tears and affliction. Ah, Gluttony, you are really the origin of all our ills!" (*MO* 8569-8580).[12] Although much of Gower's condemnation of Gluttony focuses on the individual ills caused by the sin, early in his description he acknowledges the social impact of Gluttony:

> Medical science tells us of a grievous ill called loup royal. It uses up
>
> medicines and in the end cannot be cured. In the same way the surfeiting
>
> glutton devours and wastes in his cuisine both domesticated and wild
>
> creatures. He leaves neither terrestrial nor marine creature, bird, fish nor
>
> beast. Nor does he leave wood, meadow, field, vineyard, seed or fruit,
>
> flower or root. He despoils everything in general. (*MO* 8521-8532)[13]

Gower also says that Gluttony "removes riches and causes hated poverty to come" (8610 ff.).[14] Such statements are common in discussions of the vice. Langland himself says, "In glotonye, got woot, go þei [bidderes and beggeres] to bedde, / And risen vp wiþ ribaudie

---

[12]"He, Gule, des tous mals casual, / Tu es ly pescheur infernal, / Q'ove ta maçon soubtilement / Dedeinz le pomme q'ert mortal / Dame Eve par especial / Preis par la goule fierement, / Et la treinas trop vilement / Ovesque Adam le no parent / Du paradis tanq'en ce val / U n'est que plour et marrement. He, Gule, tu es proprement / De tous noz mals l'origenal" (8569-80). All translations from *Mirour de l'Omme* are Wilson's.

[13]"Phisique conte d'un grief mal / Q'est appellé le loup roial; / Cil guaste toute medicine / Et si n'en guarist au final. / Ensi ly glous superflual / Devore et gaste en sa cusine / Le domest et le salvagine, / Ne laist terreste ne marine, / Oisel, piscoun ne bestial, / Ne bois ne pré ne champ ne vine, / Pepin ne fruit, flour ne racine, / Ainz tout deguaste en general" (8521-32). *Loup roial* is, according to Bloomfield, "an ulcerous skin disease" (196).

[14]"Si tolt richesce et fait enprendre / Poverte, que l'en hiet aprendre" (8610-11).

as Roberdes knaues; / Sleep and sleuþe seweþ hem euer" (B.P.43-45). Such condemnations serve a social as well as spiritual purpose. As a deadly sin, of course, Gluttony imperils a person's soul. As a social action, gluttonous behavior is a cause of poverty, crime, and the draining of food stores.

The fourteenth-century alliterative poem *Wynnere and Wastoure*, which includes an argument about overindulgence in food and drink similar to Gower's, highlights this socially destructive quality of the sin.[15] Winner says that wasting—which includes the overuse of forests, food, and drink—destroys the stores that should be saved for times of want:

Alle þat I wynn thurgh witt   he wastes thurgh pryde,

I gedir, I glene   and he lattys goo sone,

I pryke and I pryne   and he the purse opynes.

Why hase this cayteffe no care   how men corne sellen?

His londes liggen alle ley,   his lomes aren solde,

Downn bene his dowfehowses,   drye ben his poles.

The deuyll wounder the wele   he weldys at home

Bot hungere and heghe howses   and howndes full kene.

Safe a sparthe and a spere   sparrede in ane hyrne,

A bronde at his bede-hede   biddes he no noþer

Bot a cuttede capill   to cayre with to his frendes. (230-43)[16]

---

[15]Scholars have often compared this poem to Langland's. In his discussion of satire in *Piers Plowman*, for instance, S. T. Knight asserts that *Wynnere and Wastoure* is an example of a satiric model that Langland probably knew: "*Winner and Waster* is generally thought to antedate the A-text, and it is a moral alliterative poem which displays some fine touches of imagination as it discusses a limited topic with considerable point, but this is really all we can find in the way of a satirical tradition which the author [Langland] probably knew well" (283). Stephen A. Barney suggests that *Wynnere and Wastoure* "may have been a source for Langland" (128). See also S. S. Hussey's article on "Langland's Reading of Alliterative Poetry."

[16]All quotations from *Wynnere and Wastoure* are from Trigg's EETS edition.

74

The examples are many, the tone bitter. Winner's association of Waster's activities with Pride, a deadly sin, is important. During the Middle Ages Pride was generally considered chief among the deadly sins. It is not a bodily sin, but rather a spiritual sin, the sin that drove Lucifer and his angels to rebel and then caused the fall of Adam and Eve (though the *eating* of the apple allowed for the alternate explanation of the Fall as a result of Gluttony, as we have already seen). Winner claims that Pride is responsible for Waster's destruction of all that has been saved.

Winner's arguments about Waster focus on this destructive quality. Winner says, "With thi sturte and thy stryffe thou stroyeste vp my gudes / In sayttinge and in wakynge in wynttres nyghttis" (265-66). Winner complains here about the destruction of goods, a concept important for another point that Winner makes. As I have indicated, even in good years there were periods when supplies ran low while farmers waited for the harvest. As a result, food storage practices evolved to guard against shortages. Waster, however, does not contribute to these important practices:

> Ʒe folowe noghte ʒoure fadirs   þat fosterde ʒow alle
>
> A kynde herueste to cache   and cornes to wynn
>
> For þe colde wyntter and þe kene   with gleterand frostes
>
> Sythen dropeles drye   in the dede monethe. (273-76)

Instead of working hard to prepare for lean times, the followers of Waster participate in activities that appear often in this dissertation: they go to taverns.

> And thou wolle to the tauerne   byfore þe tonne-hede
>
> Iche beryne redy with a bolle   to blerren thyn eghne
>
> Hete the whatte thou haue schalte   and whatt thyn hert lykes
>
> Wyfe, wedowe or wenche   þat wonnes there aboute.
>
> Then es there bott "fille in" and "feche forthe"   florence to schewe
>
> "Wee hee" and "worthe vp"   wordes ynewe. (277-82)

The r

Than

the o

activ

scena

of Gl

as so

favo

ʼa di

and

of th

Lan

unar

socr

of v

wa

fai

cor

───

Ʒ
of
ʌ
O

S
Ƭ

The result is deep debt: "Bot when this wele es awaye the wyne moste be payede fore. / Than lympis ʒowe weddis to laye or ʒoure londe selle, / For siche wikked werkes wery the oure lorde" (283-85). Wasting, as Winner describes it, is an inherently destructive activity. It is associated with, first, Pride, and then Gluttony, and Winner uses a tavern scene whose inhabitants participate in practices not unlike those in Langland's confession of Gluton to illustrate this destructive nature. The poet describes both Pride and Gluttony as socially and bodily destructive.

Both *Winnere and Wastoure* and *Piers Plowman* participate in a tradition that favors winning and condemns wasting.[17] Winner characterizes Waster as a destroyer, as "a disaffected aristocrat who takes no care for the maintenance of his estate" (Trigg 99) and saves nothing for the future. This representation is similar to Langland's presentation of the half-acre, where he represents "the waster as unwilling laborer" (Trigg 98). Both Langland and the *Winnere*-poet represent wasting as destructive: "Langland is unambiguous in his representation of the latter [Waster] as destroying the fabric of society" (Trigg 97). In *Winnere and Wastoure* and *Piers Plowman*, then, a dominant view of wasting appears: to waste is to destroy—socially, spiritually, and bodily.

With this view of wasting in mind, *Winnere and Wastoure*'s association of wasting with Gluttony is even more interesting. Waster is socially destructive not only by failing to save for the proverbial rainy day but also by overusing resources—by consuming in a gluttonous manner.[18] Winner says that Waster's actions are destructive

---

[17]Stephanie Trigg's illuminating article on the rhetoric of wasting in *Winnere and Wastoure* identifies several representations of the title characters in this poem, only one of which favors Winner over Waster. She compares this particular representation directly with Langland's. The reader is left with the impression that, in spite of the neutral result of the debate, Winner's is characterized as the more favorable position.

[18]Trigg indicates that Waster's tavern scene is similar to Gluton's confession (99). She also states that Winner overindulges rhetorically in his twenty-eight-line description of Waster's feast (105).

"in playinge and in wakynge in wynttres nyghttis" (266).[19] The opposition between the

serious and the playful jumps forth in this passage, showing that the proper and serious-

minded person sleeps at night and refrains from excessive play. In ignoring the virtue of

"mesure," Waster destroys the winter stores. The description of Waster in the tavern is an

extension of the destructive view of play, with the images of the tavern-goers yelling

"wee hee" and "worthe vp" (282) serving as reminders of the immoderate play

characteristic of the tavern. Winner extends the association of Waster with the tavern in

lines 477-94, saying that Waster teaches men to go to the tavern, to "doo hym drynke al

ny3te þat he dry be at morrow" (478)—again emphasizing that at night, when people

should be resting for the following day's work, wasters participate in tavern revelry.

Moreover, Waster teaches men to spend all of their money in tavern activities (486-87),

certainly destroying a person's ability to provide for himself.[20]

Modern ideas of Gluttony as a sin often stem from the underlying concept

informing *Wynnere and Wastoure's* characterization of Waster—overindulgence in food

and drink. The dominant or at least primary referent for the word *gluttony* or *gula* in the

Middle Ages was also related to ingestion.[21] However, to medieval moralists Gluttony

---

[19]Trigg emends *playinge* to *wayttinge* and claims that the former is a deliberate
scribal substitution, arguing that *wayttinge* fits the context better, but I prefer to work
with the unemended text because this is the text that has been transmitted, the one known
to the scribe and anyone hearing/reading it after him.

[20]Trigg has argued convincingly that signification in the poem breaks down due to
the excessive re-signification of the key terms (103-106). The result of this breakdown is
that the debate cannot be satisfactorily resolved. The two combatants neither win nor
lose, and their roles are not combined. Instead, they are sent in different directions. So
one cannot argue convincingly that either side wins. The poet has presented different
views of the personified attributes, and one of these happens to agree with Langland's
view, indicating that there was a tradition of seeing Gluttony and wasting as socially
destructive and antithetical to the welfare of society, a view to which both the *Winnere*-
poet (in places) and Langland seem to have subscribed.

[21]See, for instance, passages from Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* (X.817-30), Gower's
Mirour de l'Omme (7705-8616), and the various places in Langland where he condemns
the sin (1.32-35, 6.299-301, 9.57-63, 14.229-33).

could

partic

unders

associ

during

Medie

literat

Chauc

writer

reader

false

the rel

make

having

swere

in a w

began

the *Su*

poor j

becom

One se

gluton

blasfer

betwes

could often include activities associated with sins of the tongue—*peccata linguae*—particularly with improper speech. A brief look at this association will help in understanding some of the humorous uses of Gluttony in *Piers Plowman*, where the association is also made.

Improper speech seems to have been a commonly-perceived problem in England during the Middle Ages. G. R. Owst devotes a section in *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* to preachers' complaints about swearing, saying, "In the contemporary literature of Complaint we read of it [the swearing of oaths] in Langland, in Gower, Chaucer, Hoccleve, Barclay, Hawes and other pre-Reformation poets, not to mention the writers of anonymous verse" (414-15). Owst claims, "In whatever sermon-collection the reader chooses to look, there he will find the preacher's expatiation upon the wrongs of 'false swearing'" (415).

What I find particularly interesting about Owst's discussion of oath-swearing is the relationship between such improper speech and the tavern. Sermon exempla often make this association. One tells of a man accustomed to swearing often, who, after having failed while hunting, goes to an ale house and drinks to excess. He "began to swere after this unhappy custome, sayeng—'By goddes blode, this daye is unhappy!' And in a whyle after, in swerynge so, he bledde at the nose and, therewith more vexed, he began to rayle and rayne God (as they saye), in swerynge" (Owst 423-24). The author of the *Summa predicantium* indicates that false witness, foolish promises, bad advice, and poor judgment all stem from drunkenness (Owst 432). Master Rypon says that after becoming intoxicated, gluttons "fall to ribaldries, obscenities and idle talk" (Owst 435). One sermon claims, "when that good men ben at ther servyce on the halydaye, than the glotons sitt faste in the devels servyce, with many rybald wordes and songes of lecherie, blasfemynge God with many grett othes" (Owst 438). One of the clearest associations between the tavern and improper speech comes from an English preacher, who speaks of

Here the

the taver

they say

these ac

F

consider

has said

Glutton

sorcery

45). Th

when La

actually

Glutton

some wa

around t

social in

The Sa

Although

in *Piers*

glotons sittynge in the taverne, puttynge hire mouthes into the
bolle, til thei ben drunke. Thenne thei crien with grete voice, boostynge,
swerynge, lyynge and slaunderynge, and al hire evele dedes which thei
have doun of many ȝeres afore freschli rehercynge and reioisynge. But
suche men sittynge in the drie cherche bi hire confessour, fer fro the
taverne, for to schryve her synnes, sitten as dombe and wolen speke no
word. (Owst 439)

Here the writer contrasts the tavern with "drie cherche" practices. Gluttons get drunk in
the tavern and speaks improperly. However, when they are in church and *should* confess,
they say nothing. Their speech habits are improper and damnable, and this preacher links
these activities to Gluttony.

From these and numerous other examples, it is clear that medieval writers
considered Gluttony a gateway to various other inappropriate practices. As R. F. Yeager
has said, "a tradition existed in the later Middle Ages in England which included, under
Gluttony, not only excessive eating and drinking, but also great swearing and blasphemy,
sorcery and witchcraft, and devil worship (understood in two ways) as well" ("Gluttony"
45). The concept of Gluttony frequently extended to oral transgression in general. So
when Langland's narrator, Will, receives reprimands for his improper speech Will is
actually being portrayed as gluttonous. Nearly all of the activities associated with
Gluttony—gambling, losing one's reason, wasting winter stores, improper speech—are in
some way social, for they affect more than an individual's salvation; they impact those
around them. Gluttony, then, certainly imperiled one's soul, but it also had an effect on
social interaction and hence on the social fabric in general.

The Satirical Representation of Gluttony in Piers Plowman

Although not the focus of this chapter, satirical representations of Gluttony are frequent
in *Piers Plowman.* The word *gluttony* appears at least fourteen times in the B-text,

excluding references to Gluton in Passus 5.[22] Most of these instances include descriptions of what the poet means when he uses the word, describing what the gluttonous person does rather than simply mentioning the sin. In many instances, such descriptions clarify Langland's satire, for satire is a major function of the text as a whole, and satire plays an important role in each of the instances where Gluttony is explained. However, Gluton's confession is different from these representations, as a look at some of Langland's other passages containing the sin will show.

Three instances of the word *gluttony* appear in the Prologue. In describing the "fair feeld ful of folk" (B.P.17), Langland illustrates the various estates the dreamer observes, both good and bad: "Some putten hem to plou3, pleiden ful selde, / In settynge and sowynge swonken ful harde; / Wonnen þat þise wastours with glotonye destruyeþ" (B.P.20-22). The hint of satire is here, contrasting wasters with Langland's occupational ideal, the plowman. To Langland Gluttony destroys the fruits of the plowman's hard labor, a social effect of Gluttony. This is a sentiment similar to that found in *Wynnere and Wastoure*; Langland asserts that this deadly sin is destructive. When speaking of "Iaperes and Iangeleres, Iudas children" (B.P.35), Langland describes "Bidderes and beggeres" (B.P.40) as gluttons, saying that they eat

> Til hire bely and hire bagge were bretful ycrammed;
>
> Flite þanne for hire foode, fou3ten at þe ale.
>
> In glotonye, got woot, go þei to bedde,
>
> And risen vp wiþ ribaudie as Roberdes knaues;
>
> Sleep and sleuþe seweþ hem euer. (B.P.41-45)

Although not funny, this description is grotesque in a loosely Bakhtinian sense—with these people eating until crammed full. The description does not have the humor that

---

[22]P.22, P.43, P.76, 1.33, 2.93, 5.296ff., 6.301, 9.61, 10.50, 10.83, 13.77, 13.399, 14.229, 14.234.

much of the grotesque does, though the identification of Langland's description with people that an audience might know could produce a derisive chuckle. The passage is definitely pejorative, with Langland's condemnation evident by his use of pejorative terms—*fouȝten*, *ribaudie*, *knaues*, and *sleuþ*. In the prologue, Langland talks about the friars, "all þe foure ordres" (B.P.58), "prechynge þe peple for profit of þe wombe" (B.P.59). He concludes that "thus ye gyuen youre gold glotons to helpe / and leneþ it Losels þat leccherie haunten" (B.P.76-77). Langland's depiction of the friars represents them as wholly gluttonous, having them use every dirty trick available to gain wealth.

After such depictions of gluttonous people and the underlying moral message that Gluttony should be avoided, Langland makes a point about not only Gluttony but all overindulgence. He refers to the story of Lot, who,

> for *likynge of drynke*,
>
> Dide by hise douȝtres þat þe deuel liked;
>
> Delited hym in drynke as þe deuel wolde,
>
> And leccherie hym lauȝte, and lay by hem boþe;
>
> And al he witte it wyn þat wikked dede.
>
> > *Inebriemus eum vino dormiamusque cum eo*
> >
> > *Vt seruare possimus de patre nostro semen*
> >
> > *Thoruȝ wyn and þoruȝ wommen* þer was loth acombred
> >
> > And þere *gat in glotonie* gerles þat were cherles
> >
> > (B.1.27-33, my emphasis in Middle English).

Here Langland links Gluttony and Lechery; the one leads to the other, just as in scripture. Langland's conclusion introduces a major theme for the rest of the poem: "Forþi dred delitable drynke and þow shalt do þe bettre. / Mesure is medicine, thouȝ þow muchel yerne" (B.1.34-35). Eating and drinking are not to be condemned, so long as one enjoys them in moderation. Here is Langland's overt condemnation of gluttonous behavior,

especially drunkenness. Moreover, Langland offers moderation as a solution to the social ill of Gluttony.[23]

The Comic Tavern and the Confession of Gluton

Langland's brief utterances about gluttony, though definitely grotesque, can only be taken as humorous if we believe that Langland wanted his audience to laugh *at* the offender in order to teach that such behavior is to be avoided. The descriptions are not particularly funny, and Langland uses stock characterizations of gluttons for many of his descriptions.[24] However, in Passus 5 Langland presents a truly humorous representation of Gluttony. Langland's characterizations of Gluton break sharply with his other condemnations of Gluttony and his representations of the other sins in the confession scene. Langland conflates two conflicting tavern traditions that present a morally instructive portrait of Gluton without the overt condemnation that typically accompanies representations of the sin.

This scene is unique among the confessions because Gluton does not simply relate his sins, as the rest of the deadly sins do. Instead, he enacts them, providing humor without condemnatory remarks from the narrator. Instead of condemnatory remarks, the physical descriptions of many of the sins serve as implicit condemnation. Langland describes Envy, for instance, as "pale as a pelet, in þe palsy he semed" (5.77). He also

---

[23] Langland's view of Gluttony fits perfectly with the medieval views of the sin. From his pronouncements we can glean some important characteristics of his views about Gluttony, if not his general attitudes toward the sin. I have already noted Langland's opinion on the socially and spiritually destructive qualities of Gluttony, but Langland also agrees with his preacher-counterparts on Gluttony as a springboard for other sins. Sloth (B.P.40-45, B.2.93-101, B.13.399-408, B.14.235-38) and Lechery (B.P.76-77, B.1.32-35, B.2.93-101) tend to follow Gluttony, and in at least two instances (B.10.81-85, B.13.77ff.) Pride is associated with Gluttony. Additionally, Langland links improper speech, especially jangling, judging, and oath swearing, with Gluttony, just as the sermons do (B.P.139, B.2.93.101, B.10.51, B.13.399-400).

[24]For more about representations of Gluttony, see Bloomfield, *Deadly Sins*. For some specific sermon excerpts, see the various examples in Owst (293, 440-41, 443-44, 446, 448).

says that he had "lene chekes" and that he was "lourynge foule" (82). Moreover, "His body was bollen for wraþe þat he boot hise lippes, / And wroþliche he wroþ his fust, to wreke hym he þou3te" (83-84). Langland goes on to say,

> Ech a word þat he warp was of a Neddres tonge;
>
> Of chidynge and chalangynge was his chief liflode,
>
> Wiþ bakbitynge and bismere and berynge of fals witnesse
>
> This was al his curteisie where þat eyuere he shewed hym. (86-88)

Wrath, the next sin, has a similar, though shorter, condemnatory section in his narrative introduction: "Now awakeþ Wraþe wiþ two white ei3en, / And neuelynge wiþ þe nose and his nekke hangyng" (135-36). Langland describes the next sin similarly:

> Thanne cam Coueitise; I kan hym na3t discryue,
>
> So hungrily and holwe sire heruy hym loked.
>
> He was bitelbrowed and baberlipped wiþ two blered ei3en;
>
> And lik a leþern purs lolled hise chekes
>
> Wel sidder þan his chyn; þei cheyueled for elde;
>
> And as a bondemannes bacon his berd was yshaue. (188-93)

Sloth receives the same treatment: "Thanne cam Sleuþe al bislabered wiþ two slymy ei3en" (385).

These are grotesque, descriptive condemnations, showing inner corruption through bodily monstrosity. Envy's pale countenance and hideous grimacing; Wrath's white eyes, runny nose, and hanging neck; Covetise's hollow face, "blered" eyes, and thick lips; and Sloth's slimy eyes are definitely pejorative.[25] In contrast, Gluton receives absolutely no physical description, and his verbal confession appears to be almost an afterthought, for rather than providing a condemnatory physical description followed by a

---

[25] This physical description is similar to Dunbar's portrayal of duplicitous courtiers in "Complane I wald, wist I quhome till." See my discussion of the poem in Chapter 5 (185-87).

verbal confession, Langland places Gluton in a narrative showing his audience exactly how gluttons act.[26] Langland accomplishes this by establishing what might correspond to the play world, a place where the normal rules of life do not necessarily apply. This play world is the tavern into which Gluton is diverted from his trip to confession. Here we are permitted to view, without explicit censure and with what many have considered grotesque realism, the folly of gluttonous behavior. Langland's tavern play world relies on two conflicting tavern traditions, and it will be helpful to discuss these in more depth before looking at the practices contained within this play world.

The first is the tavern as the Devil's chapel. According to G. R. Owst, "In the literature of the medieval English pulpit, the tavern and the ale-house, apart from the acknowledged fact that they are the occasion of much gluttony and drunkenness in the ordinary way, stand for a very definite menace to the common weal" (435). The tavern is the place where practices opposed to proper, orthodox behavior occur. Prohibitions against excessive drinking and behavior associated with it are common in moral writing, and the tavern is often the setting for these activities, a setting separated from proper life yet, unlike the play world, infringing upon and competing with the world outside the tavern doors.

The tavern as Devil's chapel appears in both medieval sermons and poetry. Several sermon exempla reflect this view of the tavern. One is a popular story recited in *Speculum laicorum*, which, paraphrased, says,

> A drunkard returned home late from a tavern to find his wife and two sons
> sitting near the fireplace. It seemed to him that there were four rather than
> two boys, so he asked his wife who or rather whose boys the other two

---

[26]Pernel, representing Pride, and Lecher also receive no physical description, but these sins occupy only a dozen lines together (62-74). All of the other sins except Gluton provide long, graphic confessions where they tell and describe what they've done. Pernel and Lecher simply cry out for mercy and promise amendment.

were. She responded that there were only two and they were his. The husband accused her of lying and committing adultery and beat her to death, after which he killed the two boys whom he thought were not his own. And after his drunkenness wore off, having returned to himself and remembering the death of his wife and two sons, out of desperation he hanged himself. [27]

Although perhaps tinged with a grim sort of humor, this exemplum is a bitter picture of the results of overindulgence. Any comic element here is meant to ridicule, not to be jolly, merry, or even pleasant. The story is an example of how one sin—Gluttony—leads to another—murder—which in turn leads to perhaps the worst of all—despair or *wanhope*—resulting in suicide. It is a story to use as an example of behavior to avoid, as the main character, from the very beginning, treads on a path that dooms him to death and damnation.

Another sermon places all of the deadly sins in the tavern (Owst 441). This exemplum *is* a tavern scene, showing each of the deadly sins entering the tavern and participating in tavern practices. In the tavern, we find the swearing of great oaths (Pride), boasts of past sins (Lechery), and all of the Deadly Sins laughing at these stories, in short many of the same activities represented in Langland's tavern. The tone of this scene is similar to the exemplum of the man murdering his wife and children; this is a wicked place with wicked inhabitants boasting of their wicked deeds, all behaviors to be avoided.

---

[27]"Quidam a taberna in domum suam multum inebriatus sero reversus, invenit uxorem suam et duos pueros sedentes juxta focum. Videbatur que sibi de duobus pueris esse quatuor. Interrogavit uxorem qui vel cujus alii duo pueri essent. Respondit mulier quod tantum fuerunt ibi duo et hii sui. Ad quam ille: "Mentiris, adulterini sunt." Cepit eam cedere usque ad mortem. Qua mortua, occidit duos pueros, quos putabat non esse suos. Digestoque post modicum potu ad se reversus et considerans uxorem et duos pueros esse mortuos in desperacionem versus est et seipsum laqueo suspendit..." (*Speculum laicorum* 204).

A literary scene that illustrates the same wicked tavern setting appears in *The Pardoner's Tale*. Critics have noted that *The Pardoner's Tale*, if not itself a sermon, is closely related to one, and this tavern scene is part of the Devil's chapel tradition. The Pardoner begins by describing his "protagonists" as dicers, excessive drinkers, and frequenters of brothels. The Pardoner even uses the words "that develes temple" (6.470) to describe the tavern. Moreover, the Pardoner presents activities similar to what I have highlighted from sermon exempla. He says that "ech of hem at otheres synne lough" (6.476), which is similar to the tavern scene where Lechery boasts of his sins to the others' amusement.

The Pardoner depicts a variety of unsavory practices associated with the tavern— gluttony, gambling, swearing, and lechery. He does not allow this opportunity to pass but instead interrupts his tale to condemn each of these sins, addressing drunkenness, gluttony, gambling, and the swearing of oaths before returning to his tale. When he does resume his tale, we are again reminded of exempla dealing with drinking, for in a situation similar to the sermon exempla I have discussed, the rioters, having been drinking in the tavern before prime, brag that they can defeat Death and attempt to fulfill the boast, only to fail by killing each other. Like others that I have highlighted, this exemplum illustrates the evils of the tavern, that it is indeed the Devil's chapel, and that it is a place with little hope for the salvation of those who frequent taverns. The Pardoner condemns tavern-goers.[28]

Although, as Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* illustrates, the tradition of the tavern as Devil's chapel was a strong influence on Middle English literature, another powerful tavern tradition existed as well. This is the tavern as the *locus classicus* of comedy. Drunkenness is often associated with activities frequently portrayed as comic; drunkards

---

[28]Another example, though later, is the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, which uses the tavern as the setting where the Devil hopes to corrupt the title character.

stumble, fall down, vomit, and exhibit a loss of reason—"intrat potus, exit sensus" (Owst 432).[29] Drunkenness was a fertile source for comic material, since intoxicated people will do outrageous things, and the tavern is naturally and perhaps inherently connected to drunkenness. To represent this tradition, I will briefly revisit goliardic poetry and parodic masses.

Two goliardic poems that I analyzed more fully in Chapter 2 serve my purposes here. In both "In taberna quando sumus" from the *Carmina Burana* and the Archpoet's *Estuans intrinsecus*, the poets celebrate overindulgence in drink. The central part of "In taberna" has a *bibit* litany stating that everyone in the tavern drinks (196.5). Similarly, the Archpoet says,

> My intention is to die in the tavern
>
> So that the wines are nearest to the mouth of the dead
>
> Then choirs of angels will sing more joyfully:
>
> "May God be merciful to this drinker."[30]

The poem is a defense against accusations aimed at him. Rather than deny the accusations, he claims that everyone sins, implying that his sins are no worse than his accursors'. His defense is a celebratory acknowledgement of his sins. This poem was popular on the continent and in England. Parts of this poem reappear in other drinking songs, one attributed to Walter Map, another in a parodic drinking mass from England.

Additionally, drinkers' masses use the comic tavern tradition. The parodic mass in Harley 913 (and in fact all drinkers' masses) replaces key words in the Latin Mass with words relating to drinking—substituting *Bacchus* for *Deus* and *omnepotanti* and *ciphipotent* for *omnipotent*. I mention these masses because, we saw in the last chapter,

---

[29]"Drink enters, discretion exits."

[30]"Meum est propositum in taberna mori, / ut sint vina proxima morientis ori. / Tunc cantabunt letius angelorum chori: / 'Sit deus propitius huic potatori'" (stanza 12).

they are humorous, and they illustrate tavern humor, mentioning the tavern in several places and humorously describing tavern practices—drinking and gambling. But these masses do not cast a condemnatory eye upon tavern events; rather, like goliardic drinking poems, the masses celebrate such activities. All of these works—"In taberna," *Estuans intrinsecus*, and the parodic mass, as well as all of the material presented in Chapter 2— are comic celebrations of the tavern. Moreover, nowhere is it condemned, as it is in Devil's chapel representations of the tavern. Instead, the taverns here are the setting, the play world, for humor.

The practices that Langland depicts in the tavern—revelry, games, drunkenness, laughter—are stock representations of tavern behavior. We see these activities repeatedly in tavern scenes. Langland expands upon these traditional representations, adding what has been considered realism to his tavern practices. Where many writers simply mention tavern practices, Langland shows us these practices, drawing his audience into the tavern. Langland invites his audience to participate in the action. Without judging the tavern inhabitants and practices, Langland offers us a place in the tavern as observers; he offers us entertainment by way of a spectacle. And by entertaining us, by making us laugh, Langland teaches us.

Gluton's confession illustrates a mixture of the two tavern traditions. It has long been recognized that Langland was familiar with sermon literature and that this scene draws upon the traditional tavern as Devil's chapel. But why, if the tavern is the Devil's chapel, does he not condemn the tavern? This is a significant question, for according to Owst the situation of Gluton being waylaid into the tavern is a sermon commonplace (citing Bromyard as evidence).[31] This is part of the reason that Owst dismisses the humor that other critics have found in this scene. As I have shown, however, the tavern as Devil's chapel is only one tavern representation.

---

[31]"Volentes ire ad verbum Dei [diaboli] ducunt ad tabernam." (Owst 437)

That Langland uses the comic tradition can be shown by the difference in tone

between his tavern scene and the Devil's chapel tavern scenes that I have already

highlighted, and by the humor invited by that tone.[32] Unlike these other tavern scenes,

Langland's is devoid of bitterness. In fact, Langland utterly fails to condemn the activities

in the tavern. I do not want to suggest that Langland approved of what he describes in the

tavern. He surely did not. But he does not condemn the tavern-goers. Instead, Langland

shows a place filled with a festive spirit. He describes the interior of the tavern with

phrases such as "glad chere" (V.319), indicating that the tavern is a place where people

come to have fun. Laughter and singing fills the tavern; it is a place of entertainment, a

place of perpetual carnival.

This passage is not all fun and games, of course. A darker tone lies beneath it.

Although the tavern inhabitants have great fun in the tavern, and even though no one gets

hurt, the tavern scene, *locus classicus* of comedy that it is, still diverts people from the

correct course of life, as we see with Gluton. The images of Gluton overindulging in food

---

[32]The amount and type of humor in this scene is currently under debate. Derek
Pearsall has rejected my view, saying, "I am sure that Langland regarded Glutton's tavern
as the very sump of the den of iniquity that was London, and he throws into it, with
deliberate indiscriminateness, both the criminal and the criminalized classes" ("London"
192). Pearsall does not view the tavern as a place of entertainment: "The energy of the
tavern scene is not expressed in boisterous bonhomie and good-natured drunkenness but
principally in a game ('þe newefayre,' 377) that seems to have been a cheap confidence
trick and in violent farting and vomiting" (192). See also Pearsall's note to C.6.377. On
the other hand, David Aers sees the tavern more as I do: "Langland himself presents
Beton's ale house as a convivial, warm alternative to both work-discipline and official
religion" (39). Although Aers acknowledges that the practices we see in the tavern
contrast with religious ideals and practices, "the poetry involves something other than the
respectable scheme of condemnatory judgement so familiar from sermons and
confessional manuals. However hostile the aim, the poetry includes the projection of a
profane, popular counter-culture in which the body, as Gloton's performance displays, is
present and open" (39-40). Aers describes the tavern as a place where genders and classes
meet in community: "Here we find communal solidarities, play, and laughter involving
women and men together" (40). Aers sees this tavern scene much in the same way that
Bakhtin would, as a clash of official and unofficial culture. Although I have indicated that
matters were never so clear-cut as Bakhtin would have them, in general I take Aers's
argument as more convincing than Pearsall's. This debate is evidence of how subjective
humor can be, for where one person finds hilarity, the other finds violence.

and drink, farting, emptying his bladder (on the floor?), falling down, and vomiting on Clement, funny though they are, also remind us that drunkenness—and overindulgence in anything—will produce unsavory results. Moreover, Gluton never makes it to confession; instead, he sleeps off his binge and possibly even forces his confessor, Repentance, to come to him.[33] Comic activities here are not strictly restricted to a play world, as they are with practices like the Feast of Fools; they conflict with the real world, and hence cause problems. The comic and tragic work together here, and our laughter is finally directed *at* these practices in recognition of their folly. Although perhaps in the background at all times, the realization that this behavior is to be avoided is only fully realized *after* the tavern setting disappears, after the jokes are over, when an audience ceases laughing and recognizes the folly of Gluton's actions.

I will now turn to a joke that I think serves as a good example of Langland's humor. Besides some of the stock characteristics of drunkenness—staggering, falling, vomiting—Langland adds scatological humor similar to Chaucer's, an inevitable after-effect of overindulgence:

> He pissed a potel in a paternoster while,
>
> And blew þe rounde ruwet at þe ruggebones ende
>
> That alle þat herde þat horn helde hir nose after
>
> And wisshed it hadde ben wexed wiþ a wispe of firses. (5.341-44)

The horn reference is similar to Nicholas's fart in *The Miller's Tale* in that the fart is a bodily function used for humorous purposes. In *The Miller's Tale* the fart is a joke played on Absolon and does not reach fruition until Absolon thrusts the hot *kultour* onto

---

[33] It is not clear whether Repentance travels to some of the other sins. The location of Envy's confession is unclear (75ff.). Wrath wakes up to confess (135). Covetous seems to come to Repentance (188), as does Sloth (385). But Repentance does not seem to journey to the other sins. Repentance appears to be in Glutton's house when he awakes from his long sleep (360-61), seemingly forced to track the sin down after his failed journey.

Nicholas's "toute" (1.3812). Likewise, Gluton's fart is only part of the joke. The aftermath of the fart—its odor—gives this passage its full hilarity, and Langland's rich description, in one line, of the reaction to this odor completes the joke. This reaction has two components. The first is the physical reaction of Gluton's audience to the offensive odor. However, the humor stems not just from the image of tavern-goers holding their noses. Langland adds to this physical reaction a mental one. The tavern audience "wisshed it hadde ben wexed wiþ a wispe of firses" (B.V.344).

The furze or gorse bush is essential for the humor in this line, and its use is related to medieval medical practices. A very common plant in Britain, furze is divided into six categories in John Gerard's 1633 edition of *The Herbal or General History of Plants*, where Gerard stresses the plant's most prominent aspect: "The Furze bush is a plant altogether a Thorne, fully armed with most sharp prickles" (1319). The characteristic feature of furze is its thorny nature. Modern botany indicates that the use of furze is limited and that it has no medicinal value. However, Gerard claims, "the seeds are used in medicines against the stone, and staying of the laske" (1322).[34] It is a folk remedy for diarrhea.

With this information in hand, the humor becomes a bit clearer. Those who experience Gluton's fart wish the offending body part to be plugged with furze, an extremely thorny plant.[35] This part of the joke is similar to the tack-on-the-seat gag so common in comedies like *The Little Rascals*. More important, it is similar to the hot *kultour* incident in *The Miller's Tale*. Both Gluton and Nicholas emit a superlative fart. Both poems also mention retribution for the offending action. The difference is that in *The Miller's Tale* the retribution is realized with the burning of Nicholas's offending body

---

[34]*Laske* is "looseness of the bowels, diarrhœa; an attack of this" (*OED* 1574).

[35]Perhaps in order to clarify his humor, Langland changed *firses*, which he uses in both A (V.194) and B, to *breres* in C (C.6.402).

part. In *Piers Plowman* the retribution remains unfulfilled—a wish. Both scenes use the infliction of pain—burning in Chaucer, the wish of sharp thorns in Langland—on the offending body part to provoke laughter, a crueler sort of wish-fulfillment than we found in the practices discussed in Chapter 2.[36] The fact that furze seeds were a curative for diarrhea adds to the humor—Gluton's gastrointestinal tract is indeed a bit lax. Gluton's fart is every bit as funny as any in Chaucer. Both writers use the same comic material—a fart offensive to those present and retribution applied directly to the offending body part. The use of humor in the tavern scene is related to the topos of the comic tavern, a place wherein we can peer and laugh at the outrageous, risqué, and sometimes blasphemous activities that are so often associated with drunkenness. But Langland does not openly condemn those in his tavern or strip them of hope. Instead, he offers a spectacle of tavern practices, portraying the tavern as a place of entertainment and allowing his audience to laugh at the antics within. Langland's tavern is festive, and he invites audiences to laugh at Gluton's drunken antics.

There are two possible reasons for this lack of condemnation. The first is that Langland wishes to keep the possibility of salvation open for Gluton and his fellow tavern-goers.[37] Condemnation of the sort that we find in the sermons and *The Pardoner's Tale* strips the tavern of hope, dooming the tavern inhabitants to damnation. Although

---

[36]The wish fulfillment that Langland describes contrasts with what I described in Chapter 2 in its tone. The wish fulfillment in Gluton's tavern carries with it the feeling of punishment. Gluton has offended his fellow tavern-goers, and as a result those suffering from his transgression wish ill upon him. The wish-fulfillment practices that I analyzed in the last chapter, however, have none of this disciplinary quality. They simply fulfill a victimless desire.

[37]Several critics have looked at this scene. See, for instance, Ralph Hanna III, "Piers Plowman A.5.155: 'Pyenye'"; M. Jane Toswell, "Of Dogs, *Cawdels*, and Contrition: A Penitential Motif in *Piers Plowman*"; George H. Russell, "Poet as Reviser: The Metamorphosis of the Confession of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Piers Plowman*"; Mary Flowers Braswell, "Langland's Sins: A True Confession?"; and Nick Gray, "The Clemency of Cobblers: A Reading of 'Gluton's Confession' in *Piers Plowman*."

Langland is capable of such harsh criticism,[38] he refrains from it here, instead opting to show us a lighter view of the tavern. The games in the tavern are games of exchange (and of loss), but do not include, as far as we can tell from the text, gambling and dicing, the most vilified of tavern games.[39] Moreover, even though Gluton misses confession, gets drunk, and slips into sloth with his lengthy nap, he is not abandoned as damned. Instead, he eventually confesses, which teaches that even when one inevitably backslides, confession is available.

The second and, for my argument, more important reason for Langland's lack of condemnation relates to the nature of the laughter that this scene provokes. The comparison I have made to *The Pardoner's Tale* is applicable here. Although *The Pardoner's Tale* itself is not overtly funny, the teller *is*. This type of satirical laughter seems to be the purpose of the Gluton passage. Chaucer describes the Pardoner as a ridiculous figure. He wishes to drink before telling his tale, and then he gives his trade secrets away, offering a sermon in his prologue, an exemplum in his tale, and then, after having told the pilgrims how he works, foolishly attempting to collect money. The Host's response to the pardoner's actions places the Pardoner in a position of being laughed *at*:

> I wolde I hadde thy coillions in myn hand
>
> In stide of relikes or of seintuarie
>
> Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee help hem carie;
>
> They shul be shryned in a hogges toord! (6.952-55)

---

[38]Perhaps the harshest occurs in Passus 9: "Muche wo worþ þat man þat mysruleþ his Inwit, / And þat ben glotons, glubberes; hir god is hire wombe: / *Quorum deus venter est.* / For þei seruen Sathan hir soules shal he haue" (61-64).

