TIME'S RECKONING:
TIME, VALUE AND THE MERCANTILE CLASS IN LATE MEDIEVAL
ENGLISH LITERATURE

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Dawn Simmons Walts, M.A.

****

The Ohio State University
2007

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Lisa Kiser, Adviser

Professor Richard Firth Green

Associate Professor Ethan Knapp

Approved by

_____

Adviser
Graduate Program in English

ABSTRACT

In Book 11 of *The Confessions*, St. Augustine asks the now famous question, "What, then, is time?" But whereas St. Augustine is interested in defining time, I am more interested in determining man's relationship to time. The anonymous author of the early-fifteenth century treatise *Dives and Pauper* makes clear that God created the celestial clockwork to serve man. Man is not to serve time, he writes, but rather, time was created to serve man. Analyzing three late medieval English texts (the York Corpus Christi Cycle, *Pearl*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*), my project examines how the practice of time, who reckons time and how it is reckoned, in late medieval English literature serves as a way to measure the status of the rising mercantile class.

The purpose of my introductory chapter is twofold. First, I provide a historical overview of methods practiced and instruments used to tell time in late medieval England. This section pays particular attention to the material culture of time-telling and questions the significance scholarship has traditionally placed on the introduction of mechanical clock time to England. Second, I trace the main approaches to the cultural history of time in modern scholarship. Specifically, I explain how my work draws upon and departs from French historian Jacque Le Goff's famous thesis which views "merchant's time" in direct competition with "Church time." My readings of the primary texts, supported by historical evidence, indicate that "Church time" and "merchant's time" were not mutually exclusive ways of understanding and using time, as Le Goff suggests. Rather members of the Church

profited from the increasing commodification of time, practices criticized by the anti-clerical literature of the day, and merchants employed religious notions of time to secure their superior social status.

As a civic event performed to mark and celebrate a religious festival, the York *Cycle* was directed by the powerful merchants' guild of York. The work of the cycle—redemptive, practical, and theatrical—is inextricably bound to time. While all late medieval Corpus Christi Cycles are organized around a typological time-scheme (based on the life of Christ), the York *Cycle* in particular invokes the theme of time as central to the issue of labor and production. My analysis of the York *Cycle*'s temporal discourse, particularly the conflation of religious time with quotidian time, highlights the way in which the reckoning of time is used to assert rank and status, especially as that status relates to the mercantile class.

Perhaps no other poem from late medieval England better illustrates the relationship between the transience of human life and the permanence of spiritual salvation than the Middle English poem *Pearl*. Meditating on the death of a young child, the poem shifts between descriptions of a mutable earthly realm and an eternal heavenly realm. As the dream vision progresses through different locales, the poet imbues the narrative with landscapes, seasons, temporally loaded biblical allusions, and the medieval calendar scheme. In *Pearl*, time reveals itself in space. As the *Pearl*-poet employs various complex temporal systems and symbols, he links the religious and the economic, the spiritual and the social. In so doing, the poem addresses the unsettled status of the rising mercantile class in late medieval England. In linking, and at times conflating, the

earthly and heavenly systems, the *Pearl* poet reveals an important underlying principle: the relationship between social rank and time.

As author of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* and controller of customs in the port of London, Chaucer was intimately aware of time's social value. Examining the *Miller's* and *Shipman's Tales*, this chapter argues that the ability to reckon time functions as a means of asserting, and sometimes undermining, characters' social status, especially the increasingly wealthy mercantile and artisan class. For instance, the clerk in the *Miller's Tale* owns an astrolabe and can, reportedly, read what the stars portend. The *Shipman's* monk carries a portable sundial and possesses a profitable knowledge of the commercial value of timing exchanges. In both tales, the tricks hatched hinge on the trickster's ability to read time and thereby dupe two unsuspecting husbands.

My analysis of these texts reveals not only an increasing commodification of time during this period, but also a new understanding of how that commodity could be translated into social status, specifically in regards to the rising mercantile class. These texts show how late medieval English writers employed time-reckoning to function both as a signifier of social relations and the tool by which those relationships were established.

Dedicated to Nick Howe

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so grateful for the wonderful training I received from my professors at San Francisco State University. My Latin professors, Pamela Vaughn and Pamela Morgan, taught me so much more than how to conjugate verbs; they taught me how to think like a scholar and challenged me to define what kind of scholar I wanted to be. Emma Lipton introduced me to medieval drama and prepared me well for my doctoral work. Finally, my advisor, George Tuma taught me that there is a place for compassion in the halls of academia. The most patient professor I have ever had the privilege of studying under, it is clear why his students sometimes refer to him as St. George. I hope this dissertation is worthy of all the support and kindness he has shown me over the years.

I would also like to thank my good friend Nancy Pine for always returning my phone calls and e-mails so I could "talk out" some of my sections. Mostly, she provided me with an excuse to take a break when I most needed it and encouraged me to follow my gut and back it up. I am also grateful for all of the babysitters who freed up my afternoons for research and writing. I am especially proud of my boys, Matthew and Benjamin, for filling the house with an overwhelming sense of joy and play.

Finally, I thank my husband, David Walts, for believing in me always. I am so grateful to have such an intelligent, patient, and supportive partner beside me. David, you inspire me to be greater than I am. Thank you.

VITA

July 27, 1970..Born – Long Beach, California

1994...B.A. English
Mercyhurst College
Erie, Pennsylvania

2000...M.A. English Literature
San Francisco State University
San Francisco, California

2000 – 2007... Graduate Teaching and Administrative Assistant
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE MATTER OF TIME IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

"Quid est tempus?" *St. Augustine*

"God ordeynyd hem and made hem þat be þe tokenys of þe bodyis abouyn meen shuldyn moun knowe qhanne it were tyme to slepyn and tyme to wakyn, tyme to trauaylyn and tyme to restyn, tyme to halwyn and tyme to labouryn, tyme to etyn and tyme to fastyn, tyme to settyn & to sowyn, tyme to eryin, tyme to repyn and to mowyn. […] God made hem to seruyn man, nought man to seruyn hem. He made hem for man, nought man for hem. He made hem nought to gouernyn man, but he   af man and woman wy t and discrecioun to gouernyn himself, wyt his grace, be þe lyght and þe wyssyng of tyme, quiche he hat   / of þe bodyis abouyn, þat be here lyght þey moun seen to werkyn and be here steryng and here cours þey moun wetyn qhanne it is tyme to werkyn. […] …and in cyteis and tounnys meen rewlyn hem be þe clokke, and þow propyrly to spekyn þe clokke rewly t nought hem but a man rewly t þe clokke, right so man and woman, beeste and bryd and othere creaturys rewlyn himself be þe bodyis abouyn and þe bodyis abouyn rewlyn nought hem." *Dives et Pauper*[1] (13-18, 25-31, 41-45)

        In Book 11 of *The Confessions*, St. Augustine asks the now famous question,

"What is time?" But whereas St. Augustine is interested in defining and expounding

upon the nature of time, I am more interested in exploring the social dynamic of time,

specifically regarding the human relationship to time in late medieval English literature.