[39]Bennett says of Langland's tavern scene, "Evidently two contestants proposed articles for exchange and nominated agents (the chapmen of 331) to value the goods and assess the compensation to be paid with the inferior article: i.e. if one man puts down a hood and the other a cloak and the cloak is judged the better article, the contestant who takes the hood gets some compensation" (174). For a more negative reading of the exchange game, see note 32 above.

This scene, coupled with the physical description of the Pardoner in *The General Prologue*—"I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare"(I.691)—establishes the Pardoner as an object for ridicule, his behavior as behavior not to be emulated.

Ridicule stems from a feeling of superiority, for it places the object of laughter in an inferior position.[40] Langland uses this sense of superiority in his representation of Gluton's actions. The tavern scene is certainly funny, but this is not Bakhtin's all-inclusive, positive laughter (*Rabelais* 11-12). Rather, it is laughable behavior set up for audience analysis and judgment. More than any of the other confession scenes, Gluton's confession reinforces Langland's point that a cessation from and avoidance of such laughable actions is necessary in order to begin the Christian pilgrimage to Truth.

Although audiences may laugh, the humor in this scene must be tempered by Langland's earlier condemnations of Gluttony. Gluttony is still a Deadly Sin in Langland's eyes. The excesses into which Gluton allows himself to be led imperil his soul. We must keep in mind the circumstances of this scene—it is a confession scene. As I said earlier, I believe that the lack of direct condemnation indicates the hope that Gluton will realize his wicked ways and repent, as in fact he does (5.367-77). This scene is also a lesson to the audience to be wary of sin. In part this scene illustrates how easily a Christian can be misdirected from the path to salvation. Our own temptation to laugh at the hilarity exhibited in the tavern is a warning of just how easy it is to take lightly or even to participate in destructive practices.

Langland presents the ridiculous, laughable aspects of Gluttony in order to help his moral points. Gluttonous behavior is ridiculous—absurd to the point of producing

---

[40]Three theories of laughter dominate scholarship on the subject. The oldest theory is the theory that laughter is an expression of superiority. We laugh *at* things that we consider to be below us. The second theory (Incongruity) is that we laugh when we "experience something that doesn't fit these [the established] patterns, that violates our expectations." The third theory (Relief) is that laughter is a release of nervous tension. It is a way for us to alleviate anxiety (Morreall 130-33).

derisive laughter. Gluton is a truly grotesque character in a grotesque play world—

overindulging, laughing, and acting as such behavior would dictate—pissing, vomiting,

farting. The humor here certainly provides entertainment, but more importantly, it is a

warning about behavior to be avoided. The tavern practices represented in the confession

of Gluton illustrate an important use of the comic body; here the comic body is a tool for

the moral teacher.

II. Genital Deficiency and Excess Desire: Will's Impotence

In contrast to Langland's representation of excess, very near the end of *Piers Plowman* is

a scene that draws its humor from deficit. In Passus 20 Will ceases to be a passive

observer/dreamer and physically enters the action. He encounters Elde, who ages him

rapidly and, worst of all, makes Will impotent. Several social practices come together in

this scene, at the end of which is a humorous series of lines commenting upon the source

of Will's sorrow—his wife's reaction to his impotence. Langland draws upon practices

surrounding the shame of impotence and the sexuality of the elderly, both corporeal

concerns, to construct a comic body that completes the characterization of his inept

narrator in a joke at Will's expense.[41] The audience leaves Will with a chuckle and the

view that such earthly concerns should be left behind. Just as with the Gluttony scenes,

Langland offers a chuckle for a reason—to solidify his moral stance and to teach his

audience.

Impotence in the Middle Ages

The humorous representation of Will's impotence depends upon several social practices

relating to the subject. Impotence had ramifications for the validity of marriage, for

---

[41]I am not alone in finding this scene humorous. Joseph S. Wittig characterizes
the scene as "humorously cast" (148).

sexual relations were regulated to produce offspring, and because it made procreation impossible, impotence could nullify or prevent marriage.

The topic of impotence was neither taboo nor avoided in the Middle Ages. Much of what we know about impotence in the Middle Ages comes from canon law, particularly discussions about the legal status of a marriage when one partner was unable to perform sexual intercourse.[42] According to James A. Brundage, the impact of sexual performance on the validity of marriage was a sticky subject because of the marital relationship between Joseph and the Virgin Mary ("Problem" 135). It was finally decided that the *ability* to consummate the marriage was necessary for a marriage to be valid, but the act of consummation was not; the couple could *choose* not to consummate the union (Murray, "Origins" 235). Consequently, impotence was considered a legitimate reason for annulment. In cases of permanent impotence, the impotent partner was not permitted to remarry. Those suffering from temporary impotence were permitted to remarry once the problem was corrected.

Proof of impotence could be a delicate matter, and several practices arose to verify the condition.[43] Proof of impotence could be found in oaths sworn by the husband and wife, but as Brundage says, "the canonists were understandably skeptical about the evidential value of *ex parte* declarations, even under oath, by spouses who wished to terminate a marriage" ("Problem" 136). Neighbors could be brought to swear oaths about the couple's sexual activities, but again such evidence could easily be inaccurate or falsified. Another proof of impotence was examination of the male by wise women,[44]

---

[42]James A. Brundage claims that *frigiditas* (frigidity) and *impotentia coeundi* (impotence) were used interchangeably to describe the inability to have intercourse, regardless of gender ("Problem" 135).

[43]See, for instance, Gratian's *Decretum* (Causa 33, question 1) and several documents in the *Liber Extra*.

[44]Murray claims that the examination by wise women originated in thirteenth-century England ("Origins").

physicians, doctors, or midwives to evaluate their potency (Murray, "Male Sexuality" 139, Brundage, "Problem" 136ff.).

So impotence was deemed a serious topic, probably due to the anxiety it could cause.[45] It was "an abiding fear, as suggested by the frequent repetition of ancient aphrodisiacs in medieval medical treatises" (Murray, "Male Sexuality" 139). Anxiety also resulted from the effect impotence had on the validity of marriage. And of course proving impotence could be cause for intense embarrassment, for it brought sexuality into the public light.[46] Additionally, the ability to perform sexually was linked to a man's virility, to how he both viewed himself and was perceived by others (Murray, "Male Sexuality" 139). Impotent men were sometimes categorized with eunuchs, who were typically condemned (Kuefler 286-87). Impotence in the Middle Ages, as now, was a source of embarrassment for its victims.

We should remember that one theory of why we laugh is anxiety relief. We tend to joke about what we fear or do not understand, and this impotence joke fits the anxiety-reduction theory, and the joke about Will's impotence seems to fit this theory. However, studies about impotence in the Middle Ages indicate that impotence and a decline in sexual desire were seen as a natural part of the aging process. The elderly were not expected to remain amorously active.[47] In addition, "elderly men were also confronted by

---

[45]Murray cites two cases to show that impotence could cause embarrassment. In a York case, when the husband failed to respond to stimulation, the observers "cursed him because he presumed to take as a wife some young woman, by defrauding her, unless he had been better able to serve and to please her" (139). The man in a case from Venice is quoted as saying "Look here, I am a man, even though some say I cannot get it up" (139), indicating that the ability to perform sexually was directly linked to one's self-identification as male. This measure of manhood is also related to sexual jokes regarding penis size and how well one could fill one's codpiece, which Murray sees as linked to "anxiety of penis size, compared with the norm or with some virile ideal" ("Male Sexuality" 137).

[46]John of Salisbury, for instance, thought that the disclosure of marital relations in court was improper and even scandalous (Brundage, *Law, Sex* 291).

[47]In fact, Andreas Capellanus limits his love treatise to men under sixty.

notions of

to the *sen*

of self-de

have beer

Unlucky

This joke.

characteri

fallible fir

conceptua

mistakes.

dream-vis

and at the

the audie

deprecati

writers co

narrators

character

Plowma

Richard
Plowma
vision. a
[105]. Sc
Apocaly
authorit
Afterma
F. G. W
Genres
Hieatt. *7*

notions of social propriety that disparaged their sexuality"; such social propriety is related to the *senex amans* tradition of portraying amorous elderly people as "humorous victims of self-deception" (Murray, "Male Sexuality" 138). Seen in this light, audiences may not have been as uncomfortable with an impotence joke as we might think.

Unlucky in Love—The Tradition of the Self-Deprecating Narrator

This joke, I believe, is part of a poetic tradition of a self-deprecating narrator—a narrator characterized as inept, foolish, and clumsy in order to teach a lesson. This narrator is a fallible first-person traveler who leads the audience down a road booby-trapped with conceptual snags.[48] Although Will does show promise of learning and correcting his mistakes, he continues to act foolishly in one important aspect—speech. Will is a typical dream-vision narrator, sometimes foolish, and utterly ignorant. He represents Everyman and at the same time is a guide leading the audience through the dream vision, instructing the audience as he is instructed throughout the poem. A brief consideration of the self-deprecating humor associated with many dream-vision narrators helps to illustrate how writers can use humor to teach an audience.[49] Will exhibits three features of dream vision narrators—the narrator-as-lens, the narrator-as-poetic persona, and the narrator-as-inept character. The combination of these three features presents the narrator in a way that is

---

[48]For Langland's Will as fool, see John M. Bowers, *Crisis of Will in Piers Plowman* and Jay Martin, "Will as Fool and Wanderer in *Piers Plowman*."

[49]Critics have debated the benefits of looking at *Piers Plowman* as a dream vision. Richard K. Emmerson implies that the dream-vision form is not ideal for studying *Piers Plowman*: "Critics have often acknowledged that *Piers Plowman* is not a typical dream-vision, although in general they persist in studying it in terms of the dream-vision form" (103). See, for instance, Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*; A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, which remains the most authoritative work on the dream-vision genre; George D. Economou, "The Vision's Aftermath in *Piers Plowman*: The Poetics of the Middle English Dream-Vision"; James F. G. Weldon, "The Structure of Dream Visions in *Piers Plowman*"; Steven Justice, "The Genres of *Piers Plowman*; Stephen A. Barney, "Allegorical Visions"; and Constance B. Hieatt, *The Realm of Dream Visions* (Chapter 7).

ripe for humor, and our final vision of Will, beaten by age (Elde) and complaining about his sexual deficit, is a joke that draws its humor from the body.

Each of these features has received ample attention from critics, and rehashing them here will add little to my discussion of Langland. Langland's representation of Will, like those of some other medieval narrators, brings these three features together in an elaborate joke on both his narrator and himself. In any dream vision, the narrator acts as a lens for the audience.[50] The "I" of the poem becomes, in a sense, the "I" and *eye* of the audience. Moreover, writers often cast themselves as their narrators. Chaucer names his *Parliament of Fowles* narrator Geoffrey (2.729). Gower's Amans in *Confessio Amantis* is named John Gower (8.2321), and Langland names his narrator Will. In doing so, these writers associate themselves with their narrators.

This association becomes important when the narrator is presented as humorous, which often occurs when the narrator displays his ineptness or appears silly. For instance, Langland calls Will a "doted daffe" (B.1.140), a "foolish idiot" (*MED* 1245, 814).[51] He

---

[50]See Robert R. Edwards, who says of Chaucer "It is the narrative persona that serves...as the mediator between the imaginative world of the poem and its courtly audience" (42). For the unreliable nature of the narrator-persona, see William Riggan, who says "any possibility of absolute reliability with regard to all facts and facets of the events and characters within such a narrative [told by a first-person narrator] is cancelled" (19) due in part to two "humanly fallible elements: the narrator's memory, selective processes and attitudes in the telling of his story; and the auditor's assimilation, comprehension, and retention of what he hears, in conjunction with his own human reactions to the storyteller as an individual" (20-21). What we find, then, is a reliability continuum, with completely reliable and completely unreliable at the extremes. Such a continuum of reliability is explained by Gerard Genette as *focalization*, "a restriction imposed on the information provided by a narrator about his characters" (Edmiston 729). Omniscience or zero focalization is rare for first-person narrators. A first-person point of view, then, invites an examination of the narrative persona, for dream visions are on the surface about the education of the narrator. As Charles Moorman says when discussing *Pearl*, "we accompany the 'I' of the poem through his vision, and it is through his eyes that we see the magical landscape and the girl" (104). By seeing through the "I" of the poem, in a sense we become that "I," experiencing the action of the poem as though it were happening to us, as though *we* were the narrative persona in the poem.

[51]Schmidt prints the A-text version of this as "Thou dotest daffe" (I.129), which is the same reading that the *MED* uses as its example for the definition of *doten* (1245). This gives the line a slightly different meaning, "You act foolishly, idiot" rather than "You foolish idiot." Four manuscripts, H, J, V and L, contain this variant.

has the mentality of a child in need of instruction, questioning, receiving (sometimes contradictory) answers, and then questioning again. And when he believes that he has an answer, he blurts it out, often only to have it ridiculed by his guide. After offending Reason, for instance, Will believes that he knows what *dowel* is. He is asked and confidently replies "To se muche and suffre moore, certes, is dowel" (B.11.412). Ymaginatif, his new guide, replies "Haddestow suffred ... slepynge þo þow were, / Thow sholdest haue knowen þat clergie kan & conceyued moore þrouȝ Reson" (B.11.413-14), after which Ymaginatif berates Will for not keeping his mouth shut. This type of interaction between guide/teacher and dreamer/narrator is typical of dream-visions, where a dreamer/narrator who has taken the name of the poet is berated humorously.

The combination of these three features produces self-deprecating humor, exactly what we find in Langland's impotence joke. It is a way for a writer to poke fun at himself and entertain an audience. The writer as authority figure shows an audience how easy it is for anyone to stray and in so doing, often comically directs an audience away from such stumbling blocks. Because the writer is an authority, and because we see the action through the narrator's eyes, this humor is often used to teach an audience.[52] In submitting himself to potential ridicule, a writer can instruct an audience through humor by setting himself up as an example.

One of the most common subjects of ineptness for narrators is love, and the topos of the *senex amans* is a powerful humorous representation that poets, including Langland, often use. The idea of the foolish *senex amans* is a commonplace in medieval literature. The image of the old man, as E. R. Curtius has illustrated, was not wholly farcical. Old

---

[52]For writers as authority figures, see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, especially Chapter 5, where he discusses Gower and Chaucer, concluding that "If Gower was a compiler who tried to present himself as an author, Chaucer was an author who hid behind the 'shield and defence' of the compiler" (210). By the fourteenth century, writers were increasingly considering themselves authorities, though this did not prevent them from using self-deprecating strategies, fallible first-person narrators, and humility topoi of various types.

age was praised for the wisdom that comes with its experience. The topos of the *puer senex*—the old boy—was used to describe a multitude of exceptional people.[53] However, while it was deemed exceptional when a youth behaved as an old man—with the wisdom of age—the old man who behaved as a youth was normally considered and presented as foolish.[54] Both to medieval moralists and in popular opinion, the *senex amans* was directly related to opinions on the natural aging of the human species.[55] Sexuality was believed to be connected to the heat and moisture in the body. As age progresses, the body becomes cool and dry, and sexual desire naturally lessens with the decline of heat and moisture.[56] As a result, deviation from this pattern was considered worthy of censure—labeled *senex amans* or *puer centum annorum*, which St. Gregory claimed was a "serviens vitiis" (*PL* 113.1311).

---

[53]See Curtius's section on this (98-101). On old age and wisdom, see Burrow (107-9) and Sears (61-62).

[54]See Burrow (151-162) and Sears, who, paraphrasing Philippe de Novarre, states, "Finally, in old age, it is seemly to wrap up one's affairs, to do good works, to repent and give thanks to God, *and to act one's age: it is pitiful to behave as if still young*" (102, my italics).

[55]For a full analysis of the ages of man, see J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man*—which contains a section on the *senex amans* (155-62)—and Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle*.

[56]Although a decline in health, including sexual desire, was deemed natural, during the Middle Ages health manuals and regimens prescribed measures for how to retard the accidents of old age. Part of the advice given in these manuals concerns the sexual activity of the elderly. The expectation was that sex drive diminished in old age and that people simply did not desire sexual activity as their age progressed (Shahar 78). Perhaps because of these expectations, perhaps forming them, medieval regimens like those of Roger Bacon advised that the elderly should not engage in sexual intercourse often (Shahar 40). Because heat and moisture were believed to diminish as one ages, it was considered important to conserve that heat, and intercourse was believed to strip the body of heat and moisture. So an old man who sought love or sex would have been considered unnatural. In fact, according to Shulamith Shahar, "the chief sin and foolishness of an old man who behaved like that [i.e. like a young man] was to keep seeking carnal relations" (77). For this reason, the *senex amans* was often presented in literature as laughable and grotesque, as Chaucer's January is.

Literary representations of the *senex amans* overwhelmingly cast him as ridiculous, often comically so. Chaucer's January is a grotesque example that follows from the elegies of Maximianus. Two of Dunbar's women in his *Tretis of the Tua Marrit Wemen and the Wedo* ridicule their old husbands, and we find the figure of Joseph in all four complete mystery cycles portrayed as a *senex amans*.[57] Chaucer's Parson even comments on old lovers (X.858). According to writers like Andreas Capellanus, "love is not only unnatural but actually impossible in the elderly" (Burrow 161).[58] Langland's impotence joke depends upon this type of narrator. Will, having taken the name of his creator, is an inept narrator throughout the poem who, at the end of the poem, stumbles verbally and thereby places himself in a position similar to the *senex amans*. The humor in this incident is entirely bodily, from Will's rapid aging to his impotence, to his wife's reaction, and this bodily humor becomes a way for Langland to teach his audience about proper living at the end of one's life.

Deficit and Excess: The Impotence Joke

The joke with which I am concerned is part of the larger sequence of events that turns Will old before our eyes, a process that itself could provoke a laugh, rapid as it is. Kynde calls Elde to pursue the fleeing Lif. Elde chases him and encounters Will: "and ouer myn heed yede / And made me balled bifore and bare on þe croune; / So harde he yede ouer myn heed it wole be sene euere" (B.20.183-85). Will's initial encounter with Elde is accidental, Elde having more important tasks at hand than to concentrate on aging an

---

[57]I will look at both of these examples in later chapters—drama in Chapter 4 and Dunbar in Chapter 5.

[58]There are some exceptions, of course. Burrow cites Guillaume de Machaut and Gower as representing a softened view of the *senex amans*, but "although popular hostility to elderly lovers and amorous old husbands could always be dismissed as mere vulgar prejudice, it could not be denied that courtly tradition itself often exhibited much the same hostility in a somewhat politer form" (179). Even rationalizing such opinions as prejudice, it would seem, merely offers an excuse. The trend to ridicule elderly lovers was, more or less, universal.

insignificant individual. But Will takes umbrage at Elde's action, and in a characteristic

verbal outpouring, he accosts Elde: "'Sire yeuel ytau3t Elde!' quod I, 'vnhende go wiþ þe!

/ Siþ whanne was þe wey ouer mennes heddes? / Haddestow be hende,' quod I, 'þow

woldest haue asked leeue'" (B.20.186-88).[59] This scene itself is humorous, drawing its

humor from the aging body. The image of a man, suddenly struck bald by the allegorical

figure of Old Age, shaking his fist at the flying figure of Elde and chastising him for what

in the final analysis is the very nature of Old Age, is comic.

Elde, of course, is no one to be trifled with. Lif's words say it best: "'Now I

se...þat Surgerie ne phisik / May no3t a myte auaille to medle ayein Elde'" (B.20.178-79).

We can assume that Will has heard these words.[60] Nothing can combat Elde, yet knowing

this Will foolishly tries. Elde responds by finishing the job that he inadvertently began.

Will says that Elde

> leyde on me wiþ Age,
>
> And hitte me vnder þe ere; vnneþe may ich here.
>
> He buffetted me aboute þe mouþ and bette out my wangteeþ;
>
> And gyued me in goutes; I may no3t goon at large. (B.20.189-92)

Will has aged before our eyes, and he is not happy about it at all. The scene is humorous

for several reasons. First is the speed at which old age afflicts Will. It is a scene

reminiscent of Hunger's attack in Passus 6; in a manner of moments Elde hobbles Will

---

[59]Will seems even at this late point in the poem to be unable to keep quiet.
Throughout the poem Will has been incapable of restraining himself from speaking
foolishly, to the extent that Ymaginatif berates him for interrupting Reason and driving
him away—"for thyn entremetynge he artow forsake" (B.11.414). He then paraphrases
Boethius: "Philosophus esses, si tacuisses" [*You would have been a philosopher if you
had been quiet* (*De consolatione philosophiae* II, *prosa* 7)] (11.415). Will seems to suffer
from a form of Gluttony throughout the poem, though his excess is what comes out of his
mouth rather than what enters it.

[60]The voyeuristic point of view in any dream vision means that whatever happens
is experienced by the narrator, who is the lens for the audience; we look over the
narrator's shoulder or through his eyes to observe events. So whatever the audience sees
or hears, we can assume that the narrator has seen or heard as well.

with

Will

natur

accic

The j

Gow

his se

pursu

exces

a care

"rupe

devoi

medie

wholl

believ

lamen

is only

with the effects of old age. Like a scene from a stop-motion animation sequence, we see Will age before our eyes.

To add insult to injury, Will experiences what medieval writers consider to be a natural part of the aging process—impotence, and Langland focuses upon this particular accident:

> And of þe wo þat I was Inne my wif hadde ruþe
>
> And wisshed ful witterly þat I were in heuene.
>
> For þe lyme þat she loued me fore and leef was to feele
>
> On nyghtes namely, whan we naked weere,
>
> I ne myghte in no manere maken it at hir wille,
>
> So Elde and heo hadden it forbeten. (B.20.193-98)

The joke is not a typical joke on the impotence of a *senex amans*, such as we find in Gower or Chaucer. Rather, it is a joke at the expense of his wife. Will does not long for his sexual powers to return, nor does he devote time to typical *senex amans* concerns— pursuing a young lover. Instead, Langland casts Will's wife as the one suffering from excess sexual desire. Will's penis is described as the limb that his wife loves him for, and a careful reading reveals that Will is not sorry about his impotence. Rather his *wife* had "ruþe" [pity] over her loss, and Will laments her reaction. Moreover, the passage is devoid of Will's own sexual desire, which indicates that Langland is conforming to medieval wisdom on the sexuality of the elderly. In fact, sexuality in this scene belongs wholly to Will's wife. Will's "lyme" does not work as it once did, due, we are led to believe, to Elde's actions. But it is not Will's own sexual desire that is frustrated, for he laments that he cannot make his penis obey "*hir* wille" (197, my italics). Moreover, Elde is only part of the cause: "So Elde and *heo* hadden it forbeten" (198), indicating that

Will's wife is at least partially to blame for his impotence.[61] Will's wife is both part of the cause and the one most affected by this particular accident of old age, and Will laments his wife's attitude more than his sexual deficit. The joke is both a misogynist poke at the lechery of wives and an added touch of self-deprecation for Will. We laugh at Will because of the situation in which he now finds himself, the object of his wife's ridicule. Will's deficit, his impotence, is only part of the joke, then. The joke is not nearly as funny without his wife's reaction, which results from a bodily excess—her sex drive.

Will is definitely presented as laughable and perhaps even pathetic in this scene. At the expense of his persona, Langland uses this long tradition to further edify his audience. Will has received his just rewards for speaking immoderately to Elde, and when he seeks help, Kynde instructs him to take himself to "vnitee" and learn a skill—to love, which has been a message throughout the poem. This, we can assume, is a different kind of love than Will's wife has for him, since his wife's love revolves around his penis. Kynde does not tell Will how he might reverse the effects of Elde, naturally, since this is impossible.[62] Will gets no relief from Kynde. Instead, he is instructed on how to live the rest of his life—to abandon everything save love.

With this instruction, Will exits the poem as an active character. He presumably seeks spiritual love and abandons his quest for knowledge and his sorrow over the loss of his wife's love. Although this humorous scene may mask a very real fear of impotence, it also presents the audience with an opportunity to laugh—like Troilus laughing at the folly of this world from the eighth sphere (*TC* 5.1807-27)—at the ridiculousness of seeking worldly pleasure at the expense of spiritual health. Langland's anxiety-relieving

---

[61]Different manuscripts render *heo* as *hee, she sooply, she soth, so sothly,* and "the goute & she" (Kane-Donaldson 670, Schmidt 730). The C-text has similar variants. Both Kane-Donaldson and Schmidt choose to print the feminine *heo*.

[62]However, medieval medical writers did prescribe how to lessen the effects of age, as in the widely disseminated pseudo-Baconian treatise, *De retardatione*.

joke at Will's aged impotence and his wife's desires actually solidifies the moral, presented throughout the poem, that we should seek love, should *do well*. Centering on Will's physical deficiency and his wife's excess, the scene is, in a sense, Langland's statement about the true importance (and impotence) of worldly affairs.

As with the practices that I discussed in Chapter 2, Langland uses ingestion and sexuality comically. However, the purposes for which Langland uses the comic body are quite different. The practices I discussed in Chapter 2 use the comic body primarily for entertainment—to evoke a laugh or poke fun at a societal model. Although Langland certainly entertained his audiences, in doing so he ridicules societal structures through his satire—the hypocritical Doctor, Gluton, the friars, those who attempt to defeat death through medicine. The humor derived from these satiric situations is directed toward a goal different from laughter alone, though I think that Langland probably wanted his audience to be entertained. The laughter is more *at* characters than *with* them. Langland openly condemns neither Gluton nor Will, as he does in many of his humorous episodes containing Gluttony. Instead, he displays particular behaviors that many writers would openly criticize—overeating, intoxication, sexual desire in the elderly—as laughable situations. Gluton's overindulgence and its results are funny, but it is a laughter aimed *at* the behavior, a laughter that places an audience above tavern practices. Will's sorrow about his impotence is an indication of his concern for sex. But his concern over his wife's sexual desire shows that here, too, we find excess. Will's wife's sexual desire, partly responsible for Will's impotence, since she has overtaxed his old member, is exactly what medieval medical and philosophical texts warn against. Presented as a joke, Will's sorrow over his wife's reaction reminds the audience that the search for spiritual love is the most important activity that can be pursued near the end of life, and acting like a *senex amans* impedes that search.

Langland's point is simple: "Mesure is medicine, thou3 þow muchel yerne" (B.1.34-35). Both Gluton's confession and Will's impotence teach an audience about immoderate behavior. The lesson with Gluton involves immoderate ingestion, particularly drink. Although thoroughly entertaining, it is not a picture of behavior to be emulated. Instead, Langland presents such behavior as ridiculous. However, he does not imply that all is lost if his audience participates in tavern practices, for Gluton eventually does confess. Although moderate ingestion is the ideal, there is recourse in the event of a slip. Likewise, Langland comments on what was believed to be the immoderate sex drive of the elderly by casting himself as an impotent narrator lamenting his wife's excess sexual desire. The elderly should not seek sexual relations as often as the young, and here again Langland presents a solution: abandon earthly love in favor of spiritual love. In both scenes, the implicit message is that "mesure" is necessary for living a spiritual life.

If one purpose of *Piers Plowman* is to show the successful journey to salvation, Langland's use of the comic body certainly facilitates this purpose, for these humorous situations prompt an audience to laugh at specific situations in order to lead it in another direction. Langland uses the comic body to illustrate the folly of these events and practices. The humorous parts of the poem are definitely entertaining, but the entertainment aspect of these scenes only reinforces the didactic message; these parts have *solaas*, but the *solaas* is bound so tightly to the *sentence* that it is difficult to separate them. The entertainment and laughter in these scenes is necessarily linked to the moral message. It is a didactic tool.

In *Piers

message

Gluton's

scatolog

represen

the real

the ever

immode

didactic

popular

setting.

concurr

contrib

mediev

Althou

consid

Macro

where
things
well. n
Chapte

Chapter 4
Corporeal Humor in Medieval Drama

In *Piers Plowman* the comic situations are certainly entertaining, but the poet's didactic message overshadows the entertainment. To use my first example from Langland— Gluton's confession—Langland uses images of excessive eating, drunkenness, and scatology, much of what we saw in a comic context in Chapter 2. But Langland's representations, though they occur in what appears to be a play world (the tavern), impact the real world. Beton actively diverts Gluton from his journey to confession, a practice of the everyday. Langland teaches that there is a place and time for everything and that immoderate behavior should be avoided. In his hands, the comic body is a powerful didactic tool.

Medieval drama has often been compared to *Piers Plowman*.[1] Drama was a popular form of entertainment for all levels of society, and its occasion was a festive setting. The drama edifies, but it also entertains. Edification and entertainment exist concurrently and are purposes in themselves, not detracting from and in many ways contributing to each other. Moral lesson and entertainment exist in a happy union in medieval drama.

I see drama as having a dual practice context. First, drama is a form of recreation.[2] Although, as the writer of *The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* asserts, the plays were considered "quike bookis" (*Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* 380) intended to teach lessons

---

[1] See, for instance, Mabel M. Keiller, "The Influences of *Piers Plowman* on the Macro Play of Mankind."

[2] For drama as entertainment, see Meg Twycross's introduction to *Festive Drama*, where she states that "We (at least, the English) tend when talking seriously about these things to forget that sheer excitement and enjoyment, and doing something like this really well, may be proper ends in themselves, as well as good for morale" (18). See also Kolve, Chapter 2.

about faith, they do so through entertainment.[3] The entertainment aspect of medieval

drama depends upon the transmission of drama: performance. The performance event is

the first practice essential for a full understanding of medieval drama in its social context.

The second practice by which I approach drama is the embodiment of the text in

performance. The recreative aspect of drama—the performance event—is always in the

background of my analysis, but my focus in this chapter is on the act of performing a

text. The main difference between a performance focus and a textual focus is

embodiment. Much literature in the Middle Ages was transmitted via performance, with a

narrator, perhaps the poet himself, reading aloud to an audience. Storytellers were

popular entertainers (see for instance the entire narrative frames of both *The Decameron*

and *The Canterbury Tales*), and listening to stories seems to have been popular. The oral

delivery of literary texts is one method of performance, but the practice of embodying a

text—assuming the guise, voice, and dress of a character—is different than vocalizing a

text. Dramatic performance differs from the oral recitation of literature in at least three

areas that depend in large part on the interaction of multiple performers. Dramatic

performance involves a company of actors performing a play. Though a particular actor

might play double or triple roles, drama is the embodied interaction of bodies before an

audience. I identify three factors of embodied interaction that distinguish drama from oral

recitation. First, actors take on the appearance of the roles that they play. They transform

themselves into another person, using masks, makeup, costumes, and properties to effect

this change. Second, some actors will change their voices to fit the part.[4] Some actors will

adopt voices completely different from their own, some will adopt different voices for

---

[3]The *Tretise*-writer sees the entertainment aspect of these plays as detracting from true spiritual enlightment: he says that the playing of miracles "ben made more to deliten men bodily than to ben bokis to lewid men" (380).

[4]Chaucer provides evidence of changing vocal quality when he describes the Miller as speaking in "Pilates voys" (I.3124). The reference to out-Heroding Herod in *Hamlet* is perhaps also a reference to voice alteration (3.2.13).

each role played. And even actors who do not alter their own voices participate in this diverse vocal quality of drama; the voices of different actors on stage help to distinguish individual characters. Finally, the appearance on stage of more than one person allows for action. The solitary reader of poetry can perhaps alter his appearance and vocal patterns, but he cannot achieve the action that two or more actors can. In drama, as in practice, we see the text in motion, in the action of becoming. Bodies speak, move, interact in a performance. Bodies also speak, move, and interact in a text. But performance makes this action alive. It bombards the audiences' senses with images: visual, aural, sometimes even tactile. The role of imagination, which in literary performance must be prominent, in dramatic performance is lessened because it is not needed. In this sense, the performance has more control over interpretation: the audience sees/hears what is performed rather than imagining action from a read or heard text.

As a result I focus on play texts in performance, using existing performances to inform my view of the plays. I will restrict my analysis to *Mankind* and The York Cycle of mystery plays. The *Mankind*-playwright places the comic body overtly in the script, giving a producer/director almost no choice but to present these comic scenes on stage. The York play text often gives us only hints of bodily humor; comedy can only reach fruition if the actors decide to emphasize these elements in performance. In order to illustrate how such textual hints can be converted into humorous episodes, I rely in part upon performances that I have either seen or performed in. Textual evidence is always important, but existing performances bring that text to life. For this chapter I use a filmed performance of *Mankind*, directed by William G. Marx and produced at Michigan State University on May 1, 1976. I also rely upon the performance of the *York Plays* at Toronto on June 20, 1998. In addition to these two productions, I use my experience as an actor and production assistant in a production of *The York Play of Pilate*, a conflation of scenes involving Pilate from The York Plays, performed at Michigan State University in 1998;

110

that expe

importan

T

practices

totality"

publishe

evidence

instances

performa

becomin

could no

stations a

performa

for both

performa

mystery

(Twycro

will" tha

do not d

some of

I

elements

5
performa
from am
that they
Christma
itself, is

that experience has given me valuable insights into the production of a play and, more importantly, the role of humor in these plays.

Though not the primary focus of this chapter, it is important to keep in mind the practices associated with the actual performance event, Strohm's "socially performative totality" (226), for the atmosphere of performance often impacts performance. Records published by the REED (Records of Early English Drama) Project give us ample evidence of the festival nature of dramatic performance. The audience was in many instances a scripted character in plays.[5] But the audience, especially during the marathon performances of the Corpus Christi cycle, also contributed to the performance by becoming a player in the festive atmosphere of the performance. These performances could not be escaped. At York, for instance, there were between twelve and sixteen stations along the main streets of the city, effectively closing the city streets on performance days. Records indicate that large sums of money were spent on refreshments for both the players and audience, and that festive meals were held during the performance. Dramatic performance seems to have been the occasion of festivity: "The mystery plays were at the same time a religious festival and a tourist attraction" (Twycross 37). Performances were "more like a party one could drop into and out of at will" than the modern concept of stage and captive audience (Twycross 44). Although I do not delve deeply into the party atmosphere of performance, it must have contributed to some of the interactions between audience and player described below.

In this chapter I look at two types of medieval plays and specific comic body elements in them. *Mankind* takes advantage of slapstick and scatology to entertain and

---

[5]Several examples of the audience becoming an active player in these performances exist. Mumming plays often have characters entering the playing space from among the audience, telling the audience to "make room" (Smart 24) and implying that they have emerged from the audience. Mankind does this twice, once just before the Christmas song (331) and again before the collection scene (469). The collection scene, itself, is evidence of audience participation in the pageant.

111

through that entertainment to teach the audience a valuable spiritual message. The Corpus Christi cycles include far too many comic incidents to address in a book, let alone a chapter. I will focus on three pageants that highlight male-female relationships—"The Fall of Man," "The Building of the Ark" and "The Flood," and "Joseph's Trouble about Mary." In each pageant the potential for using humorous material to help its scriptural message exists. In all three, the body is at the center of humor focusing on gender difference and sexuality. Medieval drama was an important form of entertainment, but it was also a powerful didactic tool. The examples that I choose here (and by extension most of medieval drama) illustrate the dual purpose of the drama—edification and entertainment. It does each equally well without either sacrificing itself for the other. For this reason, I have termed the use of the comic body in drama as edifying entertainment. The performance teaches the audience a valuable lesson through but not at the expense of entertainment.

I. Festive Drama in Medieval England

All that remains of English medieval drama are various play texts, some of which were extensively edited (with complete passages blackened out) during their performance histories, and documents recording the performance history of the plays. With few, if any, exceptions, medieval English drama has more written historical documents associated with it than perhaps any other English cultural artifact of the period.[6] These records give the scholar a far fuller view of the performance of these plays than the play

---

[6]Records of Early English Drama (REED) has printed nineteen collections of localized records and six volumes under the series name SEED (Studies in Early English Drama), which use dramatic records. Thirty editors are currently working on present REED projects, and the REED Newsletter continually examines new historical documents relating to drama. It is probably safe to say that no other literary/creative genre from the Middle Ages has as much historical evidence associated with it.

texts alone could ever hope to offer.[7] Records documenting aspects of performance and the atmosphere surrounding these productions tell us, in part, what it was like to attend these performances, and play productions appear to have been associated with a great deal of general merry-making. In fact, the activities that took place during the performance of a Corpus Christi cycle are remarkably similar the practices in some of the festivals that I discussed in Chapter 2, minus the parodic elements.[8]

We know from a variety of sources that the occasion of a performance was festive, with the tone of a fair. Many performances were lengthy.[9] As a result, people would need a break—to eat, for personal relief, for rest. The York records for 1520 indicate that £4 11s 4 1/2d were spent on food-related items (mostly for the performers). To put this in perspective, Christopher Dyer indicates that the average skilled building worker in 1500 earned little more than £9 for an entire year (6d per day), if we count the working year as 365 days. In reality it was not; workers did not work on Sundays and on feast days, and much work was seasonal. In fact, Dyer estimates that a worker at the end

---

[7]The topics covered in the REED volumes include financing performances, local organization of regular performances, acting, organizing events, approval of texts, and expenditures for items like costumes and properties. They tend to cover civic plays: Corpus Christi cycles and other plays sponsored regularly by civic authorities. Few, if any records exist for plays like *Mankind*, which were probably performed by professional acting troupes. My comments on the performance event, then, use records from civic-sponsored performances, but I believe that my comments apply equally to professional performances. Also, these documents tend not to include comments on particulars of the actual performance, such as acting style or specific descriptions of properties, costumes, and sets.

[8]Perhaps due to its relationship to Corpus Christi, these performances became the occasion for feasting and celebration in general. Corpus Christi was a relatively new feast, having definitely been established in England by 1311 (Kolve 37). It could occur anytime between May 23-June 24, an ideal time for an outdoor festival (Kolve 46).

[9]The York Plays produced in Toronto on June 20, 1999 lasted over fifteen hours. From the records it would seem that medieval productions were a lengthy affair, as well. A 1415 record from York stipulates that "euery player that shall play be redy in his pagiaunt at convenyant tyme that is to say at the mydhowre betwix iiijth & vth of the cloke in the mornyng" (REED *York* 25), and notes that the other pageants should be ready to follow "without Tarieng" (20), indicating that speed is of the essence.

of the fourteenth century earning 4d per day could "in theory" earn more than £4 in a year, though in practice the earning may have been £3, depending on his needs and wants. With an income of 6d per day, Dyer says "he [an average worker] could well have increased his earnings to, say, £3 10s." (225). Again, it would depend on how much the worker actually worked and what rate of pay he could claim for his services. Regardless, the expenditures recorded in 1520 for food and drink are more than a skilled worker might have earned in an entire year.

There are two reasons for these costs. First, actors in the longer plays—which would run nearly continuously through all of the twelve to sixteen stations (depending on the year)—would undoubtedly be in need of refreshment. Meg Twycross indicates that the actor playing God in the York *Last Judgment*, which is almost entirely a monologue, probably acted seven to eight hours continuously. She concludes, "one realises why such phenomenal sums were spent on beer" ("Theatricality" 42). The records for Coventry have many references to refreshments for the players. The 1450 Smith's Accounts lists payment of 20d for ale "to ye players in ye pajent" (Twycross, "Theatricality" 19-20), as well as money paid for meals on Corpus Christi day itself.