Explicating the significance of the first commandment, the anonymous author of the

early-fifteenth century treatise *Dives et Pauper*, cited above, makes clear that God created

the celestial clockwork to serve man. Man is not to serve time, he writes, but rather, time

was created to serve man. Pauper emphasizes this point repeatedly to Dives, and, as he

---

[1] *Dives et Pauper* Vol. I, Pt. 1, ed. by P. Heath Barnum, Early English Text Society 275 (Oxford, 1976) 119-20.

does so, he singles out the urban-dwellers, those who live in cities and towns, as being particularly guilty of transgressing this natural law.

What is particularly interesting about the exchange between Dives and Pauper is that it emphasizes the *role* of time in society over the *kind* of time that is determined by its use. In other words, the central issue is one of men and women's relationship to and use of time rather than the concept or perception of time. The lines in *Dives et Pauper* do not seem consistent with what scholars have come to regard as the central issue regarding time in the middle ages, namely, that the growth and rise of urban centers contributed to the commodification of time and, as a result, created a conflict between what has come to be known as merchant's time and Church's time. The idea of the conflict between merchant's time and Church's time has its roots in the work of French historian Jacques Le Goff's famous essay "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages" in which he argues, "Against the merchant's time, the Church set up its own time, which is supposed to belong to God alone and which cannot be an object of lucre" (30). For Le Goff, it is the ability to gain profit from the increasing commodification of time as the result of the growth and rise of urban centers that is central to the conflict surrounding time in the Middle Ages. But as the example from *Dives et Pauper* illustrates, the commodification of time in itself is not a sin; rather, the dominance of the clock in the lives of the urban dwellers serves as the root of the problem. Further examination of late medieval English literature reveals even more examples that do not reflect the conflict Le Goff finds.

As the following chapters make clear, the issue at stake surrounding time-reckoning in late medieval England had less to do with the kind of time, Church time or

2

merchant's time in Le Goff's conception, and more to do with man's relationship to time. Arguably, in late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth-century England, different populations used time for different purposes and maintained varied relationships to time based on their education, occupation, and proximity to time-telling instruments. My analysis of time-reckoning in three late Middle English texts reveals a surprisingly cohesive narrative, one that addresses the increasingly vexed status of the emerging mercantile class in late medieval England. While the texts do not necessarily agree with one another as to the position of merchants in terms of rank and social status, they all invoke time-reckoning in the identification and enforcement of that status.

The Critical Tradition of the Cultural History of Time

The 1960 publication of Jacques Le Goff's essay, "Merchant's Time and Church Time in the Middle Ages," marked a turning point in temporal studies for medievalists. Before Le Goff, the main approach to studying the cultural history of time was one which examined a whole society or culture's approach to time. This approach, practiced by Emile Durkheim, and his followers Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert at the onset of the twentieth century, resulted in scholarship that reduced time to an oppositional binary construction that simply contrasted one society or culture's sense of time against another's. This binary construction became a dominant framework as scholars contrasted traditional time (qualitative, concrete, local, imprecise, organic time—also referred to as "primitive" time) against modern time (quantitative, abstract, uniform, exact, mechanical

3

time). Le Goff's work, however, diverged from this approach to examine time-reckoning

practices among various social groups within the same society.[2]

The pervasiveness of Le Goff's framework throughout medieval scholarship is a

tribute to its enduring strength, but the reception of LeGoff's essay also serves to reveal

the limitations inherent in its framework. Although Le Goff diverges from the Durkheim

group, his work, and more importantly the work of scholars who use Le Goff, perpetuates

the same problem as that found in Durkheim: a framework that reduces time to an

oppositional binary construct that sets church time as necessarily opposite to and apart

from merchants' time. Le Goff seems to have been aware of at least the potential for

problems when he wrote "The time in which he [the merchant] worked professionally

was not the time lived religiously" suggesting that the categories constructed for

analyzing time, namely economic and theological, actually overlapped in practice if not

in theory (37). Yet despite his clear warning that "this essay has no other purpose than to

stimulate a more intensive study of a history which raises numerous problems," many

scholars today continue to quote Le Goff's essay as definitive and conclusive with no

need for further investigation.

Within the last two decades, however, a handful of scholars from a variety of

fields have begun the intense study Le Goff intended to stimulate. The most notable

contribution to date remains Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum's magisterial *History of the*

Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders, published in 1992 and translated into

---

[2] Peter Burke traces the history and trajectory of the three phases of temporal scholarship in "Reflections on the Cultural History of Time." Peter Burke, "Reflections on the Cultural History of Time," *Viator* 35 (2004): 617-26. See also Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1996) 1-15. For an overview of the anthropological study of time see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 1-35.

English in 1996. Meticulously researched, this historiography sheds new light on the

field by introducing a new host of sources and correcting significant errors that are often

cited by scholars today.[3] Since the publication of Dohrn-van Rossum's work, the study

of time in the Middle Ages has seen a modest surge in scholarship including the

academic collections of essays *Time in the Medieval World* edited by Chris Humphrey

and W.M. Ormrod (2001), *The Medieval Concept of Time* edited by Pasquale Porro

(2001), *The Use and Abuse of Time in Christian History* edited by R.N. Swanson (2002),

and *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse* edited by Gerhard Jaritz and Herson

Moreno-Riano (2003).

The most recent trend in scholarship concerning the cultural history of time

examines how small groups within a society or culture employ various notions of time

within and through different domains of activity. Scholars in the fields of theology and

feminist theory have also begun to examine time-reckoning, exploring such issues as the

relationship between time and authority, as well as the role gender plays in both the

understanding and usage of time.[4] Postcolonial and postmodern theorists along with

economists are using this approach as a way to discuss the complex issue of time in the

new global economy.[5] In other words, the field of critical temporal studies is emerging

---

[3] One particularly egregious error popular in the scholarship is the citing of a guild of clockmakers in Cologne in 1183 attributed to a careless translation; see Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1996) 96-98.

[4] See Richard K. Fenn, *The End of Time: Religion, Ritual, and the Forging of the Soul* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997); Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 197-217; Karen Davies, "Time, Gender, Science and Everyday Life," *Time—Utopia—Eschatology,* ed. Charlotte Methuen (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1999) 91-104.

[5] See Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective,* trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham: Duke UP, 1996); Jeremy Rifkin, *Time Wars* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987).

from a largely interdisciplinary conversation among cultural theorists, philosophers, physicists, sociologists, and psychologists.[6]

Medieval scholarship, especially medieval literary scholarship, has been slow to engage with the most recent approaches to time, instead relying heavily on the now canonical work of Le Goff. In *Medieval Identity Machines* (2003), Jeffrey Cohen writes that, as medievalists, "we have not yet approached critically the question of *time*" (1). When I first began researching the present study, the literary scholarship concerning medieval time generally fell into one of three categories: translating the technical time reckonings, explaining the philosophical and theological sources for understanding time, and trying to explain how different texts perceive time. For instance, when Linne R. Mooney treats the subject of time in Chaucer's work, her study serves to translate some of the more technically complicated and confusing passages about time in *The Canterbury Tales* for a modern audience. Peter Travis's "Chaucer's *Chronographiae,* the Confounded Reader, and Fourteenth-Century Measurements of Time" is primarily concerned with explaining the technical calculations of time and computation errors in *The Canterbury Tales.* Further, in *Time and the Astrolabe in* The Canterbury Tales, Marijane Osborn attempts to interpret how the technical use of the astrolabe might enhance our understanding of the *Knight's Tale* and the *Miller's Tale*, but her final conclusion that "Chaucer conceived of astronomical time in *The Canterbury Tales* as a graphic image, perhaps imagined as a great arc something like a modern clockface

---

[6] Jeffrey Cohen describes critical temporal studies as "a field of inquiry that receives its inspiration from sources as diverse as continental philosophy and particle physics." See Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2003) 3. See also Huw Price, *Time's Arrow and Archimedes' Point* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996); Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997); Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

marking the daylight hours above his pilgrimage route" ultimately falls short of providing

an interpretive framework for the whole of the work. The astrolabe, after all, is not the

only time-telling device mentioned in the *Tales* but rather one of many. I would argue

that these methods for telling time are not operating in isolation to one another but rather

that they function together to reflect a complex system loaded with ideological

significance rarely analyzed.

When literary texts are analyzed in light of their deployment of temporal rhetoric,

the analysis usually involves only one literary text and a single theological concept of

time, such as Augustine's theory of eternity or Boethius' notion of the temporal

interaction between free will and predetestination. The result, more often than not, is a

reading that actively seeks out evidence of these philosophies in a literary text. The

problem with this approach is that literature often employs multiple ways of keeping

time, sometimes even seemingly competing ways, in a single text. Furthermore, the

emphasis on the "concept" or "perception" of time, while interesting, never delivers a

useful interpretive analysis and often fails to argue any specific point. Ultimately, we

will never know what medieval people thought about time or how they perceived it.

However, we can analyze the way they wrote about time and consider what that literature

has to tell us about their relationship to and use of time.

One notable, and fairly recent, exception that breaks from Le Goff and avoids the

patterns of analysis listed above is Jeffrey Cohen's *Medieval Identity Machines* (2003).

In this book, Cohen acknowledges and builds upon the relationship between time and the

body. He argues that "time itself can be conceptualized within the same open,

connective, machinic frame within which [one can] read bodiliness and identity" (xiv).

While Cohen's work offers a promising theoretical framework for medievalists to utilize in their work—especially in the fields of postcolonial theory and critical temporal studies—his chapter on time fails to move beyond offering much more than a framework for "thinking about time as something more than the linear unfolding of history."

Cohen's work in "Time's Machines" is significant, however, in that it acknowledges the material and artistic culture that supports the telling of time in the late middle ages. The residue of this culture is pervasive in medieval literature yet remains largely neglected by literary scholars, Cohen included. The field of medieval technology is perhaps one of the richest and most promising fields for medieval scholarship today; many medieval scholars who are utilizing information provided by scientific writing about time-keeping do so in the interest of further understanding the complex role of the body in medieval society.[7] The subjects of time and the body might not seem to share much commonality at first glance, but for medievalists the link is critical.[8] Scholars working on the body have dealt peripherally with the significance of time, especially in the growing fields of gender studies and performance studies where rituals regulate and are regulated by time. The body of Christ is central to the liturgical calendar; the social body performs rituals regulated by time; in the medieval medical paradigm, diagnosis and treatment were determined by astrological time; calendars depicted the labors of the months and church bells rang out marking the beginning and the end of the work day.[9]

---

[7] See Linda Ehrsam Voigts, "Scientific and Medical Books," *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475,* ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 345-402.

[8] For instance, Cohen writes about the representation of the Zodiac Man. See Cohen, *Medieval Identity*, xi-xxix.

[9] In most depictions, the laboring body is young, beautiful, clean and strong. Laborers are shown performing their tasks with ease. One fascinating exception to this trend is found in the Luttrell Psalter

Few literary scholars, however, have drawn attention to or even considered the link between time and the body and fewer still have pursued the role of time as a subject in its own right. But the critical and scholarly environments are changing, with time now taking center stage. At the 2006 New Chaucer Society Congress in New York, there was a panel entitled, "Time, Value, and Measure in Chaucer's Work." The 2007 London Chaucer Conference was completely devoted to the topic "Chaucer and Time." These conferences not only indicate an increasing interest in the subject of time in Chaucer's work, but also suggest that it is time to rethink some of the existing models by which we have been approaching the subject of time in the Middle Ages.

The Technology and Methodology of Reckoning Time in the Middle Ages

The abstract temporal concepts of hours, days, and years were marked and measured by a vast array of instruments in late medieval England. The material culture supporting the reckoning of time was as large as it was varied. Methods for measuring, calculating, and telling time were largely inherited from the classical world. Throughout the middle ages, aside from nature itself, the Church remained the dominant institution responsible for measuring, marking, and announcing time. Church bells announced the monastic hours; special candles were burned to track the hours during the darkness of night; sundials and clepsydrae (water clocks) were used, as were hourglasses and

---

which shows aged bodies bent and dirty from their toil. For more about this anomaly, see Janet Backhouse, *Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000) and Michael Camille, *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998).

astrolabes.[10] Calendars in psalters and books of hours depicted the labors of the months

often combined with the zodiac and/or scenes from Christ's life. Pageants celebrating

liturgical festivals, such as the York *Corpus Christi Cycle*, paraded biblical history

through the streets weaving together liturgical, typological, and civic time schemes.[11]

The material and artistic culture supporting the telling of time was vast and complex, and

the residue of this culture is pervasive in medieval literature. The sheer number and

variety of these instruments and other methods used to reckon time suggests that telling

time during this period was an especially significant activity. And finally, the

introduction of mechanical clocks to England in the late fourteenth century served to

replace the relevance of the celestial clockwork.[12] Or, did it?

The technological advances in time-keeping did not automatically abrogate all

other methods for telling time. In fact, the literary, documentary, and historical texts

from the period suggest that rather than promoting a cultural shift in the reckoning of

time, the introduction of clocks to late medieval England merely became one more way,

---

[10] In Asser's *Life of Alfred*, Asser writes how the king, wanting to devote one quarter of his time to the service of God, is confronted with the difficulty of measuring time: "But as owing to darkness he could in no wise discover the passing of the hours of the night, and often on account of the thick rain and clouds could not even tell the passing of the hours of the day, he began to devise how by some fixed rule and with certainty he might be able keep this promise that he had vowed to his life's end without faltering." See John Asser, *The Life of Alfred*, trans. L.C. Jane (New York: Cooper Square, 1966), 85-86.

[11] The liturgical calendar is comprised of two overlapping cycles, Temporale and Sanctorale. The Temporale is a seasonal cycle based on the life of Christ. While the ordering of the Temporale is constant, not all of the dates are fixed. The most famous example is Easter which is always celebrated on a Sunday but can be celebrated as early as March 23 or as late as April 26. Sanctorale is the cycle of individual feast days celebrated on fixed dates. See John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 45-57.

[12] Writing about the history of clocks in England, R.W. Symonds reminds readers that the "first public clocks were without dials and striking mechanism, for they only gave the alarm to 'the keeper of a cloke' when to strike the hour on the bell" (10). See R.W. Symonds, *A History of English Clocks* (London: King Penguin, 1947); C.F.C. Beeson, *English Church Clocks 1280-1850* (London: The Antiquarian Horological Society, 1971).

among many, of measuring and marking the passage of time. Sundials, for instance, were

still employed as time-reckoning instruments as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries because of their low cost and high precision.[13] In *Clocks and Culture: 1300-*

1700, Carlo Cipolla argues that the cultural conditions created a demand for such time-

keeping technology and allowed for it to develop and eventually play a critical and

crucial role in society. He writes that "while an important technological innovation has a

good chance to influence or modify the sociocultural environment, the ultimate effects of

the same innovation rest on the nature and the quality of the environment" (36).[14] David

S. Landes, author of *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*,

concurs with Cipolla's assessment: "The clock did not create an interest in time

measurement; the interest in time measurement led to the invention of the clock" (53).