We also have records of dinners, feasts, eating, and drinking associated with the drama. An entry in the *York Memorandum Book* from 1426 discusses the decision to move the play from the feast day to the Wednesday before the feast day. Brother William Melton, a Franciscan, complained about the activities surrounding the Corpus Christi play: "the citizens of the aforesaid city and the other foreigners coming in to it during the said festival, attend not only to the play on the same feast, but also greatly to feastings, drunkenness, clamours, gossipings, and other wantonness" (*York* 43).[10] Melton does not seem to object as much to the festive nature of the activities surrounding the play—the

---

[10]"Ciues predicte ciuitatis & alij forinseci indicto festo confluentes ad eandem non solum ipse ludo in eodem festo verum eciam comessacionibus ebrietatibus clamoribus cantilenis & alijs insolencijs multum" (*York* 43).

feasting, drunkenness, and wantonness that he mentions—as he does to how these activities detract from "the divine service of the office of the day" (*York* 728). Indeed, this friar "has commended the said play to the people in several of his sermons, by affirming that it was good in itself and most laudable" (*York* 728).[11] The plays are praiseworthy, and the occasion of their performance brings with it a variety of activities that we saw in the mock festivals that I described in Chapter 2, most notably feasting and drinking.

The civic authorities seemed to consider the activities associated with the play performances as worthy of continuation. A record from York dated 9 March 1558 states, "bycause metyng of neighburges at the sayd festes & dynars and there makyng mery togiders was a good occasion of contynewyng and renewyng of amytie and neighburghly lovve one with an other therfor other part of the said festes & dynars shall still remayne but the costly ffare yerof to be moderated and abatyd" (*York Records* 326). Civic feasts and dinners were a part of the Corpus Christi celebration, and the civic authorities saw these as beneficial to the well-being of the community, at least if provided at a reasonable cost.[12] These feasts could certainly be extravagant, as we can see by the amounts spent on food. In 1449, for instance, £4 18s 1/2d was spent on the feast (which included 18 1/2 lambs) (REED 78-9). These plays were thus the occasion of broader festivities, for which everyday work was suspended and where people would come together to view the plays, eat, and drink.[13]

---

[11]"In suis sermonibus diuersis ludum predictum populo commendauit affirmando quod bonus erat in se & laudabilis valde" (*York* 728).

[12]This is not to say that there were not objections and outright condemnations of these performances. See, for instance, the *Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*.

[13]The Wife of Bath mentions attending "pleyes of myracles" (*CT* III.558) when she describes what she did while her husband was in London during Lent and while she "hadde the bettre leyser for to pleye" (*CT* III.551). Barry Windeatt suggets that when Margery and John Kempe visited York at midsummer in 1413, it was for the purpose of seeing the York Corpus Christi play (305 n.1).

The festivity surrounding the Corpus Christi cycles is similar to that for the feasts I discussed in Chapter 2. Entertainment was a major purpose for the dramatic productions of the cycles, as it had been for the older festivals. As the record from York indicates, civic authorities believed that such festivities were good for the community. Though mock leaders were rarely elevated and deposed, and though the type of wild revelry that we see in festivals like the Feast of Fools seems to have not occurred during Corpus Christi, the plays were performed during a festival period, with food and drink flowing readily and people coming together in community. Chester's midsummer celebration sometimes coincided with Corpus Christi, and one editor of the Chester Cycle says, "there was, evidently, a connection between the plays and the civic secular carnival" at midsummer (Mills xvi). The writer of *The Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge* complains that the money that people "shulden spendyn upon the nedis of ther negheboris, they spenden upon the pleyis; and to peyen ther rente and ther dette they wolen grucche, and to spenden two so myche upon ther pley they wolen nothinge grucchen" (111). In particular, he complains that the occasion of the plays presents an opportunity for unfair profit:

> Also, to gideren men togidere to bien the derre there vetailis, and to stiren men to glotonye and to pride and boost, they pleyn these miraclis, and also to han wherof to spenden on thes miraclis and to holden felawschipe of glotenye and lecherie in siche dayes of miraclis pleyinge, they bisien hem beforn to more gredily bygilen ther neghbors in byinge and in selling.
> (111)

The *Tretise*-writer contrasts true piety with the greed that he sees during performances of miracle plays, indicating that local merchants took advantage of these performances to deceitfully sell food (*vetailis*) and other items to an unsuspecting public. These performances, then, were similar to popular fairs and celebrations, at times performed during various festivals and often being the occasion for profit.

In addition, Corpus Christi shares some elements with the play world. First, there is a set time and space for the festival and plays. Though the plays might last as long as three days (as they did at Chester in the 1530s), the time of festivity was firmly established.[14] The space was the city with its set stations for the pageant wagons. During this time and in this space, the rules and norms of everyday life were suspended; people did not perform their daily labor, instead converging on the stations to watch the plays. Here we find an atmosphere, though not identical to the festivals discussed in Chapter 2, that is ready to accept revelry associated with performance. Dramatic performance is the ideal play world: set off from the everyday as it is by the calendar/pageant wagon. This play world, with its festivities and carnivalesque practices, makes dramatic performance possible.

The event of a performance, then, can be viewed as a festival of sorts. The records indicate large sums of money spent on food and drink for both players and audience. The occasion of a play offered recreation for the audience; plays held as part of the Corpus Christi festival were typically held on a holiday, where work was suspended and people, like the Wife of Bath, would take the opportunity to entertain themselves at the performance. The performance event is a practice that brought with it certain expectations: food, drink, entertainment, even perhaps laughter. Though my analysis of medieval drama focuses on the play text and actors interacting with it, it is important to keep in mind that the overall atmosphere of dramatic performance was festive and receptive to humor.

---

[14]Tale Four in *A Hundred Mery Talys* concerns "a player from a pageant who wears his devil's costume while going home, frightening everyone grievously" (Kolve 21). During the performance, the audience would probably have accepted this character as a representation, probably comic rather than frightening, of a devil. However, outside of the time and space set aside for the performance, this costumed player becomes realistically frightening.

II. Performance Practice on the Stage

The second and primary dramatic practice that I analyze is the physical performance of a play text: how drama was experienced within the festive atmosphere that I have just described. Drama is a unique artistic endeavor. As many have observed, drama is not literature.[15] The play texts that have survived reflect what amounts to a Polaroid snapshot of a single, two-dimensional aspect of a particular moment in the performance history of any play.[16] It is difficult to talk about drama without acknowledging that a play is merely a piece of writing until it is performed. Performance is what makes drama live, and it is how almost all medieval and early Renaissance people experienced drama.[17]

Drama has suffered from an alarming scholarly pitfall—a problem that George Kennedy has coined *letteraturizzazione*, a "tendency of rhetoric to shift its focus from persuasion to narration, from civic to personal contexts, and from discourse to literature, including poetry" (5). The majority of scholars have studied early drama as literature rather than as performance art.[18] Granted, the literary study of a play text can reveal a great deal about the play, but more important than the literary dimensions of a play text is its place in a performance history of the play, for a play text does not become drama until it is performed: "It is a truism that reading a dramatic script is like reading a musical score. Whatever impression may be conveyed by the printed page, the only measure of worth that matters ultimately is performance" (Alford, "Introduction" 1).

---

[15]This idea is the general thrust of the collection of essays *From Page to Performance*.

[16]Manuscript evidence, however, can tell us something of the revision history, with emendations perhaps reflecting changes made during production.

[17]By the sixteenth century plays were being printed for a reading public, but the drama with which I am here concerned was transmitted entirely via performance, and even Shakespeare's plays, though eventually printed, were written as performance texts. The primary mode of transmission, at least for medieval drama, was performance.

[18]John A. Alford asserts that "The improper application of literary methods to dramatic works has resulted in interpretations that would be difficult or impossible to sustain in any actual performance" ("Introduction" 1).

118

Because drama is not literature, it is important to approach all drama, no matter how old, as something different from literature and to balance opinions arrived at textually with the fact that the text is only one of several factors that contribute to the transmission of plays. As Arnold Williams has asserted, medieval drama "was produced in conditions almost strictly analogous to those governing a modern film or television program. There was no way by which anyone could experience the *Second Shepherds' Play* except by witnessing it" ("Typology" 679-80). Williams also draws a sharp distinction between modern drama and early drama. Some modern playwrights write their plays with an understanding that at some point they may be read as literature, which is both the result of and a contribution to *letteraturizzazione*. One need only look at the plays of Eugene O'Neill to see evidence of this awareness.[19] This is definitely not the case with early drama. In fact, early dramatic texts have little if any narrative description.

Dramatic performance embodies a text, the recognition of which is for this chapter essential. The play text is only one aspect in a dramatic performance, and it may at first seem a stable element in theatrical history; however, it is unstable, for it depends upon the other elements of production. The director (and sometimes the producer, if these are different entities) constantly determines how lines will be delivered, how properties will be used, what the scenery, if any, will look like.[20] The director determines the

---

[19]The beginning of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, for instance, contains three and a quarter pages of stage direction, describing everything from the authors represented on bookshelves, which an audience could hardly see, to Mary's "long, curling lashes" (12), and James Tyrone's light brown eyes. O'Neill gives an incredible amount of information that will never be noticed by an audience.

[20]By director I do not necessarily mean a person similar to twentieth-century film and theater directors. Instead, the director can be any force that performs the function of director. There comes a point in every production when decisions critical to the performance must be made: where characters are to stand, what special effects are to be used, how particular lines are to be spoken, what facial expressions might work best with particular lines, what properties will be needed. We have no evidence of the role of director in medieval drama, but we do know that medieval plays were performed, that they work as theater, and that directorial decisions must be made in order for a performance to work. I use the term *director* to indicate the directorial force behind decisions about blocking, properties, interpretation, timing, etc. We know that, at least for

blocking and, finally, the general meaning of each utterance. But the director is rarely an omnipotent entity in a dramatic performance. Decisions are often arrived at in consultation with the actors, and it is the actor who, finally, is responsible for the performance of the play.[21] Actors embody the text by appearing on stage and assuming the role of characters in the play text; as a result all action on stage is bodily. The play text can be edited during the performance process,[22] and lines that are ambiguous take on added meaning as the director and actors determine the thrust of their performance.[23] The

---

the civic cycles, the craft guilds functioned as producers, and they may have also taken a directorial role in the drama as well.

[21]Acting of the *Corpus Christi* plays was taken seriously. An entry from York dated 3 April, 1476 states "Ordinacio pro Ludi corporis christii / Also it is ordeined and stabliished by þe ful consent and auctoritie of þe counsaiile aforesaide þe day and yere wiithin writen from þis day furth perpetually to be obserued and keped That is to saie þat yerely in þe tyme of lentyn there shall be called afore the Maire for þe tyme beyng iiij of þe moste Conyng discrete and able playeres within þis citie to serche here and examen all þe plaiers and plaies [and] pagentes thrughoute all þe artificeres belonging to corpus christi Plaie And all suche as þay shall fynde sufficiant in personne and Connyng to þe honour of þe Citie and Worship of þe saide Craftes for to admitte and able and all oþer insufficiant personnes either in Connyng voice or personne to discharge ammove and avoide" (*York Records* 109).

[22]Most dramatic manuscripts from the period show signs of editing, though we cannot tell if this editing reflects changes made during a performance or outside of the immediate performance setting (though these changes would presumably have been intended to be performed in any case). At the top of folio 122 in the Macro manuscript, "and yf ther he cry man or womans" (250) was added well after the bulk of the manuscript was written. Folio 124 has "In the name of God amen" added. Folio 125 has added brackets assigning a passage to Nowadays. On folio 129 lines are reassigned to New Gyse. Such emendations may be evidence of performance adjustments.

[23]A good example of reinterpretation and meaningful non-scripted action is *The York Play of Pilate*, produced during a class at Michigan State University in 1998. The interaction between the Porter (the *Janitor* in the unmodified York script) and Judas is, on paper, marginally funny, with the Porter portrayed as a cross, gruff, irritable man, as his first words to Judas indicate: "Go hense þou glorand gedlyng, God geue þe ill grace, / Thy glyfftyng is so grymly þou gars my harte growe" (157-8). The thirty-six lines of verbal jousting in the original text seem to be of little consequence in a play of 294 lines ("The Conspiracy"). *The York Play of Pilate* combines this play with several other pageants that deal with Pilate's place in history, making it a longer play, so this scene should be even less significant. However, the embellishments made by the director and the actors who played Judas and the Porter made this scene memorable for its humor. The Porter is portrayed as a drunk whose primary motivation is to procure more drink. The opening of the scene has the Porter shuffling onto the stage after Pilate and his court have abandoned it, leaving behind a large pitcher of wine. Rather than have Judas knock at the

text, then, is a only a starting point for drama; it changes as actors interact with it. The text is only one of many factors that determine exactly what the audience sees, and the audience itself is an additional element in every performance, perhaps due to the festive nature of the event and the seeming absence of a separation between player and audience.[24]

Rather than approach performance as many critics who purport to see the medieval drama as performance—by *imagining* the text in performance—I go a step further. In May, 1998 I played Judas in a performance of *The York Play of Pilate*, which combined the York plays that focus on Pilate's role in salvation history. This experience, in addition to providing some needed information on the full production of a play of this

---

door and begin the scene immediately, this production has the Porter shuffle to the pitcher and pour a large goblet of wine, pause, drink liberally, then refill it, proceeding across the stage to a bench, where he then slowly falls asleep. The interaction between Judas and the Porter is modified as well. The Porter has a runny nose (a detail not even suggested in the original York script), and at one point, Judas offers a handkerchief, which the Porter, after blowing his nose noisily into it, attempts to return to him. Judas refuses, a disgusted look coming over his face. This handkerchief becomes a subsidiary focus throughout the scene with the Porter, for as he announces Judas to the court, he coughs and sneezes on Caiaphas's shoulder, then wipes the shoulder with the handkerchief, which the audience remembers has already been soiled. These embellishments are hardly suggested in the play text; they add life and humor to the drama, and they help to add a human element to the scriptural events depicted in these plays.

[24]Many of the extant play texts from medieval England call for interactions between the players and the audience. Such interactions can range from direct contact and dialogue, as we find in *Mankind* (discussed below) to simple topical references, as we get in both *Mankind* and cycle plays like the Wakefield *Second Shepherds' Play*. Though the initial comments involving the audience are scripted, no one can determine exactly how an audience will react. At one performance an audience may simply ignore such incidents, while at another the audience might actually participate in the action, interacting with the actors after such an invitation to enter the performance. In the York plays performed in Toronto on June 20, 1998, for instance, the audiences interacted often with the players. At one point during "The Judgment," the Jews call to crucify Jesus (the leaf is missing in York, but N-Town does include the clamor for crucifixion, and it seems likely that this would not have been omitted in York). The Toronto production has someone in the audience cry "Crucify him" when Pilate asks what should be done. This audience member was obviously planted by the production, but other audience members joined in, and a full chorus calling for crucifixion cried out from the audience, completely spontaneously.

scale, illustrated the transformation a script necessarily undergoes during the process of becoming performance. In addition to this experience, I had the opportunity to become an audience member in one of the most ambitious performances of medieval drama since the early Renaissance. On June 20, 1998, *Poculi Ludique Societas* in Toronto successfully sponsored a performance of the entire 47-pageant York cycle in one day, using pageant wagons, four stations, and almost as many performing troupes as plays.

As a result of these two experiences, I approach drama from a slightly different angle than many scholars do, for my imagining of performance draws upon these actual performances to complete the picture. From these performances I have realized how humor can be introduced into the drama based on only a few lines or words of text, or simply at the discretion of the director. These performances have also allowed me to witness how various techniques, comic and other, work in performance and affect an audience. While I acknowledge that my interpretations are based on a relatively limited experience, I believe that this experience can illustrate how medieval drama, as performed, operates.[25]

The act of performing is by far the most important practice for my analysis of medieval drama. It was the primary and perhaps only mode of transmitting medieval drama to contemporary audiences, who because of the festive environment of the performance event were probably receptive to humor. In the following sections, I will show how humor in performance operates to provide entertaining edification. The drama entertains and it teaches. But unlike *Piers Plowman*, where the entertainment seems to exist primarily as a didactic tool, medieval drama seems to take entertainment as a purpose equal in importance to its didactic purpose. The comic body in medieval drama

---

[25]Though I discuss only these performances in this chapter, I have seen a number of other performances, among them *The Second Shepherds' Play*, the Chester *Noah*, and the Wakefield *Last Judgment*.

entertains, but as it entertains, and in many cases by way of this entertainment, it teaches the audience important lessons.

III. Slapstick and Scatology in *Mankind*

I begin with what Pamela King calls the "prototype of the English moral play" (248). *Mankind* has been a controversial play in the eyes of scholars, due mostly to the comic elements that I focus upon here.[26] Slapstick and scatology drive the humor in *Mankind*, and we find both of these comic types used in later moralities and comedies, extending into the English Renaissance. The slapstick and scatology provide merry entertainment. They also teach the audience a lesson by including the audience in these jokes, leading the audience to see that the excesses represented by the vice characters should be avoided.

I indicated that Langland uses humor to draw the audience into the tavern during Gluton's confession. The *Mankind*-playwright's use of this technique goes a step beyond Langland's use of the comic body. An audience's participation in the tavern scene through laughter obviously would implicate it in the behavior that Langland warns us about. However, the extent to which an audience participates is entirely unknown and unpredictable, if it happens at all. The potential is there, but little more than that. With *Mankind*—and many of the Corpus Christi pageants as well—the audience plays an active, even scripted role in the performance. Bakhtin asserts that "carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" (7). This is an extreme view, I think, but one that merits attention. Though a distinction between audience and performance space definitely existed, it was

---

[26]Scholarly opinion of this play has improved recently: "Few medieval English Plays have experienced as radical a critical reassessment in recent years as the fifteenth-century morality *Mankind*" (Pettitt 198).

not nearly so sharp as it was in Shakespeare's theater. For medieval drama, the violation

of space (audience and performance) goes beyond simple audience address. Many if not

most medieval English plays present audience interaction, attempting to capture and keep

the audience's attention. This absence of footlights—that separator between audience and

player that has for so long dominated the theater (and cinema)—is pronounced in

medieval drama. Characters often emerge from the audience to make their entrance, and

at times the audience is actually used as the crowd (Twycross 59). *Mankind* takes full

advantage of this absence of audience-player separation. By using slapstick and scatology

in humorous ways the vices implicate the audience in vicious behavior, thereby forcing

an erring audience to identify with Mankind and to heed the lesson of the play.

Entertainment and edification exist side by side in this play, but the edification depends

in large part on the entertainment for its full effect, for only though entertainment does

the audience implicate itself in vicious practices.

Slapstick in Mankind

Slapstick is a comic device that perhaps is suited only for dramatic presentation and one

that, according to David B. Morris, "at its most basic is an affirmation of the comic body"

(102). Slapstick exists as sight-gag; no literary representation can successfully present

slapstick in the same way that performance can. Nor can the static visual arts present

slapstick successfully, since slapstick produces its humor from action. Perhaps the best

example of English medieval slapstick occurs in *Mankind*.[27] This play is an early

example of the slapstick that we find in later moralities and comedies, like the humorous

abuse in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*. We find slapstick scattered throughout the

other drama in medieval England, such as the beatings between Cain and the various

incarnations of his servant or the beatings exchanged between Noah and his wife in the

---

[27]I am indebted to William G. Marx's 1976 production of *Mankind* for many of
my comments on the spectacle of slapstick in the play.

cycles. *Mankind* presents the most concentrated amount of slapstick in medieval English drama, a slapstick that turns to viciousness in order to reinforce the play's didactic message.

The slapstick begins almost immediately. After Mercy's initial forty-four-line sermon to the audience, the first of five vice-figures, Myscheff, comes onstage. Myscheff engages in mostly verbal humor, parodying Mercy's Latinate speech. A leaf is missing, and then we see—as Lawrence M. Clopper calls them—the "Three N's" (347), Nought, New Gyse, and Nowadays, and our introduction to this community of vice is nothing other than slapstick farce. New Gyse calls "Ande how, mynstrellys, pley þe comyn trace! / Ley on with þi ballys tyll hys bely breste!" (72-73).[28] According to Mark Eccles, the most recent editor of the manuscript, "Either New Guise or Nowadays tells his companion, not the minstrels..., to apply the rod to make Nought dance" (217). Nowadays is beaten to entertain both the other vices and the audience.

However, a major problem arises with this opening scene, and it is directly related to performance. How do we identify vice? As a reader of the text, identification is easy. The second character we encounter is named *Myscheffe*; the name of the character in the margin beside his lines gives the reader an inkling of the character's nature. And then we get the names of the other three vices: New Gyse, Nought, and Nowadays. However, in performance the identification of characters is absent at this point. The second character to speak, Myscheffe, does not identify himself until 417, when he gives his name. Granted, Mercy has warned Mankind of Myscheffe at line 306, but we still do not know who Myscheffe is until 417, when the identification is made explicit. The audience does not have a play text; it does not have names neatly paired with individual speeches. Moreover, the Three Ns are not named until after the object of play changes from Nought

---

[28]All quotations from *Mankind* are from Eccles's *Macro Plays*.

to Mercy, and even when introductions are made, the names do not necessarily identify the Three Ns with vice.

Additionally, the vice's behavior at the beginning of the play is not necessarily vicious. In fact, the initial horseplay is directed *at* one of the vice characters, further obscuring the identification of vice. Here, we have a vice resisting the efforts of his fellows, saying "I putt case I breke my neke: how than?" (74). At this point Nought is not exhibiting vice characteristics. Instead, he is acting in a way that would lead an audience to believe that he is one of the good characters, for he is the victim of the games of vice. It is only after Mercy attempts to break up "þis reull" (82) that the vices unite and turn their efforts toward Mercy, who resiliently resists. Nought is happy for the interruption ("3ys, mary, I prey yow, for I loue not þis rewelynge. / Cum forth, goode fader, I yow prey!" (85-86)), but immediately after he calls for Mercy's intervention, he begins the game a-new, this time with Mercy as the object of the game. The rest of this scene (until the vices exit) involves the vices attempting to "play" with Mercy, much to his dismay. The slapstick includes tripping Mercy and making fun of him:[29] Nought says "Lo, take yow here a trepett!" (113).

By offering a confusing look at vice, this initial slapstick routine inaugurates a technique of audience implication that runs throughout the play. None of this behavior can be considered nice, but neither can it be considered harmful. The vices have fun at Mercy's expense, but they do not harm him. The activities of the vices seem to be mere horseplay. Mercy, after all, presents himself as a bit stuffy, regurgitating his "Englysch Laten" (124) as a preacher delivers a sermon. The vices lighten the mood, enliven the atmosphere, and, most important, offer the audience the opportunity to laugh. Moreover, the recognition of these characters as vices is delayed until deep into the play. The Three

---

[29]Marx's production included extra-textual elements like shoving and back slapping.

Ns name themselves relatively early (lines 113-115). Immediately after this identification, Mercy exclaims, "Be Jhesu Cryst þat me dere bowte / 3e betray many men" (116-17), but New Gyse denies the charge: "Betray! nay, nay, ser, nay, nay! / We make them both fresch and gay" (118-19). What the audience has seen thus far seems to verify New Gyse's statement. These characters have not betrayed anyone, and they have provided entertainment. Thus far, the vice characters have offered the audience the best entertainment. The slippery identification of vice in this play helps to align an audience with the vices. The Three Ns offer merry entertainment and entice the audience to laugh, and the audience is inclined to believe New Gyse's statements about making people merry.

With this initial slapstick the playwright presents his audience with what will become, I believe, a major pedagogic tool. As I will show, this play is concerned in part with teaching the audience about behavior that should be avoided. The playwright does this exactly as Langland does, by representing such behavior as ridiculous and dangerous. However, the *Mankind*-playwright delays representation of truly vicious practice until rather late in the play. *Mankind* teaches in part how thin the line between merry entertainment and vice can be. The playwright develops this lesson throughout the play, using the comic body both to illustrate how difficult the identification of vice can be and to dupe the audience into such behavior, thereby teaching by example.

The dominant type of bodily humor in this play is slapstick, a special type of humor. Morris, remember, sees a necessary link between comedy and pain: "comedy functions so often as a defense against pain—as numerous comic writers attest—that the absence of pain would deprive comedy of its chief villain and underlying purpose" (92). Such comic pain occurs in Tudor comedies like *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and in the beatings in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Don Quixote*. But there is another, somewhat paradoxical, relationship between pain and humor, and it is this association that defines slapstick—the lack of serious pain. Morris says that this type of humor arises when "the

127

situations call for pain, but pain mysteriously turns up missing.... Such comedies offer us a vision in which—despite beatings, collisions, and man-eating plants—there is no cost to pay and nothing really hurts" (93), concluding that "what we regularly encounter in comedy is violence without violent consequences" (101). When we think of some of the best-known slapstick performers—Charlie Chaplin, the Three Stooges, even some cartoons—we find just this relationship to pain. We laugh at Chaplin teetering on the brink of a precipice, knowing that in spite of the threat, the Little Tramp will prevail unscathed. The Three Stooges are a slightly different example, where pain actually occurs, but it is not the debilitating pain that would realistically result from, for example, an eye-poke. They squeal and grimace in pain, but heal before our eyes, never losing their vision, bleeding, or visiting a hospital. Slapstick involves the lack or lessening of pain where, realistically, intense pain would be present. It is the collision of bodies with objects—often other bodies—in the spirit of fun and without realistic results.

The distinction between the threat of pain (or pain that is miraculously and comically healed) and the debilitating pain that such actions would realistically cause is critically important for slapstick in *Mankind*, for there is a point when the vices' antics cease to be slapstick and become vicious. Until Titivillus enters—and Mankind finally succumbs to temptation—the vices' antics are just what the vices suggest—sport, amusing antics that undoubtedly made audiences laugh. Even when Mankind beats the vices, the action is humorous. For there is no real damage, despite the violence of the incident. In fact the wailing of the vices as they are beaten could hardly be played straight, with New Gyse wailing, on a topic very similar to Will's lament after his encounter with Elde, "Alas, my jewellys! I xall be schent of my wyff!" (381). All of the vices lament similarly, exaggerating their injuries. The Three Ns enter crying, and we get more slapstick. New Gyse cries "Alasse, master, alasse, my privyte!" (329), to which Myscheff says, "A, wher? alake! fayer babe, ba me! / Abyde! to son I xall yt se" (430-31). One can imagine Myscheff bending down to take a look, surely a comic moment in

the play. Nowadays complains about his head, and Nought complains about his arm. Myscheff's answer is simple: "I xall smytt off þi hede and sett yt on agayn" (435).[30] The reaction to Myscheff's prescription is hilariously funny: the vices' wounds miraculously heal. New Gyse says "ʒe xall not choppe my jewellys, and I may," concluding that "I hade a schreude recumbentibus but I fele no peyn" (441, 446). Though Myscheff's remedy does indeed seem severe, he claims that all will be well, for he "kan choppe yt of and make yt agayn" (445). His companions do not trust him, and the miraculous cessation of crying in favor of feigned wholeness is, indeed humorous.

This humor, however, soon ceases, as more serious representations of violence enter the stage. Immediately after the discussion of amputating wounded body parts, the vices decide that they cannot succeed alone. Myscheff has decided to call for help, and he sends the Three Ns to gather money to pay their new associate. The vices go among the audience to collect money, after which Titivillus enters, successfully tempts Mankind, and leaves, all in a matter of 153 lines (453-605). Believing Titivillus's claim that Mercy has died, Mankind asks the Three Ns, instead of God, for forgiveness. By this point even the vices are not safe from misfortune. They enter boasting of capital crimes; Myscheff and New Gyse have narrowly escaped hanging, Myscheff by quoting the neck verse and New Gyse by the luck of a weak rope. He says, "I was twychyde by þe neke; þe game was begunne. / A grace was, þe halter braset asonder; ecce signum!" (615-16), presumably pointing to the noose that still hangs from his neck. Nowadays enters, saying that he has robbed a church. These are not playful antics but are instead serious offenses.

The vices then hold a parodic court (664-725), where they make Mankind swear that he will steal, kill, go to the ale house on Sundays, and commit robbery, all seriously

---

[30]There is a tradition of a doctor cutting off a head and setting it healed on the body in mummer's plays. See Walter K. Smart and Arthur Brown. This is not the case here, as Richard Axton asserts (37), for the vices react against this action, and there is no more indication that Myscheff cuts off a head than there is that he cuts off testicles.

vicious activities. Mankind agrees, and at the end of the parodic court, Mercy arrives desiring to speak with Mankind. But Mankind has fallen, saying "I xall speke wyth þe anoþer tyme, to-morn, or þe next day" (727). The vices flee the playing space.

When we next see Mankind, it is obvious that the vices have brought him to the brink of damnation, for he calls for "a roppe, a rope, a rope! I am not worthy" (800). He suffers from *wanhope*, the state of despair which is a sin against the Holy Ghost and the underlying cause of suicide. The merry antics of the vices have ceased to be sport and have turned against Mankind, threatening him with serious physical and spiritual peril— suicide.

Moreover, the audience's final glimpse of the vice characters is permeated by violence. After Mankind calls for a rope, New Gyse shows him how to hang himself: "Lo, Mankynde! do as I do; þis ys þi new gyse. / Gyff þe roppe just to þy neke; þis ys myn avyse" (804-5). The lesson cannot be completed, for Mercy arrives and chases the vices away. Fleeing Mercy, New Gyse hangs himself, yelling

> Qweke, qweke, qweke! Alass, my thrott! I beschrew yow, mary!
>
> A, Mercy, Crystys coppyde curse go wyth yow, and Sent Dauy!
>
> Alasse, my wesant! Зe were somwhat to nere. (808)

These are the last words from a vice in this play, and it is, for the vice at least, serious, for he has approached death. The audience leaves the play with a very different impression of the vices than that created by the merriment they provided early in the play. If this scene is humorous at all, it is the dark comedy that ridicules and provides poetic justice, for the vices' antics have turned diabolic in their attempts to lead Mankind to his doom, and one of them may even have lost his own life in those attempts.[31]

---

[31]The play text leaves the hanging scene open. In performance, a director could have New Gyse die on stage or have the other vices rescue him. The play text contains the word *Exiant* after New Gyse's final words, which does nothing to clarify the matter. The particulars of this scene depend upon the particular performance. Regardless, the final scene containing vice characters is definitely violent, even without an on-stage death.

The shift from slapstick to violence is rare in other plays, though the shift from comic to serious is not.[32] Later plays that use slapstick tend to leave the line between slapstick and reality unviolated. In *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, for instance, we find consistent attention paid to slapstick without the slapstick resulting in serious misfortune. In each of the incidents involving violence, injury is somehow avoided and the plot moves on to its comic climax.

One incident serves as an example (though there are many in the play), for it is integral to the resolution of the play. Diccon tells Dame Chatte that Hodge will crawl through a hole and attempt to kill all of her hens. Dame Chatte opts to wait in the dark in order to catch the culprit. Meanwhile, Diccon tells Doctor Rat that, if he sneaks into Dame Chatte's house through a secret hole, he will catch her with Gammer Gurton's purloined needle. The two lies meet violently, with Dame Chatte beating Doctor Rat (891-97). The playwright presents some serious violence here, for later Dr. Rat reveals a head injury received during the encounter. But, with the exception of legal action, the violence is forgotten, and all we remember is the wily plan that Diccon constructed to get Dr. Rat into that situation, for no other reason than to provide entertainment, as he tells the audience before the trick:

> Softe, let me alone, I will take the charge
>
> This matter further to enlarge
>
> Within a tyme shorte;
>
> If ye will marke my toyes, and note,
>
> I will geve ye leave to cut my throte
>
> If I make not good sporte. (404-409)

---

[32]A similar example is the York "Cain and Abel" as performed in Toronto in 1998. The humor and slapstick in the beginning of the play are abruptly cut off by the murder of Abel, which serves to reinforce the horror of fratricide.

Diccon will "enlarge" (or amplify) this incident in order to make "good sporte," to provide entertainment for the audience. The violence is slapstick; it provides entertainment.

There is a pronounced difference in how the two plays use slapstick, and it is this difference that I wish to emphasize. The type of bodily humor in each is related—slapstick.[33] But the purpose for that slapstick is different, and it is this difference that helps to define the usage of humor in *Mankind*. The slapstick in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* exists purely for recreation and entertainment, to make an audience laugh. Though the slapstick in *Mankind* certainly provides some wonderful entertainment, with the disruption of what must have been an all-too-familiar and boring sermon and the playful gaming throughout, it also teaches a valuable lesson not only about forgiveness but also about play. Immoderate play produces unsavory results.

Festive Elimination: When Scatology Happens On Stage

A second type of bodily humor works together with slapstick to teach the same lesson. Though slapstick is prevalent in medieval and Renaissance drama, it does not cause the scholarly discomfort that scatological humor does. Scatology is a repeated comic topic, appearing in the parodic texts discussed in Chapter 2, Chaucer, and *Piers Plowman*. The drama is no exception, though staging scatological jokes could raise presentational problems. A surprising amount of scatological humor exists in the drama of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. This humor ranges from the abusive "kiss my ass" taunt of Cain and other vice characters to simple references to defecation, references to actual (on- or off-stage) elimination, and, (presumably) on-stage flatulence.

---

[33]In fact, though tangential to this study, it could be argued that the slapstick in *Mankind* is a direct precursor to what we find in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* in much the same way Douglas L. Peterson has argued that the vices in plays like *Mankind* evolved into the trickster whom we find in characters like Diccon, and Matthew Merygreke ("Playmaker").

The discomfort with this topic is evident everywhere in criticism. One apologist for this material asserts that "Medieval artists did not hesitate to use what we should call 'obscenity' *to illustrate a moral point*," and that such images, both artistic and literary, "were intended to be significant within the framework of Christian morality" (Robertson 20-21, my italics). Though Robertson acknowledges the inclusion of this material, he perceives a need to justify its usage by claiming a moral framework within which the material works. Moreover, Robertson eschews specific mention of the material, opting instead to generalize and discuss the topic evasively. Though many years have passed since the publication of Robertson's work, attitudes have changed little. Critics do go into somewhat more detail about what has generally been considered "obscene" material;[34] however, we still find many scholars who are uncomfortable with such direct language. For instance, when quoting a scatological passage describing Martin Luther, Karl P. Wentersdorf translates the verb *geschissen* as *defecated*. A more literal, and probably clearer, translation would be *shit*, but Wentersdorf avoids this word for a more "polite" translation.[35]

---

[34]E. Jane Burns, for instance, correctly translates the French *con* as *cunt* when she translates the fabliaux, but she only uses such language in the context of translation or paraphrase. By contrast, Martin Pops uses the word *shit* rather than more polite alternatives throughout his article, not just in his translations, saying, for instance, that "A healthy person wants to shit and then, at a certain moment, must: the sphincter muscles are appropriately (even symbolically) semi-automatic" (31).

[35]I believe that this discomfort is a direct result of changing tastes and that these attitudes need to be revised in order to better understand the usage of such material. Robertson was correct when he asserted that there was a religious application for what we consider "obscene." There is a long tradition of using such "unmentionable" material, stemming from pre-Christian Jewish texts, in a spiritual or religious setting. The Bible itself displays this language in several passages, and the word used is often *stercus*, a word meaning excrement or dung, especially "as a term of abuse" (Lewis and Short 1757). Lamentations says, for example, "qui nutriebantur in croceis amplexati sunt stercora (they that were brought up in scarlet have embraced the dung)" (4.5). Translations of this are interesting, rendering *stercora* as *dung*. The passage is clearly using the word in a derogatory manner. The neutral *dung* more than likely would refer to the Latin *fimus*, which has a neutral or positive connotation (dirt, dung, fertilizer). The English *shit* would probably more aptly capture the derogatory nature of *stercora*. Yet translations of the passage insist on using *dung*. The Latin word is stronger, but our discomfort prevents us from indicating its strength.

Though medieval writers tended to be direct, there was also a sense of decorum in medieval writing. Laura Kendrick says. "In the late medieval period, the rules of proper speech...forbade the outright naming of sexual parts or open discussion of lower bodily functions such as sexual intercourse or excretion" (*Chaucerian Play* 74). Thomas W. Ross has printed a glossary of "Taboo-Words in Fifteenth-Century English," based on three unpublished manuscripts containing lessons in Latin that contain Middle English glosses. His list suggests that many words offended a sense of decorum in the fifteenth century, and we do find many euphemisms for bodily functions in Middle English.[36] Still, a good many of the words Ross lists were used by poets, and many of these uses seem to be for comic effect, which is exactly what Kendrick assumes in her chapter on "Breaking Verbal Taboos." A writer will violate a verbal taboo for comic purposes. Though Wentersdorf is correct when he asserts that "during the Middle Ages...people were very outspoken: they called a spade a spade and did not hesitate to use the imagery of the dunghill" (5), there were still taboo words, and these taboo words could be used for comic purposes. a use that Wentersdorf neglects to discuss.[37]

---

[36]Langland's reference to a horn in Gluton's confession is one example.

[37]Wentersdorf points out that the language in scripture was an impetus for this directness, for scripture set the example by its blunt language. The use of these images, Wentersdorf indicates, were many. First, defecation was an indication of sin. By extension, defecation is often associated with desecration or the defiling of holy places. In this sense we find the enemies of the righteous—demons and devils—using flatulence and defecation in their battles against the forces of God (Wentersdorf 8). But such weapons are also used by the righteous against God's enemies, as we see in several stories about Martin Luther (Pops 29-31). Wentersdorf also states that defecation is associated with the righteous *just as often* as it is with the powers of evil (8). The act is also an act of contempt or defiance (The popular story about the defender of an English town dropping his breeches and farting at William the Conqueror, who in anger leveled the town, is one memorable and humorous example). In light of the ample evidence that can be supplied in support of each of these instances, I think that it is safe to say that scatology—using what we might consider the most grotesque, inappropriate. impolite diction that we can imagine—was used in a wide variety of situations, even though it could and did offend some tastes.

Mankind is full of such humorous uses of taboo words and subjects, the abundance of which is what has made this play suffer the slings and arrows of outraged critics.[38] This humor begins when the Three Ns taunt Mercy for the first time. Nowadays challenges Mercy to translate into Latin, "I haue etun a dyschfull of curdys, / Ande I haue shetun yowr mowth full of turdys" (131-32), which the other vices probably greet with laughter.[39] Yet such taunts are not directed wholly toward Mercy. Nought's comments about Nowadays's wife, Rachel, prompts him to exclaim "Osculare fundamentum!" (142), in much the same manner that Cain speaks to Abel in the Wakefield "Murder of Abel."[40] The use of scatology, and of bodily humor in general, is not directed at the good characters. The vices are equal-opportunity offenders.

The next instance of scatological humor in *Mankind* is the much-maligned "Crystemes songe" (332).[41] Nought leads the other vices, and perhaps the audience, in a sing-along, singing the words, then having the others repeat them:

> Yt ys wretyn wyth a coll, yt ys wretyn wyth a cole,
>
> He þat schytyth with hys hoyll, he þat schytyth wyth hys hoyll,
>
> But he wyppe hys ars clen, but he wyppe hys ars clen,
>
> On hys breche yt xall be sen, on hys breche yt xall be sen.

---

[38]See, for instance, C. F. Tucker Brooke, *The Tudor Drama*; Hardin Craig, *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages*; Arnold Williams, *The Drama of Medieval England*; W. K. Smart, "Some Notes on *Mankind*"; Joseph Quincy Adams, *Chief Pre-Shaksepearean Dramas*; F. P. Wilson, *The English Drama: 1485-1585*; Elbert n. S. Thompson, *The English Moral Plays*; E. K. Chambers, *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages*; and Louis B. Wright, "Variety-Show Clownery on the Pre-Restoration Stage".

[39]Wentersdorf seems to miss the point here, calling such instances "imprecations" and stating that the vices in this play are "devils" (10).

[40]See particularly lines 268 and 289, where he says "Com kys the dwill right in the ars!" (289).