The spread of commercial networks throughout Europe in the late middle ages

resulted in the increased need for more accurate measures of time. The clock was merely

an instrument that aided in measuring time in smaller units; it was not the catalyst for a

new way of understanding time nor did it replace other ways of keeping time. As the

"Rules for the conduct of Masons of York Minster," cited below, reveals, clock time

became merely one more element in the medieval repertoire of time-reckoning.

> It is ordained by the chapter of the church of St Peter of York that all the
> masons that shall work on the works of the same church of St Peter shall
> from Michaelmas Day unto the first Sunday of Lent be each day in the
> morning at their work, […] as early as they may see skillfully by daylight
> for to work. And they shall stand there truly working at their work all the

---

[13] Sundials needed to be supplemented by other devices as they could not be relied upon to measure time
during the evening hours or on overcast days.

[14] See also Dava Sobel, *Longitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995). Sobel tells the story of eighteenth-
century clock-maker John Harrison whose quest to invent precise time-keeping instruments as a means to
determine longitude was dismissed by the scientific community of his day.

day after, as long as they may see skillfully to work, if it be all workday; otherwise till it be high noon smitten by the clock when holy day falls at noon, so that it be within the aforesaid time between Michaelmas and Lent. And in all other time of the year they may dine before noon, if they will, and also eat at noon when they wish, so that they shall not stray from their works in the aforesaid lodge at any time of the year at dinner time, but such a short time that no skilful man shall find fault in their absence. And at time of meat, at noon, they shall, at no time of the year, stray from the lodge nor from the work aforesaid, more than the space of the time of an hour, and after noon they may drink in the lodge. And for their drinking time between Michaelmas and Lent they shall not cease nor leave their work passing the time of half a mile away.[15]

In the above passage, the workers are referred to the clock as the instrument by which noon is determined, but they are also instructed to begin their labor "as early as they may see skillfully by daylight"—a reference to natural, diurnal time. The liturgical calendar determines the schedule for when their work breaks. While the clock is able to break the workday into smaller units of hours, another system must be used in regulating the length of the workers' drinking breaks: "the time of half a mile away." Another common spatial marker of time used in England during the middle ages was the furlong, about one-eighth of a mile.[16] Because walking time varies from person to person, this is not a precise measure of time, but, nonetheless, this method appears popular in late medieval English literature. If we were to accept that a mile generally takes about twenty minutes to walk, the formula agreed upon by most scholars, "the time of half a mile away" would then equal about ten minutes. Clocks in the middle ages were able to measure hours and those hours could be broken into half-hours, but without faces and dials they were not useful in

---

[15] See "Rules for the conduct of Masons of York Minster," *English Historical Documents 1327-1485,* ed. A.R. Myers (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), 1182-4. Quote is adapted by and cited in Chris Humphrey, "Time and Urban Culture," *Time in the Medieval World,* ed. Chris Humphrey and W.M. Ormrod (Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2001), 106-7.

[16] The etymology of the word "journey" clearly demonstrates this relationship between space and time. Coming from the Old French, *jounee* meant day, day's space, or day's travel.

determining smaller units of time. So while the increased mercantile activity in late medieval England may have driven the need for clocks, those clocks were not always able to fulfill the time-measuring needs of that population.

But clocks served to meet more than the need to measure and announce the passing of time; they also served to express civic authority and pride. Le Goff's assertion that, "The communal clock was an instrument of economic, social, and political domination wielded by the merchants who ran the commune," has been accepted as definitive and conclusive by most scholars working on time today (35). It must be remembered that in the often-quoted line above, Le Goff was writing about the work bell in Aire-sur-la-Lys used to regulate the working hours in the mid-fourteenth century and that his observations might not necessarily translate in other instances. The installation of public clocks, defined by Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum as clocks "which indicated visually or aurally the sequence of hours of the full day," and their maintenance were underwritten by royalty, clergy, guilds, and taxes (129, 134-150). In Dohn-van Rossum's exhaustive study, clocks appear less as an instrument of domination by one segment of the population and more as a symbol of civic authority, a symbol whose power the author of *Dives et Pauper* was particularly concerned.

Medieval Reckoning

> *reken*: (v.) Calculate, add up (figures); work out (astrological conclusions); allow for (a variable) [quot: Chaucer *Astr.* 2nd]; to count up (money, a group); establish a measure for (time); mark out (the horizon in divisions); to give an accounting, render an account; to answer for one's conduct, also assess one's conduct; to relate, recount, narrate (a story)
> *The Middle English Dictionary*

> *reckon*: (v.) To include in a (*or* the) reckoning; hence, to place or class; to calculate, work out, decide the nature of value of; to judge; to go over or settle accounts
> *The Oxford English Dictionary*

In the late middle ages, the term "reckoning" was used to describe a variety of activities. There was time-reckoning, the calculating and measuring of time; mathematical reckoning, computing numbers and working out patterns; economic reckoning, determining value and worth as well as classifying and accounting; literary reckoning, the relating or narrating the events of a story; and, finally, God's reckoning, the final judgment at the end of the world that marks the end of time, the resurrection, the apocalypse.

The polyvalence of the word "reckoning" in late medieval England is central to this work. The title of my dissertation, *Time's Reckoning*, invokes the obvious meaning of calculating the time. But the title is also meant to suggest the story of time told in the texts I analyze—a story which seeks to classify and account for the rank and status of the rising mercantile class in late medieval English society. For the purpose of my project, I am concerned mainly with five different, yet interrelated kinds of "reckoning:" 1/Time-reckoning (Bede breaks this reckoning down into 3 kinds of time-reckoning—nature, custom, authority); 2/Mathematical reckoning (calculating, computing numbers);

3/Economic reckoning (determining value, worth, classification, accounting); 4/Literary reckoning (narrating the events of a story); 5/God's reckoning or the final reckoning (end of time, apocalypse, resurrection, final judgment, end of world). It is perhaps not surprising to find these interconnected and overlapping meanings of "reckoning" in fourteenth-century England because the increased monetization of society would undoubtedly have had a profound influence on the language, conflating religious and moral notions of reckoning (God's final reckoning at the end of time) with not only the economic, but also the temporal.[17]

What is perhaps most remarkable about the definitions listed above is the way in which they intersect with one another in each of the texts I analyze. While I began looking primarily at the role of time-reckoning in these texts, I found that economic reckoning (determining value, worth, classification) was often invoked in tandem with religious reckoning. Likewise, attempts to position the rising mercantile class within the social hierarchy of the day was often addressed and explicated in texts that also presented an interesting discussions and practices of time-reckoning. Today, we tend to keep those notions of reckoning, more or less, separate and distinct. Yet, in reading and analyzing late medieval English texts, the relationship between telling time, narrating tales, and assessing one's social status seems more synonymous than disparate. And finally, the last judgment, God's final reckoning, looms large over every act of reckoning.

---

[17] For more about the increased monetization and monetary consciousness in the fourteenth century, see Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 15-36.