[41]See Wentersdorf (10) and Davenport (42) for specific comments about the obscenity of the Christmas song. Joseph Quincy Adams, an early editor of the play, prints only the first and last lines, stating in a note that "The song is unprintable" (311).

Hoylyke, holyke, holyke! holyke, holyke, holyke! (335-43)[42]

Wentersdorf explains this song as somehow related to characteristic demonic activity

(10). But it is clear from the context—especially since the three vices, not yet identified

by their actions as vices, have provided merry entertainment for the audience—that the

song is a simple tune of revelry, albeit with a scatological focus. We must remember that

Christmas was not the same holiday as it is now and was celebrated much differently in

the Middle Ages. It was a feast, and it occurred during a time traditional for pagan

ceremonies (Chambers 238).[43] Christmas, the December 25 date of which was well

established by the late Middle Ages (Chambers 240-41), occurs very near the New Year

celebration and winter mock festivals like the Feast of Fools.[44] Christmas was a time of

game and revelry. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* describes Christmas as a time of

"rych reul" (40), and the Green Knight calls his proposal a "Crystemas gomen" (283). In

light of the different types of festivities that occurred in the Christmas season—which

included a boy bishop, a banquet (sometimes incredibly lavish), gift giving, jousts and

tournaments, music, mirth, minstrels and jugglers, and masques (Chambers 391)—the

scatological Christmas song in *Mankind* seems far less "sacrilegious" (Wentersdorf 10)

than many would lead us to believe. Although critics take exception to this song—either

on account of its language alone or because the language is associated with Christmas—

---

[42]Both David Bevington (915) and Pamela King (250) see this as a sing-along or round, where a character sings a line, then the audience repeats it.

[43]Chambers muses that "it is not at all improbable that it [the date of Christmas] was determined by an attempt to adapt some of the principal Christian festivals to the solstices and equinoxes of the Roman calendar" (241). Moreover, Christmas was not celebrated as it is now. The solemnity that many today connect to the Christmas holiday was for the most part absent in the Middle Ages. Instead, the entire Yule season was celebrated with sumptuous feasts and practices very similar to what we find in the Feast of Fools. Eating and drinking to excess, mumming, the election of a lord of misrule, all dominated Christmas festivities. See Kolve (163-65), Chambers (390-91).

[44]Tom Pettitt, for instance, sees *Mankind* as a type of *Fastnachtspiel*, a Shrovetide play performed at the end of the traditional season of revels from Christmas to Shrovetide.

this song is a major factor in a didactic technique that the playwright uses throughout—

audience interaction.[45]

It might have been enough for the playwright simply to represent vicious behavior

on stage as a spectacle to be ridiculed, to be laughed at and avoided. But audiences, then

as now, are unpredictable, and this playwright seems to have come up with a clever way

to ensure that he made his point. He includes the audience in the action of the play,

seducing it into aligning itself with the vices, thus making the audience as well as

Mankind need redemption. Several scholars have noted this trick, but none have linked it

with the bodily humor in the play.

The most obvious place where the audience takes an active role in the

performance is the famous collection scene. At a pivotal point in the play, the vices

---

[45]Another category of scatological humor that we find in several plays is flatulence. Flatulence was not simply the subject of amusement in literature or drama. Indeed, there is evidence to indicate that certain entertainers put their flatulent skills to good use throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. St. Augustine states in *The City of God* that "Nonnulli ab imo sine pædore ullo ita numerosos pro arbitrio sonitus edunt, ut ex illa etiam parte cantare videantur" (24.2 "Some emit a great number of sounds from below, without any stink, that seems to the person present to sing from that part"). And there was a person named Roland le Pettour, also called "le Fartere," who was rewarded by Henry II for entertaining, which included farting (Rastall 127).

I think that we can safely assume that the humor and entertainment derived from literary and performative flatulence occurred in the drama, as well. We do not have many instances of flatulence in early drama—probably because flatulence, like all action, was rarely explicitly scripted—but where we do, the act is generally associated with vice characters, especially devils (Wentersdorf 8-9). A stage direction from the beginning of *The Castel of Perseverance* states, "he þat schal pley belyal loke þat he haue gunnepowdyr brennynge / In pypys in hys handys and in hys erys and in hys ars whanne he gothe to batayl" (Eccles 1). Wentersdorf sees this as an indication that the devil would have been represented as farting during battle. The appearance of other devils support this supposition. The first pageant in the N-Town cycle has Lucifer state "For fere of fyre a fart I crake!" (1.81), and it is probably safe to say that his fart is somehow represented on stage. In pageant 23 we again find a devil, this time Satan, farting. After finding his attempts at tempting Jesus in vain, Satan says "For sorwe I lete a crakke" (23.195), his last line in the pageant. Such evidence leads Richard Rastall to surmise that, although the textual evidence is thin, "it is possible that farting was a not unimportant feature of the devils' stage business" (111). We know from Chaucer, Langland, and Dunbar (see Chapter 5) that flatulence could be a powerful comic tool. There is no reason to believe that similar images (and probably sounds) on stage would produce different results.

concede that alone they will be unable to trick Mankind into joining them. They decide to employ Titivillus to aid their efforts. However, the appearance of Titivillus will require payment:

> We xall gaþer mony onto,
>
> Ellys þer xall no man hym se.
>
> Now gostly to owr purpos, worschyppful souerence,
>
> We intende to gather mony, yf yt plesse yowr neclygence,
>
> For a man wyth a hede þat ys of grett omnipotens. (457-61)

Nowadays continues, further prodding the audience for contributions: "Gyf ws rede reyallys yf ȝe wyll se hys abhomynabull presens"(465). King sees this scene as evidence of an attempt to enhance the playwright's message: "the moral lesson becomes an object lesson" (250). It is a clever ruse, for "the audience is faced with the clear proposition that the play cannot continue until they pay, the fiction is then re-established and it becomes apparent that the audience has participated in a black mass and enabled Mankind's final downfall to be effected" (251), and Clopper agrees: "The playwright uses laughter to trap the viewer into 'sin." (352) As the vehicle of Mankind's downfall, the audience is just as culpable as the vices and must thus redeem itself, or, presumably, suffer the same fate as the vices.

This is not the only place where the audience is implicated in vice-like actions, however. Until the collection scene, the audience participates in vicious behavior through its laughter. The playwright has manipulated events to trick the audience into a loose alliance with the vices. In a number of places in *Mankind*, the vices emerge from the audience to play their games. Immediately before the Christmas song, Nowadays says, "Make rom, sers" (331), indicating that he moves through the audience to the playing area. In performance, a director could very easily place the vices among the audience

while singing the song.[46] Moreover, by emerging from the audience, mocking the dull

Mercy, and providing merry entertainment for the audience, the vices establish a rapport

with the audience that, combined with the sing-along and collection, forms a community

between the actors and the audience. These merry activities play upon the festive

environment of dramatic performance, and by doing so, the vices dupe the audience into

participating in the vicious behavior that leads to Mankind's downfall.

The audience in its role as active spectator—laughing at the vices' antics, singing

along, and contributing money—becomes an additional vice character in the play. Once

the action turns violent and the audience realizes to what it has contributed, it recognizes

how easy it is to slip from passive viewer to active participant and how thin the line

between innocent fun and vice can be. Moreover, the audience should pay special heed to

the lesson that Mankind learns at the end. The audience has mirrored Mankind in his

error. The vices have gradually won over the audience, like Mankind, to their point of

view, only Mankind was helped along by the audience's actions. The audience, then, is in

the same moral position as Mankind at the end of the play, and Mercy's teachings apply

to both Mankind and the audience equally.

The two types of humor I have focused upon in *Mankind* are used, in part, to

involve the audience. Both slapstick and scatology were popular humorous forms in the

Middle Ages and Renaissance. *Mankind* uses both slapstick and scatology to draw the

audience into a loose alliance with the vices. The end result is that, once the audience has

contributed to Titivillus's entry, Mankind falls.[47] The audience has contributed to

Mankind's fall, and as a result must pay special attention to Mankind's redemption. But

later plays like *Gammer Gurton's Needle* omit the moral message that we find in

---

[46]Paula Neuss says that "pretending to be a member of the audience was not an unusual procedure for actors in the early theatre" (46).

[47]Clopper states that Mankind's fall is "farcical" (353), but this farce soon turns serious as Mankind is in mortal danger.

139

Mankind, opting rather to provide merry games for the sake of entertainment. In scripting the comic body in this way, the playwright virtually assures that the effect of the performance will serve his didactic purposes.

The technique of implicating the audience ties entertainment and edification together. This play, probably performed by a professional acting troupe, was definitely a form of entertainment. But it also teaches a lesson. The entertainment, which revolves around slapstick and scatology, is an integral part of the didactic lesson, for in this play the message depends upon implicating the audience through entertainment. The evolution of humor to vice, the main vehicle of this audience implication, is not unique to *Mankind*. The cycle plays also show a shift from entertainment to serious lesson.

IV. Mystery Cycles: The Divine Comedy of Male-Female Conflict

The mystery cycles also contain bodily humor. Though scatology and slapstick appear in the mystery plays, I will move to humor that focuses on gender difference in the relationships of Adam and Eve, Noah and his wife, and Joseph and Mary. The humor in all of these episodes, at the most basic level, is rooted in gender difference. These plays take the male point of view in stock male-female conflicts: the battle between husband and temptress, the troubles between the obedient husband and his disobedient wife, and the reaction of a husband who believes himself to be an impotent cuckold. Beyond the biological (or psychological) conflict, these three humorous scenarios all focus on physical difference. Moreover, the comic body here depends upon performance in order to bring about laughter fully, for the texts of the pageants do not signal humor as obviously as *Mankind* does.

Adam and Eve

I begin my analysis with the first couple, the cycle plays' first representations of humankind. The four cycles devote different amounts of space to the events portrayed, but those events are relatively the same in all.[48] The basic events portrayed are the creation of Adam and Eve, the temptation by the serpent, God's interrogation of Adam and Eve after eating the forbidden fruit, the judgment of God, and the expulsion from paradise.

For the most part, these events are handled uniformly across the cycles, though the style of presentation varies. Reading these pageants as literature results in a relatively bland, almost lifeless account of humankind's tenure in paradise. This is where performance becomes important, for it is the responsibility of the players and director to give life to the bland text. Textually there seems to be little potential for humor. But this is a result of reading the plays as texts rather than as performance. There are two main areas that at least hold potential for humor in these plays. The first is Adam's sudden realization that he is naked. The second is when Adam and Eve pass the buck, so to speak, after God learns of mankind's disobedience.

Adam's disconcerting recognition that he is naked occurs in three of the four cycles.[49] In York, after eating the apple Adam says "me shames with my lyghame, / For I am naked as methynke" (110-11). The event occurs similarly in the other cycles. The N-Town Adam asserts, "Schameful synne doth us vnhede: / I se vs nakyd before and

---

[48]York devotes four pageants to the Adam and Eve story. The other cycles place the story of Adam and Eve in one pageant, combining it with the creation in Wakefield, Cain and Abel in Chester, and the creation of the world in N-Town.

[49]Wakefield is missing four leaves at the end of the play, so the text ends with Lucifer beginning to tempt Eve. Based on the similarities between the York and Wakefield cycles in general, it can be safely assumed that the revelation of nakedness occurs in Wakefield as well. On the relationship between the two cycles see Peter Meredeth's discussion of "Literary Relationships" (145-48) in his discussion of "The Towneley Cycle."

behynde" (2.167-68), and the Chester Adam says, "Out, alas, what ayleth mee? / I am

naked, well I see" (2.33-34). The event itself is biblical, of course: "And the eyes of them

both were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together

fig leaves, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3.7).[50] But in all the cycle

representations of Adam's nakedness, there is an implicit stage direction. Both the N-

Town and Chester Adams use the word *see*, and York uses "methynke." Both words

imply that the character must actually look to confirm his nakedness. In all three pageants

Adam's realization is sudden, suggesting that he eats, then looks down and recognizes

that he is exposed. The York text places Adam's decision to eat, the action, and then his

blame of Eve for what he has done in a single stanza:

> *Adam*: To ete it wolde Y nought eschewe
>
> Myght I me sure in thy saying.
>
> *Eue:* Byte on boldely, for it is trewe,
>
> We shalle be goddis and knawe al thyng.
>
> *Adam:* To wynne þat name
>
> I schalle it taste at thy techyng.
>
> *Et accipit et comedit.*
>
> Allas, what haue I done, for shame!
>
> Ille counsaille, woo worthe the!
>
> A, Eue, þou art to blame,
>
> To þis entysed þou me—
>
> Me shames with my lyghame. (107-10)

The pageant is written mostly in eleven-line stanzas with only five exceptions, where a

five-line stanza is used (*York Plays* 419). The suddenness of Adam's realization comes

---

[50]"Et aperti sunt oculi amborum cumque cognovissent esse se nudos consuerunt folia ficus et fecerunt sibi perizomata" (Genesis 3.7).

just before the stanza break. Adam realizes what he has done and blames Eve. Immediately afterward, concluding this stanza (with perhaps a slight pause represented by the dash in Beadle's edition), Adam refers to his nakedness: "Me shames with my lyghame" (110). The first line of the next stanza, "For I am naked as methynke" (111), concludes Adam's realization. By initiating the realization at the end of the stanza where Adam eats and blames Eve, the York playwright seems to present a sudden realization, a time where Adam—eating, knowing that what he has done is wrong, and attempting to place blame—recognizes his lack of clothing as shameful. The action might be difficult to play straight.

Toronto performance of the York plays presented the scene humorously, using Adam's sudden realization to fuel the humor. In the "Fall of Man," Adam had a codpiece sewn into his tights (Fig. 1). To the audience, this was hardly even noticeable, until Adam ate the apple, realized his transgression, blamed Eve and said "me shames with my lyghame, / For I am naked as methynke." At the stanza break, Adam paused and looked downward to his anatomy, a look of innocent surprise coming over his face. With this subtle move, Adam's anatomy jumped to the forefront, becoming for that instant, and remaining for some time afterward, the center of attention. The audience, of course, roared with laughter. This particular production was filled with similar humorous touches, due mostly to the ability of the actor who played Adam to express subtle humor with gesture and facial expression (Fig. 1).

Another appearance of humor occurs when God inquires, "Þis werke why hast þou wrought?" (5.141). In all of the cycles Adam attempts to explain why he ate from the Tree of Knowledge by blaming Eve. Eve, in turn, blames the serpent. Again, textually we have biblical precedent for the episode (Genesis 3.12-13). But in performance, this incident can easily be played humorously, as it was in the Toronto production, where the combination of Adam's facial expressions and the way he delivered the lines again made the audience laugh. Rather than humbly state "Lorde, Eue gart me do wronge / And to þat

Figure 1.

Adam's expressive face. From the York Plays at Toronto, June 20, 1998.

bryg me brought" (5.142-43), Adam looked around quickly, set his gaze on Eve, and then, the proverbial light bulb illuminating his face, he stuttered through his excuse, showing the audience that he was not merely telling the truth but, rather, that he was actively attempting to shirk responsibility for his actions. Eve followed suit, blaming the serpent, attempting to pass responsibility as most people would. The result was a comic line ending with the serpent, each person looking to another in order to avoid blame.

Though these two textually dry incidents can be humorous when acted comically, this humor does not detract from the overall thrust of the play. It provides an opportunity for entertainment, but it also contributes to the moral message. Adam ate from the tree, just as Eve did. And his attempts to deflect God's wrath come across, after the laughter, as feeble and petty. God knows what has happened. And in spite of the very real fact that the serpent was behind Adam and Eve's disobedience, Adam and Eve did disobey God. All three are punished, and the final image of this pageant is the very serious expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise (Fig. 2). The corporeal humor in the play drives home an important lesson: we must and will be responsible for our actions—in this case disobedience to God—and in this sense the pageant looks forward to the judgment, when humankind is called to a reckoning for its behavior.

Noah and Mrs. Noah

The next male-female relationship that appears in the cycles occurs in the play of Noah.[51] The episode with Adam and Eve focuses upon Eve's gullibility and weakness—Eve succumbs to temptation and, as a result, humankind is expelled from paradise. There is also the underlying theme of disobedience and the results of disobedience in the Adam

---

[51] York has two pageants, "The Building of the Ark" and "The Flood," dealing with Noah, but in this it is unique. The other three cycles only devote one pageant to Noah. In York, Noah's wife only appears in "The Flood." The Toronto production combined the two into one pageant.

Figure 2.
The Expulsion. From the York Plays at Toronto, June 20, 1998.

and Eve episodes. The focus of the Noah plays is, again, obedience.[52] And the lesson of obedience is taught through the misogynistic bodily humor that permeates the play. In all of the plays of the Flood, with the exception of N-Town, Mrs. Noah commands the stage through her comic action. Perhaps because of this, criticism on these plays has tended to focus on Mrs. Noah, neglecting in large part the rest of the pageant. But it is clear to me that Mrs. Noah's humorous portrayal, rather than detracting from the play's overall message, as William G. Marx suggests it can, contributes to the overall message and, in fact, makes that message all the more powerful.[53]

Again, performance is important for a full understanding of the comic action in this pageant. Marx raises an interesting issue when he discusses what characters do when they are not speaking: "Literary scholars may presume that an absence of words on paper means an absence of meaningful action on the stage, but such a presumption would be far removed from the reality of performance. The business of performance is to discover what combination of sights, sounds, and physical actions best reveals the meanings inherent in the text" (Marx 115). In most of the plays, once the clash of ideas between Noah and his wife is completed, Mrs. Noah seems to disappear.[54] But though she has no lines, she could have an active role in the play. Marx's production of the Chester Noah

---

[52]Rosemary Woolf develops this theme most cogently, asserting in general about Noah's wife that she is "not a figure harmoniously in the scheme of salvation but one who initially repeats the pattern of the Fall" (133). Marx's production of the Chester "Noah" contains a focus on obedience as well (Marx 123)

[53]Marx is correct in stating that focusing too much on Mrs. Noah can detract from the rest of the play. His concern is with the Chester play, where Mrs. Noah's final reconciliation with Noah is not expressed in the text. However, like Marx, I believe that some sort of reconciliation is necessary, lest the play remain wholly a farce. That the other three cycles script the reconciliation and Mrs. Noah's final obedience to Noah's and God's will can stand as evidence for the non-verbal reconciliation that probably occurred in the Chester performance.

[54]See Millicent Carey (89) and Rosemary Woolf (141).

gives Mrs. Noah meaningful action after her final words, thus reinforcing the dominant theme of obedience in the play.[55]

At the beginning of the York "Flood," Noah has already shown his obedience to God. In the previous pageant, "The Building of the Ark," Noah, first reluctant, obediently builds the ark and proceeds to gather the animals as God commanded. The theme of obedience continues at the beginning of "The Flood," when Noah bids his first son to call his wife. The son replies, "Fadir, we shal nouȝt fyne / To youre biddyng be done" (51-52), emphasizing the proper obedience that has, until now, been foregrounded. This pattern of obedience continues for only a few lines more, however, for Mrs. Noah replies to the request to enter the ark "ȝa, goode sone, hy þe faste agayne / And telle hym [Noah] I wol come no narre" (61-62). She proceeds to the ark, where Noah awaits, and refuses again, saying, finally, "Þou arte nere woode, I am agaste" (91). Soon thereafter the verbal war turns physical, with Noah asking his sons for help, "to holde her here" (102). This scene erupts into slapstick that is reminiscent of *Mankind*. Mrs. Noah finally exclaims, "Nay, be my trouthe, þou getis a clowte" (120), following which, we can safely assume, she strikes Noah. The image of Noah, whom God has chosen to build the ark, being beaten by his wife must have provided a good bit of laughter, as it did in the Toronto production. The conflict is only resolved, it would seem, when the rain begins. And from then onward, Mrs. Noah is as obedient and agreeable as her sons and daughters, uttering such humble lines as "Loved be þat lord þat giffes all grace, / Þat kyndly þus oure care wolde kele"(197-98).

The dramatists in all but one cycle cast Noah as an old man, a henpecked husband struggling to obey God. The failure to obey God is a major theme in the preceding

---

[55] I should note here that this is only one interpretation. It is entirely possible that Mrs. Noah disappears completely and that the actor playing her filled some other role in the play. On the theme of obedience see Marx (123) and Woolf (136 ff.).

pageants,[56] and Noah has little problem obeying God until Mrs. Noah refuses to enter the ark, which produces the dramatic conflict that provides entertainment for the audience (by introducing the stock shrewish wife). But the introduction of this conflict is not, as with much of the bodily humor in drama, merely for entertainment. The slapstick that represents the most severe strife (and perhaps the most dramatic humor) is resolved by Mrs. Noah's acquiescence to Noah's request that she enter the ark. She abandons her obstinacy and becomes obedient, providing a mini-resolution that foreshadows the peaceful resolution of the play—Noah and his family finding dry ground.

The humor in this pageant works closely with the moral, just as it does in *Mankind* and "The Fall of Man." Audiences tend to find the interactions between Noah and his wife humorous, drawing as they do on stock comic characterizations of husband-wife relations. But there comes a point when the humor ends, when Mrs. Noah becomes obedient, and when the play presents a serious message. By contrasting comic and serious, edification and entertainment work together here and in many other pageants. The audience is entertained as it learns about obedience.

Joseph and Mary

The humor in the Adam and Eve episodes depends upon performance. Textually there is a hinting at humor, but the roles could also be played straight. With the Noah pageant the humor becomes more insistent and difficult to ignore. The final male-female relationship I address—Joseph and Mary—is also the most dependant on performance, for the play text provides little hint as to how to play the pageant. The potential for humor—the grumpy old man worrying incessantly over what appears to him to be a case of cuckoldry—is the subject of much comic material in the Middle Ages. But it is not necessarily comic. I argue that playing this pageant humorously adds to the power of

---

[56]Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment, as did Cain.

Joseph and Mary's reconciliation at the end and, thus, makes the pageant's message far more powerful than if it were played seriously. Joseph's role until the end is comic; his actions and words amuse the audience, providing entertainment. As in the Noah pageant, the sharp shift from comic to serious, when Joseph realizes his error and begs Mary's forgiveness, is almost shocking. Suddenly, Joseph ceases to be funny and becomes a pious protector. Though I acknowledge that the pageant can be played seriously, I will here concentrate on the effect of a comic pageant as it was performed in Toronto, for I believe that playing the pageant humorously enhances both the entertainment value and the moral lesson.

The comic material in the Joseph and Mary episodes is far older than the medieval cycles. The raw material for Joseph's doubts is found in Matthew 1.19-24.[57] This scene is elaborated upon in some of the Apocryphal Infancy Gospels, especially in the *Protoevangelium Jacobi* and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.[58] In England, the Old English *Christ I* contains a passage depicting Joseph's doubts (164-195a). The situation is ancient and is close to the *senex amans* literature that I discussed in Chapter 3.

---

[57]"Ioseph autem vir eius cum esset iustus et nollet eam traducere voluit occulte dimittere eam. Haec autem eo cogitante ecce angelus Domini in somnis apparuit ei dicens, "Ioseph fili David noli timere accipere Mariam coniugem tuam quod enim in ea natum est de Spiritu Sanctu est. Pariet autem filium et vocabis nomen eius Iesum. Ipse enim salvum faciet populum suum a peccatis eorum. Hoc autem totum factum est ut adimpleretur id quod dictum est a Domino per prophetam dicentem: "ecce virgo in utero habebit et pariet filium et vocabunt nomen eius Emmanuhel," quod est interpretatum Nobiscum Deus. Exsurgens autem Ioseph a somno fecit sicut praecepit ei angelus Domini et accepit coniugem suam." ["Whereupon Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. Now all of this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Behold a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife."]

[58]For a lengthy account of this tradition, see Martin W. Walsh, "Divine Cuckold/Holy Fool: The Comic Image of Joseph in the English 'Troubles' Play."

This material cries out for comic representation. In it, we have an old man—Joseph—married to a young maiden—Mary.[59] As noted in the last chapter (100-01), the *senex amans* was a popular comic subject, and Joseph's age and marital circumstances certainly invite the savvy writer to write a joke at his expense. Martin W. Walsh shows that our view of Joseph as a tender, devoted, pious father is a recent representation (278). The older tradition was not so kind. The archetypal Joseph contained "farcical, grotesque, and pathetic elements" (Walsh 280). Walsh is correct in stating that the cycle playwrights adopted this character for "larger artistic ends" (280). Walsh sees Joseph's place in the troubles plays as the foolish doubter whose function was to illustrate the foolishness of disbelief, to provide a voice for those who might say that the Virgin Birth without discomfort is impossible and to refute that voice. I agree with Walsh, but I also see Joseph as a figure similar to the *senex amans*. He is here to educate us about the folly of his attitudes, but I would add to this point that we should understand Joseph as an entertaining figure, a character who provides laughter and entertainment to an audience.

All four cycles and one short poem present Joseph as troubled over Mary's pregnancy.[60] For the sake of space, I will focus on the longest of these, York 13, often entitled "Joseph's Trouble about Mary." A comic presentation of this pageant can be reasonably hypothesized because of the overall situation of the pageant and Joseph's characterization.

The setting of the pageant is the material from which modern situation comedies are cut, a classic case of situational ignorance where one character, due to a failure of perception, becomes the butt of a joke. This elaborate joke lasts for most of the pageant

---

[59]One is immediately reminded of *The Merchant's Tale* (part of which parodies the cherry tree legend portrayed in "The Cherry Tree Carol"), where January is represented as almost insane in guarding against cuckoldry.

[60]York and N-Town each devote an entire pageant to this episode. Wakefield places this episode in the Annunciation play, and Chester places it in the nativity play, and "The Cherry Tree Carol" concerns Joseph's startling discovery, as well.

(245 of 305 lines). Here I think that Mary Douglas's ideas about jokes are useful.

According to Douglas, a joke is not an isolated utterance. Instead it manipulates a social

situation, requiring knowledge and acceptance of that social situation. The situation of

this pageant is scriptural, well-known to the audience. Additionally, the situation as

presented in the pageant is accepted by everyone—audience, Mary, the handmaidens,

Gabriel—except Joseph. Mary is pregnant, and Joseph is not the father. That much

everyone, especially Joseph, acknowledges. However, everyone except Joseph accepts

that God is the father, a Christian verity. And here is where the potential for humor arises

in the pageant. By not believing the miracle of Mary's pregnancy, Joseph is portrayed as

foolish. His behavior, seen in light of the truth that everyone knows and accepts, sets the

scene for humor that adds to the message of the pageant.

The situation is not the only element allowing for a humorous presentation of the

pageant, however. Joseph's actions lend to a comic performance of the pageant. Three

characteristics are common to the representation of Joseph in the cycles, all of which can

be presented as funny. First is his age. The York Joseph says,

> I am of grete elde,
>
> Wayke and al vnwelde
>
> Als ilke man se it maye;
>
> I may nowder buske ne belde
>
> But owther in frith or felde; (5-9)[61]

As I indicated in the last chapter, the mixing of old and young in marriage was frowned

upon enough to prompt bitterly satirical representations, such as January in Chaucer's

---

[61]All of the cycles mention Joseph's age early on. The Chester Joseph mentions that he is old three lines into his initial monologue, stating his age as sixty ten lines later. Wakefield's Joseph takes thirteen lines to state that he is old. N-Town takes longer, 49 lines, where Joseph begins a lecture to "all olde men" (49). "The Cherry Tree Carol" states that Joseph is old in the first line, reiterating it in relation to his marriage to Mary: "Joseph was an old man, / And an old man was he, / When he wedded Mary / In the land of Galilee" (1-4).

Merchant's Tale. These typically involved an old man attempting to engage in amorous activities with a much younger woman. Though Joseph is in a potentially amorous relationship with Mary, his role is more that of protector than husband, as Matthew 1.25 indicates: "et non cognoscebat eam donec peperit filium suum primogenitum et vocavit nomen eius Iesum."[62]

Another common trait in dramatic representations of Joseph is his impotence.[63] Three of the four extant cycles explicitly state that not only did Joseph not consummate his marriage with Mary but also due to his age he was physically unable to procreate.[64] York explains Joseph's deficiency in three lines: "Þou art yonge and I am alde, / Slike werkis yf I do walde, / Þase games fra me are gane" (194-96). Wakefield also states Joseph's situation briefly: "Passed I am all preuay play, / The gams fro me ar gane" (168-69).[65] Chester has Joseph state his impotence—"For many yeares might I not playe / ne worke noe workes wild" (128-29)—and then reiterate it five lines later:

> And myne yt is not, bee thou bould,
>
> for I am both ould and could;

---

[62]"And he knew her not till she brought forth her first born son: and he called his name Jesus."

[63]For more on impotence in the Middle Ages, see Chapter 3 (95-98).

[64]N-Town is the exception.

[65]All quotations from the Wakefield cycle are from the Stevens and Cawley EETS edition.

these xxx^{tie} winters, though I would,

I might not playe noe playe. (133-36)⁶⁶

Joseph is old and, as we might expect, his diminished ability to perform sexually conforms to medieval wisdom about aging.

Joseph displays yet another characteristic consistently across the cycles: his interrogation of Mary. Chester represents the interrogation with Joseph asking once "Whoe hasse made her with chyld?" (124). The question is softened here, for it is not directed to Mary but instead functions rhetorically. Wakefield expands the incident. Twice Joseph asks Mary whose child she carries. But York develops Joseph's questioning into a potentially humorous incident. Joseph asks Mary the identity of the father seven times, turning a basic and very human situation—an impotent husband who has not consummated his marriage worried about his wife's mysterious pregnancy—into the type of repeated questioning and reactions that we find in comic bits like Abbot and Costello's "Who's on First."

These characteristics common to dramatic characterizations of Joseph combine with the situation—Mary's pregnancy—to create a scenario that, though possible to portray seriously, I believe works best as comedy. Joseph believes that due to his failure to consummate the marriage—and his impotence—the young, beautiful Mary has taken a lover and become pregnant. He is distraught, uncertain what to do, wanting answers and wanting to hide from the shame that he believes will rest on his head. The situation is perfectly reasonable under normal circumstances. This pageant portrays Joseph as the only person—on stage or in the audience—who believes that he is a cuckold. We know

---

⁶⁶It is interesting that these playwrights have chosen to discuss sexual activity by using entertainment terms—*play* and *game*, two terms that are both used in conjunction with dramatic performances (Kolve, Chapter 2). On one level, sexuality is afforded a similar status to the dramatic performance that the audience is viewing, a striking example of the self-reflexivity that much early drama displays.

the truth, and as a result Joseph becomes the silly fool who serves to entertain with his distraught reactions.

The humor of the Joseph's Trouble pageants revolves around Mary's pregnancy. As the pageant opens, Joseph already knows of his wife's pregnancy, and he is going to confront her. Walsh sees this as a way to minimize the spectacle of staging Joseph's surprise about Mary's obvious pregnancy.[67] The spectacle of the *senex amans*-like Joseph is, in itself, a comic image. However, the interaction between the alarmed, sorrowful, jealous Joseph and the pregnant Mary, who remains "milde and fre" (William of Shoreham 1), amplifies this humor. Although the playwright avoids the initial surprise at Mary's pregnancy, he expands Joseph's interrogation and thus emphasizes Mary's pregnant state; Joseph asks seven times who the father of the child is. After each question Mary calmly replies that the child is Joseph's and God's.[68] In the other cycles, such an answer dismays Joseph, and after the last unsuccessful questioning of Mary, he launches into a speech against old men marrying young women.[69] York, however, omits Joseph's advice, instead having Joseph repeat the question. By repeating this question, Joseph accomplishes two purposes. First, he provides ample material for humor. Repeating a question once or twice indicates serious concern, but repeating it seven times turns the interrogation into ridiculousness. Second, by asking this particular question and not believing the direct answer that he receives, Joseph is actually questioning and doubting the veracity of the Virgin Birth. So not only does Joseph provide entertainment for the

---

[67]In contrast to the York episode, Wakefield's Joseph exclaims upon seeing her "Allmyghty God, what may this be? / Of Mary, my wyfe, meruels me; / Alas, what has she wroght? / A, hyr body is grete and she with childe!" (155-58).

[68]The question and answer pairs occur at 154-57, 158-59, 168-69, 177-78, 187-88, 207-208, with an unanswered question occurring at 198.

[69]These occur as follows: Chester (145ff.), Wakefield (216 ff.), and N-Town (49-61).

audience, but he also addresses a serious theological issue: could Mary have conceived and given birth without a mortal mate and without discomfort?

Each time Joseph questions Mary, the response leads him to make a statement affirming the truth of her pregnancy and then to question who the father is. Joseph's responses in York include exclamations of "Late be, for shame" (178) and "Yha Marie, God helpe!" (217) as he reacts to Mary's repeated answer that she is still a virgin, albeit a pregnant virgin. A cyclical pattern emerges, with Joseph asking for the truth and Mary revealing it. Joseph, disbelieving, asks again, each time becoming more and more frustrated by the answer.

Though the truth of the matter is within his grasp, Joseph remains the fool for most of the pageant. He reasons from his knowledge of the natural world, which dictates that pregnancy results from sexual intercourse. Joseph asserts that, first, he did not consummate the marriage and, second, that he cannot perform the act: "Þou art yonge and I am alde, / Silke werkis yf I do walde, / Þase games fra me are gane" (194-96). Though he mentions the prophecy—"But wel I wate thurgh prophicie / A maiden clene suld bere a childe" (61-62)—he immediately rejects it, in spite of the explanation that Mary gives him. Indeed, when told by *I Puella* that no man came, save an angel, Joseph immediately thinks that he knows what has happened:

> Þanne se I wele youre menyng is
>
> Þe aungell has made hir with childe.
>
> Nay, som man in aungellis liknesse
>
> With somkyn gawde has hir begiled,
>
> And þat trow I. (134-38)

The story of a man dressing as an angel to have sex with a woman was well-known in the Middle Ages.[70] Joseph's mention of this commonplace, which is often used comically, would probably have brought a chuckle to the audience, which may have been familiar with the tale. The audience is also a part of the joke. The audience knows the truth of the situation, either having heard it in sermons, having read it, or having seen the plays in previous years. The audience, like Mary and her handmaidens, knows the truth, and it is Joseph who, through his ignorance, rejects the truth and remains a fool.

The function of this humor is similar to that of humor in the morality plays like *Mankind* and other didactic literature like *Piers Plowman* in that the humor, though thoroughly entertaining, emphasizes the moral. But a humorous portrayal makes the moral a powerful statement on Christian doctrine—one is a fool not to accept and believe in Mary's miraculous pregnancy. One event in the Joseph incidents that can be considered imperative is a reconciliation, a point where Joseph realizes his error and returns to Mary, begging her forgiveness. This reconciliation is the point where comedy ceases and the message of the play begins. In a comic portrayal Joseph has, until now, been a comic figure similar to the *senex amans*. Drawing upon the *senex amans* tradition, the performance entertains the audience at the expense of Joseph. After the reconciliation, Joseph becomes a pious wise man and protector of Mary. Though the humor in this play is light-hearted and at the expense of a saint, and though it does imply that Mary has had an adulterous affair, it does not cross the line to blasphemy. Instead, it leads the audience through a merry comedy fueled, in ways similar to *The Comedy of Errors*, by misinterpretation and misunderstanding, to the serious and joyful truth about the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus. The pageant is at once recreative and didactic, and the humor both entertains and teaches.

---

[70]See, for instance, the story of Fra Alberto and Madonna Lisetta in *The Decameron* (Fourth Day, Second Story). It appears in association with the Mary and Joseph story in the fifteenth-century *Life of Saint Anne*.

The Toronto production is an excellent illustration of how humor can function in this type of divine comedy, enhancing the texts with comic action. Joseph's representation in this performance wholly fit the foolish, *senex amans* figure suggested by medieval representations of him.[71] Joseph's opening monologue establishes the situation when he bemoans, "Of grete mornyng may I me mene" (1), lamenting that he entered the temple, that he took the wand, and that he became husband to Mary. His seventy-four line complaint against his circumstances is extreme, especially coupled with his visage, which is that of an old man, unable to walk without a walking stick (Fig. 3).

But it is Joseph's repeated questioning of Mary that prompted the most laughter in this production. Joseph's manner of shuffling and his opening lament initiated his humorous portrayal. The humor continues once he is told that an angel has visited, when he turns to the audience and throws his arms wide as if seeking support for his disbelief at such a story. Although Walsh suggests that the York playwright attempted to avoid representing Mary's pregnancy humorously, the Toronto performance suggests that the juxtaposition of Mary's obvious pregnancy with Joseph's reaction to this news is unavoidably humorous. The exaggerated reaction of Joseph to Mary, whose hands constantly frame her swollen belly, provides the audience with a good laugh (Fig. 4). He asks his questions seven times, receiving the same answer each time and becoming more and more exasperated with each answer, a reaction that becomes increasingly humorous with repetition (Fig. 5).

Though readily available in the play text, the humor here is achieved extra-textually. The movements and positions of Joseph's body, especially compared to the calm Mary, always highlighting her swollen womb with her hands, casts Joseph not

---

[71]Walsh says that "When not playing the Divine Cuckold, he is a species of Holy fool, bumbling in his ministrations to Madonna and Child" (278-79).

Figure 3.

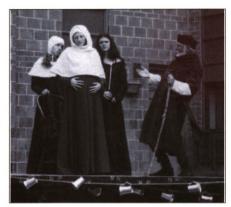Joseph's lament. From the York Plays at Toronto, June 20, 1998.

Figure 4.

Joseph's reaction to Mary's pregnancy. From the York Plays at Toronto, June 20, 1998.

Figure 5.
Joseph's Exasperation

161

merely as a fool but, more importantly, as an old man afraid of popular opinion.[72] While Joseph's doubts are presented seriously in texts like *The Life of St. Anne*, here they are comic. Joseph claims that he is "begiled" (42, 103). He says, "I mon noȝt scape withouten schame" (54). And he is concerned more with himself than anyone else, opting to wander the wilderness rather than to face his tarnished reputation. The presentation of this material in the York play highlights what would typically be considered the violation of age in Joseph.[73] Joseph here acts like a child: selfish, stomping his feet, grimacing when he does not receive the answer he believes he should. Though the text suggests this, the performance establishes this aspect of Joseph as foolishly comic. And after staging such a representation of Joseph, the reconciliation, the point where Joseph finally realizes the verity of Mary's story (by way of an angelic visit), is all the more powerful. Joseph realizes his mistake, and the audience is glad to see the reconciliation.

It is this contrast—between bodily humor and pious lesson—that effectively completes the didactic message of the play. This is a play confirming the very real nature of the virgin conception and eventual birth of Jesus. It is in a sense an attempt to quell any doubts that audience members may have by representing a doubter as a comic fool. Moreover, this play attempts to show the true miracle that is the birth of Jesus. Though a serious performance of this pageant would effectively present the error of disbelief, like Mrs. Noah's rapid transition from shrew to obedient wife, Joseph's transition from fool to saint is powerful if he is presented as the butt of a joke. The change is important, and the bodily humor highlights that change by emphasizing the contrast between comic and

---

[72]Joseph's concern over his reputation appears in other literature as well. In the Middle English *Life of St. Anne*, Joseph's reaction is to begin to cry out and pray to God: "Soo ald a man als I / Sall now haue more shame & more anger; / Lord, lat me are lyfe no longere / Bot dight me here to dy (738-41). Joseph is here concerned with both his feelings about the situation (his anger) and with public opinion (his shame).

[73]See my discussion of the *senex amans* above.

serious while, concurrently, providing entertainment for the audience. We get a good laugh at Joseph's expense, and we are all the more moved at his reaction to the truth.