Reckoning, by its very nature and prevalence in late medieval English society, would have immediately evoked images of the apocalypse and the end of time.[18]

Thinking Beyond LeGoff

The idea of time as a source of or catalyst for social division has, to a great extent, its roots in Jacques Le Goff's seminal essay "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages." As the title suggests, the essay establishes a binary in which the rising merchant class began to perceive and use time in a way that contradicted Church teachings. According to Le Goff,

> the conflict, then, between the Church's time and the merchant's time takes its place as one of the major events in the mental history of these centuries at the heart of the Middle Ages, when the ideology of the modern world was being formed under pressure from deteriorating economic structures and practices. (30)

But the Church was not immune to commercialization and mercantile interests. In fact, the works of Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langland, two of the most important writers in late medieval England, portray the Church as being corrupted by greed and commercial interests. Most recently, scholars are beginning to question the significance and degree of the conflict between the rising merchant class and the Church in the late Middle Ages suggested by Le Goff. Historian Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, for instance, cautions that "The counterposing of the catchphrases 'Church's time'—'merchant's time' imparts a graphic and seductive drama to the historiography of the Late Middle Ages"

---

[18] For more about the prevalence of the final reckoning in popular medieval thought, see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961; Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End* (New York: Columbia UP, 1979); *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Ed. Richard Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992); *Last Things: Death & the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Feedman (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000).

(231). Le Goff seems to have been aware of the potential danger of his binary when he

wrote

> in spite of the importance of the change, we should be careful not to make
> too bald a distinction between secular and religious time. At times, the
> two sorts of bells coexisted without confrontation or hostility. In York, for
> instance, between 1352 and 1370, at the work site of the cathedral itself, a
> work bell was installed, relieving the church bells of this function. (48)

The fact that Le Goff cites an example in late medieval England as a case where the

distinction between secular and religious time is blurred is telling and of particular

interest to this present study. Many other examples from late medieval England also

reveal this same kind of coexistence without confrontation or hostility.[19] In fact, one of

the limitations of Le Goff's theory is that his examples span a broad geography with little

regard to cultural or regional variations. By focusing on a specific region, England,

during a specific time frame, late fourteenth to early fifteenth century, I am able to argue

that in the literature of late medieval England, time—including time-telling instruments

and temporal discourse—serves the ideological function of reflecting and reinforcing

distinctions among rank and status within social practice.

　　　　Such evidence of harmonious or conflated time systems, however, does not

necessarily abrogate Le Goff's theories or findings, but it does point to the limitations of

---

[19] "In an earlier set of rules governing the working times of the masons and other workers on York
Minster, *c.* 1355, their finishing time at the end of the day was to be indicated by the bell of St Mary's."
(Humphrey 111). See *The Fabric Rolls of York Minster,* ed. J. Raine, Surtees Society 35 (Durham: Society
by G. Andrews, 1859), 171-3. "In a set of ordinances regulating the Fishmongers' Guild from 1301, it was
ordered that no fish was to be sold after vespers was struck at the church of St Michael on Ouse Bridge,
until prime was struck at York Minster the next day." (Humphrey 111). See *York Civic Ordinances, 1301,*
ed. M. Prestwich, Borthwick Papers 49 (York: St. Anthony's Press, 1976), 13. "The ordinances of the
Girdlers' Guild, dated 1417, ordered that no-one of the craft should work on a Saturday after twelve
o'clock was struck at York Minster, on pain of a fine of a pound of wax. This enabled the afternoon to be
observed as the eve of Sunday" (Humphrey 113). See *York Memorandum Book,* ed. M. Sellers, 2 vols.,
Surtees Society 120 and 125 (Durham: Society by Andrews, 1912-15), I, 184. "The rules for the market of
Salsibury, for example, in the early years of the fourteenth century, refer specifically to the striking of the
cathedral clock" (North 172-3). See Beeson, C.F.C. *English Church Clocks 1280-1850: History and
Classification.* (Sussex: The Antiquarian Horological Society, London, 1971),16.

Le Goff's study which was, in Le Goff's own words, an "investigation [that is] by no means exhaustive" (46). While Le Goff had hoped that his work would inspire further inquiry, it is more often than not quoted as if it were the final and only word on the subject. The most troubling aspect of Le Goff's theory, however, lies not with the limitations of his work but rather with the misleading and sometimes inaccurate application of his terminology by later scholars. Perhaps the most egregious error perpetuated in recent times by medieval scholarship about time is the equating of merchant's time with mechanical clock time. Such careless application of Le Goff's terminology often results in a misreading of the text and implies that "merchant's time" as mechanical clock time is equivalent to our modern notions of perceiving and telling time. In fact, the distinction has less to do with the mechanizing of clocks and far more with the way in which days were divided into hours. Supporting LeGoff's thesis that the increase and spread of commercial networks resulted in the need for a more accurate measure of time, Chris Humphrey reiterates Dohrn-van Rossum's claim that merchants' time is not necessarily mechanical time. As Humphrey reminds us, "after all, equal-length hours were around a long time before clocks appeared on the scene."[20]   Looking specifically at evidence from late medieval York, Humphrey's essay seeks to understand, "what was at stake in the acquisition and use of clocks by urban communities, or at least the authorities acting on their behalf" (109).

---

[20] See also J.D. North, "Monasticism and the First Mechanical Clocks" *Stars, Minds and Fate: Essays in Medieval Cosmology* (London: Humbledon Press, 1989), 171-86. Humphrey incorrectly [double-check] attributes the following quote to J.D. North, "Monasticism and the First Mechanical Clocks" *The Study of Time II,* ed. J.T. Fraser and N. Lawrence (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1975),381-98: "It should not be thought that the concept of equal hours ('horae de clock,' in the late fourteenth century), had to wait for the invention of the mechanical clock" found in ftnt. 1 on pg. 105 in Humphrey.

While the rise of the merchant class may have created the cultural conditions that allowed for such technology as mechanical clocks to develop and eventually play a critical and crucial role in modern society, it does not necessarily follow that mechanical clock time was exclusively the purview of the merchant class nor does it mean that the Church was opposed to measuring time with mechanical clocks.[21] In fact, according to historian J.D. North, the Church was the primary institution responsible for fostering the development of mechanical clocks. Rather than existing in isolation from society, North maintains that

> the Church was a feudal force, and through the close regulation of the monastic day a measure of regularity was imposed on society at large. With or without automatic control, the canonical hours of the monastic life were struck eight times daily on a tower bell which, in summoning the monks to prayer by day an by night, was heard far beyond the confines of the cloister. The rules for the market of Salisbury, for example, in the early years of the fourteenth century, refer specifically to the striking of the cathedral clock. (172-3)[22]

The Church played an important role in late medieval English society, and the time that regulated the activity of monks within the walls of a cloister was the same time that regulated the secular and civic activities outside. In fact, religious notions of time were often employed as a means of reinforcing, maintaining, and regulating the social class boundaries threatened in the wake of the economic upheaval of the plague.

---

[21] Dohrn-van Rossum writes, "The statutes of the Abbey of St. Mary in York, revised prior to 1404, arranged not only the waking time but the entire monastic daily routine explicitly by the hours of the clock. [...] Thus churches and monasteries, no differently than secular institutions, did not hesitate in introducing and making practical use of the new technology as soon as it was available." See Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour* 232. See also L. MacLachlan and J.B. L. Tolhurst, *The Ordinal and Customary of the Abbey of St. Mary York* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1936), 49, 158.