These three episodes share a common structure within their respective pageants in their use of the comic body. Each presents comic incidents and then completes the humor with a more serious moral. The Adam and Eve Toronto performance has Adam comically realize his nudity, and then when confronted with his very serious offense, again in comic fashion he passes the blame onto Eve, who does likewise. The audience laughs at each of these incidents but at the end realizes that the scenes portrayed so comically have very serious consequences, as Adam and Eve are cast into the cold world. The Noah incidents are similar. The verbal jousting and slapstick that so humorously characterize the relationship between Noah and his wife give way to Mrs. Noah's acquiescence to Noah's order that she board the ark, just as the rain begins to fall. Disobedience is comic and light, but obedience saves one's life. Finally, the humor that drives Joseph's troubles—and most of the York play—gives way to epiphany when Joseph realizes the nature of Mary's pregnancy and obediently begs her forgiveness. In each episode humor entertains the audience and then leads to a serious lesson.

Generally, this seems to be the case in all of the drama. When we have humor, especially bodily humor, we also have a serious lesson to be learned through that humor. The festive atmosphere of performance placed audiences in a mood more receptive for a mode of presentation appropriate to a festive situation—comedy. But there is still a lesson to be taught, and these playwrights capitalize on the power of humor to teach these lessons. *Mankind*'s vices provide merry entertainment for the audience, but the merry entertainment becomes immoderate and turns to vicious, harmful activities. By tempting the audience the playwright creates a situation where the audience must pay heed to Mercy's final message, for, having acted in vice-like fashion by laughing and contributing

163

money, the audience is in a position similar to Mankind's. The transition from comic to serious highlights the moral message, allowing entertainment to powerfully present a serious lesson. The same is true of the cycle plays. There is a lesson to be learned from all of the episodes where the comic body makes an appearance, not just the three that I focus on here.[74] All of these episodes begin humorously and by means of that humor teach a very serious lesson, which is presented seriously near the end of the episode. The contrast between comic and serious entertains the audience thoroughly by presenting situations and characters with which the audience can identify while at the same time making the message of the pageant more memorable via the shift from comic to serious.

The humor in these plays, then, exists not purely for the gratuitous pleasure of the playwright or audience. Entertainment is a result of the humor, and entertainment was considered a valuable end in itself. But the entertainment also edifies, teaching the audience valuable lessons and scriptural truths. The comic body in the drama fulfills the two main purposes of medieval drama—to edify and entertain, and medieval playwrights, with a sophisticated sense of their art, joined laughter and sobriety in a marriage of seeming opposites: the base comic body and the serious business of God's work. This joining is not, as some scholars would have us believe, scandalous, blasphemous, or degrading in any sense. Even at its most extreme—*Mankind*—the base comic body works within the moral framework of the play to uphold rather than subvert the didactic message. Like Langland, these playwrights adopted a popular comic subject for their own

---

[74]The Toronto production of *Cain and Abel*, for instance, highlighted the sharp contrast between comic and tragic through the use of masks. The beginning of the play presented Cain with a mask similar to Abel's—a stylized human face with a neutral expression and slightly drooping eyelids. Cain's servant wore a similar mask and remained drunk throughout the play, finally falling into a drunken stupor among the audience after providing merry entertainment with his interactions with Cain. The turning point in the play, Cain's slaughter of Abel, was effected by a quick change of masks. Cain's face became horrific, with bulging eyes and an enraged expression that, combined with the intense action of on-stage murder, contrasted sharply with the comic parts of the play, reinforcing the horror of the first murder.

purposes. It is not until the early Renaissance with the interludes and school comedies—

with Heywood's *Johan Johan*, Udall's Mathew Merygreeke, *Jack Juggler*, and Diccon—

that we English find playwrights dropping didacticism altogether and creating a genre of

dramatic farce.

Chapter 5
Dunbar's Comic Body: Court Performance and Social Criticism at the Close of the Middle Ages

In the last chapter I focused particularly on how the comic body can be used for both entertainment and instruction in dramatic performance, when actors present bodily humor on stage. But performance is not limited to staged texts like those discussed in Chapter 4. As anthropologists and theater historians have acknowledged, performance is a social practice that includes far more than just staged theater.[1] I now turn from this balanced presentation of entertainment and instruction to social criticism, the final use of the comic body that I will discuss. In this chapter, I will look at some of the performance practices found in the Scottish court at the very end of the Middle Ages—the presentation of a court persona and dramatic entertainments (aside from staged drama)—to help analyze a set of poems that use bodily humor for social analysis and criticism. William Dunbar, whose canon is a potpourri of subjects and styles, was a royal servant (probably a secretary or royal clerk) and poet working in James IV's court. He writes about religion, poets, people around him, and courtly events, and uses satire, flyting, dream vision, complaint, and lyric forms. In a particular set of court poems Dunbar uses the comic body to criticize practices related to court performance.

Interaction in the late medieval and early Renaissance court relied on the active presentation and ritualization of behavior to execute court business. Courtiers presented themselves according to a system of etiquette and polite conduct, as emphasized in the

---

[1]See, for instance, Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theater: The Human Seriousness of Play.* See also Johan Huizinga, who in *Homo Ludens* treats ritual as a form of play. Theater historians have been debating the issue of performance studies for several decades. See, for instance, the corpus of work by Richard Schechner, Bruce A. McConachie's views on theater history, and J. Ndukaku Amankulor, "The Condition of Ritual in Theater: An Intercultural Perspective."

many conduct books that we find from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[2] This active and conscious presentation is a type of performance. Although not impersonating a specific person, the court servant re-creates himself as a member of the court, consciously adopting the mannerisms, speech patterns, and outward appearance expected of a courtier. Performance also appears in elaborate dramatic entertainments that were often associated with the court—pageants, tournaments, disguisings, mummings, and other festivals. The individual participating in these entertainments assumed dramatic roles in ways similar to actors embodying a script and the self-creation required of the courtier; in each a form of disguise helps in the establishment of a role.

In revealing the performative aspect of individual and recreative court life, my aim is to show some of the social practices that Dunbar criticizes. Dunbar recognized that adopting a courtly role could cover sinister motivations and that emphasizing form and procedure—in both rhetoric and social practice—over substance often reduces a social practice to an empty shell. In many of his poems, Dunbar uses the comic body to criticize social practices where disguise—in courtly roles, rhetoric, and form—covers underlying motivations or character traits. As with all of the examples in this dissertation, Dunbar's use of the comic body entertains, but it also criticizes the social practices that Dunbar saw regularly in the Scottish court.

After discussing court performance in more detail, I will look at poems that criticize unindustrious courtiers. Using grotesque images, Dunbar strips the courtier of his courtly image to show that the person behind the performance differs from his outward display. I then turn to poems that highlight the difference between courtly expectation (stemming from rhetorical or dramatic disguise) and reality. Some of

---

[2]By *courtier* I do not mean a Renaissance courtier like Sidney or Raleigh. Instead, I refer to members of the king's court, the residential employees who provided service to the court. For more on the king's court, see Richard Firth Green's *Poets and Princepleasers*, Chapters 1 and 2.

Dunbar's poems focus on the conflict arising from the interaction of courtly love and romance settings and the physical desires that lie beneath the conventional setting. Here Dunbar shows the difference between rhetorical performance and underlying intent as the characters' actions violate courtly expectations. Similarly, Dunbar criticizes the dramatic spectacle of tournaments by depicting ignoble events and rewards taking place within the noble setting of these ritualized courtly conflicts. I end with Dunbar's parodies, where he criticizes his parodic models by showing that those models are mere performance, stock formulae that hide the person composing them. In all of these poems, Dunbar criticizes courtly performance, showing the potential for deception that can lie behind courtly gilding. Each of these poems establishes either a person or setting conforming to courtly norms, only to reveal that something less ideal hides beneath the artificial coverings of courtly performance. Dunbar's use of the comic body in these poems serves as an example of the final use of the comic body that I will discuss, social criticism.

I. Individual and Theatrical Performance at Court

First, it is important to establish what I mean by performance. As I noted in the last chapter, I view drama as a practice rather than as a text. In a theatrical sense, performance is the practice of embodying a text for an audience. Drama is never fully realized outside of performance: "theatre is primarily what happens between actors and audiences in performance; it is not playhouses, scripts, or scenic designs, though these objects may, of course, provide the historian with important insight into the patterns of interaction which have defined theatrical culture" (McConachie 230). However, drama/theater—a script embodied on a stage before an audience—is not the only arena for performance. According to Kepke and Shields's useful review essay on the relationship between theater history and performance studies, the traditional study of theater approaches it as "the staging of texts" (325, quoting Marranca and Gautam). However, some theater historians

have begun to move away from the actor/text relationship toward performance studies, a field that recognizes performance as having a social role and emphasizes that "performance is a kind of communicative behavior that is part of, or continuous with, more formal ritual ceremonies, public gatherings, and various means of exchanging information, goods, and customs" (Schechner, "Introduction" 3). This school "has encouraged the theoretical and historical study of theatre to move from the stage and page (with performers and scripts) into the arena of social action (with agents and texts)" (Kepke and Shields 325). At the heart of performance studies is the idea that "people in groups—whether of two, three, or dozens—in some ways 'ritualize' their behaviors; 'present' themselves rather than just be" (Schechner "Introduction" 3). Viewed from this perspective, performance can include any act of presentation; it requires a social setting (people interacting) and some form of ritual, "any formal and customarily repeated act or series of acts" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*). All it requires is a presenter, audience, and ritualized material. Nearly any interaction can be performative, and I analyze the court interactions of medieval Scotland from this performance perspective.

From the records that exist, it is clear that Dunbar worked and wrote at court, the topic of many of his poems.[3] I will discuss two court practices relevant for the poems in

---

[3]Dunbar seems to have studied at St. Andrews, and his date of birth, c. 1460, is more or less fixed by the date he received his licentiate or master's degree from (1479), a degree that was typically attained at twenty years of age (Baxter 9-10, Reiss 21-22, Ross 5, and Bawcutt, *Poems* 1). Between 1480 and 1500 records of Dunbar's life are absent. Bawcutt says that he may have traveled abroad but that there is no evidence of this ("Introduction" 1-2). Based on evidence from the poems, several scholars have suggested that Dunbar wandered as a Franciscan, relying on lines from "How Dunbar wes desyrd to be ane Freir" (e.g., Baxter, Chapter 3, especially 27-39; D. Laing, *The Poems of William Dunbar*, 10 ff.; Schipper 39-40; and Mackay xvii-xxiv). However, Mackenzie (xx-xxi) and Kinsley (xiii) are both skeptical of autobiographical elements in the poem, as is A. G. Rigg, who asserts, "the theme of the 'feigned friar' is an accepted literary device, and...therefore serious doubt is cast on any attempt to use such a passage as this for biographical reconstruction" (270). In 1501 James IV awarded him an annual pension, which continued until the king's death at Flodden in 1513. James also granted Dunbar a livery and occasional fees throughout his career. Dunbar was probably not a professional poet: "it is more probable that, like some of the poets he mentions in 21 ["Timor mortis conturbat me"] he served as a scribe or secretary" (Kinsley 2). Although Dunbar's initial pension was relatively low (£10 Scots), it was doubled in 1507, and raised to the

this chapter. First, in ways similar to dramatic production, courtly convention forced the

courtier to present himself creatively—but within the constraints of specific social

expectations—in order to thrive at court. Second, many of the most lavish court

entertainments involved dramatic elements, including aspects of characterization (speech

patterns, ways of moving and behaving) and costumes, and in the case of some

disguisings, mummings, and tournaments, even a script. I do not suggest that the

adoption of a courtly role is identical to playing a role for dramatic entertainments. But

role-playing in both of these situations is connected in that each requires conscious

presentation according to a code (whether written or unwritten) that dictates how the

character should appear and act. What is presented, then, is actually an image that the

courtier prepares for social interaction. However, this role-playing can be dangerous, for

the creation of self-image disguises what lies underneath, which might not conform to

courtly ideals.[4] In many cases repressed traits or opinions would merely be indecorous if

---

substantial sum of £80 in 1510. This pension was tied to his future career in the Church. The original grant says that the pension is to "be pait to him of [our] soverane lordis cofferis, be the thesaurare, for al the dais of his life or quhil [*until*] he be promovit be oure soverane lord to a benefice of xl lib. or abone" (Bawcutt, *Poems* 2). Dunbar never received this benefice, though he did become a priest in 1504, when James granted him a gift for his first mass ("Item the xvii day of merche to the kingis offerand at maister William Dunbarris first mes vii Franch crounis summa iiii lib. xviiis." Baxter 123). The last date for Dunbar in the Treasurer's Accounts is 14 May 1513, though records from August 1513 to June 1515 are missing.

[4]Although obviously deemed a productive practice at court, the deceptive nature of disguising was always present. In concealing one's true identity, disguising introduces an element of risk into both the court and dramatic entertainments. During disguised interactions individual identities and motivations remain hidden; the participants assume established roles. For the court, this meant adopting a costume, speech pattern, and manner of acting acceptable to other members of the court. For entertainments, this meant changing one's identity to conform to a script. Officials recognized that the creative aspect of disguise—self re-creation—could be dangerous. According to Chambers, "orders of the city of London in 1334, 1393, and 1405 forbid a practice of going about the streets at Christmas *ove visere ne faux visage*" [*with visors or false visage*] (393). A proclamation in 1418 states that "no manere persone, of what astate, degre, or condicioun that euere he be, duryng this holy tyme of Cristemes be so hardy in eny wyse to walk by nyght in any manere mommyng, pleyes, enterludes, or eny other disgisynges," defining *disguisings* as "feynyd berdis, peyntid visers, diffourmyd or colourid visages in eny wyse" (Chambers 394 n.3). Disguising here is identical to theatrical costuming or courtly masking. Participants adopt false visual features to

displayed at court. In some cases, however, performing a role at court hides more sinister personality traits, ideas, or motivations. This idea of performance as artificial image is a topic of Dunbar's court poetry, for Dunbar strips the presented facade from some people and practices and deflates their lofty idealism to show the ugliness that can hide behind the role.

Individual Performance in the Drama of the Court

In every aspect of court life, the courtier was expected to conform to courtly decorum, which included the presentation of a courtly image created according to a strict set of conventions. This courtly role helped the court servant to advance socially and professionally. Playing a role via self-creation is similar to the creation of a character in drama, for it is a type of performance. The courtier needed to perform this role according to courtly expectations. It was not enough for a servant like Dunbar to tumble out of bed and perform his courtly tasks. He needed to *look* and *act* like a member of the court, and popular books of conduct and manners codified conventions for appearance and behavior in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

---

obscure or change their physical appearance. Chambers notes that such prohibitions lasted into the sixteenth century: "as late as 1511 an Act of Parliament forbade the visits of mummers disguised with visors to great houses.... Even the sale of visors was made illegal" (396), and Withington shows that in London prohibitions against visors lasted into the Victorian era (104). In addition, records indicate that at times disguised entertainments served as fronts for seditious activities. On Twelfth Night, 1400, mummers apparently attempted to seize Henry IV "to have sclayn the kyng...be a mommynge" (Chambers 395 n. 1). On another occasion John Oldcastle was accused of using disguises to destroy the king: "the whyche Lollers hadde caste to have made a mommynge at Eltham, and undyr coloure of the mommynge to have destryte the Kynge and Hooly Chyrche" (Chambers 395-96 n.3). Other insurrections that used disguises include Gladman's insurrection in 1443 (Withington 8), and Withington identifies a reference to the use of mumming for seditious purposes in *The Marriage between Wit and Wisdom* (104). John Alford indicates that Medwall's *Nature* is the first instance of such disguising in literature, where vice masquerades as virtue. Although productive for both political purposes and entertainment, disguising carried with it the danger of unidentified threat.

171

Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* provides an example of what I mean by codified performance in a slightly more refined way than was available in the fifteenth century.[5] In his "Breef Rehersall of The Chiefe Conditions and Qualities in a Courtier," Hoby's appendix condensing Castiglione's ideas into neat, practical lists, Hoby describes—in effect, he "scripts"—the courtier's activities.[6] Of particular importance for my purposes are items relating to how the courtier should speak and look. He advises a courtier "To be well spoken and faire languaged" (368) and immediately afterward "To be wise and well seene in discourses upon states" (369). He also instructs the courtier in actions—especially verbal "actions"—not to lie, flatter, babble, brawl, or chatter, to be amiable in countenance, and "to speake and write the language that is most in use emonge the commne people, without inventing new woordes, inkhorn tearmes or straunge phrases, and such as be growen out of use by long time" (369).

Hoby emphasizes how a courtier should appear before an audience. He tells the courtier "to make his garmentes after the facion of the most, and those to be black, or of some darkish and sad coulour, not garish" (369). When participating in games, Hoby says that the courtier should "sett out himself in feates of chivalrie in open *showes* well provided of horse and harness, well trapped, and armed, so that he may *showe* himselfe nymeble on horsbacke" (371, my emphasis). The courtier must actively present himself—"sett out himself"—for all to see. He also notes the most important audiences for courtly performance: "To undertake his bould feates and couragious enterprises in warr, out of companye and in the sight of the most noble personages in the campe, and (if

---

[5]All quotations are from Thomas Hoby's 1561 translation. Castiglione's original was published in 1528, though possibly written as early as 1516 (Raleigh viii, n.1).

[6]Hoby's translation includes appendices listing the qualities of a courtier and gentlewoman; these lists do not appear in the original. The reception of Castiglione's work was often practical. Many sixteenth-century editors provided practical apparatuses as an aid to instruction (Cox xxix). Hoby's summaries, according to one editor, are "a good example of this prescriptive and practically oriented trend in the reception of *The Courtier*" (Cox xxix).

it be possible) beefore his Princis eyes" (371). It is important, Hoby implies, that the courtier not just perform well, but perform well before the right people to maximize the effect of his performance.

Even more important for me are Hoby's comments on disguise. According to Hoby, the courtier should "disguise himself in maskerie eyther on horseback or a foote, and to take the shape upon hym that shall be contrarie to the feate that he mindeth to worke" (371). By disguising himself as a person unable to perform a specific task, the courtier makes the completion of that task seem more praiseworthy, thereby boosting his image. Hoby links the courtier's role to what amounts to dramatic performance. He instructs the courtier to fake his abilities, to act as if the feat he is about to attempt is above his capabilities when in reality it is not. It is a disguise, a creative lie to promote the courtier's image at court. Much as an actor creates a character from a play text, the courtier must create a character to perform his role at court. In 1561, a mere fifty years after Dunbar's lifetime, Hoby equates the courtier's role at court with disguise and performance.

I do not imply here that Dunbar or his Scottish court knew Castiglione or Hoby; Dunbar's court is simply too early to have encountered this text. However, the ideas that Hoby presents were anticipated, albeit in less sophisticated forms, in fifteenth-century England, the provenance of a number of conduct books in Latin, French, and English.[7] These texts mostly deal with table manners and instructions for children. But a number contain general instructions for behavior, and these instructions bear at least a primitive resemblance to Hoby's. John Russel's *Boke of Nurture* (first half of the fifteenth century) contains a short section on "symple condicions," where he directs the reader—who was probably younger and of lower social condition than Castiglione's and Hoby's envisioned

---

[7]For an annotated list of conduct books see Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the* Gawain-*Poet*, Appendix B.

audiences—how to act in different situations: not to pick one's nose, to "put not youre handes in youre hosen youre codware for to clawe," not to tell lies, cough, hiccup, belch, or expose the lord to one's halitosis, and to "be ware of þy hyndur part from gunnes blastynge" (277-312). It is a short list (only thirty-five of 1250 lines) of how to speak and behave as a household servant, how to present oneself to secure a position. Other conduct books are similar in their instructions. Caxton's verse *Book of Curtesye* (middle of the fifteenth century) teaches among other things proper speech, and the fifteenth-century Middle English verse translation of Robert Grosseteste's "Household Statutes" offers advice on dressing.[8] The many conduct books emphasizing self-presentation indicate that the practice of making one's actions and body conform to standards of courtly conventions was followed in England and probably Scotland. Hoby's popular translation thus participates in a long line of codified guidelines for self-presentation in households and noble courts.[9]

Embodied Entertainment at Court

We also find performance at play in court entertainments. James IV's court was a place of spectacular entertainments. Recreation was important to the court, where we find two general types of entertainment practices—games or sports and public spectacles. We have

---

[8]Caxton writes "yf the caas require ye may speke but ye muste thenne percaas seuen condicions obserue as ye may now hyre auyse you wel what ye saye & in what place of whom & to whom in your mynde compace how ye shal speke & whan take good hede this councelith the wise man withoute drede" (141-47). Of proper dress, Grosseteste says, "commaunde ȝe that ȝoure gentilmen yomen and other, dayly bere and were there robis in ȝoure presence, and namely at the mete, for ȝoure worshyppe, and not oold robis and not cordyng to the lyuerey, nother were they oolde schoon ne fylyd" (216).

[9]Conflicts between courtly expectations and a courtier's personal wishes inevitably resulted from this situation. A good example can be found in Dunbar's *Thrissill and the Rois*, a poem written for the occasion of James's wedding to Margaret Tudor. The opening of the poem, when May commands the poet to awake and write while the narrator says that he will write another day (30-35) is, in both Louise Fradenburg's and Deanna Evans's opinions, evidence of this courtly tension at work. Dunbar does not want to write, but the occasion and his patron demand it of him. The poem, then, "fulfills a duty, performs a service, answers a demand" (Fradenburg 135).

evidence of both types in the court of James IV, who enjoyed various entertainments: hunting, hawking, dice playing, gambling, and card playing. He listened to minstrels, danced, watched plays, and heard storytellers.[10] What concerns me more than gaming are the elaborate dramatic festivities that not only were performative but also involved the creation of roles in ways similar to the court servant's self-representation.[11]

Tournaments were perhaps the most popular court entertainments in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. The tournament was related in many ways to court spectacle in general, which involved not just tournaments but also festivals, disguisings, masks, plays, and royal entries (Anglo 3). In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, tournaments, along with all such royal spectacles, were "instruments of prestige propaganda" (Anglo 106) and "were calculated to enhance the prestige of the...dynasty" (Ferguson 46). Tournaments never completely lost their martial element, but they did become increasingly artificial, adding "elements of display and disguising, that is the dressing up of combatants in fanciful and exotic costumes" (Anglo 98). This dramatic element eventually dominated the tournament form: "in its most highly developed form, the tournament became an incipient drama in which the participants represented particular characters and even uttered speeches, so that the actual fighting would arise from a dramatic dispute or allegorical story" (Anglo 98).

---

[10]See Mackie (119-22). Denton Fox says, "especially, he [James IV] liked giving money to people: minstrels, alchemists, physicians and other quacks, would-be aviators, pipers, buffoons, jugglers, musicians, beggars, guisers, tightrope-dancers, falconers, goldsmiths, French dog-fanciers, and even poets" ("Poets and Patrons" 118).

[11]For festivals in James IV's court, see Mackie 122-25 and 146-50, where he describes James's festivals in terms similar to those applied to the misrule festivities described in Chapter 2 (25-34). See also Carol Edington, *Court and Culture in Renaissance Scotland: Sir David Lindsay of the Mount* (90-91). An interesting comparison can be made to Henry VII's court, which included elaborate tournaments and feasts as well. See Chapter 3 of Sydney Anglo's *Spectacle Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy.*

Tournaments were hosted throughout Europe, including England and Scotland.

The courts of Burgundy were famous for their tournaments, and Sydney Anglo has

posited that the lavish tournaments of Burgundy directly influenced England's dramatic

combats. We know that spectacular tournaments were popular in England; Henry VII

hosted some elaborate events, and Henry VIII raised the tournament to new levels of

spectacle in England. James IV was famous throughout Europe for his tournaments, in

which he himself participated.[12] The tournaments of 1507 and 1508, which included a

black lady and a wild knight, were by far the most elaborate in Scotland, but they were

definitely not isolated incidents: "they [tournaments] were...part of a pattern of elaborate

and costly court revelry, including 'moralities, 'fars,' 'devis,' moriscos, mumming,

misrule celebrations at every turn in the calendar, and a number of tournaments of a less

dramatic bent" (Fradenburg 176).[13]

As an example, I will look briefly at one of the several staged events that occurred

during Margaret Tudor's wedding procession from London to Edinburgh, which involved

several royal entrances, tournaments, pageants, and "five days of revelry" (Mackie

111).[14] As the queen's company approached Edinburgh, it came upon the staged event of

---

[12]See Withington for specific events associated with Henry VII, VIII, and James
IV. For a fully analysis of James's tournaments, see the final part of Fradenburg's *City,
Marriage, Tournament*.

[13]Fradenburg also acknowledges the theatrical nature of James's various
tournaments, especially the tournament of the wild knight and the black lady: "Violence,
in the late medieval tournaments, is scripted with as much deliberation and care as are its
narratives" (228). Macdougall says that Henry VIII emulated "James IV's disguise as the
'wild knycht' by appearing incognito in his first joust at Richmond in January 1510"
(295), indicating that James's fondness for participating in these scripted battles gave him
a reputation as a fierce tournament player. Arthur B. Ferguson says, "beginning with a
revival in the later fifteenth century, the chivalric tradition has remained capable of
reviving and of modifying attitudes toward honor, war, and love virtually to our own
day" (11). In his opinion the tournament was the ultimate display of chivalry and was by
the sixteenth century almost wholly theatrical: (50). Maurice Keen also sees the dramatic
tournament as having been influenced by medieval romance, the artistic expression of
chivalry.

[14]The procession form itself has been called dramatic pageantry. See Robert
Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline*, Vol. 1 (11-42.). Also, the royal

176

two knights fighting over a lady: "The King rode up, calling 'Paix!' and parted them" (Mackie 108). Although meriting less than a paragraph in Mackie's long accounts of court festivities, this episode illustrates the dramatic character of royal festivities and James's willingness to participate in them. It is a play, a scripted tournament similar to the fierce battle between Palamon and Arcite in *The Knight's Tale*, with James playing the role of Theseus.[15] Fradenburg's comments on the theatrical elements of this event are useful:

> We are watching the king and his courtiers as actors in a drama of the king's devising: the message is that the king presides over the articulation of knightly identity and thereby presides over the dramatic space of the court; his courtiers enact his drama, which is a drama that makes them, simultaneously, mere actors and real men. Honor becomes a matter of the king's theater. (223)

For Fradenburg this dramatic representation defines the participants; it is a way of asserting masculinity for the knights, an act of inscripted authority for the king (223-224). For me the importance of this incident is in the king's role as dramatist. Not only does the king adopt a role in a drama, actively presenting himself as arbiter of the dispute, but he also writes—or at least must have commissioned and ultimately approved—the script for the other participants, the lady and the knights who fight for her. His participation in the spectacle parallels the creation of the courtier's character; both are embodiments of a

---

entry, whereby a ruler "made his solemn *entré* into and took possession of a city or town" (Strong 7), was another form of dramatic pageantry. The purpose of the royal entry was undoubtedly to present the legitimacy of the ruler (Strong 8). On the theatricality of royal entries, see Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650* (7-11). For Margaret's trip to Scotland, see Withington (124-95, 168-69). For a description of Margaret's journey and the festivities surrounding the wedding, see Mackie (106-12).

[15]Fradenburg characterizes this event as "a scene" that "stages the enactment of honor, played out over the possession of the woman" (222-23).

codified courtly ideal. And it is performed for an audience: Margaret's retinue and the onlookers from the vicinity of Edinburgh.

This example illustrates the importance of dramatic spectacle in courtly entertainment. English and Scottish courts went to great lengths to entertain themselves. Lavish, spectacular entertainments—pageants, royal entries, and tournaments—were dramatic, and James acted in his theatrical entertainments, fighting in his tournaments and acting roles in pageants.[16] Court spectacles as we see them in James's Scotland were carefully-scripted dramas that included the creation of character (often from romance or allegory) via costume, disguise, and sometimes spoken parts.

The relationship between performing the role of courtier and theatrical performance should not be overstressed, but it definitely existed. Performing successfully at court meant presenting oneself as a courtier and following the code of courtly conventions. This self-creation was also a part of the court entertainments that I have discussed: disguisings, tournaments, royal entries, all of which included a form of script, a physical appearance achieved via costume, (at times) makeup, and specific ways of acting and speaking.[17] Both role-playing at court and dramatic events are forms of presentation or performance, where the individual actively creates an image of himself to suit the purpose of the situation, an image that necessarily forms the individual's bodily

---

[16]James also played a leading role in the tournament of the wild knight and the black lady of 1507 and 1508, where James seems to have appeared disguised as the wild knight. See Fradenburg, Chapter 12.

[17]The use of makeup during court entertainments is speculative. We know, however, that makeup was used during dramatic performances. Actors in Coventry, for instance, blackened their faces. In 1561 and 1563 we have records for money paid "for blankyng of the Sowles facys" (217). In 1499 money was paid to a painter for "Peyntyng the fauchon and Herodes face" (59), and similar records for painting of faces occur for 1502 (96), 1548 (181), and Thomas Sharp, an early scholar of the Coventry documents, says "it is evident that those characters which were not played in maskes or vizors, as was the case with Herod and the Devil, were represented with the faces of the performers painted" (REED, *Coventry* 559).

presence, appearance, and actions. Linking the two types of presentation does not require a huge leap.

The common element linking courtly roles, entertainment, and theatrical performance is disguise. Hoby recognized this when he discussed a courtier feigning ineptness, disguising his true abilities. Disguise—covering one's identity or personality by altering one's appearance, voice and/or mannerisms—is necessary for adopting a courtly role (by conforming to a dress code and prescribed manners of behavior), performing in courtly entertainments (by assuming a scripted role with costume and set actions and speeches), and performing on stage (by dressing, speaking, and acting the part). Each requires the individual to disguise parts of his identity in order to perform the role. Disguise was not always positive, however. Disguise could, and often did, hide personalities less noble than what outward appearance and actions might intimate, and Dunbar recognizes this aspect of the courtly role in some of his court poems, to which I will now turn.

II. Monstrous Bodies and Disreputable Court Servants

Scholars tend to note Dunbar's critical tone as a prominent feature of his poetry.[18] In many places Dunbar uses the body to vilify the targets of his social criticism. And at times Dunbar transforms the human body into a form reflecting inner monstrosity. This transformation ranges from exaggerating certain corporeal features to actually casting the human body as a mythical creature. Dunbar's depictions of the body in these instances are grotesque, often comically so. By casting his rivals and social ills as a corporeal Other, Dunbar reveals much about his view of the court, for these bodies represent the

---

[18]On *The Tretis* as literary judgment see Roy J. Pearcy, "The Genre of William Dunbar's *Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo.*" On bawdy as a device whereby Dunbar "revaluates the forms, styles, and traditions to which he turns, " see Lois Ebin, "Dunbar's Bawdy" (278). Dunbar's various editors often comment on his critical mode.

courtier's presence, and by presenting his perception of these courtiers' inner selves as monstrous, Dunbar lowers the high ideal of courtly presentation and reveals the courtier's performance as disguise, a way of masking these people's real, monstrous ambitions.

Grotesque Disguise in Dunbar's Court

An important starting point in looking at these poems is Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque, for Dunbar's use of the comic body is often grotesque. The grotesque body focuses on "excrescences and orifices," including "only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths." The grotesque transforms bodies: "the grotesque image in its extreme aspect...never presents an individual body; the image consists of orifices and convexities that present another, newly conceived body" (318). In this sense, the grotesque body violates expected bodily boundaries. The grotesque style depends upon "exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness" (303). But the grotesque is not limited to the outer form of the body: "The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs. The outward and inward features are often merged into one" (318). From Bakhtin I take my general view of the grotesque; it is the exaggeration of the human body and its functions to epic proportions.

Bakhtin's description of the grotesque includes most, if not all, of what we would call grotesque, but his analysis of the grotesque has been questioned. The grotesque figures that we find decorating medieval churches, manuscript marginalia, and dramatic and literary works all conform to Bakhtin's view.[19] They are exaggerations of bodily features or functions. But Aron Gurevich questions Bakhtin's assertion about the comic nature of the grotesque: "Bakhtin opened up our view on medieval grotesque, but he

---

[19]See, for instance, Georges Duby, *Medieval Art: The Making of Christian West 980-1140* (73-79) for some images. The Saint-Guilhem Cloister in the Cloisters Museum in New York City has such grotesque figures carved into its pillars.

erred, it seems to me, in interpreting it solely as comic grotesque" (180). According to

Gurevich, the grotesque could be serious as well as comic. He convincingly argues that

humorous and serious are often fused: "This grotesque can evoke merriment, but it does

not destroy fear" (207). In Gurevich's view, "the grotesque was a style of medieval man's

thinking in general, embracing the entire culture, beginning from the lower, folkloric

level and continuing up to the level of official church culture" (208). He does not deny

the existence of a comic element in the grotesque; he just modifies Bakhtin's theory to

include a serious aspect.[20] This fusion of comic and serious is important, for Dunbar's

depiction of monstrous bodies is often simultaneously comic and serious. Those bodies

certainly entertain with humor, but beyond entertainment the humor helps Dunbar present

a critical view of the court. The laughter produced here is not Bakhtin's positive, all-

inclusive laughter.[21] This laughter is dark, derisive, and infused with harsh moral

judgment.

Material for these monstrous bodies was readily available to Dunbar, for bodily

otherness fascinated the court of James IV. The tournament of the black lady and wild

knight is just one example. In 1507 and 1508, James hosted an elaborate tournament

honoring a black lady ("with mekle lippis," in Dunbar's description, and probably of

African origin) and featuring a wild knight.[22] Both the black lady and wild knight

represent presences foreign to the Scottish court; they represent wondrous difference.

They are figures from the Other World—a wild man and black lady in a civilized, white

---

[20]Others have questioned Bakhtin's theory as well. See, for instance, Michael André Bernstein, *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero*, in which he reevaluates Bakhtin's ideas of carnival as wholly positive. See also Arthur Lindley, *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse: Studies in Carnivalesque Subversion* (20).

[21]Bakhtin says that laughter is ambivalent, without moral significance and that "Carnival laughter is the laughter of all people" (11).

[22]For a full account of the tournament, see Fradenburg's analysis, Chapters 11, 12, and 13.

court.[23] But other strange bodies inhabited the court as well. Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, writing sometime before 1578, records in his *Historie and Cronicles of Scotland* the birth "of ane munsture" (233) during the reign of James IV.[24] Lindsay's description is detailed:

> Ane bairne was borne, raknit to be ane man chyld bot frome the waist wpe was tuo fair persouns witht all memberis and protratouris perteinand to tua bodyis, to wit, tua heidis, weill eyit, weill eirit and weill handit be tua bodyis; the on bak was to the wtheris, but frome the waist done they war bot on personage and could not weill knaw be the Ingyne of man quhilk the tua bodyis the legis and previe memberis proceidit. (233)

Lindsay describes a form of Siamese twin, it would seem, a person with two torsos and heads but with a single set of legs. Moreover, Lindsay says that the king himself supervised the raising of "thir tuo bodis in ane personage" (233), and that once raised they could play music, being able to sing two parts at once. Lindsay reports that this person lived to be 28 years old, when the story turns a bit morbid. One of them "depairtit lang befoir the wther" (233). Lindsay's final comment on the incident is the person's response to requests for him to be merry: "How cane I be merrie that hes my trew marrow as ane deid carieoun wpoun my bak" (234), and he continues to tell of the comfort the two bodies gave each other, contrasting that with the singleness that he now feels.[25]

The case of the black lady and the monstrous birth are important for the information they provide about Dunbar's courtly environment. Bodily difference was

---

[23]For evidence of Africans in Britain during this period, see Paul Edwards, "The Early African Presence in the British Isles."

[24]The date of this event is uncertain but appears to be sometime after Stephen Bull, an English sea captain, returned to England (around August, 1490) and before the marriage negotiations with England in 1501.

[25]Additionally, the image of a person living with the "deid carieoun" on his back contributes the sense of the bizarre and grotesque.

fostered in a controlled way. As something at which to marvel, such difference was a form of entertainment. Human difference fascinated courts in Europe, as accounts of court dwarves imply. Steven Mullaney reports two entire Brazilian villages that were constructed outside of Rouen in 1550, "stocked with over fifty Tabbagerres and Toupinaboux Indians freshly imported for the occasion" (70). The occasion was Henri II's royal entry into Rouen, another obvious example of a royal dramatic pageant. The Brazilian village and its imported inhabitants were spectacles added to the entertainment of the royal entry, making the entry more lavish and spectacular. The wonder that such bodies—different and in many ways grotesque—must have evoked is unimaginable. If we are to believe Lindsay, bodily monstrosity was something the court enjoyed. So Dunbar was no stranger to such oddities, and he uses similar images in some of his court poems.

"Evill horrible monsteris": False Courtiers in Dunbar's Poetry

Such bodily difference appears in several of Dunbar's poems. I begin with poems in which Dunbar classifies some court servants as unworthy of patronage and transforms their bodies into monsters, implying that their courtly appearance disguises inward guile. Many of Dunbar's poems complain about court life, sometimes accusing the king of being hard, other times threatening the king with a bad reputation ("Schir, lat it never in toune be tald"[26] and "Schir, ꝫe have mony servitouris").[27] He reserves his harshest criticism for courtiers who are only leeches, hangers-on doing nothing (in his opinion) save draining the royal coffers.

---

[26]The titling of Dunbar's poems is a contested subject. For most of the poems I use the titles that Kinsley prints, which are taken from eighteenth and nineteenth century editors (Bawcutt, *Poems* 17). For the many poems entitled "To the king," I cite the first line.

[27]These poems are related to Dunbar's begging poems, which Scott discusses in his sixth chapter. Dunbar's need for additional funds is questionable, since he received a pension throughout his career. So these poems seem to be more like rhetorical positioning than genuine petitions for money.

The "evill horrible monsteris fals and fowll" ("Complane I wald, wist I quhome till" 27) that Dunbar sees at the court are criticized in several poems, and he frequently compares them to those he considers to be good courtiers, who "pleisand ar and honorable / And to ȝour hines profitable" ("Schir, ȝe have mony servitouris" 19-20). *These* "servitouris" Dunbar claims are "Deserving of ȝour grace most ding / Bayth thank, rewarde and cherrissing" (23-24).[28] In sharp contrast to these profitable servants are those who provide service only to themselves:

> Fenȝeouris, fleichouris and flatteraris,
>
> Cryaris, craikaris and clatteraris,
>
> Soukaris, groukaris, gledaris[29], gunnaris,
>
> Monsouris of France (gud clarat cunnaris) (39-42)
>
> [*Feigners, cajolers and flatterers, criers, boasters and clatterers,*
>
> *parasites, gunners, monsieurs of France (good claret tasters)*]

These are the people of whom Dunbar does not approve, for they represent the unfairness of the patronage system:

> Bot quhen the uther fulis nyce
>
> That feistit at Cokelbeis gryce
>
> Ar all rewardit, and nocht I,
>
> Than on this fals warld I cry, Fy. (65-68)
>
> [*But when the other silly fools that feasted at Colkelbie's suckling pig are*
>
> *rewarded, and not I, then on this false world I cry Fie!*]

---

[28]Dunbar places himself among those who provide good service, though he adds that "I amang the laif / Unworthy be ane place to have / Or in thair nummer to be tald" (25-27).

[29]Kinsley says that *groukaris* and *gledaris* are obscure; *gledaris* could be related to *gled*, a kite, which is associated with ravenous greed (324).

The reference to "Cokelbeis gryce" indicates that these people, whom Dunbar describes in pejorative terms, are fools worthy of no royal reward. Dunbar's "fantastik fulis bayth fals and gredy / Off toung untrew and hand evill diedie" [*fantastic fools both false and greedy, of tongue untrue and of evil hand deadly*] (57-58) are the equals of the fools "off all evil ordour" in the Middle Scots poem *Colkelbie Sow* (137).[30] Here we find a general description of the type of courtier whom Dunbar deems unworthy of patronage. It is for the most part typical estates satire, naming the actions that Dunbar finds unfavorable. But Dunbar's description goes beyond typical estates satire in other poems.

Dunbar's criticism turns grotesque in another poem to the king ("Complane I wald, wist I quhome till"), where he implies that the servants he describes play a duplicitous role at court. After a fourteen-line complaint on the times, Dunbar lists those whom "the Devill is glaid off his promocioun" (32). These are monsters, and their physical deformity and bodily functions dominate the description:

Bot fowll, jow-jowrdane-hedit jevellis,

Cowkin kenseis and culroun kevellis;

Stuffettis, strekouris and stafische strummellis,

Wyld haschbaldis, haggarbaldis and hummellis,

Druncartis, dysouris, dyvowris, drevellis,

Misgydit memberis off the Devellis,

Mismad mandragis off mastis strynd,

Crawdones, couhirttis, and theiffis off kynd;

Blait-mouit blad3eanes with bledder cheikis,

Clubfacet clucanes with clutit breikis;

---

[30]In *Colkelbie Sow* the feasting fools never eat their pig, which escapes and grows into the greatest boar the world has ever seen (512-37). Kinsley says that the poem is "a farcical popular tale of a feast" (325), but it is more a tale of the proper use of money. For the poem, see Gregory Kratzman, ed., *Colkelbie Sow and the Talis of the Fyve Bestes*.

Chuff midding churllis, cuming off cart fillaris,

Gryt glaschewe-hedit gorge-millaris. (15-26)

[*But foul, infidel rascals, shitten rascals and rascally rogues; grooms,*

lean dogs and unruly worthless beasts, wild [?][31]*, Drunkards, dicers,*

bankrupts, worthless fellows, misshapen mandrakes of mastiff's breed,

cowards, and thieves of nature, loose-mouthed clowns [?] *with bladder*

cheeks [puffed up cheeks] heavy-faced yokels [?] *with patched breeches;*

rustic dung-hill peasants, descended from cart-fillers, great [rest of line is

obscure].[32]

The physical description, heavily alliterative as well as rhymed, a "rhetorical *tour de*

force" (Kinsley 325), focuses intensely on the body. These are people whose

unworthiness is easily recognizable from Dunbar's description. Bred from large dogs and

dung-cart fillers, their physical characteristics (as Dunbar presents them) match their

worthiness of royal reward. The description is certainly grotesque by all standards. But

this description cannot be taken literally, for were these courtiers' physical characteristics

as Dunbar describes them, there would be no need for such depictions, since their

depravity would be clearly visible. Instead, Dunbar describes these courtiers' inner

ugliness by using physical description. Dunbar is the omniscient poet who can gaze

beneath the disguise of the courtly role to see what is in the hearts of men. In the hearts of

profitable servants, Dunbar finds the qualities of a loyal courtier. In the hearts of these

"fenʒeouris" he finds something very different. Dunbar unmasks the false, feigning,

flattering courtier to reveal his ugly, monstrous inner self.

---

[31]The words *haschbaldis, haggarbaldis,* and *hummelis* are obscure.

[32]Line 26 is mostly obscure, though Bawcutt states that *gorge millaris* "seems a
compound of two nouns: *gorge,* 'throat,' and *miller*" (*Poems* 308). The line seems to
have something to do with gluttonous millers, though *glaschewe* remains obscure.

The problem here is a difficulty faced when attempting to analyze humor in general: was this description considered funny? The answer depends largely upon the audience and the tastes of the day, but I believe that Dunbar's description is an attempt at dark humor. We know, for example, that demons and devils were often portrayed as comic. The Summoner's Prologue illustrates one instance of the Devil as comic:

> Right so as bees out swarmen from an hyve,
>
> Out of the Develes ers ther gonne dryve
>
> Twenty thousand freres on a route
>
> And thurghout helle swarmed al aboute,
>
> And comen agayn as fast as they may gon,
>
> And in his ers they crepten everychon. (III.1693-98).

The Summoner's story is a joke at the expense of the friar, just as Dunbar's description is meant to provoke laughter at the expense of these courtiers. Demons and devils on stage tended to be funny, according to Jeffrey Burton Russell: "The function of the funny demon was to produce comic relief, which relaxed the audience in order to prepare them for the next tragic action" (259). Devils received elaborate costuming, farted on stage (perhaps using gunpowder to makes the farts more horrible), and participated in slapstick similar to what we have seen in *Mankind*. And stage devils, like devils in the visual arts, were grotesque representations with elaborate costumes that included horns, claws, tails, and other bodily protrusions. It seems to me that descriptions like Dunbar's were meant to provoke *critical* laughter. We are meant to laugh *at* these unindustrious courtiers, to ridicule them, to shame them. There is more here than sheer humor. At the same time that these lines may have amused an audience, they also disclose the true nature of this type of courtier and are thus harshly critical.

John Damian's Monstrous Body

Two poems on one court servant include a similar unmasking, revealing a very specific courtier as a charlatan, at least in Dunbar's mind. "The Antechrist" (53) and "Ane Ballat of the Fenȝeit Freir of Tungland" (54) both take as their subject John Damian, a foreign friar-scientist who enjoyed James's patronage during the first decade of the sixteenth century.[33] Dunbar disliked him intensely, registering his dislike in ways similar to his description of false servants described above. In both poems Dunbar reveals his judgment of Damian's performance at court via bodily transformation: into a mythical creature in one poem and a disguised bird in another.

Damian's career is a case study in the manipulation of court practices, if we are to believe historical accounts. He was a physician, referred to in the Treasurers' Accounts as "Maister Johne the Franch leich" and "medicinar," and he received payments for saltpeter, coals, and glass flagons in 1502 (Baxter 167-68). Damian was not just a physician and scientist but a shrewd judge of character as well: "Damian knew also the ways of the court" (Baxter 168). He played dice and cards with the king, and he also won money from the king in shooting contests (Baxter 172). The combination of Damian's scientific mind with his ability to participate in entertainments with the King obviously had an effect, for until his death at Flodden, James patronized the physician.

Damian's most noted role was as alchemist; one of James's keen interests was alchemy, and he patronized Damian's alchemical investigations. The payments of 1502 were probably for alchemical experiments, as well as payments in 1503, "probably 'to multiply'" (Baxter 168). The king's interest in transmutation was perhaps fueled by his grand plans for both an invasion of England and a crusade (for which he planned most of

---

[33]Damian was either Italian or French. Scholars tend to disagree on the subject. Ross and Baxter, for instance, call him French, while Reiss and Kinsley say he was Italian.

his reign), both of which would have been expensive endeavors.[34] Alchemy also had a

purpose beyond padding the treasury; it was a search for prolonged life.[35] Damian was

happy to oblige James's interests, and John Leslie, bishop of the Isles in the late sixteenth

century, criticizes him for taking advantage of his royal patron, saying that Damian was

"sa disceitful, and had sa craftie and curious ingin to begyl, that he persuadet the king of

his gret cunning in al thing natural, cheiflie in that politic arte, quhilk quha knawis that

cal him an alcumist; bot his intentioun only was to milk purses" (Baxter 168). Early in

1504, only three years after Damian first appears in the records, James appointed Damian

Abbot of Tungland, a benefice similar to what Dunbar spent his entire career pursuing.[36]

And we find Damian "milking purses" in a Treasurers' Account entry for 27 July 1507,

which refers to a large sum of money lent to Damian and never returned.[37] His most

notable exploit, at least in terms of how later generations remember him, is his failed

flight in September 1507.[38] Damian's enemies, including Dunbar, saw ulterior motives in

---

[34]See Mackie 201-202, 203-206. Alchemy was an interest of many courts during this period. For Scotland, see J. Read, "Alchemy under James IV of Scotland." James was interested in various things scientific, including gunnery, ship building, and medicine. Royal interest in alchemy was not limited to James, of course. See Anthony Gross, *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship* for Henry VI's patronage of alchemists (18-25).

[35]The eighth-century Arabic alchemist Jabir associated alchemy with medicine, ideas that found their way into Western thought. Writers like Roger Bacon (*Opus tertium*) and John of Rupescissa (*Consideration of Quintessence*) linked alchemy with medicine. Rupescissa, for instance, believed that the mixing of alcohol with herbs would produce "the quintessence of the medicinal plant or material, what we would now call an extract" (Halversen 37), a more powerful form of the drug.

[36]See, for instance, "Off benefice, Sir, at everie feist" and "Schir, at this feist of benefice." Both complain, in the metaphoric language of the feast, about benefices being given to those already well-endowed while people like Dunbar go (figuratively) hungry. This is another use of the body in Dunbar's poetry, but it is not openly comic, as much of what I discuss here is.

[37]The Treasurers' Accounts say that money was "lent be the Kingis command to the Abbot of Tungland, and can nocht be gotten fra him" (Baxter 168).

[38]The desire to fly was, of course, not limited to Damian. Leonardo da Vinci designed a number of flying machines (at least fourteen), among them an aerial screw, (ca. 1483-1486), a glider (date unknown), a flying ship (ca. 1486-1490), a parachute (ca.

this stunt, which was perhaps prompted by his failed alchemical experiments or the money that he owed to James, as Ross hypothesizes (197).

Bawcutt, however, introduces evidence that the episode might be fictitious. Leslie wrote two accounts of the incident. The first, written in 1570, historically far removed from the event it describes, says,

> This Abbott tuik in hand to flie with wingis, and to be in Fraunce befoir the saidis ambassadouris; and to that effect he causet mak ane pair of wingis of fedderis, quhilk beand fessinit apoun him, he flew of the castel wall of Striveling, bot shortlie he fell to the ground and brak his thee bane; bot the wyt thairof he asscryvit to that thair was sum hen fedderis in the wingis, qhhilk yarnit and covet the mydding and not the skyis. (Bawcutt, *Poems* 296).

The second, in Leslie's 1578 *De Origine Moribus et Rebus Gestis Scotorum*, anonymously translated from Latin into Scots in 1596, is nearly identical, save an emphasis on pejorative descriptions of Damian and a report of the audience laughing at the outcome.[39] Bawcutt claims that Leslie's is the only account of the incident other than

---

1483-1486), a flapping machine (ca. 1496-1499), and an articulated wing (ca. 1496). For brief descriptions of these, along with images of the original designs, see the "Leonardo da Vinci" section of The National Museum of Science and Technology Machines web site (http://www.museoscienza.org/english/leonardo/Default.htm.). For a discussion of these designs (and their practicality), see Ivor B. Hart, *The World of Leonardo da Vinci: Man of Science, Engineer and Dreamer of Flight* (especially 317-30). Because Damian attempted to use feathers on his wings, like those of Daedalus and Icarus, rather than the "dove-tailed linen cloth" specified in da Vinci's drawing of the articulated wing, Damian probably was unaware of da Vinci's theories, though whether or not da Vinci's work was known in Scotland is uncertain. Jenny Wormald wonders "whether it is possible that the attempt…to fly from the battlements of Stirling castle is an echo of the world of Leonardo da Vinci," basing this similarity on general scientific interest in Europe" (56).

[39]"To baith his schouders he couples his wings, that of dyvers foulis he had prouydet, fra the hicht of the castel of Sterling as he wald tak Jornay, he makis him to flie up in the air; bot or he was weil begun, his veyage was at an end, for this deceiuer fel doun with sik a dade, that the bystanders wist not, quhither tha sulde mair meine his dolour [*more pity his sorrow*], or meruel of his dafrie. Al rinis to visit him, that ask the Abbot with his wings how he did. He ansuers that his thich bane is brokne, and he hopet neuer to gang agane; als war lyke to cleiue of lauchter, that quha lyk another Jcarus wald

190

Dunbar's, and points out that there is no indication in the records through 1508 that Damian "suffered a fall or injury" (*Poems* 296). This lack of evidence casts doubt on the veracity of Dunbar's description of Damian's flight attempt.

The truth about the historicity of this event may never be known, but the distinction between truth and fiction does not matter much for my purposes. What is clear is that some, namely Dunbar and later Leslie, despised Damian enough to ridicule him. Neither Dunbar's attacks on Damian nor, if it actually happened, Damian's aborted and ridiculous attempt at flight impeded James's patronage: "Even Damian's abortive flight from Stirling castle to France with a pair of manufactured wings...did not end the alchemist's court career or his intimacy with the king" (Macdougall 288), and this continued familiarity with the king surely fueled Dunbar's dislike of the abbot.

Dunbar's depiction of Damian is intensely pejorative, and much of his invective against the foreign abbot centers on corporeal monstrosity and bodily functions. In "The Antechrist" (53) Dunbar casts Damian as the father of Antichrist.[40] We know that Dunbar refers to Damian because of the prophecy uttered by Fortune:

> Thy [the narrator's] trublit gaist sall neir moir degest,
>
> Nor thow in to no benifice beis possest,
>
> Quhill that ane abbot him cleith in ernis pennis
>
> And fle up in the air amangis the crennis
>
> And as ane falcone fair fro eist to west. (21-25)
>
> [*Your troubled spirit will never more be settled, nor will you be possessed*
>
> *of a benefice, until an abbot clothes himself in eagle's feathers and flies up*

---

now flie to hevin, rycht now lyk another Simon Magus mycht nott sett his fute to the Erde" (Baxter 169).

[40]For the tradition of a friar or monk as father of Antichrist, see Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*, 267, n.22.

in the air among the cranes and makes his way from east to west like a

falcon.]

We learn that this abbot will ascend like a horrible griffin and meet with a she-dragon:

"Thir terrible monsteris sall togidder thrist / And in the cludis gett the Antechrist / Quhill

all the air infeck of thair puson" [*These terrible monsters shall copulate together and in*

the clouds produce the Antichrist until all the air is infected with their poison] (27-30).

By casting Damian as a griffin, Dunbar strips the abbot of his human form and as in his

other poems on courtiers, turns the target of his verse into a monster. Moreover, the

characterization is also a judgment. Two aspects of the griffin are important. First, the

griffin was always depicted as at least part bird, typically eagle, which focuses attention

on Damian's flight. Second, the griffin often represented evil: "Usually the griffin

represents an evil principle, gaining victory over animals and men whom he appears to

tear to pieces" (Rowland 48).[41] The abbot's actions as beast also involve important bodily

functions. Damian is the demonic inseminator of the she-dragon who will produce the

Antichrist, the monstrous destroyer of the world, a debasing description, especially for an

abbot.

The bodily element in Dunbar's other Damian poem, "Ane Ballat of the Fenȝeit

Freir of Tungland" (54), is not monstrous, as it is in "The Antechrist." Instead, Dunbar

represents Damian in an avian disguise, the cause of the flight's failure being the

discovery of that disguise. The poem traces Damian's career, from his beginnings as "a

---

[41]A long tradition of the griffin as diabolic existed in the West: "the griffin in the books and art of Christendom passed almost universally as a demon that destroyed horses and men" (Holbrook 227). Dante, however, figures the griffin as Christ (*Purgatory 31*), its dual nature representing the dual nature of Jesus as God and man: "Now, of course, the animal is seen in its symbolic meaning as Christ, who is one person in two natures" (Singleton 766 n. 81). Dante's identification of the griffin with Christ is rare: "the fact that in all the works edited by Migne, Christ almost never figures as a griffin, indicates that such symbolisation was very uncommon" (Holbrook 227). In Dunbar's hands the griffin clearly has a sinister connotation, associated as it is with the she-dragon and the Antichrist.

Turk of Tartary" (5) through killing "a religious man" (10), to his journey to France,

pretending there to be a doctor, and finally his flight to Scotland, where he "murdreist

mony in medecyne" (30), becomes a "new maid channoun" (54), attempts alchemy, and

pulls his flying stunt. But Dunbar does not simply mention the incident. Dunbar turns

Damian into a feigned bird whose disguise is foiled by his fellow (and real) avians.

Dunbar here creates his own brand of wish fulfillment—allegorically envisioning the

court (birds) realizing that Damian is a fraud and punishing him accordingly:

> The golk, the gormaw and the gled
>
> Beft him with buffettis quhill he bled;
>
> The sparhalk to the spring him sped
>
> Als fers as fyre of flynt.
>
> The tarsal gaif him tug for tug,
>
> A stanchell hang in ilka lug,
>
> The pyot furth his pennies did rug. (77-83)
>
> [*The cuckoo, the cormorant and the kite struck him with buffets until he*
>
> *bled. The sparrow hawk hastened to the attack, as fierce as fire from flint.*
>
> *The eagle gave him a good tugging. A kestrel hung from each ear. The*
>
> *magpie pulled his feathers.*]

Dunbar's birds mob the object of their ire, flocking madly about him, as fierce as sparks

from a piece of flint, to punish his transgression.[42] Moreover, Damien "does not fall into

hell and eternal damnation but into a local barnyard slough, complete with squawking

ducks" (Parkinson 507), adding insult to injury. Damian's punishment is not just a

spoiled flight, caused by the birds plucking out his feathers. Additionally, they render his

genitals useless. The buzzard is "so cleverus of hir cluik" (*so nimble of her claw*) that

---

[42]For a view of this scene as a conventional mobbing scene, see David Parkinson,
"Mobbing Scenes in Middle Scots Verse: Holland, Douglas, Dunbar" (505ff).

"His bawis he micht not langer bruik, / Scho held thame at ane hint" (*He might no longer have the use of his balls, she held them with such a grip*) (85-88). The buzzard emasculates him in a scene reminiscent of the Host's words to the Pardoner, another clever manipulator of audiences: "I wolde I hadde thy coillons in myn hond" (VI 952). The visual image is like something from a political cartoon, with birds hanging from each ear, plucking Damian's feathers, and identifiable breeds of birds pecking him. It has both entertainment and critical value, offering a cruelly humorous view of the abbot while at the same time illustrating the folly of patronizing him.[43]

Humorous as this episode may be, it also raises serious issues about disguised identity. In the poems where he criticizes his fellow court servants, Dunbar uses as a main weapon his ability to reveal inner truth by casting his rivals in unseemly bodily guise. In doing so, Dunbar implies that their performance at court is feigned, that hidden beneath the assumed costume and speech patterns of the court servant is a much more sinister individual intent only on personal gain at the expense of king and country. Dunbar recognizes the dangerous aspects of altering one's identity in his poems on Damian. The implication in "The Antechrist" is that Damian is really a fiend whose evil will conceive the destroyer of the world. In "Fenȝeit Freir" we have Damian assuming roles that cover his vicious nature, early on as a physician who kills many and later as a bird, whose disguise is foiled. In both cases the body is the site of feigned characterization. Additionally, Dunbar's attacks on Damian's body are related in that they are both sexual. In "The Antechrist" the focus is on monstrous conception: Damian's seed. Although Damian clothes himself in "ernis pennis," as though he were a bird, his identity is more truly defined by the generative power of the diabolic griffin. In such an image Dunbar shows that Damian is an evil influence at court. "Fenȝeit Freir" focuses on

---

[43]Criticizing the king for such patronage probably was not as dangerous as it might at first seem. Dunbar is critical of the king in several poems, especially his begging poems. See Scott, Chapter 4, for a discussion of these poems.

eliminating that monstrous seed; the birds emasculate Damian. In both Dunbar unmasks Damian, in one by showing him to be the father of Antichrist and in the other by stripping him of his disguise and the ability to reproduce his duplicity. In each case Dunbar's criticism illustrates that this is a person to be kept away from the court, for his influence will, like the actions of Antichrist, bring ruin to the realm.

This poetic strategy of tearing down the seemingly lofty is not limited to Dunbar's criticism of court servants, however. His technique of presenting the noble and high as comically debased is evident elsewhere in his poetry. I will restrict myself to three additional instances that serve as evidence: courtly love, tournaments, and legal/ecclesiastical documents.

III. Comic Debasement of Lofty Ideals: Courtly Love and Courtly Battles

The critical unmasking in Dunbar's poems about court servants is similar to other places where Dunbar uses the comic body to criticize the court. Dunbar uses the comic body to criticize courtiers whom he believes to be detrimental to the common good, but he also uses the comic body to criticize courtly ideals themselves, or at least the popular literary conventions through which those ideals were so often expressed. As noted above, much of Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque is based on comic debasement: the lowering of all that is high. I will look at three representations where Dunbar's use of the comic body achieves comic debasement: the sexuality of courtly love, where he parodies the language of courtly desire; battle prowess, where the body's functions betray the true feelings of noble fighters; and legal/ecclesiastical documents, where Dunbar uses techniques similar to the parodic practices discussed in Chapter 2. These representations illustrate additional ways in which Dunbar uses the comic body for social criticism. They also illustrate Dunbar's concern with language, especially the potential for the misuse of language.

Courtly Love, Courtly Sex

A major source of humorous representations of the body in general, human sexuality appears repeatedly in Dunbar's poems. However, Dunbar's representations of the sexual body are not as openly comic as we saw in the goliardic practices in Chapter 2 or in the *fabliaux*, to both of which his poetry has been compared. Instead, Dunbar uses sexual relations to comment upon the conventional language of *amour courtois*. Dunbar was familiar enough with traditional courtly love poetry to play with the poetic conventions of *amour courtois*. In most cases, Dunbar presents courtly love negatively, and in two poems in particular he uses representations of sexuality to tear down courtly conventions, lampooning these conventions by focusing attention on the discrepancy between surface structure (diction, appearance) and reality (action, intention). "In Secreit Place" and *The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo* both highlight the conflict between expectations produced by courtly love conventions and some of the underlying desires and behaviors behind these conventions. "In Secreit Place" sets up a courtly setting only to tear it down with diction and action referring not to the courtly convention of polite love but instead to the sexuality that lies just beneath the polite diction of courtly love. *The Tretis* criticizes courtly conventions similarly, though this criticism is not the main thrust of the poem, as it is in "In Secreit Place." Dunbar describes the women with courtly images, making the audience believe in the beginning that the poem will be romance. But the topics and diction of the women's conversation destroy the courtly setting. The contrast that Dunbar sets up in each poem helps him to censure this aspect of human sexuality; courtly love conventions are, like the false court servants he criticizes, disguises for baser, underlying desires.

In several poems Dunbar illustrates his familiarity with courtly love conventions.[44] Like Lydgate, also a priest who received royal patronage, Dunbar was an able love poet, having composed several poems on the topic.[45] Kinsley characterizes *The Golden Targe*, for instance, as a love poem, though critics tend to see it as an exercise in rhetoric rather than a genuine love poem.[46] Although he comes down hard on love in some ("Lufis Inconstance" and "The Merle and the Nychtingall" in particular), he is also capable of writing traditional love poetry, as in "Sweit Rois of Vertew," which Kinsley calls a "beautifully controlled courtly complaint" (256). Another poem, "To a Lady, quhone he list to Feyne," begins earnestly enough and conforms to the conventions of courtly love lyric: the lover complaining that he will die without his lady's mercy. In almost every stanza we find the narrator pleading with the lady: "Stynt of ȝour slauchtir; allace, ȝour man am I, / A thowsand tymes that dois ȝow mercy cry" [*Cease your slaughter; alas, I am your man, who a thousand times asks you for mercy*] (6-7); "Beseikand grace on kneis ȝow befoir / Or that ȝour man be lost for evermoir" [*Beseeching grace on knees before you, before your man is lost for ever more*] (20-21); "Bot ȝour mercie, for laik of quhilk I de: / Allace, quhair is ȝour womanlie petie?" [*Without your mercy, for lack of which I die: alas, where is your womanly pity?*] (27-28). But the sheer number of times the narrator pleads for mercy or claims that he is soon to die makes its editor state that "this is manifestly a parody of the poetry of *amour*

---

[44]"Sweit Rois of Vertew," "Bewty and the Presoneir," "Gude Counsale," "To a Lady, quhone he list to Feyne," "Lufis Inconstance," "The Merle and the Nychtingall," and "Trew Luve."

[45]Lydgate's canon resists classification since, like Dunbar, he wrote in so many genres and on so many topics. He enjoyed the patronage of Henry V, as well as various other persons in English society, both religious and lay. He was responsible for at least two royal mummings, and he is often cited as a strong influence on Dunbar.

[46]Walter Scheps asserts that rhetoric and content work together in the poem, saying that Dunbar treats "the love poetry that it purports to exemplify" in a "comically destructive manner" (356). The poem, then, is about both love and rhetoric at the same time.

courtois" and "the tone becomes hysterical, and rhetorical extravagance preposterous" (Kinsley 255).[47] Whether or not this poem is a genuine example of a courtly love lyric, there is no denying that the narrator's repeated statements about dying are a bit excessive, and at the very least Dunbar has fun with these conventions. Dunbar does not openly dismiss such feelings, as he does in *The Merle and the Nychtingall* (16), where the nightingale's refrain, "All lufe is lost bot upone God alone," overcomes the merle's (blackbird's) repeated praise of earthly love. Of "To a Lady," Scott says, "just as there is an undertone of realism, of counterpoise to the exaggerated romantic attitude of the more serious poems in the tradition of *amour courtois*, so here there is a curious undertone of seriousness under the mockery—as if he were laughing or mocking at feelings of which he disapproved but still actually felt" (60).[48] Although the poem may be a serious courtly love lyric, it also comes across as subtly making fun of the genre.

I have digressed a bit here to show that Dunbar was acutely aware of the *amour courtois* tradition, aware enough to make fun of it in his own poetry and to use its conventions as a rhetorical exercise. But he was also aware that the system to which the language of courtly love belonged metaphorically and euphemistically signified sexual desire. The lovers' pleas and the women's pity were both associated with physical sex; they were a rhetorical way to disguise carnal desire.[49]

---

[47]Scott agrees, saying, "the note here is openly satirical, the golden shield of reason matched by the cutlass of wit, the jibe of mockery" (60). Bawcutt, however, says, "there is little to justify this [view]," for "medieval parody...including Dunbar's own...usually sent clearer signals to the reader" (*Poems* 364).

[48]To his credit, Scott acknowledges that his view is subjective: "One cannot pinpoint this—it is something which comes over from the whole poem, but is difficult to locate" and continues, "it may be something subjective in me projected on to the poem" (60).

[49]The language of courtly love often carries connotations—more or less subtle, depending on context—of physical desire. *MED* defines *merci* as "Favor, kindness; charity; friendship; the favor of a woman to a lover," using a quotation from *The Knight's Tale* as evidence: "And wel I woot, er she me mercy heete, / I moot with strengthe wynne hire in the place" (I.2395-96). *Mercy* here refers to the favor of Emelye's love. *MED* lists "bisechen of merci" and "preien merci" as directly related to love. The phrases "finden

Dunbar foregrounds the difference between rhetoric and meaning in "In Secreit Place" (13). The poem is, in a single instant, critical of the euphemistic courtier-lover—whom Dunbar would certainly have found in the literary tradition and probably saw in James's court—and a delightful comic representation of lovers, which in many ways reminds one of the *fabliaux* or Chaucer's comic tales, especially those of Fragment I: the tales of the Miller, Reeve, and Cook.[50] Dunbar achieves both entertainment and social criticism by emphasizing the sharp contrast between courtly ideal and realistic language, exposing what lowbrow lovers really mean when they adopt courtly love conventions for their ignoble purposes. This poem is a parody of courtly love conventions, with a clerkly lover courting a country girl.[51]

Opening as a traditional courtly love lyric, the poem quickly up-ends its courtly love conventions. "In Secreit Place" has a voyeuristic frame with a narrator who overhears a "bern say till a bricht" [*a man say to a glorious one*] (2),

> My hunny, my houp, my hairt, my heill,
>
> I haif bene lang ȝour lufar leill
>
> And can of ȝow gett confort nane;
>
> How lang will ȝe with denger deill?
>
> ȝe brek my hart, my bony ane. (3-7)

(geten) merci" [get a woman's love or a mistress' favor] and "haven merci" ["obtain (a woman's) love or favors]" both have sexual connotations. Other words associated with such courtly love complaints, like *solace* and *pity*, have similar undertones.

[50]Scott says, "Dunbar is simply burlesquing the extravagant prattle of lovers. The note is one of genuine good-humoured comedy," and he continues to assert, "this is the hearty belly-laughter of a Rabelais or a Boccaccio" (64). While some of the fun is, indeed, "in the ridiculous names the 'lovers' call each other" (Scott 64), there is more to this poem than fun.

[51]Kinsley has characterized them in realistic, humorous terms: "he is a backstairs fornicator, familiar with the terms and postures of *amour courtois* but foul in person and manners; she is a giggling kitchen girl" (257).

[*My honey, my hope, my heart, my source of health, I have long been your*

faithful lover and cannot get any comfort from you; how long will you

busy yourself with disdain? You break my heart, my pretty one.]

The diction that Dunbar uses for these lovers is the first step in setting up a courtly

setting. *Bern* typically means *man*, but there is often a hint of nobility associated with it;

MED says that the word can mean "A man; esp. a youth, a young warrior," but also "In

direct address (with varying degrees of respect): man, sir." He is certainly not represented

here as a churl. *Bricht* is even more courtly in nature. The word can mean "(a) morally

pure, free of sin; ~ in soule; (b) enlightened (faith); of an utterance: clear, unambiguous;

(c) of virtue, a good deed: splendid, glorious" (*MED*), and the word is used to describe

romance heroines.[52] The initial situation is also typical, with a distressed lover beseeching

his beloved to have pity on him, to give him comfort.

In this opening situation Dunbar displays his familiarity with courtly love

convention through the use of a single word: *denger* (more commonly spelled *daunger*).

A concept common to much courtly love poetry, *daunger* is a complex term: "it is

difficult to find a single modern equivalent for this word" (Bawcutt, *Poems* 420 n.223).

Editors have glossed it as *reluctance*, *coldness*, and *disdain*, but the concept contains

more meaning than single glosses can give it. It is "the real enemy who cannot be

flattered or overcome,…the ever-present dread of lovers and the stoutest defence of

virgins" (Lewis 123). The word *daunger* appears throughout courtly love poetry. It

appears in *Le Roman de la Rose* as the personified guardian of the rose and, incidentally,

as the main obstacle to the lover. Chaucer uses the word in this sense in *The Wife of*

Bath's Tale, and in *The Golden Targe* Dunbar uses *Dangere* as a character similar to the

corresponding character in *Le Roman de la Rose* (223). Dunbar also uses the concept

---

[52]In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for instance, we find the word used to
mean "pure white" but also "fairest" (1284).

extensively in "Trew Love," a rejection of the courtly love longing of youth in favor of a more mature spiritual love. He juxtaposes courtly love, characterized by longing and "denger and deseis" (39) with the love of God: "I haif a luve farar of face / Quhome in no denger may haif place" (61-62). By juxtaposing the comfort of spiritual love with the *daunger* of physical love, Dunbar makes a powerful point about the virtues of spiritual love, a point similar to the one Langland makes with his impotence joke. More important, by using the concept of *daunger* as a defining aspect of courtly love, Dunbar in effect shows that courtly love conventions veil physical love, which he rejects in favor of true love, God's love:

> I haif a luve farar of face
>
> Quhome in no denger may haif place,
>
> Quhilk will me guerdoun gif and grace
>
> And mercy ay quhen I me mene. (61-64)

This love is spiritual, the love of God, which Dunbar chooses over physical love, with its characteristic *daunger* and lack of mercy.[53]

After establishing a romance setting, Dunbar immediately turns that setting on its head, showing us the nature of his courtly lovers. In the next stanza we learn the reality of the situation:

> His bony berd wes kemd and croppit
>
> Bot all with kaill it wes bedroppit
>
> And he wes townysche, peirt and gukkit.
>
> He clappit fast, he kist, he chukkit
>
> As with the glaikkis he wer ourgane—
>
> 3it be his feiris he wald haif fukkit. (8-13)

---

[53]For more on the concept of danger, see C. S. Lewis's Appendix II in *The Allegory of Love* (364-66).

[*His beautiful beard was combed and cut short but was spattered with cabbage, and he was uncourtly, saucy, and foolish. He patted vigorously, he kissed, he fondled, as if he were overcome with desire – yet according to his manners he wished to have fucked.*]

Dunbar clearly describes a person who is not the courtly ideal. Although the man's beard is short, it is also stained with his food, and Dunbar describes him as a fool unable to contain his lust. The diction, too, grounds this person in the earthly, and the use of *fukkit* rather than a more expected euphemism contrasts sharply with what we would expect from a courtly lover. The use of this word strips any doubt as to what form the "confort" should take. The poetic style reflects the contrast between courtly love situation and sexual philandering. The abandoning of the euphemism and metaphor apparent in the initial stanza emphasizes the veiling nature of courtly love conventions. The typical roles that lovers play in the courtly love tradition are similar to roles in a play. In complaining to his beloved, wanting pity, mercy, and comfort, the lover conforms to a conventional code. Dunbar unmasks the tradition, telling exactly what lovers mean by "confort."[54] In doing so, he highlights the contrast between situation and diction, violating our expectations by debasing courtly love conventions to show the intention lying behind them.[55]

---

[54]We find such a plea for comfort often in romance. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, for instance, when Troilus believes that Criseyde will return to Troy, he says, "Ne felte I swich a comfort, dar I seye; She comth to-nyght, my lif that dorste I leye!" (5.1168-69).

[55]Additionally, by including ridiculous pet names in the poem, Dunbar characterizes courtly love diction and practices as being not only hypocritical but also absurd. The woman calls her lover "my clip, my unspaynd jyane" (*My big awkward fellow, my unweaned giant*) (36), clearly terms of endearment but odd ones indeed. She goes on to call him her "belly huddroun": glutton. Dunbar piles on the list of odd pet names. These are absurd, of course, and are bound to cause laughter. But they also cast doubt on the idea that a courtier could be interested in a country girl as an object of idealized love, as does entire poem. The *bern* and the *bricht* play the role of courtly lovers, but they are, at heart, simple people with basic desires.

The man's purpose clearly is to persuade the girl to have sex with him, not to raise her as his icon of courtly love. He tells her so in the seventh stanza: "Quhen that our mowthis dois meit at ane / My stang dois storkyn with ʒour towdy: / ʒe brek my hairt, my bony ane" (*When our mouths do meet together, my penis stiffens against your vagina. You break my heart, my pretty one*) (47-49). Previously, the narrator had indicated the lover's apparent intentions: "be his feiris he wald have fukkit." This peek into the *bern*'s mind calls into question the entire system of courtly love. Here we have the lover stating his intentions directly, something we never find in courtly love literature.[56] He refers to his erect penis and her vagina rather than to his comfort and her pity, as he did earlier. This statement does not drive the woman away. Instead, she acquiesces, saying, "I am applyid to ʒour opinʒoun" (*I am inclined to your view*) (55). After he gives her an apple (itself a suggestive act, though with genders reversed from the archetypal scene), she thanks him, and the narrator says, "Syne tha twa till ane play began / Quhilk that thay call the dirrydan, / Quhill bayth thair bewis did meit in ane" (*After that these two began a play, which they call the dirrydan* [name of a dance in reference to copulation] *while both their limbs did meet in one*) (59-61). The lover has gained his objective in a move that derives not from courtly love but instead from the explicit rhetoric of the *fabliaux* and bawdy jokes like those found in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*. However, Dunbar's poem does more than provide a good laugh (though it certainly does that). This poem criticizes the courtly ideals of human relations by exposing the real motivations of courtiers who use flowery rhetoric to court ladies; it is Dunbar's criticism of the entire social system of

---

[56]The closest that I can find is the Lady Bertilak's direct approach in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where she says openly "ʒe ar welcum to my cors, / Yowre awen won to wale, / Me behouez of fyne force / Your seruant be, and schale" (1237-40). This still is not nearly as direct as Dunbar's poem. For the scholarly debate over the meaning of these lines, see Tolkien's edition, 108 n.1237.

courtly love, the diction of that system, and its ridiculous participants, who hide their real motivations behind the disguise of rhetoric.[57]

The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo is similar to "In Secreit Place" in that it also casts doubt on the system of courtly love and its conventions of concealment. However, for *The Tretis* this criticism lies just beneath other concerns: questions about what wives do when husbands are away and misogynist jokes. The setting of *The Tretis* is again taken from courtly love poetry or romance. However, what the narrator reports overhearing soon takes on the "eldritch" style of "In Secreit Place."[58] Scott rightly says, "Dunbar, the poet of courtly love, Dunbar the poet of women, Dunbar the satirist of social vice, Dunbar the castigator of the court of James IV, Dunbar the ribald entertainer doing the Queen's 'gam,' and Dunbar the flyter, all unite in the 'Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo'" (Scott 179). As with "In Secreit Place" he is here severely critical of courtly convention.

---

[57]That Dunbar might criticize such a social structure should not seem unusual. At court Dunbar probably observed practices very similar to what he writes about: seduction phrased in the rhetoric and disguise of courtly love. James IV was famous for his many mistresses, with one at every port, it would seem, and though no evidence survives, illicit affairs were probably as prolific in the sixteenth century as they are today. Mariot Boyd bore James a son, Alexander Stewart, who at the tender age of eleven became Archbishop of St. Andrews. Margaret Drummond was another mistress, as was Janet Kennedy. On James's mistresses, see Mackie 80-81, 92-93, 100-105. Scholars have surmised that one of his poems, "The Wowing of the King quhen he wes in Dumfermelig" (37), is an account of such an illicit affair, though the identification of the fox as the king is debatable. Bawcutt questions this identification of the fox with James, stating, "Dunbar probably alludes to some contemporary sexual scandal" (*Poems* 470). In "In Secreit Place" Dunbar shows courtly love rhetoric for what it often represents: sexual relations between unmarried couples. By establishing the contrast between convention and reality, he also establishes the contrast between rhetoric and action, calling into question the entire cult of chivalric courtly love. By establishing a courtly setting with plain, straightforward language rather than the expected euphemism and metaphor of the love lyric, Dunbar questions the mask of courtly love. The humor that results is entirely bodily and severely critical.

[58]John Leyerle describes Dunbar's wilder style, which he used for flyting and comic poems, as "eldritch," a term he finds in *The Golden Targe*. It means "wild, exuberant, weird, frightful," and it "lent itself to abuse and invective where the general purpose was satirical" (321).

The visual description with which the poem begins draws upon romance conventions. Dunbar says of the women's physical appearance,

> Fetrit with thair quhyt fingaris about thair fair sydes
>
> Off ferlifull fyne favour war thair faceis meik ,
>
> All full of flurist fairheid as flouris in June—
>
> Quhyt, seimlie and soft as the sweit lillies
>
> Now upspred upon spray , as new spynist rose;
>
> Arrayit ryallie about with mony riche vardour ,
>
> That nature full nobillie annamalit with flouris
>
> Off alkin hewis under hevin that ony heynd knew—
>
> Fragrant, all full of fresche odour fynest of smell. (25-33)
>
> [*Secured with their white fingers about their fair sides, of wonderful fine*
>
> *favor were their meek faces, all full of blooming beauty as flowers in*
>
> *June—white, excellent, as soft as sweet lilies, now spread upon the twigs,*
>
> *like a newly opened rose; arrayed royally with many rich plants*
>
> *['verdure'] that nature enameled full nobly with flowers of every kind of*
>
> *hue under heaven that anyone knew—fragrant, all full of fresh odor, finest*
>
> *of smell.*]

Dunbar's description of the women is consistent with descriptions of romance heroines. The *Gawain*-poet, for instance, speaks of Lady Bertilak by commenting on the whiteness of her skin: "Hir brest and hir bryȝt þrote bare displayed, / Schon schyrer þen snawe þat schedez on hillez" (*Her breast and her shining throat displayed bare shone whiter than snow that falls on the hills*) (955-56). Using nature to describe the superb beauty of a woman is a commonplace in romance. In *The Knight's Tale*, for instance, Chaucer describes Emelye by saying that she

fairer was to sene

Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene

And fressher than the May with floures newe—

For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe. (I.1035-38)

Dunbar's description of the women, even the older widow, conforms to the romance tradition of comparing the fair attributes of the idealized woman to nature—skin white as snow, complexion like spring flowers. The combination of images and style establishes a courtly love or romance setting.