[22] See C.F.C. Beeson, *English Church Clocks 1280-1850: History and Classification.* (Sussex: The Antiquarian Horological Society, London, 1971),16.

Time's Reckoning: Time, Value and the Mercantile Class in Late Medieval English Literature

The main question driving the chapters that follow is how does time function in late medieval English literature? Why, for instance, does the York Corpus Christi Cycle, a civic cycle meant to celebrate a religious festival, make so many references to time, especially in relationship to issues of labor and social hierarchy? Why does the jeweler-narrator of *Pearl* require such a lengthy exposition of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard? And finally, why does Chaucer make use of complex and elaborate methods of reckoning time consecutively within the same passages of the *Canterbury Tales* merely to indicate a simple, single point in time?[23] *Time's Reckoning* argues that the practice of reckoning time participates in the instabilities that Rodney Hilton has famously referred to as *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism.* I have chosen the following texts because they all incorporate time-reckoning in their content as well as address some thematic issues surrounding the reckoning of time. The texts are rich in temporal discourse and employ various methods and systems for reckoning time. Further, I intentionally decided to examine texts from various genres, in part to show the pervasiveness of the interest in time. Finally, my analysis of these three late medieval English texts reveals a specific anxiety about the rank and status of the rising mercantile class.

In chapter one, "Staging Time: Regulating Status in the York Corpus Christi Cycle," I write about how, as a civic event performed to mark and celebrate a religious

---

[23] Linne R. Mooney observes "at least the two almanac writers [John Somer and Nicholas of Lynn] and Chaucer were in the habit of citing the time by several methods consecutively, as if to compare them." See Linne R. Mooney, "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 15 (1993): 92.

festival, the Cycle's temporal discourse, particularly the conflation of religious time with the everyday time of laborers, highlights the reckoning of time as a way of asserting superior social status, especially for the mercantile class. Keeping in mind that the Cycle was directed by the powerful merchants' guild of York, it reveals a concern with the issue of authority especially in regards to time and labor. My discussion centers mainly around the The Fall of the Angels, the Noah pageants (The Building of the Ark and The Flood), the Crucifixion, and The Last Judgement. While all late medieval Corpus Christi Cycles are organized around a typological time-scheme (based on Biblical history), the York *Cycle* in particular invokes the theme of time as central to the issue of labor and production.

My second chapter, "Time's Boundaries: The Ends of Time in *Pearl*" analyzes the myriad of temporal schemes presented in the dream vision *Pearl.* The narrator of the poem is a jeweler, a member of the mercantile and/or artisanal class, who sees his deceased daughter in the form of the Pearl maiden. In his vision, the maiden explicates the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, a parable that at once challenges the narrator's perception of time and speaks directly to the shifting economic practices of late-fourteenth England. I explore time's role in the tension between the merchant/jeweler's economic reality and the Pearl maiden's religious notion of heavenly time and its resultant rewards. The jeweler's limited access to the heavenly realm reflects his own liminal economic and social status in a society where he is allowed to associate with the aristocratic class yet, for the time being, must remain a humble servant in the vineyard.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the work of Geoffrey Chaucer. In "Tricks of Time: The Power of Time-Reckoning in the *Canterbury Tales*," I argue that

the ability to reckon time functions as a means of asserting, and sometimes undermining, characters' social status, especially the increasingly wealthy mercantile and artisan class. As author of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* and controller of customs in the port of London, Chaucer was intimately aware of time's social value. The chapter focuses mainly on the fabliaux, i.e., the *Miller's Tale* and the *Shipman's Tale*. In both tales, characters associated with the Church who possess time-reckoning instruments hatch plans that hinge on their superior knowledge of reading and using time.

Finally, in "The End(s) of Time," I conclude by summarizing and reflecting on some of the eschatological issues raised by the texts I examine. In this conclusion, I provide a brief summary of the historical context of apocalyptic and eschatological literature in late medieval England. I comment on the role of the end of time, the Final Reckoning, as presented in all of the texts. My analysis of these texts reveals not only an increasing commodification of time during this period, but also a new understanding of how that commodity could be translated into social status, specifically in regards to the rising mercantile class. These texts show how late medieval English writers employed time-reckoning to function both as a signifier of social relations and the tool by which those relationships were established.

CHAPTER 1

STAGING TIME: TIME, VALUE AND THE MERCANTILE CLASS

IN THE YORK CORPUS CHRISTI CYCLE[24]

Perhaps the most important way the urban bourgeoisie spread its culture was the revolution it effected in the mental categories of medieval man. The most spectacular of these revolutions, without a doubt, was the one that concerned the concept and measurement of time.
Jacques Le Goff, *The Fontana Economic History of the Middle Ages*

At the conclusion of the Woolpackers' and Woolbrokers' play of the *Supper at Emmaus* in the York Corpus Christi Cycle, one of the pilgrims who encounters the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus apologizes to the audience for cutting the action short:

> I PERIGRINUS. Here may we notte melle more at þis tyde,
> For prossesse of plaies þat précis in plight. (XL. 191-2)

In this moment, the actor draws attention to the "real time" of the production. Appearing towards the end of the cycle, the lines remind the audience of the pageant-wagons lined up behind the station waiting to perform. According to the civic records, the players were to be assembled and ready to perform at 4:30 AM the morning of Corpus Christi Day or be subject to a fine:

---

[24] All citations from the York Corpus Christi Cycle are taken from *The York Plays*. Ed. Richard Beadle (London: E. Arnold, 1982).

euery player that shall play be redy in his pagiaunt at convenyant tyme that is to say at the mydhowre betwixt iiijth & vth of the cloke in the mornyng & then all oyer pageants fast folowyng ilkon after oyer as yer course is without Tarieng sub facienda camere vj s viij d. (REED 25)

On the level of performance, the cycle unfolds within time, a time made glaringly apparent by the processional staging, as the lines from the *Supper at Emmaus* cited above remind us and the regulation from the civic ordinance reveals. On the narrative level, the cycle performs the scriptural history beginning with the Barkers' (Tanners') production of the *Creation and Fall of the Angels* and concluding with the Mercers' production of the *Last Judgement*. As V.A. Kolve has pointed out, "the Corpus Christi drama was most significantly concerned with the ways God has allowed Himself to be known *in time*" (3). But the performance of the York Corpus Christi Cycle also marks the feast of Corpus Christi Day, a moveable feast celebrated the Thursday after Trinity Sunday.[25] The cycle demonstrates a remarkable interest not only in theatrical timing and the scriptural representation of time, but also in exploring the profound social function of the everyday use of time. Enacting Christian history within time as a celebration marking time, the pageants present the modern audience with one of the most well-documented performances of civic time from the late middle ages.

In this chapter, I focus on five primary pageants: the Barkers'[26] *The Fall of the Angels,* the Shipwrights' *The Building of the Ark,* the Fishers and Mariners' *The Flood,* the Pinners' *The Crucifixion,* and the Mercers' *The Last Judgement.* I have selected these

---

[25] Corpus Christi Day fell within between May 21 and June 24, depending on the date of Easter. See Meg Twycross, "The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre.* Ed. Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 38.

[26] Barkers were tanners "concerned with the preparation of hides for manufacture into leather goods. They were evidently a numerous and prosperous trade in medieval York, and their prestige is perhaps reflected in their ownership of the first play in the cycle throughout its recorded career." See Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 1.

pageants not only because they portray and perform revealing aspects of time, but also because they are thematically linked in their treatment of human salvation—an act associated with the end of time. Fascinatingly, the pageants which represent most significantly the relationship between labor and time are also those that deal with establishing and maintaining the social rank and status, specifically in regards to authoritative relationships (i.e. husbands over wives, fathers over sons, lords over knights). The punishment for deviating from one's social position, as the pageants make clear, is eternal damnation, while the reward for serving within one's social role is eternal salvation. Social rank is reflected in the authority to regulate time; obedience or deviation from that authority has eternal consequences.

In her article, "Cultural Approaches to Medieval Drama," Kathleen Ashley reminds us of the Corpus Christi Cycle's function and role in regards to constructing myth: "Situated at the ritual center of the urban ceremonial year and crucial to civic mythmaking, the cycles performed the town's identity both for its citizens and to the nation at large" (60). For the York Corpus Christi Cycle, economic power, maintained largely by the town's Mercer's guild, was central to that myth. As the second most powerful city in late medieval England after the Black Death of 1349, York was also home to one of earliest and longest running Corpus Christi Cycles of record with the first mention of the pageants in 1376 and performances continuing annually, with rare exceptions, until a final, unsuccessful, attempt to stage the cycle in 1580.[27] The York cycle has the longest extant cycle text at 13,121 lines. According to Beadle and King, "there is no doubt that the [York] cycle was also intended to reflect the wealth and

---

[27] The last performance of record took place in 1569. For more about the history of the York cycle's production and performance, see Richard Beadle, *The York Plays* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), 19-20.

prestige of the city, particularly the economic pride and self-confidence of the merchants and master-craftsmen who financed the performances annually" (ix).

The first record of the feast of the Corpus Christi in England dates back to 1318 (Rubin 199). As an annual event, the Corpus Christi cycle would have served to mark time as a communal celebration of the feast of the Corpus Christi. The date of the Corpus Christi feast was moveable, dependent on when Easter fell in any given year. The feast occurs the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, which could place the celebration as early as May 21 and as late as June 24. The cycle celebrates the body of Christ through its performances based on Christian history enacted by the members of the city's guilds. Although the cycle occurs on a single day, the content of the pageants would have invoked the yearly time scheme of the liturgical calendar.[28] Trying to imagine how audiences would have understood the cycle within their temporal framework, Ruth Nisse urges modern readers of the plays to imagine "the public spectacle of a summer feast day celebration and to decipher a series of references to annual liturgical events—Candelmas or Easter festivities, for instance—prompted by the cycle form's invocations of the entire church calendar" (4). In other words, as the cycle progressed from the Nativity to the Crucifixion, the narrative source of the liturgical calendar would be enacted for the audience. The celebration of the Corpus Christi cycle, then, becomes a time when the citizens of York witness time unfolding before their eyes.

---

[28] There is some debate as to whether or not the cycle could have been performed in its entirety in a single day. Margaret Dorrell has mapped out a possible performance schedule of the pageants based on the length of the individual pageants and the time required to move the pageant-wagons from one station to the next. According to Dorrell, the cycle could have been performed in its entirety if begun at 4:30am, as the civic ordinances dictate. The performance would have lasted all day and ended at about 1am the next morning. See Margaret Dorrell, "Two Studies of the York Corpus Christi Play," *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 63-111. Dorrell's work remains the dominant thinking in scholarship about the performance schedule for the York cycle. For a criticism of Dorrell's work, see Martin Stevens, "Postscript," *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 113-115.

The cycle celebrates the body of Christ through the glorification of his life story as prefigured in the Old Testament and depicted in the New Testament. The clergy, however, are surprisingly largely absent from the planning and production of the cycle intended to celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi. As a civic event produced by the various guilds of York and overseen by the city government, the cycle presents quotidian medieval cultural concerns against the backdrop of the biblical narrative. The York cycle not only celebrates the body of Christ as represented in biblical narrative, but also presents a profound concern with the uses and functions of time in late medieval English society.

The cycle presents the distinctions between crafts guilds and non-crafts guilds, and historical documents point towards conflict between these two groups. As Sarah Beckwith contends, the cycle is more concerned with "construct[ing] a series of tensions" rather than proclaiming a cohesive, unified dogma (67). The role of the merchant class both in regulating the cycle and governing the city, coupled with the cycle's frequent use of economic language and the depiction of physical labor, provide this present study with a unique intersection of ideological functions, namely religious and economic, in which to examine the social role of time.

Jacques Le Goff's famous thesis about time in the Middle Ages constructs a binary between Church time and merchant time that sets the two in conflict with one another. But as Le Goff's own example from medieval York, cited in the Introduction, illustrates, secular and religious time often existed in harmony. Le Goff proposed that the medieval Christian merchant practiced within both time schemes but that he did not do so simultaneously. He writes that "For the Christian merchant, [Church's time] was

essentially the second horizon of his existence. The time in which he worked

professionally was not the time in which he lived religiously" (37). But the Church, as a

commercial institution, was not immune to the changing economic structures in late

medieval England. In York, the cycle is the site where secular and sacred notions of time

come together to celebrate and perform the economic power of the city. Moreover, the

religious time of the Corpus Christi cycle *was* the work of the merchants in York as

members of the guild controlled the production throughout the middle ages. A close

analysis of the pageants reveals that the reckoning of time is used as an instrument of

power throughout, one that not only controls the rate of production, but also ranks its

citizens within the social hierarchy of late medieval York.

The major didactic purpose of the cycle is to instruct the laity in the history of

their faith through stories from the bible; however, more recent scholarship on the York

cycle has begun to examine how the cycle also functions as a source of civic pride,

revealing views of how the city saw itself and how it wanted to be perceived.[29]

Furthermore, scholarship is beginning to examine the role of guilds in the production and

performance, as well as to emphasize the civic and social function of the cycles.[30] This

trend can even be seen in the title under which the York cycle is performed today: they

---

[29] See Chester N. Scoville's *Saints and the Audience in Middle English Biblical Drama,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) especially pgs. 3-9; Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), especially chapters three and four; Stephen Spector's "Time, Space and Identity in the *Play of the Sacrament*," in *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan E. Knight (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997) 190-200, discusses how the relationship between religious drama and social identity is not confined to the productions of mystery cycles.

[30] For the role of the guilds in York, see R.B. Dobson, "Craft Guilds and City: The Historical Origins of the York Mystery Plays Reassessed," *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Alan E. Knight (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997) 91-105; Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2001), 42-55; and Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

are "Mystery" plays or cycles, emphasizing the role of guilds in the production rather than the religious festival the performance was once intended to commemorate. This present study is also interested in the representations of quotidian life in late medieval England as represented in the pageants that reveal a great deal about the society in which the cycle was produced and performed.

With a large portion of York's population involved in manufacturing, it is not surprising that the theme of labor should pervade nearly every pageant of the cycle. Often, the very tools of the trade can be found within the individual pageants as we see in the Shipwrights' *Building of the Ark* and the Pinners' *Crucifixion*. The organization of the cycle reflects the division of labor: each guild is responsible for an individual pageant that most appropriately represents or is associated with its occupation. Mounting a production on the scale of the York Corpus Christi would have required an enormous amount of time, labor, energy, and effort. Ruminating on the planning, preparation and performance of the York cycle, Beadle observes the following:

> These immense physical demands in relation to a single artistic enterprise by one community have no significant modern analogue, and the practical conception answers to an equally singular grandeur and complexity of thought: the idea of a unified drama of the Fall and Redemption of mankind presented in such a way as to implicate the spiritual lives of the audience throughout. ("York Cycle" 88)

The scale and scope of the project necessitated the distribution of production as we see in *The Records of Early English Drama: York.* While the presentation of these individual pageants within the cycle may seem to suggest cooperation and social cohesion, Sarah Beckwith argues that "far from unifying the city of York, the Corpus Christi festivities are intimately bound up with a divisive political regulation of labor" (42).