As soon as the narrator begins to report what he hears, however, the audience's expectations are shattered: "They wauchtit at the wicht wyne and waris out wordis; / And syn thai spak more spedlie and sparit no matiris" (*They quaffed the strong wine and expend words. And afterwards they spoke more quickly and spared no matters*) (39-40). There is a sharp shift here on two levels. First, the women "sparit no matiris," indicating that we will hear some juicy gossip instead of a tale about knightly adventures. Second, the style of the poem changes sharply.[59] The shift from romance topic and setting to baser matters and "eldritch" language helps to undercut the courtly setting from the opening, and the focus on marital woes, stated in uneuphemistic terms, comically debases the highly conventional romance style.

Dunbar establishes a stark contrast between appearance and action. The widow asks "Qwhat mirth 3e fand in maryage sen 3e war menis wyffis" [*What mirth have you found in marriage since you have been men's wives*] (42). The answers she receives are not flattering to men. Both wives complain about their husbands' impotence, using

---

[59]I am not the first to notice the change in diction and style. Catherine Singh says, "Without being differentiated at this stage, they [the women] are skillfully described in the most delicate conventional romance terms after the fashion, and according to the traditional techniques, of the fourteenth-century alliterative romances" (27). She continues, "the poet switches abruptly to a different technique, however, as the poem progresses, that of flyting, or Scottish invective verse" (27).

diction similar to that which we saw in Dunbar's poem about unindustrious courtiers. The

women pile on derogatory comments about their husbands. The first wife disdainfully

describes her reaction to his attempts at marital relations:

> Ay quhen that caribald carll wald clyme one my wambe
>
> Than am I dangerus and daine and dour of my will;
>
> 3it leit I nevir that larbar my leggis ga betueene
>
> To fyle my flesche na fummyll me without a fee gret. (131-34)
>
> [*And when that monstrous rustic would climb onto my belly, then I am*
>
> *disdainful and haughty and stubborn of my will; I never yet let that*
>
> *impotent man go between my legs to defile my flesh nor feel me sexually*
>
> *without a great fee.*]

She makes a contract for a fine headdress, gown, or ring before sexual relations begin.

She concludes by saying "And thus I sell him solace thoght I it sour think; / Fra sic a syre

God 3ow saif, my sueit sisteris deir" (144-45).[60] The second wife reiterates these

sentiments, saying that though her husband is young, he acts like an old, impotent man,

boasting of his sexual prowess but being unable to perform. Yet in spite of the crude

words that these women use, Dunbar still describes the women in courtly terms at the end

of their individual speeches. When the first wife finishes, Dunbar calls her "the semely"

(146). The second wife he calls "this amyable" (239). The contrast between the narrator's

description of the women and what they say is humorous, and it adds to the shock value

of their diction and topic. The widow receives similar attention, but rather than call the

widow fair, Dunbar calls her "eloquent" and her story "ornate speche" (505), obviously

playing on the coarseness of what his narrator has overheard. Dunbar ends the poem by

saying, "Than rais thir ryal rosis in ther riche wedis / And rakit hame to ther rest through

---

[60]Such exchange for sexual favors was, according to Eileen Bentsen and S. L.
Sanderlin, standard in representations of scheming and sexually dissatisfied wives (5).

the rise blumys" (*Then these royal roses in their rich clothes arose, and went home to their rest through the brushwood blooms*) (523-24). Despite the crude words that these women use, after such coarse talk Dunbar returns to his courtly setting, calling the women "roses" and calling attention to the contrast between the outer and inner self, courtly appearance and base speech. In Dunbar's hands, the courtly appearance of the women is superficial covering, disguising what their hearts truly hold.

Perhaps the best example of how Dunbar handles performance in the poem is the widow's description of her public performance. It is, we might say, Dunbar's indictment of the disguising practices that I have analyzed. The widow says,

Wise wemen has wayis wonderfull gydingis

With gret engyne to bejaip ther jolyus husbandis,

And quyetly with sic craft convoyis our materis

That undir Crist no creatur kennis of our doingis. (451-54)

Her dictum is clear: "Faith has a fair name bot falsheid faris beittir" (460), and she illustrates her methods with a description of how she keeps her many suitors (at least thirteen, as the widow would have us believe) interested in her: "with my fiar calling I comfort thaim all" (489). Faith is only a word; false action achieves more. Her description is grotesque, even crude, emphasizing the gap between the courtly setting of the poem and the actions she describes.[61] The best example of the widow's acting abilities is her description of how she handles multiple suitors in the same location (490-96), comforting them all with a nip on the finger, leaning back on one, touching one's foot, winking at another across the room. In this description the widow graphically illustrates her "falseheid." She is not necessarily interested in all of these men; she keeps them interested in her in order to advance her position.

---

[61]For instance, she says, "Sum stalwardly steppis ben with a stout curage / And a stif standand thing staiffis in mi neiff" [*Some boldly step up with stout desire / And thrust an erect standing thing into my hand*] (485-86).

This is not to say that *The Tretis* is *about* convention, or even that it is primarily concerned with convention. It is not. The poem presents the difference between word and deed in the women's descriptions of their activities. Most of the poem deals with misogamist and misogynist themes. The way Dunbar handles these themes is to show the contrast between "ideal beauty and ugly actuality" (Bawcutt, *Poems* 284).[62] When viewed against the backdrop of a poem like "In Secreit Place," where such a contrast reaches the foreground, and *The Merle and the Nychtingall*, where earthly/physical love is directly contrasted to and abandoned in favor of divine love, I think it is safe to say that the violation of expectations produced by the contrast between courtly setting and base actions not only exists in this poem but also contributes to Dunbar's overall tendency to separate artifice from meaning. Like much of Dunbar's love poetry, these poems criticize aspects of the court, in this case the courtly love tradition, in both literature and practice. He uses grotesque images of the body in each to pass judgment, emphasizing the difference between courtly ideal and corporeal reality. In this way, then, Dunbar brings the lofty ideal of courtly love down to earth. In "In Secreit Place" he strips the mask from the courtly lover and exposes the physical desire that exists beneath these courtship rituals. In *The Tretise* he establishes a contrast between romance setting and realistic speech and action, between the expectation prompted by polite presentation and the realistic motives and desires that lie within the hearts of people.

"For hir saek with speir and scheld": Scatology and the Tournament

Dunbar's criticism of courtly convention is not limited to individual performance or courtly sexuality. In several poems, Dunbar criticizes theatrical courtly tournaments, many of which occurred in Scotland under James IV. The tournament was an immensely

---

[62]Bawcutt calls "the relation of this natural setting to the women" "teasing and enigmatic" (*Poems* 284), calling some critics' (Speirs, Kinsley) emphasis on this aspect of the poem simplistic.

209

popular entertainment during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. However, tournaments strayed from their roots in medieval warfare, and Dunbar lampoons the tournament by debasing the courtly virility upon which the tournaments that he saw at court were based. Dunbar strips the tournament of its lofty idealism, attacking it on a number of levels: the lady of the tournament, battle heroism, and even romance, the genre associated with the tournament.

The lady played an important role in the tournament. Combatants fight for the lady, who "is winnable as symbolic reward" (Fradenburg 211). The tournament "brings men together but allows them to constitute themselves as 'men,' who fight for and who are watched by women." Knights fight to win the lady, "the incarnation of beauty" (Fradenburg 210). The lady of the tournament is present for the purpose of display and definition. The knight uses the lady as prize to establish his masculine role—theatrical and purposefully created—in the tournament. The presence of the lady is a scripted part of the virile drama of combat; she and her ability to define masculinity are the prizes.

Dunbar reverses the expected script of the tournament in "Ane Blak Moir" (33) and essentially lowers the lofty ideals of the court spectacle. The lady of his tournament is black, probably of African heritage.[63] Typically, the lady of the tournament represented beauty, but Dunbar presents ugliness. In fact, Bawcutt says that this poem is part of an antitype of poems praising beauty.[64] Rather than "ladyes quhytt"—not a comment on race but instead a comment on the whiteness associated with beauty (Bawcutt, *Poems* 351)— Dunbar "will indytt...of ane blak" lady (2), presenting us with a body not unlike the

---

[63]This poem has often been associated with James IV's tournaments of the black lady and wild knight in 1507 and 1508. Although I am not concerned with the historical reality of this poem, I think it likely that these tournaments and the poem are related, especially since the last two stanzas of the poem deal directly with a tournament.

[64]She says, "There was a long medieval tradition of praising female beauty...; this poem belongs to a less familiar sub-genre, or antitype, the description of ugliness" (*Poems* 351).

monstrous bodies I described above. This lady "is tute mowitt lyk ane aep" [*has a projecting mouth and lips, like an ape*] and "lyk a gangarall onto graep" [*like a toad to grope*] (6, 7).[65] The lady makes cat-like noises with her nose, and her complexion is black: "Schou blinkis als brycht as ane tar barrell" [*She gleams as bright as a tar barrel*] (12). She is not the ideal lady of chivalry. Dunbar here parodies typical descriptions of beauty, which tend to focus on whiteness.

But Dunbar's description is but a precursor to a further attack on chivalric ideals, for in the final two stanzas, he establishes this lady "with the mekle lippis" (*with large lips*) as the feminine prize of the tournament:

> Quhai for hir saek with speir and scheld
>
> Preiffis maest mychttelye in the feld
>
> Sall kis and with hir go in grippis,
>
> And fra thyne furth hir luff sall weld (16-19).
>
> [*Whoever for her sake with spear and shield proves most strongly in the field shall kiss and wrestle with her, and from thenceforth shall enjoy her love.*]

Dunbar does not overtly degrade the tournament or its participants. Instead, he strips the prize of its beauty. Rather than the white lady, the icon of beauty that we would expect, Dunbar gives us its opposite. The implication is that the prize simply does not matter. What really counts is spectacle and self-creation. The artifice of chivalry—jousting for a lady—is mere covering. The prize can be anything, just so long as there is a prize.

The final moment of debasement comes in the last stanza, where Dunbar talks about the loser of the tournament, and here the comic body appears in a form that will resurface in his other tournament representations:

---

[65]Bawcutt indicates that there could be a sexual connotation with *graep*, and indeed, one can find sexual undertones throughout the poem (*Poems* 352 n.7, 19).

Quhai in felde receaves schaem

And tynis thair his knychtlie naem

Sall cum behind and kis hir hippis

And nevir to uther confort claem. (21-24)

[*Whoever in the field receives shame and loses there his knightly name*

shall come behind and kiss her hips and never have claim to other

comfort.]

Dunbar leaves us with a sexual and scatological image that calls tournament practice into question. Here Dunbar sexualizes the tournament. Several phrasings in this poem have a sexual connotation: *graep*, "go in grippis," and *weld*. The final stanza brings together two comic body ingredients that I have highlighted throughout this dissertation: sexuality and scatology. Bawcutt refers the reader to *The Flyting* for an image similar to the hip-kissing in this poem: "Thy commissar Quintyne bidis the cum kis his ers" (131). We find this scatological sentiment in various places, such as the cycle drama and *Mankind*, where vice figures often call upon other characters to kiss their arse. Bawcutt relates it to the misdirected kiss, "a common humiliation in folktale and fabliau" (*Poems* 352), and Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* provides an excellent analogue. The next line of Dunbar's poem couples this sentiment with sexuality: "And nevir to uther confort claem" (24). The loser in the tournament can expect no other "confort" (another courtly term that could have a sexual connotation) than kissing the black lady's arse. The winner gets sexual favors, the loser favors of a different sort.

Scatological debasement appears in conjunction with the tournament in two other poems, both of which can be viewed as scatological parodies of the tournament: "Schir Thomas Norny" (27) and "The Turnament" in *Fasternis Evin in Hell* (52).[66] "Schir

---

[66] Dunbar's *Fasternis Evin in Hell* is a Shrovetide poem containing some of the Shrovetide festivities that I highlighted in Chapter 2 (25-27), including a focus on eating and drinking (mostly associated with Gluttony but also appearing with Covetise, who vomits money), as well as scatology, as we see in the "Turnament" section of the poem.

212

Thomas Norny" is a romance parody very similar to Chaucer's tale of Sir Thopas; it uses

"the meter, style, and formulaic diction of popular romance and outlaw balladry"

(Bawcutt, *Poems* 370).[67] Thomas Norny was apparently a servant in James IV's

household, and Dunbar describes him, at least in this poem, as a "*miles gloriosus*"

(Kinsley 300). "The Turnament" is a humorous battle between a tailor and soutar

(cobbler).[68] Both poems refer to soiled britches during tournament practices.

Scatology plays a minor part in "Schir Thomas Norny" but has an expanded role

in "The 'Turnament.'" Dunbar compares Norny to Curry, a court fool from 1495 until his

death in June 1506 (Bawcutt, *Poems* 372). Dunbar says, "3et this far furth I dar him

prais— / He fyld [*defiled*] never sadell in his dais, / And Curry befyld tua" (46-48). The

use of scatological language for criticism is not uncommon; we find it in a particularly

vivid stanza in *The Flyting*:

> Quhen that the schip was saynit and undir saile
>
> Foul brow in holl thou preposit for to pas;
>
> Thou schot, and was not sekir of thy tayle,
>
> Beschate the stere, the compass and the glas;
>
> The skippar bad ger land the at the Bas[69]:
>
> Thou spewit and kest out mony a lathly lomp
>
> Fastar than all the marynaris coud pomp. (457-63)

"The Turnament," then, could be seen as part of the wild Shrovetide celebrations found throughout Europe during the Middle Ages..

[67]The six-line tail-rhyme stanza is identical to Chaucer's in Sir Thopas.

[68]The mock tournament appears elsewhere in English poetry: Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece*, *The Tournament of Tottenham*, and Alexander Scott's "Justing and Debait," for instance.

[69]The Bass is a rock in the Firth of Forth.

213

[When the ship was blessed and under sail. you intended to pass a foul

brew in the ship's hold; you shit, and weren't able to control your tail. You

beshit the helm, the compass, and the glass; the skipper ordered to land

you at the Bass. You spewed and cast out many a horrible lump faster than

all the mariners could pump, and now your belly is worse than ever it

was.]

Here, as elsewhere in *The Flyting*, the association of scatology with a person is meant insultingly, as a form of debasement.[70] Scatology is the ultimate debasement, associated as it is with evil.[71] It is the ultimate lowering of the lofty. Stating that Norny never fouled his saddle is simply saying that Norny is not as low as Curry, who fouled two. It is definitely not praise.

Dunbar takes expulsion—vomiting and scatology—to extremes in "The Tournament," going far beyond its use in "Schir Thomas Norny." Here, the combatants are unable to fight because they are so frightened that they vomit and defecate all over the battlefield and spectators. In fact, their main weapons are bodily emissions, since they are unable to strike blows due to their excessive fear. The fear-induced emissions begin when the tailor first sees the cobbler: "In harte he tuke ȝit sic ane scunner / Ane rak of fartis lyk ony thunner / Went fra him, blast for blast" [*In heart he took yet such a loathing, / A crash of farts like any thunder / Went from him, blast for blast*] (154-56). The cobbler reacts similarly, though from the opposite end of the gastro-intestinal tract. Upon seeing the tailor, "In to his stommok wes sic ane steir, / Off all his dennar quhilk he coft deir /

---

[70]*The Flyting* employs scatology in many places. See, for instance, the stanza immediately following this one (465-72) but also brief references at 55-56 (where Dunbar compares Kennedy's verse to the sound of a fart), 195 (where Dunbar accuses his rival of passing worms), and 200 (where Dunbar says that Kennedy's hips do not allow his hose to go dry).

[71]Dante's place for destroyers of language, for instance, is filled with dung, and medieval art often illustrates Satan as eating sinners and passing them into hell.

His breist held deill a bitt" [*In his stomach was such a commotion / From all his dinner which he bought dearly / His breast held not a bit.*](172-74). He vomits, and when his patron, the devil, attempts to comfort him by knighting him, "he about the Devillis nek / did spew agane ane quart of blek" [*about the Devil's neck he did spew again a quart of vomit*] (178-79). When the combatants first come together, the tailor "left his sadall all beschittin" (191), which places him as equal to Curry, who left two saddles in the same condition. The sound of the tailor and his armor clattering to the ground spooks the cobbler's horse, which bolts back toward the Devil, who fears a repeat dousing by the cobbler; in self-defense, the Devil

> turnd his ers and all bedret him
>
> Evin quyte from nek till heill
>
> He lowsit it of with sic a reird,
>
> Baith hors and man he straik till eird,
>
> He fartit with sic ane feir. (203-207)
>
> [*He turned his arse and all beshit him; Paid back evenly from neck to heel. He loosed it off with such a noise, Both horse and man he struck to the earth He farted with such violence.*]

The demonic associations of excremental humor are explicit here, though they have seldom been far from the surface in any of Dunbar's scatological or emetic passages.

In the final stanza, the narrator re-enters the poem, offering us his reaction to the scatological action as he closes the frame of the dream vision. He claims that he would have written more, "Had nocht the sowtar bene beschittin / With Belliallis ers unblist" (218-19). Neither the action nor the noise of the Devil's fart awakens the narrator. Rather, he is roused by the sound of his own laughter, a bodily sign that he has found the whole scene entertaining:

> Bot that sa gud ane bourd me thocht,
>
> Sic solace to my hairt it rocht,

For lawchtir neir I brist;

Quhairthrow I walknit of my trance. (220-23)

[*But that so good a jest it seemed to me, such solace to my heart it made,*

for laughter I nearly burst, on account of which I awakened from my

dream.]

Dunbar's narrator laughs so hard at the spectacle that he awakens himself from his dream. The base, bodily actions in the poem contrast sharply with the subject in ways very similar to how action and rhetoric clash in "In Secreit Place." The mock tournament is obviously meant to provoke laughter and entertainment rather than wonder at heroic deeds, as we might expect from the setting.

"Ane Blak Moir," "Schir Thomas Norny," and "The Turnament" all perform a similar function. They parody the chivalric tournament in ways similar to the poems in which Dunbar debased the conventions of *amour courtois*. The use of scatology, brief in "Ane Blak Moir" and "Norny" but extensive in "The Turnament," demeans a social practice that was popular in the courts of Europe. The tournament was by the sixteenth century a form of theater, and Dunbar acknowledges this theatrical aspect by lampooning the feminine prize and the chivalric courage of the tournament, and possibly even the kind of lordly or royal patronage that sponsored tournaments as well as other courtly practices. Dunbar's image of the tournament does not correspond to the chivalric ideal that was presented in tournaments of the time. The lavish displays and theatrics that we find in actual tournaments give way in Dunbar's poetry to clumsy scatology and anti-prizes. Yet despite the extent to which he parodies and criticizes social practices, Dunbar does not limit his parodic talents to the physically embodied, social realm. He also parodies serious literary and societal forms, altering the diction and topic of a serious literary genre to produce a comic document that reveals the inextricable intertwining of literary form and social practice, and that will return us to the goliardic world in which this dissertation began its explorations of the comic body.

"Corpus meum ebriosum": Dunbar's Parody

Dunbar also parodied serious literary forms in ways that echo some of the goliardic texts that I discussed in Chapter 2, such as the drinkers' mass.[72] His "Dregy of Dunbar Maid to King James" (22) is a parody of the liturgy, including the titles *lectio* and *responsorium* and using the structure and diction from the office of the dead to petition James to return to Edinburgh from Stirling, casting the former as idyllic paradise and the latter as a place of stark, monastic denial.[73] However, I will here focus on another poem—"The Testament of Maister Andro Kennedy." This poem takes as its model the last will and testament and is part of the tradition of drinking parody that I discussed in Chapter 2.[74] The parodic nature of the poem, coupled with its bodily humor and relationship to the Archpoet's *Estuans intrinsicus*, makes this poem one of the most important in the Dunbar corpus for my purposes, for it combines the parodic practices I have already discussed with the comic, corporeal debasement of a court figure and elevated form.

The poem closely follows the last will and testament form. Julia Boffey describes a typical formula for the testament. Nearly all wills open with a statement of identity: "I,

---

[72]For discussions of Dunbar's parody, see Bawcutt, "Text and Context in Middle Scots Poetry," Elizabeth Roth Eddy, "Sir Thopas and Sir Thomas Norny: Romance Parody in Chaucer and Dunbar," and Elizabeth Archibald, "William Dunbar and the Medieval Tradition of Parody."

[73]Dunbar's comparison is reminiscent of the utopian comparison between paradise and Cokaygne in *The Land of Cokaygne*. Dunbar says that at Edinburgh one can "eit swan, cran, pertrik and plever / And every fische that swymis in rever" (51-52) and that Edinburgh has good wine to drink. Stirling, on the other hand, offers no meat to eat or wine to drink (11-12). See my discussion of *The Land of Cokaygne* above (56).

[74]The testament form was a popular genre during the Middle Ages. Henryson's *Testament of Cressid* includes an example. Parodies of testaments were also popular. Walther von der Vogelweide, Deschamps, and Jean Regnier wrote parodic testaments. The best known parodic testaments are probably Villon's *Les Lais* and *Le Testament*. For more on the genre, see W. H. Rice, *The European Ancestry of Villon's Satirical Testaments* and Eber Carle Perrow, "The Last Will and Testament as a Form of Literature." For a parodic testament, see Guiseppe Scalia, "Il 'Testamentum Asini' e il lamento della lepre." Janet M. Smith says that Dunbar's poem "belongs not to the class of long elaborate self-revealing poems like Villon's, but rather to the humorous songs of the Goliards" (66).

Richard Dixton, squyer..." (*Wills* 108). Then the testator affirms his mental health,

bequeaths his or her soul to God and body to a particular place for burial. Dunbar's poem

begins similarly, with the announcement of the speaker: "I maister Andro Kennedy" (1).

Dunbar inserts a short bit about Kennedy's diabolic lineage (3-8)[75] and then announces,

"Nunc condo testamentum meum" [*Now I write my testament*] (17), after which follows a

direct parody of the testament formula:

> I leiff my saull for evirmare
>
> *Per omnipotentem Deum*
>
> Into my lordis wyne cellar,
>
> *Semper ibi ad remanendum*
>
> Quhill domisday without dissever
>
> *Bonum vinum ad bibendum* (18-23)
>
> [*I leave my soul for evermore, through almighty God, into my lord's wine*
>
> *cellar, to remain there always, until doomsday without separation, good*
>
> *wine for the drinking.*]

Rather than leave his soul to God, Kennedy leaves it to the wine cellar. The move

violates expectations raised by the testament form, which was a serious spiritual and legal

document. From this point forward, the poem is reminiscent of the parodic practices that I

discussed in Chapter 2, especially the parodic masses and goliardic poetry. In a sentiment

similar to the Archpoet's, Kennedy says,

> *Quia in cellario cum cervisa*
>
> I had lever lye baith air and lait

---

[75]Although my main concern here is with Dunbar's parody, the presentation of a
diabolic lineage here is related to how Dunbar criticizes other courtiers. For instance, like
Damian, Kennedy is presented in diabolic terms, though Damian is a demonic
inseminator, whereas Kennedy is the offspring of demons.

Nudus solus in camesia

Na in my lordis bed of stait. (29-32)

[*Because I would rather lie both early and late in the cellar with beer,*

alone naked in my shirt, than in my lord's bed of estate].

He continues along the same vein, saying that he has no more use for the world's goods.

He will leave his body, "A barrel bung ay at my bosum / Corpus meum ebriosum" [*my*

drunken body] (33-34), to the town of Ayr, where he wishes to be buried. Leaving the

body to a specific place for burial is typical of the testament form.[76] However, Dunbar

has Kennedy add the drinking theme to this statement, again making the testament into a

drinking song and implying that though the form may be worthy, the person behind it is

not.

Kennedy's wishes for his burial are close to the Archpoet's sentiments about

death. The Archpoet, we might recall, says, "My intention is to die in the tavern so that

the wines are nearest to the mouth of the dead. Then choirs of angels will sing more

joyfully: 'May God be gracious to this drinker.'"[77] Dunbar has Kennedy say, "In a draf

mydding for evir and ay / *Ut ibi sepeliri queam* / Be cassyne *super faciem meam*" [*In a*

brewery refuse heap for ever and always so that there I could be buried where drink and

malt-refuse may each day be thrown over my face] (37-40). Dunbar adds the drinking

theme to the testament form. Here, like the Archpoet, who wants to have wine near his

mouth, Kennedy wants to be buried in the brewery refuse heap so that beer can be poured

over him continually. It is absurd, of course, but the absurdity helps to make the parody

and criticism obvious.

---

[76]Nearly all wills include bequeathing the body to a specific place. See Frederick
J. Furnivall's *Fifty Earliest English Wills* for examples. For instance, the will of Sir
Thomas Brook, who died in 1439, states, "More-ouer hit is my will that my body be
buryd yn the north yle of the chirch of Thornecoumbe" (129).

[77]Meum est propositum in taberna mori: / ut sint vina proxima morientis ori. /
Tunc cantabunt letius angelorum chori: / sit deus propitius huic potatori." (12). See my
discussion of this poem in Chapter 2, 47-49.

219

Dunbar's aim here, though humorous, is similar to what he does in the other poems discussed in this chapter. In parodying a popular form, Dunbar calls attention to the artificial, formulaic nature of testaments, perhaps questioning the authenticity of the person behind the formula. He burlesques the death service (105ff.), and in ways very similar to the parodic mass discussed above (34-37), parodies the serious testament genre by converting it into a drinking song. However, his parodic creation is not "a study in blasphemy" (Reiss 58). Instead, as Scott says, "it is yet another variation on the theme of 'Mihi est propositum in taberna mori,' but given a new turn by its application to a real person" (225). And it "is a rueful shrug at death, asserting the philosophy of the 'sensual man in the street,' the 'ordinary' man—let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" (Scott 226).[78] It contrasts sharply with "Timor mortis conturbat me" precisely because it is a comic view of death and dying. And though parody is a comic genre, it can be used as a form of criticism and often is humorously critical of the parodic model.

The parodic nature of this poem has been acknowledged. What interests me more than its link to the Archpoet or its parody is its link to the court that it represents. All of the poems I have addressed in this chapter take as their subject the court and, in some way, lower the lofty ideals of the courtly subject by means of the comic body. This poem is no different. Andro Kennedy was probably an actual court figure.[79] The testament form can also be seen as a courtly form, or at least a form familiar to the members of the court, for it required access to writing and the accumulation of wealth in order to make its composition a worthwhile endeavor. By having Kennedy reveal his drunkenness through

---

[78]Although Scott's comments on this poem are useful, I resist his idea that the mixing of Scots with Latin "is also a sign of rising nationalism against the supra-national feudal state of 'Christendom'" (227). To me, such an interpretation is reading too much into the poem.

[79]In "William Dunbar, Andro and Walter Kennedy, and Hary's *Wallace*," Alasdair A. MacDonald identifies Andro Kennedy as a physician who appears in records between 1501 and 1503.

the serious document form of the testament, Dunbar makes a joke at the expense of the court servant by bringing to bear on his behavior the moral and institutional practices and values implied by a document focused on death and judgment. Yet, as Scott suggests, Kennedy's unrepentant hedonism may well in its turn call into question the institutional practices and values embodied in the same documentary form. The parodic testament had become a common form by Dunbar's day, especially in France. So testaments were formulaic enough for their sincerity to be questioned easily, which is part of the effect of Dunbar's comic testament.

The set of poems discussed here in no way represents all of Dunbar's poetry or even the complexity of his attitudes toward the court. All of these poems use the body to criticize, often humorously, court practices. The performative and theatrical aspect of patronage and court entertainment figures into these poems, for Dunbar often points out the contrast between appearance and reality. The courtier was expected to perform according to a courtly code, disguising many aspects of the individual and performing as the court environment expected him to. The set of poems I have addressed all concern some element of disguise, which hides truth behind artifice. Dunbar reserves his most severe criticism for those court servants who at heart are monsters but present an agreeable appearance at court. But he also criticizes polite courtship as flowery rhetoric that hides sexual desire and the chivalric, theatrical tournament that emphasizes display, pomp, and show over battle prowess. Dunbar recognizes that people create roles for themselves on the court stage, but he also recognizes that when the outward show hides contradictory desires the creation of roles can be detrimental to the common weal. Although not as directly related to performance as the other poems addressed here, his parody of the testament form indicates that the parodic model—the last will and testament—is so formulaic that it ceases to have true meaning beyond the distribution of goods. So in this

sense, performance is still an aspect of Dunbar's criticism; Andro Kennedy is, at heart, a drunkard whose only care is alcohol.

In highlighting the group of poems that I have discussed, I do not mean to pigeonhole Dunbar solely as a parodist or social critic. This group of poems illustrates one important aspect of Dunbar's poetry: social criticism. Dunbar's topics and styles were diverse. When he uses the comic body, he also tends to criticize his poetic subject and at times the conventional language by which his poetic subject was represented. The influence of courtly performance and court entertainment is strong in these poems. Dunbar comically debases his courtly subject, certainly entertaining his audience, but also pointing out serious problems with the court. By using the comic body for social criticism, Dunbar anticipates Jonson, Swift, and other satirists who also deploy the body in attacking the objects of their ire.

Epilogue: Directions for Future Study

In this dissertation I have presented an introduction to how medieval writers use the comic body. I have looked at particular uses of the comic body—entertainment, instruction, and social criticism. In doing so, I have also concentrated on four types of bodily humor—ingestion, slapstick, sexuality, and scatology. My method, based on practice theory as developed by Bourdieu and de Certeau, places literature in a social practice context. In this view literature is one of many social practices. The comic body is a literary practice, and it often represents social practices.

The Land of Cokaygne and the parodic practices that I have associated with it present the comic body primarily for entertainment. It participates in wish-fulfillment practices by making available aspects of life that in reality are either scarce or forbidden. These practices have a social element to them in that they were tolerated, even fostered, by authority, probably for their entertainment value and the social harmony that would result from recreation. But their primary purpose is entertainment: to give people something at which to laugh.

Although definitely entertaining, William Langland employs the comic body to enhance his moral message. In portraying Gluttony and inappropriate sexual desire as ridiculous and laughable, he teaches a valuable lesson about moderation and excess. His representations draw upon numerous practices associated with harvest yields, the social aspect of Gluttony, marriage, and ideas about the elderly. His portrayals of Gluton in the tavern and the impotent Will are funny, but the function of that humor is to further Langland's moral message, making the comic body a didactic tool.

Medieval drama contains a balance of entertainment and instruction. Plays were popular forms of entertainment, and the event of a performance was often festive. Many plays contain scripted bodily humor, while others could easily be embellished with humor drawn from familiar cultural constructs like the battle of the sexes or the *senex*

amans. However, medieval drama also almost always teaches a lesson, using entertainment to help teach. Entertainment and instruction tend to exist in medieval drama as purposes unto themselves, contributing to but never overshadowing each other.

Social criticism is the final use of the comic body that I discuss here, and this use I illustrate with William Dunbar's court poems. Dunbar draws upon court practices emphasizing disguise and acting—the creation of the role of courtier, dramatic entertainments like tournaments, and even highly formalized documents—to illustrate that disguise—be it a mask, a feigned attitude, or rhetoric—can cover more sinister motivations and personalities. He criticizes selfish courtiers whose primary purpose at court is self-advancement, courtly love conventions, which he identifies as covering physical desire, and the dramatic tournament, which he recognizes as having little to do with actual combat and much to do with dramatic performance. In addition, Dunbar parodies a popular form—the last will and testament—in ways similar to the drinkers' mass that I discussed in Chapter 2. The combination of replacing key words and phrases in the testament with counterparts relating to drunkenness and placing a named personality in the text presents criticism of both the document form and the individual, making this parody different in character from the parodic practices that I discussed in Chapter 2.

I draw three main conclusions from my analyses. First, in its delicious variety of representations, the comic body rarely functions as entertainment alone. Entertainment is its initial purpose, for comedy necessarily amuses; that is one of the primary functions of humor. In making an audience laugh, the comic body produces pleasure, but often we find writers employing bodily humor for other purposes. Frequently when we look below the hilarious surface we will find social commentary of some sort, be that moral edification, scriptural lesson, social criticism, or a call to action. Even in television

cartoons social commentary frequently resides just beneath the comic surface.[1] There is a close link between comic and serious: the one does not exist without the other. So the entertainment factor of the comic body frequently exists on a continuum with more serious purposes.

Another conclusion stemming from my analysis is that the comic body is rarely subversive, although it is often accused of being so. Bakhtin's assertions about conflicting ideologies, one serious and one comic, are more creative wish-fulfillment about his own situation than a reality of the medieval or Renaissance world. It is clear from the purposes to which this material was put that bodily humor more often than not upheld the dominant social and political positions and merely provided an interlude, the return from which may actually have strengthened the position of Church and state, since normalizing a return from a play world implies that the play world should be temporary.

Finally, the play world or world-set-apart exists in some form in almost all of the works that I have analyzed, and I believe that it is safe to say that when the comic body is present, a play world tends to exist. All literature, of course, can be considered a play world, having a set beginning and end. But beyond those boundaries, we have other limits. Cokaygne, for example, is depicted as a land outside of the known world. The festivals I discussed are all presented as interludes—days when normal activities are suspended in favor of those of the festival. Likewise, *Piers Plowman* is, first, a dream vision, which is always set off from the world of earnest and always has its own conventions. Second, Gluton's drunken antics occur in the tavern, a play world of sorts. But, interesting enough, the violation of the play world—represented by Beton diverting Gluton from his trip to confession and by Repentance's need to come to Gluton—

---

[1]The cable television show *Southpark* comes to mind. At the end of each episode, one of the characters steps forward with the line "I've learned something from all of this" and then states the lesson. But behind that, the comic representations frequently veil serious social commentary.

illustrates a powerful point about play worlds: they need a strictly controlled environment. Play world activities have no place outside of the play world. Medieval drama exists within the play world of performance, and even Dunbar's poems tend to exist within a play world. Many are dream visions and some have the frame of an overheard conversation, all of which present the reader with a set beginning and end. The comic body tends to occupy a play world in the works that I have presented here.

This dissertation has been an introduction to the uses of the comic body in a very narrow sense. I have not attempted to be comprehensive in any aspect of my analysis. Further investigation will show that writers use the comic body for other purposes, some subsets of the purposes outlined here, others completely different. Likewise, I have chosen the categories of bodily humor presented here—ingestion, slapstick, sexuality, and scatology—because they happen to coincide with the uses I wanted to discuss, not because they are all or even dominant types of bodily humor. These are representative examples, no more.

My hope is that this initial analysis of a prevalent comic literary practice will serve as a starting point for several future studies. Although Chambers has given the scholar an excellent tool for analyzing festive occasions, his work, nearing the century mark, did not have the valuable resources of REED or the theoretical development of practice and performance studies, all of which I believe can greatly enhance our understanding of festivals and performances. A study of medieval performance in all of its rich varieties, taking advantage of recently edited records and new critical approaches, will serve students and scholars of not only drama but also poetry, literature in general, philosophy, history of theology, and history. Likewise, diachronic studies of any of the four types or three uses of bodily humor that I have highlighted would prove useful for literary students and scholars.

The comic body in medieval English and Scottish literature is a dynamic comic device. It always entertains and is frequently used for purposes other than entertainment.

By the time of Chaucer it was already a familiar comic device in English and Scottish literature, and it continues to be popular in the final year of the twentieth century. The comic body presents the human body, its functions, and its frailty to entertain, to instruct, and to criticize, but most of all, to make us laugh.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
The Drinkers Mass: Text and Translation

Incipit MIssa de potatoribus. [1]

V^a. Introibo ad altare Bachi. *R*. Ad eum qui letificat cor hominis.

Confiteor reo Bacho omnepotanti, et reo vino coloris rubei, et omnibus ciphis ejus, et vobis potatoribus, me nimis gulose potasse per nimiam nauseam rei Bachi dei mei potatione, sternutatione, ocitatione maxima, mea crupa, mea maxima crupa. Ideo precor beatissimum Bachum, et omnes ciphos ejus, et vos fratres potatores, ut potetis pro me ad dominum reum Bachum, ut misereatur mei. Misereatur vestri ciphipotens Bachus, et permittat vos perdere omnia vestimenta vestra, et perducat vos ad majorem tabernam, qui bibit et potat per omnia pocula poculorum, Stramen. Crapulanciam et absorbutionem et perditionem omnium vestimentorum vestrorum tribuat vobis ciphipotens Bachus, per talem decium dominum nostrum, Stramen. Deus tuus conversus letificabis nos. Et plebs tua potabitur in te. Ostende nobis, domine, letitiam tuam. Et perditionem vestimentorum da nobis. Dolus vobiscum. Et cum gemitu tuo, Potemus. *Oratio*.

Aufer a nobis quesumus, Bache, cuncta vestimenta nostra, ut ad taberna poculorum nudis corporibus mereamur introire per omnia pocula poculorum, Stramen. *Introitus*.

Lugeamus omnes in decio, diem mestum deplorantes sub honore quadrati decii, de cujus jactatione plangunt miseri et perjurant filium dei. *V*. Beati qui habitant in taberna tua, Bache, et meditabitur ibi die ac nocte. *V'*. Gloria potori et filio Londri. Asiot, Ambisasiot, treisasiot, quinsiot, quinsasiot, sinasiot, quernisiot, quernisasiot, deusasiot. *V'*. Dolus vobiscum. Et cum gemitu tuo. Potemus. *Oratio*.

---

[1] The Latin text is reprinted from the edition in *Reliquiae Antiquae*, Vol. II, 208-10.

Deus qui multitudinem rusticorum ad servitium clericorum venire fecisti et militum, et inter nos et ipsos discordiam seminasti, da nobis quesumus de eorum laboribus vivere, et eorum uxoribus uti, et de mortificatione eorum gaudere, per dominum nostrum reum Bachum, qui bibit et poculat per omnia pocula poculorum. Stramen.... tuum apurtatricum.?

In diebus nullis, multitudinis bibentium erat cor unum et omnia communia, nec quisquam eorum quod possidebat suum esse dicebat. Sed qui vendebat spolia, afferebat ante pedes potatorum, et erant illis omnia communia. Et erat quidam Londrus nomine, pessimus potator, qui accommodabat potatoribus ad ludum prout vestis valebat. Et sic faciebat lucra et dampna e poculo. Et eicientes eum extra tabernam lapidabant. Dejectio autem fiebat vestimentorum ejus, et dividebatur potatio unicuique prout opus erat. R. Jacta cogitatum tuum in decio, et ipse te destruet. V'. Ad dolium enim potatorem inebriavit me. Asiat, asiat. V'. Rorate ciphi desuper, et nubes pluant mustum, aperiatur terra et germinet potatorem. Dolus vobiscum. Et cum gemitu tuo. Frequentia falsi ewangelii secundum Bachum. Fraus tibi, rustice. In illo turbine. S'. Bachum.

In verno tempore, potatores loquebantur ad invicem, dicentes, Transeamus usque ad tabernam, et videamus hoc verbum quod dictum est de dolio hoc. Intrantes autem tabernam, invenerunt tabernariam et tres talos positos in disco. Gustantes autem de mero hoc, cognoverunt quia verum erat quod dictum fuerat illis de dolio hoc. Et omnes qui ibi aderant inebriati sunt de hiis quae data fuerant a potatoribus ad ipsos. Tabernaria autem contemplabat vestes eorum, conferens in corde suo si valerent. Et denudati sunt potatores glorificantes Bachum, et maledicentes decium. Dolus vobiscum. Et cum gemitu tuo. Potemus. Off. Ciphi evacuant copiam Bachi, et os potatorum nauseant usque ad fundamentum. Non cantatur sanctus, nec agnus dei, sed pax detur cum gladiis et fustibus. Pater noster qui es in ciphis, sanctificetur vinum istud. Adveniat Bachi potus, fiat tempestas tua sicut in vino et in taberna, panem nostrum ad devorandum da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis pocula magna sicut et nos dimittimus potatoribus nostris, et ne nos

induces in vini temptationem, sed libera nos a vestimento. Co. Gaudent animae potatorum, qui Bachi vestigia sunt secuti, et quia pro ejus amore vestes suas perdiderunt, imo cum Bacho in vini dolium. Dolus vobiscum. Et cum gemitu tuo. Potemus. Oratio.

Deus, qui tres quadratos decios. . lx^a iij^{us}. oculis illuminasti, tribue nobis quesumus, ut nos qui vestigia eorum sequimur, jactatione quadrati decii a nostris pannis exuamur. per d. Dolus vobiscum, etc. Ite bursa vacua. Reo gratias.

The Drinkers' Mass: Translation

Here begins the mass of the drinkers.

V^a. I will go in to the altar of Bacchus. R. To him who rejoices the heart of man.

I confess to the all-drinking culprit Bacchus, and the accursed red wine, and to all his dishes, and to you drinkers, that I have drunk most excessively gluttonously through great sickness of the culprit Bacchus my god with gulping, with snorting, with greatest speed, through my vat, through my most grievous vat. Therefore I pray the most blessed Bacchus, and all his dishes, and you brother drinkers, that you will drink for me to the lord culprit Bacchus, so that he will pity me. May cup-powerful Bacchus have mercy on you, and permit you to lose all your clothes, and lead you to the great tavern, he who drinks and gulps through all the cups of cups, Strawmen. May cup-powerful Bacchus grant you intoxication and devouring, and the loss of all your clothes, through Decius our lord, Strawmen. Thy god will turn, and bring us rejoicing. And your people shall be drinking in you. Show us, O Lord, your joy. And grant us the loss of our clothes. Fraud be with you. And with your groaning. Let us drink. *Oratio*.

Take away from us all of our clothes, we implore you, Bacchus, that with naked bodies we may be worthy to enter to the tavern of cups through all the cups of cups, Strawmen. *Introitus*.

Let us all lament in the die, bewailing the mournful day in honor of the square die, at whose throwing the wretched complain and slander the son of God. V'. Blessed are they who live in thy tavern, Bacchus, and he shall meditate there day and night. V'. Glory to the drinker and to the son of Londrus. It's an ace. It's two-ace. It's three-ace. It's five. It's five-ace. It's six-ace. It's four. It's four-ace. It's two-ace. V'. Fraud be with you. And with thy groaning. Let us drink. *Oratio*.

O God, who made the multitude of rustics come to the service of clerics and knights, and between us and them sowed discord, grant us, we pray, to live from their

labors, and use their wives, and rejoice in their mortification, through our lord culprit Bacchus, who drinks and quaffs through all the cups without end. Strawmen. *tuum apurtatricum?*[2]

On no days, there was but one heart to the multitude of drinkers, and all was held in common, neither did any of them say that what he possessed was his own. But he who was selling the spoils, would bring them before the feet of the drinkers, and to them all things were common. And there was a certain Londrus by name, the worst drinker, he who prepared drinkers for play according as the clothing was worth it. And so he made profits and losses from the cup. And casting him forth from the tavern, they stoned him. The throwing off of his garments was done, and the drink was divided each according to his need. Throw your thought on the die, and it will destroy you itself. For he inebriated me, the drinker, at the jug. It's an ace, it's an ace. Rain down from above dishes, and let the clouds rain unfermented wine, let the earth be opened and sprout forth a drinker. Fraud be with you. And with thy groaning. The frequency of the false gospel according to Bacchus. Fraud be with you, rustic. In that spinning. *S.' Bachum.*

In spring time, drinkers said to one another, "Let us go over to the tavern, and let us see the word that is said concerning this jar." And entering the tavern they found the hostess and three dice lying in the dish. And tasting from this pure wine, they understood that it was true what had been spoken to them concerning this cask. And all that were there were inebriated by those things that were told them by the drinkers. But the hostess considered their clothes, pondering them in her heart, if they might be valuable. And the drinkers were stripped, glorifying Bacchus, and cursing the die. Fraud be with you. And with thy groaning. Let us drink. *Off.* The dishes pour forth the abundance of Bacchus, and nauseate the mouth of the drinkers all the way to the bottom. The Sanctus is not sung, nor the Agnus Dei, but let the kiss of peace be given with swords and cudgels. Our Father,

---

[2]Unclear to the original editor.

233

who art in dishes, hallowed be that wine. May the cup of Bacchus come, may thy storm be done in wine as it is in the tavern, give us this day our bread for the devouring, and forgive us our great cups as we forgive our drinkers, and lead us not into temptation of wine, but deliver us from our clothing. *Co.* May the souls of drinkers rejoice, who followed the footsteps of Bacchus, and because they destroyed their clothes for his love, indeed with Bacchus in a jar of wine. Fraud be with you, and with thy groaning. Let us drink. *Oratio.*

O God, who hast illuminated three squared dice, with 63 eyes, grant us we pray, that we who follow their footsteps, by rolling the squared die may be stripped of our clothes. Through our lord.... Fraud be with you, etc. Go, the purse is empty. Thanks be to the culprit.

Appendix B
Goliardic Poems

1. Olim lacus colueram,
olim pulcher exstiteram,
dum cygnus ego fueram.
            miser! miser!
      Refl. Modo niger
            et ustus fortiter!

Eram nive candidior,
quavis ave formosior;
modo sum corvo nigrior.
            miser! miser!
      Refl. Modo niger ...

Me rogus urit fortiter,
gyrat, regyrat garcifer;
propinat me nunc dapifer.
            miser! miser!
      Refl. Modo niger ...

Mallem in aquis vivere,
nudo semper sub aere,
quam in hoc mergi pipere.
            miser! miser!
      Refl. Modo niger ...

Nunc in scutella iaceo
et volitare nequeo;
dentes fredentes video—
            miser! miser!
      Refl. Modo niger ...

2. Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis
et consilium meum est cum bibulis
et in secta Decii voluntas mea est,
et qui mane me quesierit in taberna,
post vesperam nudus egredietur
et sic denudatus veste clamabit:
      "wafna, wafna!
      quid fecisti, sors turpissima!
      nostre vite gaudia
      abstulisti omnia."

1. Once I inhabited a lake
Once I was beautiful
When I was a swan.
            O miserable! O miserable!
            Now black
            and well-charred.

I was whiter
Than any more beautiful bird
I am now blacker than a raven.
            O miserable! O miserable!
            now black ...

The pyre will burn me strongly
The waiter turns me, wheels me around;
now the waiter sets me out.
            O miserable! O miserable!
            now black...

I would rather live in water
Always below the naked air,
than drowned in this pepper.
            O miserable! O miserable!
            now black...

Now I lie in the platter
and I cannot fly;
I see teeth gnashing—
            O miserable! O miserable!
            now black...

2. I am the abbot of Cokaygne
And my counsel is with the drinkers
My will is in the sect of Decius,
And he who will seek me in the tavern in the morning
Will come forth naked after vespers
And, stripped of clothes, will cry thus:
"Alas! Alas!
            What have you done, most disgraceful fortune?
All joys of our life
You have taken away!"

WORKS CITED

Works Cited

Primary Sources

The Abbot of Gloucester's Feast. Reliquiae Antiquae. Ed. Thomas Wright and James
    Orchard Halliwell. Vol. 1. New York: AMS, 1966. 140-44.

Adams, Joseph Quincy, ed. *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas.* Boston: Houghton
    Mifflin, 1952.

Adcock, Fleur, ed. and trans. *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP,
    1994.

Archpoet of Cologne. *Estuans intrinsecus. Medieval Latin Lyrics.* Ed. Penelope Rainey.
    Vol. 2. Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr Commentaries, 1993. 37-49.

Augustine. *De civitate dei. Patrologia Latina* 41. Ed. J. P. Migne. Paris, 1845.

Bacon, Roger. *De retardatione accidentium senectutis cum aliis opusculis de rebus*
    medicinalibus. Ed. A. G. Little and E. Withington. Oxford: Clarendon, 1928.

Holy Bible. Douay-Rheims Version. Chicago, 1912.

Biblia Sacra. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Decameron.* Trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella. New
    York: Mentor, 1982.

The Book of Vices and Virtues. Ed. W. Nelson Francis. EETS os 217. London: Oxford
    UP, 1942.

Breul, Karl, ed. *The Cambridge Songs: A Goliard's Song Book of the XIth Century.*
    Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1915.

Carmina Burana. Ed. Alfons Hilka and Otto Schumann. 2 vols. Heidelberg: Carl
    Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1930.

Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of the Courtier.* Trans. Sir Thomas Hoby. New York:
    AMS, 1967.

The Castle of Perseverance. The Macro Plays 185-202.

Caxton, William. *The Book of Curtesye.* Ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. EETS es 3. 1868.
    Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1973.

Cervantes, Miguel. *Don Quixote*. Trans. J. M. Cohen. Middlesex: Penguin, 1986.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

"The Cherry Tree Carol." *Medieval English Literature*. Ed. J. B. Trapp. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. 429.

The Chester Mystery Cycle. Ed. R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills. EETS ss 3. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.

"A Cleric Courts His Lady." Davies 59-62.

Colkelbie Sow. Colkelbie Sow *and* The Talis of the Fyve Bestes. Ed. Gregory Kratzmann. New York: Garland, 1983. 53-86.

Cross, Tom Peete, and Clark Harris Slover, ed. and trans. *Ancient Irish Tales*. New York: Holt, 1936.

Dante. *Purgatorio*. Ed. and trans. John D. Sinclair. New York: Oxford UP, 1970.

Davies, R. T., ed. *Medieval English Lyrics*. Chicago: Northwestern UP, 1964.

Dit is van dat edele land van Cockaengen. Ed. Veikko Väänänen. "Le 'fabliau' de Cocagne: Le Motif du pays d'abondance dans le folklore occidental." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 48 (1947): 3-37.

Dives and Pauper. Ed. Priscilla Heath Barnum. EETS os 275, 280. London: Oxford UP, 1976.

Dunbar, William.*The Poems of William Dunbar*. Ed. Priscilla Bawcutt. 2 vols. Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1998.

---. *The Poems of William Dunbar*. Ed. David Laing. 2 vols. Edinburgh, 1865.

---. *The Poems of William Dunbar*. Ed. James Kinsley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1979.

---. *The Poems of William Dunbar*. Ed. J. S. Schipper. Vienna: Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1894.

Le Fabliau de Cocagne. Ed. Veikko Väänänen. "Le 'fabliau' de Cocagne: Le Motif du pays d'abondance dans le folklore occidental." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 48 (1947): 3-37.

Fifty Earliest English Wills. Ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. 1882. EETS os 78. London: Oxford UP, 1964.

"The Fraternity of Drinkers." Ed. Rossell Hope Robbins. *Studies in Philology* 47 (1950): 35-41.

Gammer Gurton's Needle. *Four Tudor Comedies*. Ed. William Tydeman. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984. 211-88.

Gerard, John. *The Herbal or General History of Plants*. New York: Dover, 1975.

Gower, John. *The Complete Works of John Gower*. Ed. G. C. Macaulay. 4 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1899-1902.

---. *Mirour de l'Omme*. Trans. William Burton Wilson. East Lansing: Colleagues, 1992.

Grosseteste, Robert. "Bp. Grossetest's Household Statutes." *The Babees Book*. Ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. EETS os 32, 1868. New York: Greenwood, 1969. 328-31.

Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. *The Romance of the Rose*. Trans. Charles Dahlberg. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983.

Hoby, Sir Thomas, trans. *The Book of the Courtier*. New York: AMS, 1967.

"Jankin, the Clerical Seducer." Davies 162-63.

Langland, William. *Piers Plowman: The B Version*. 2 vols. Ed. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson. London: Athlone, 1975.

---. *Piers Plowman: The C Version*. Ed. George Russell and George Kane. London: Athlone, 1997.

The Life of Saint Anne. Ed. Roscoe E. Parker. EETS os 174. London: Oxford UP, 1928.

The Macro Plays. Ed. Mark Eccles. EETS es 91. London: Oxford UP, 1969.

Mankind. The Macro Plays 153-84.

Mankind. Dir. William G. Marx. Michigan State University Campus. 1976.

Mannyng, Robert. *Handlyng Synne*. Ed. Idelle Sullens. Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983.

Mapes, Walter. *The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes*. Ed. Thomas Wright. London: John Bowyer Nichols, 1841.

Mary Magdalene. Medieval Drama. Ed. David Bevington. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975. 687-753.

Maximianus. *Maximiani Elegiae. Poetae Latini Minores*. Ed. Aemilius Baehrens. Vol. 5. New York: Garland, 1979.

The N-Town Play. Ed. Stephen Spector. EETS ss 11, 12. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991.

O'Neill, Eugene. *Long Day's Journey into Night*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.

Pearl. Ed. E. V. Gordon. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.

Pseudo-Matthew. *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. Documents for the Study of the Gospels.* Ed. David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994. 91-95.

Records of Early English Drama: Coventry. Ed. R. W. Ingram. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981.

Records of Early English Drama: York. Ed. Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979.

Robbins, Rossell Hope. *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries.* New York: Columbia UP, 1959.

Ross, Woodburn O., ed. *Middle English Sermons.* EETS os 209. London: Oxford UP, 1940.

Russell, John. *John Russell's Boke of Nurture. The Babees Book.* Ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. New York: Greenwood, 1969. 115-228.

"Satire on the People of Kildare." *Reliquiae Antiquae* 2. Ed. Thomas Wright and James Orchard Halliwell. New York: AMS, 1966. 174-77.

Scott, Alexander. *The Poems.* Ed. J. Cranstoun. Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1896.

Shakespeare, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare.* Ed. G. Blakemore Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon. 2nd ed. Ed. Norman Davis. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.

Speculum laicorum. Ed. J. T. Welter. Paris: Librarie des Archives Nationales et de la Société de l'Ecole des Chartes, 1914.

"Testamentum Asini." "Il 'Testamentum Asini' e il lamento della lepre." *Studi Medievali* 3 (1962): 129-51.

The Tournament of Tottenham. Middle English Verse Romances. Ed. Donald B. Sands. New York: Holt, 1966. 313-22.

The Towneley Plays. Ed. Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley. EETS ss 13. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.

Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge. Ed. Clifford Davidson. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993.

Udall, Nicholas. *Roister Doister.* Adams 423-68.

Waddell, Helen, ed and. trans. *Medieval Latin Lyrics*. New York: R. R. Smith, 1930.

---, ed. and trans. *Songs of the Wandering Scholars*. London: Folio Society, 1982.

Walsh, P. G. *Love Lyrics from the Carmina Burana*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993.

William of Shoreham. "A Song to Mary." Davies 103-5.

Wynnere and Wastoure. Ed. Stephanie Trigg. EETS os 297. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.

The York Plays. Ed. Richard Beadle. London: E. Arnold, 1982.

The York Play of Pilate. Dir. William G. Marx. Molly Grove Chapel, Lansing, MI. May 5, 1998.

The York Plays. University of Toronto, June 20, 1998.

Zeydel, Edwin H., ed. and trans. *Vagabond Verse: Secular Latin Poems of the Middle Ages*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1966.

Secondary Sources

Alford, John A., ed. *A Companion to Piers Plowman*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

---. "The Design of the Poem." Alford, *Companion* 29-66.

---, ed. *From Page to Performance: Essays in Early English Drama*. E. Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1995.

---. "Introduction." Alford, *From Page to Performance* 1-12.

---. "'My Name is Worship': Masquerading Vice in Medwall's *Nature*." Alford, *From Page to Performance* 151-77.

Amankulor, J. Ndukaku. "The Condition of Ritual in Theatre: An Intercultural Perspective." *Performing Arts Journal* 33/34 (1989): 45-58.

Anglo, Sydney. *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969.

Appel, Alfred, Jr. "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov." *Nabokov: The Man and His Work*. Ed. L. S. Dembo. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1967. 19-44.

Archibald, Elizabeth. "William Dunbar and the Medieval Tradition of Parody." *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Scottish Language and Literature (Medieval and Renaissance)*. Stirling: U of Stirling, 1981: 328-44.

Axton, Richard. "Popular Modes in the Earliest Plays." *Medieval Drama*. Ed. Neville Denny. New York : Crane. 13-39.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

Barney, Stephen A. "Allegorical Visions." Alford, *Companion* 117-34.

Bawcutt, Priscilla. "Text and Context in Middle Scots Poetry." *Actes du 2e Colloque de Langue et de Litterature Ecossaises (Moyen Age et Renaissance)* (1978): 26-28.

Baxter, J. W. *William Dunbar: A Biographical Study*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1952.

Bayless, Martha. *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1996.

Beadle, Richard, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Bennett, J. A. W., and G. V. Smithers, eds. *Early Middle English Verse and Prose*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.

Bentsen, Eileen, and S. L. Sanderlin. "The Profits of Marriage in Late Medieval Scotland." *Scottish Literary Journal*. 12 (1985): 5-18.

Bernstein, Michael André. *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992.

Bloomfield, Morton W. *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature*. E. Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952.

---. Piers Plowman *as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1961.

Blythe, Joan Heiges. "Sins of the Tongue and Rhetorical Prudence in 'Piers Plowman.'" *Literature and Religion in the Later Middle Ages: Philological Studies in Honor of Siegfried Wenzel*. Ed. Richard G. Newhauser and John A. Alford. Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995. 119-42.

Boffey, Julia. "Lydgate, Henryson, and the Literary Testament." *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992): 41-56.

Bolton, J. L. *The Medieval English Economy, 1150-1500*. London: Dent, 1980.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977.

Bowers, John M. *The Crisis of Will in* Piers Plowman. Washington: Catholic U of America P, 1986.

Braswell, Mary Flowers. "Langland's Sins: A 'True' Confession?" *American Notes and Queries* 18 (1980): 154-56.

Brewer, Derek. "Introduction." *Medieval Comic Tales*, Ed. Derek Brewer. Suffolk: Brewer, 1996.

Briscoe, Marianne G. "Some Clerical Notions of Dramatic Decorum in Late Medieval England." *Comparative Drama* 19 (1985): 1-13.

Brooke, C. F. Tucker. *The Tudor Drama: A History of English National Drama to the Retirement of Shakespeare*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911.

Brundage, James. "The Problem of Impotence." Bullough and Brundage 135-40.

---. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

---. *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages*. Aldershot: Variorum, 1993.

Bullough, Vern L., and James Brundage, eds. *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*. Buffalo: Prometheus, 1982.

Burke, Linda Barney. "Genial Gower: Laughter in the *Confessio Amantis.*" Yeager, *Recent Readings* 39-64.

Burns, E. Jane. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993.

Burrow, J. A. *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1986.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone, 1991.

Caputi, Anthony. *Buffo: The Genius of Vulgar Comedy*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1978.

Carey, Millicent. *The Wakefield Group in the Towneley Cycle*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1930.

Carruthers, Mary. *The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in* Piers Plowman. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973.

The Catholic Encyclopedia. 17 vols. New York: Encyclopedia, 1913-1922.

Cawley, A. C., ed. *The Wakefield Pageants in the Towneley Cycle*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1958.

Chambers, E. K. *English Literature at the Close of the Middle Ages*. New York: Oxford UP, 1947.

---. *The Mediaeval Stage*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996.

Charney, Maurice. *Comedy High and Low: An Introduction to the Experience of Comedy*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991.

Clopper, Lawrence M. "*Mankind* and Its Audience." *Comparative Drama* 8 (1974): 347-55.

Cochran, Carol M. "Flyting in the Mystery Plays." *Theatre Journal* 31 (1979): 186-97.

Cowell, Andrew. *At Play in the Tavern : Signs, Coins, and Bodies in the Middle Ages*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1999.

Craig, Hardin. *English Religious Drama of the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1960.

Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.

Davenport, W. A. *Fifteenth-Century English Drama: The Early Moral Plays and Their Literary Relations*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982.

Davidson, Clifford, ed. *The Iconography of Hell*. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992.

---. "The Sins of the Flesh in the Fourteenth-Century Middle English *Land of Cokaygne*." *Ball State University Forum* 11 (1970): 21-26.

Dean, James. "Gather Ye Rosebuds: Gower's Comic Reply to Jean de Meun." Yeager, *Recent Readings* 21-38.

de Caluwé-Dor, Juliette. "Cokagne I. L'anti-Paradis du 'Pays de Cocagne': Étude et traduction du poème moyen-anglais." *Mélanges de philologie et de littératures romanes offerts à Jeanne Wathelet-Willem*. Liège: Marche Romane, 1978. 103-23.

---. "L'Élément Irlandais dans la version moyen-anglais de *The Land of Cockaygne*." *Mélanges de langue et littérature françaises du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance*. Ed. Charles Foulon. Vol. 1. Gaston-Berger: Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980. 89-98.

de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven F. Randall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.

Denny, Neville, ed. *Medieval Drama*. London: E. Arnold, 1973.

Donaldson, E. Talbot. "Chaucer the Pilgrim." *Speaking of Chaucer*. New York: Norton, 1972. 1-12.

---. "Criseide and Her Narrator." *Speaking of Chaucer*. New York: Norton, 1972. 65-83.

Douglas, Mary. "Jokes." *Implicit Meanings: Essays on Anthropology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975. 91-114.

Drabble, Margaret, ed. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.

Duby, Georges. *Medieval Art: The Making of Christian West 980-1140*. Geneva: Booking International, 1995.

Dunn, Charles W., and Edward T. Byrnes, eds. *Middle English Literature*. New York: Garland, 1990.

Dyer, Christopher. *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages c. 1200-1520*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.

Ebin, Lois. "Dunbar's Bawdy." *Chaucer Review* 14 (1979): 278-86.

Economou, George D. "The Vision's Aftermath in *Piers Plowman*: The Poetics of the Middle English Dream-Vision." *Genre* 18 (1985): 313-21.

Eddy, Elizabeth R. "Sir Thopas and Sir Thomas Norny: Romance Parody in Chaucer and Dunbar." *Review of English Studies* 22 (1946): 401-09.

Edington, Carol. *Court and Culture in Renaissance Scotland: Sir David Lindsay of the Mount*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1994.

Edmiston, William F. "Focalization and the First-Person Narrator." *Poetics Today* 10 (1989): 729-44.

Edwards, Paul. "The Early African Presence in the British Isles." *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain*. Ed. J. S. Gundara and I. Duffield. Aldershot, Eng: Avebury, 1992. 9-29.

Edwards, Robert R. *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives*. Durham: Duke UP, 1989.

Emmerson, Richard K. *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1981.

---. "'Covetise to Konne,' 'Goddes Pryvetee,' and Will's Ambiguous Dream Experience in Piers Plowman." *'Suche Werkis to Werche': Essays on Piers Plowman in Honor of David C. Fowler*. E. Lansing: Colleagues, 1993. 89-122.

Evans, Deanna Delmar. "Ambivalent Artifice in Dunbar's *The Thrissill and the Rois*." *Studies in Scottish Literature* 22 (1987): 95-105.

Evans, Robert C. *Ben Jonson and the Poetics of Patronage*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1989.

Ferguson, Arthur B. *The Chivalric Tradition in Renaissance England*. Washington: Folger, 1986.

Fox, Denton. "Dunbar's *The Golden Targe*." *ELH* 26 (1959): 311-34.

---. "Middle Scots Poets and Patrons." *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*. Ed. V. J. Scattergood and J. W. Sherborne. New York : St. Martin's, 1983. 109-27.

Fradenburg, Louise O. *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991.

Frank, Robert Worth. "The 'Hungry Gap,' Crop Failure, and Famine: The Fourteenth-Century Agricultural Crisis and *Piers Plowman*. *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 4 (1990): 87-104.

Garde, Judith N. "Christ I (164-195a): The Mary-Joseph Dialogue in Medieval Christian Perspective." *Neophilologus* 74 (1990): 122-130.

Gash, Anthony. "Carnival Against Lent: The Ambivalence of Medieval Drama." *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*. Ed. David Aers. New York: St. Martin's, 1986. 74-98.

Gaunt, Simon, and Sarah Kay. "The Practice of Medieval Literature." *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 33 (1997): 193-282.

Genette, Gérard. *Figures 3*. Paris: Seuil, 1972.

---. *Nouveau discours du récit*. Paris: Seuil, 1983.

George, Michael W. "An Austere Age without Laughter." *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages*. Ed. Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby. 1998. ORB (Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies) <http://ORB.rhodes.edu/non_spec/missteps/Ch10.html>

Gottfried, Robert S. *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe*. New York: The Free Press, 1983.

Gray, Nick. "The Clemency of Cobblers: A Reading of 'Glutton's Confession' in *Piers Plowman*." *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1986): 61-75.

Greenblat, Stephen. "Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion." *Representing the English Renaissance*. Ed. Stephen Greenblat. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. 1-30.

Gross, Anthony. *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship*. Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1996.

Gurevich, Aron. *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception.* Trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Halversen, Marguerite. *The Consideration of Quintessence: An Edition of a Middle English Translation of John of Rupescissa's* Liber de consideratione de quintae essentiae omnium rerum *with Introduction, Notes and Commentary.* 2 vols. Diss. Michigan State University, 1998.

Hanna, Ralph III. "Piers Plowman A.5.155: 'Pyenye.'" *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 4 (1990): 145-49.

Henry, P. L. "*The Land of Cokaygne*: Cultures in Contact in Medieval Ireland." *English Studies Today* 5 (1972): 120-41.

Hieatt, Constance. *The Realism of Dream Visions.* Paris: Mouton, 1967.

Hill, Thomas D. "Parody and Theme in the Middle English 'Land of Cokaygne.'" *Notes and Queries* 22 (1975): 55-59.

Hiscoe, David W. "Heavenly Sign and Comic Design in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*." *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature.* Ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1989. 228-44.

---. "The Ovidian Comic Strategy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*." *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985): 367-85.

Holbrook, Richard Thayer. *Dante and the Animal Kingdom.* New York: AMS, 1966.

Hope, A. D. *Midsummer Eve's Dream: Variations on a Theme by William Dunbar.* Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970.

Howard, Irene. "The Folk Origins of *The Land of Cokaygne*." *Humanities Association Bulletin* 18 (1967): 72-79.

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture.* Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Boston: Beacon, 1967.

Hussey, S. S. "Langland's Reading of Alliterative Poetry." *Modern Language Review* 60 (1965): 163-70.

---. Piers Plowman: *Critical Approaches.* London: Methuen, 1969.

Jardine, M. D. "New Historicism for Old: New Conservatism for Old?: The Politics of Patronage in the Renaissance." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 286-304.

Jonassen, Frederick B. "Lucian's *Saturnalia*, the Land of Cockaigne, and the Mummers' Plays." *Folklore* 101 (1990): 58-68.

Kane, George. *The Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies*. London: H. K. Lewis, 1965.

Keen, Maurice. *Chivalry*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.

Kendrick, Laura. *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in* The Canterbury Tales. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

---. "Medieval Satire." *European Writers: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. 2 vols. Ed. William T. H. Jackson. New York: Scribner's, 1983. 337-75.

Kennedy, George A. *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987.

Kepke, Allen N., and Ronald E. Shields. "From Chronicle to Social History: Interpreting Public Ceremony as Theatre History." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 10 (1990): 324-30.

Kershaw, I. "The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England, 1315-1322." *Peasants, Knights and Heretics*. Ed. R. Hilton. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976. 85-132.

King, Pamela. "Morality Plays." Beadle 240-64.

Kinser, Samuel. "Wildmen in Festival, 1300-1550." *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages*. Ed. W. F. H. Nicolaisen. Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995. 145-60.

Knight, S. T. "Satire in *Piers Plowman*." Hussey, *Critical Approaches* 279-309.

Kolve, V. A. *The Play Called Corpus Cristi*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966.

Kuefler, Mathew S. "Castration and Eunuchism in the Middle Ages." Bullough and Brundage 279-306.

Ladurie, Emmanuel Le Roy. *Times of Feast, Times of Famine: A History of Climate since the Year 1000*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971.

Lawlor, John. Piers Plowman: *An Essay in Criticism*. London: E. Arnold, 1962.

Lazar, Moshe. "Carmina Erotica, Carmina Iocosa: The Body and the Bawdy in Medieval Love Songs." *Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages: Texts and Contexts*. Ed. Moshe Lazar and Norris J. Lacy. Fairfax, Virginia: George Mason UP, 1989. 249-70.

Lehmann, Paul. *Die Parodie im Mittelalter*. Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1963.

Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love*. London: Oxford UP, 1971.

Leyerle, John. "The Two Voices of William Dunbar." *The University of Toronto Quarterly* 31 (1962): 316-38.

Lindley, Arthur. *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse: Studies in Carnivalesque Subversion.* Newark: U of Delaware P, 1996.

Lucas, H. S. "The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316 and 1317." *Essays in Economic History.* Ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson. Vol. 2. London: E. Arnold, 1954-62. 49-72.

MacDonald, Alasdair A. "William Dunbar, Andro and Walter Kennedy, and Hary's Wallace." *Neophilologus* 68 (1984): 471-77.

Macdougall, Norman. *James IV.* Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989.

Mackenzie, W. Mackay. *The Poems of William Dunbar.* London: Faber and Faber, 1960.

Mackie, R. L. *King James IV of Scotland: A Brief Survey of His Life and Times.* Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1958.

Mann, Jill. *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1973.

Marx, William G. "The Problem with Mrs. Noah: The Search for Performance Credibility in the Chester *Noah's Flood* Play." Alford, *Page to Performance* 99-108.

McCarthy, Shaun. "'Syne maryit I a Marchand': Dunbar's *Mariit Wemen* and Their Audience." *Studies in Scottish Literature* 18 (1983): 138-56.

McConachie, Bruce A. "Towards a Postpositivist Theatre History." *Theatre Journal* 37 (1985): 465-86.

---. "Reading Context into Performance: Theatrical Formations and Social History." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 3 (1989): 229-37.

Meredith, Peter. "The Towneley Cycle." Beadle 134-62.

Middleton, Anne. "Introduction: The Critical Heritage." Alford, *Companion* 1-28.

Miller, Paul. "John Gower, Satiric Poet." *Gower's* Confessio Amantis. Ed. A. J. Minnis. Cambridge: Brewer, 1983. 79-105.

Mills, David. "Introduction." *The Chester Mystery Cycle.* Ed. David Mills. E. Lansing: Colleagues, 1992. xi-xxx.

Minnis, A. J. *Medieval Theory of Authorship.* 2nd ed. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1988.

Moorman, Charles. "The Role of the Narrator in *Pearl*." *The Middle English* Pearl: *Critical Essays.* Ed. John Conley. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1970. 103-21.

Morton, A. L. *The English Utopia.* London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1952.

Morreall, John. "A New Theory of Laughter." *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*. Ed. John Morreall. Albany: SUNY Press, 1987. 128-38.

Morris, David B. *The Culture of Pain*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991.

Mullaney, Steven. "Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance." *Representing the English Renaissance*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988. 65-92.

Murray, Jacqueline. "On the Origins and Role of 'Wise Women' in Causes for Annulment on the Grounds of Male Impotence." *Journal of Medieval History* 16 (1990): 235-49.

---. "Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages." Bullough and Brundage 123-52.

Neuss, Paula. "Active and Idle Language: Dramatic Images in Mankind." Denny 41-67.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia. 18 vols. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967-1988.

Nicholls, Jonathan. *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the* Gawain-Poet. Suffolk: Brewer, 1985.

Norman, Joanne S. "William Dunbar: Scottish Goliard." *Selected Essays on Scottish Language and Literature*. Ed. Steven R. McKenna. Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992. 41-54.

Norton-Smith, John. *William Langland*. Leiden: Brill, 1983.

Olsen, Alexandra Hennessey. *"Betwene Ernest and Game": The Literary Artistry of the* Confessio Amantis. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

Olson, Glending. *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.

Owst, G. R. *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1933.

Parkinson, David. "Mobbing Scenes in Middle Scots Verse: Holland, Douglas, Dunbar." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (1986): 494-509.

Pearcy, Roy J. "The Genre of William Dunbar's *Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*." *Speculum* 55 (1980): 58-74.

---. [William Dunbar's *Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*]. *Studies in Scottish Literature* 16 (1981): 235-39.

Pearsall, Derek. "Langland's London." *Written Work: Langland, Labor, and Authorship.* Ed. Steven Justice & Kathryn Kerby Fulton. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997. 185-207.

Penkethman, John. *A Collection of Several Authentick Accounts of the History and Price of Wheat, Breat, Malt, &c.; from the Coming in of William the Conqueror to Michaelmas 1745: with Some Occasional Remarks.* London: n.p. (Printed for W. Warden and sold by C. Davis), 1748.

Perrow, Eber Carle. "The Last Will and Testament as a Form of Literature." *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 17 (1913): 682-753.

Peterson, Douglas L. "Lyly, Greene, and Shakespeare and the Recreations of Princes." *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1987): 67-88.

---. "The Origins of Tudor Comedy: Plautus, Jack Jugeler, and the Folk Play as Mediating Form." *The Work of Dissimilitude: Essays from the Sixth Citadel Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Literature.* Ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White. Newark; London : U of Delaware P; Associated UP, 1992. 105-15.

Pettitt, Tom. "*Mankind*: An English *Fastnachtspiel*?" *Festive Drama.* Ed. Meg Twycross. Cambridge: Brewer, 1996. 190-202.

Pops, Martin. "The Metamorphosis of Shit." *Salmagundi* 56 (1982): 26-61.

Postan, M. M. ed. *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe.* Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966.

Raleigh, Walter. "Introduction." *The Book of the Courtier.* New York: AMS, 1967. vii-lxxxviii.

Rammel, Hal. *Nowhere in America: The Big Rock Candy Mountain and Other Comic Utopias.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990.

Read, John. "Alchemy under James IV of Scotland." *Ambix* 2 (1949): 60-67.

Reiss, Edmund. *William Dunbar.* Boston: Twayne, 1979.

---. "William Dunbar: The 'Fenyeit Freir.'" *Review of English Studies* 14 (1963): 269-73.

Rice, W. H. *The European Ancestry of Villon's Satirical Testaments.* New York: Corporate, 1941.

Riggan, William. *Picaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator.* Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 1981.

Robbins, Rossell Hope. "Political Poems in the Kildare MS." *The Manual of Writings in Middle English.* Ed. J. B. Severs and A. E. Hartung. Vol. 5. Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1975.

Robertson, D. W. Jr. *Preface to Chaucer.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969.

Robinson, J. W. "The Art of the York Realist." *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual.* Ed. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972. 230-44.

Ross, Ian Simpson. *William Dunbar.* Leiden: Brill, 1981.

Ross, Thomas W. "Taboo-Words in Fifteenth-Century English." *Fifteenth-Century Studies: Recent Essays.* Ed. Robert F. Yeager. New York: Archon, 1984. 137-60.

Rowland, Beryl. *Blind Beasts: Chaucer's Animal World.* Kent: Kent State UP, 1971.

Russell, George H. "Poet as Reviser: The Metamorphosis of the Confession of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Piers Plowman.*" *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600.* Ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk. Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1982. 53-65.

Russell, Jeffrey Burton. *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984.

Schechner, Richard. *Ritual, Play and Performance.* New York: Seabury, 1976.

Scheps, Walter. "*The Goldyn Targe*: Dunbar's Comic *Psychomachia.*" *Papers on Language and Literature* 11 (1975): 339-56.

Schmidt, Paul Gerhard. "The Quotation in Goliardic Poetry: The Feast of Fools and the Goliardic Strophe Cum Auctoritate." *Latin Poetry and the Classical Tradition.* Ed. Peter Goodman and Oswyn Murray. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990. 39-55.

Schüppert, Helga. *Kirchenkritik in der lateinischen Lyrik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts.* Medium Ævum, Philologische Studien 23. Munich: W. Fink, 1972.

Scott, Tom. *Dunbar: A Critical Exposition of the Poems.* New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966.

Sears, Elizabeth. *The Ages of Man: Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.

Singleton, Charles S. *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio.* "Commentary." Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.

Shahar, Shulamith. *Growing Old in the Middle Ages.* Trans. Yael Lotan. London: Routledge, 1977.

Simpson, James. Piers Plowman: *An Introduction to the B-text.* London: Longman, 1990.

Singh, Catherine. "The Alliterative Ancestry of Dunbar's 'The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo.'" *Leeds Studies in English* 7 (1973-74): 22-54.

Smart, Walter K. "*Mankind* and the Mumming Plays." *Modern Language Notes* 32 (1917): 21-25.

---. "Some Notes on *Mankind*." *Modern Philology* 14 (1916): 210.

Smith, Janet M. *The French Background of Middle Scots Literature*. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd. 1969.

Spearing, A. C. *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976.

Strohm, Paul. "Afterword." *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*. Ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P. 1996. 223-32.

Strong, Roy. *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.

Thompson, Elbert N. S. *The English Moral Plays*. New York: AMS, 1970.

Toswell, M. Jane. "Of Dogs, *Cawdels*, and Contrition: A Penitential Motif in *Piers Plowman*." *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 7 (1993): 115-22.

Trigg, Stephanie. "The Rhetoric of Excess in *Winner and Waster*." *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 3 (1989): 91-108.

Turner, Victor: *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982.

Twycross, Meg. "Some Approaches to Dramatic Festivity, especially Processions." *Festive Drama*. Ed. Meg Twycross. Cambridge: Brewer, 1996. 1-33.

---. "The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays." Beadle 37-84.

Väänänen, Veikko. "Le 'fabliau' de Cocagne: Le Motif du pays d'abondance dans le folklore occidental." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 48 (1947): 3-37.

Veeser, H. Aram. "Introduction." *The New Historicism*. Ed. H. Aram Veeser. New York: Routledge, 1989.

Waddell, Helen. *The Wandering Scholars*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955.

Walford, Cornelius. "The Famines of the World: Past and Present." *Journal of the Statistical Society* 41 (1878): 433-526.

Walsh, Martin W. "Divine Cuckold/Holy Fool: The Comic Image of Joseph in the English 'Troubles' Play." *England in the Fourteenth Century*. Ed. W. M. Ormrod. Woodbridge, Eng.: Brewer, 1986. 278-97.

Walsh, P. G. "'Golias' and Goliardic Poetry." *Medium Ævum* 52 (1983): 1-9.

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1985.

Wentersdorf, Karl P. "The Symbolic Significance of *Figurae Scatologicae* in Gothic Manuscripts." *Word, Picture, and Spectacle.* Ed. Clifford Davidson. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1984. 1-20.

Wenzel, Siegfried. *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1967.

Williams, Arnold. "The Comic in the Cycles." Denny 109-23.

---. "Typology and the Cycle Plays: Some Criteria." *Speculum* 43 (1968): 679-80.

---. *The Drama of Medieval England.* E. Lansing, MI: Michigan State UP, 1961.

Wilson, F. P. *The English Drama: 1485-1585.* New York: Oxford UP, 1969.

Windeatt, Barry, trans. *The Book of Margery Kempe.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.

Withinton, Robert. *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline.* 2 vols. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1963.

Wittig, Joseph. *William Langland Revisited.* New York: Twayne, 1997.

Woolf, Rosemary. *The English Mystery Plays.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1972.

Wormald, Jenny. *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland 1470-1625.* London: E. Arnold, 1981.

Wright, Louis B. "Variety Show Clownery on the Pre-Restoration Stage." *Anglia* 52 (1928). 51.

Yeager, R. F., ed. *John Gower: Recent Readings.* Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989.

---. "Aspects of Gluttony in Chaucer and Gower." *Studies in Philology* 81 (1984): 42-55.

Yoder, Emily K. "The Monks' Paradise in *The Land of Cokaygne* and the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani.*" *Papers on Language and Literature* 19 (1983): 227-38.