29

Beckwith's reading of the Corpus Christi is important in that it distinguishes labor

as a unique concern of the York cycle. Building upon Beckwith's reading, I argue that

time is central both to the political regulation of labor in organizing the play and to the

representation of labor in the pageants themselves.   The theme of time's relationship to

labor is so prominent throughout the York Corpus Christi Cycle that when "work" is

mentioned or labor is depicted, the speed of production, age of the laborer, or time of day

or year invariably follows. This is perhaps not surprising given that time regulates labor,

but what is interesting about the depiction of time in the cycle is how it continually

relates to the theme of maintaining a hierarchical social order.

The first pageant of the cycle, the Barkers' *The Fall of the Angels*, not only depicts

the fall of Lucifer, but also emphasizes the result of his fall: the division of night from

day.

> DEUS. In hell shall neuer myrknes by myssande,
>   Þe myrknes thus name I for nighte;
>   The day, þat call I this lyght--
>   My after-warks shall þai by wyssande.
>
>   Ande nowe in my blyssyng I twyne tham in two,
>   The nighte euen fro þe day, so þat thai mete neuer,
>   But ather in a kynde courese þaire gates for to go.
>   Bothe þe nighte and þe day, does dewly your deyuer,
>   To all I shall wirke be ye wissyng.
>   This day warke es done ilke a dele,
>   And all þis warke lykes me ryght wele,
>   And baynely I gyf it my blyssyng. (I. 149-160)

The word "work," used as both a noun and a verb, is mentioned four times in the space of

eleven lines. The repetition of "work" in this passage emphasizes the significance of

God's intervention in the intersecting relationship between labor and time. God is

depicted as creating time, namely the division of night from day. The linking of work

with the creation of the span of a day reveals God's plan for what constitutes a "day's work." God's action is not punitive, but creative. In dividing night from the day, God creates the most common and basic unit for measuring time: the daily cycle. Furthermore, this act of creating the "daily cycle" is considered by God as "work," placing God in the position of a laborer. It is important to note, however, that God's labor in this pageant, the first pageant performed annually to mark the beginning of the cycle, is only indicated verbally and not depicted physically; His "work" is in the form of commanding, not physical labor. Furthermore, despite the punishment that Lucifer suffers as a result of his hubris, God's first command, or "blessing," in the cycle is not that of judgment or punishment; rather, it is the act of creation through separation. Specifically, God's "work" consists of creating a cycle of time that will in turn come to regulate the labor of His later creation, man.

In separating night from day, God also imparts time with a natural divide. The night, now associated with Lucifer's transgression, is to be separate from the light of day that will guide Man's work. Lines 53 through 55 emphasize the divisible nature of time stating that night and day shall never meet, but that they should each go their way in a natural course. The implications of *The Fall of Angels* pageant for a late medieval English audience are also fascinating in terms of constructing authority and illustrating the dangers of overstepping one's status. Lucifer's fall, for instance, is the direct result of his pride and arrogance as he seeks to elevate himself to God's status.

> LUCIFER. Ther sall I set myselfe full semely to seyghte,
> To ressayue my reuerence thorowe righte o renowne;
> I sall be lyke vnto hym þat es hyeste on heghte.
> Owe, what I am derworth and defte—Owe! Dewes! All goes downe!
> My mighte and my mayne es all marrande—

Helpe, felawes! In faythe I am fallande. (I. 89-94)

In this pageant, the fall is not depicted as God's punishment, but, rather, the fall is

presented as the inevitable and immediate result of Lucifer's attempt to usurp a status

above his own. In attempting to ascend to the highest height, the resulting action is a fall.

The division of night from day as the result of Lucifer's hubris is entirely absent

from the account provided in Genesis. "Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux. Et vidit

Deus lucem quod esset bona et divisit lucem ac tenebras. Appellavitque lucem diem et

tenebras noctem factumque est vespere et mane dies unus" (Genesis 1:3-5).[31] The

biblical account does indicate that God saw that the light was good, but there is no

corresponding judgment that explicitly links darkness with that which is not good. While

it can be inferred from the Genesis passage that darkness, as the absence of light, is the

absence of that which is good, the link between darkness and Lucifer is not present in the

biblical account of creation. Furthermore, the division of night from day is entirely

within God's purview with no mention of Lucifer or his grab for power.

The lesson that devastating consequences result from transgressing one's social

position is of particular note in light of the Peasants' Uprising of 1381.[32] One of the

rights demanded by the rebels of the Uprising was the ability to negotiate wage-labor

contracts—a right that would serve to weaken the social hierarchy of the already

vulnerable three estate system. Lucifer's sin in the pageant, then, reflects a major anxiety

---

[31] All biblical passages are taken from the Vulgate as found online at
http://www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/Vulgate/Genesis.html

[32] See *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*. ed. R.B. Dobson, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1983); Christopher Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381," *The English Rising of 1381* Eds. R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 9-42; J.A. Tuck's "Nobles, Commons and the Great Revolt of 1381," *The English Rising of 1381*. Eds. R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 194-212.

in late medieval English society: the usurping of a higher social position by someone of a lower position. The didactic purpose of the pageant is clear: plotting to usurp a higher status will only lead to the plotter's downfall. In the pageant, it is the individual, however, who has the authority to determine his course—not God or, by extension, a lord or noble in charge of labor. The social order, as presented here, is so intrinsic to one's nature that to deviate from that order, even in one's imagination, leads to destruction and downfall. Lucifer's status is so inherent that his attempt to usurp a higher status immediately results in its own punishment, with no need for an external authority either to judge the transgression or deliver the punishment.

Lucifer's sin, however, results not only in his fall, but also in the creation of night, a period of time described twice within the pageant as "murky." The negative depiction of night is not unique to the York cycle. According to A.J. Gurevich, "Night was the time of danger and terrors, of the supernatural, of demons and of other dark and mysterious forces" (Gurevich 107).[33] The association between night and Lucifer is repeated in the cycle's final pageant, *The Last Judgement,* when a Bad Soul cites night as the time when he served Satan.

> 2 BAD SOUL. Rought we neuer of Goddis seruise,
>   His comaundementis wolde we no t kepe,
>   But ofte þan made we sacrafise
>   To Satanas when othir slepe. (XLVII. 149-152)

---

[33] Gurevich goes on to explain that "Christianity tried to combat and overcome the conception of night as the time when the devil ruled. Christ, it was taught, was born at night so as to bring the light of truth to those wandering in the night of their error. The light of day was seen as scattering the terrors engendered by the darkness of night. Despite this, throughout the whole of the medieval period, night remained the symbol of evil and sin, and if the Christian Vespers were designed to inspire the soul of the believer with tranquility, and the awareness of the nearness of God, the devil was still closer at hand and more dangerous under the cover of darkness." See A.J. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture,* trans. G.L. Campbell (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1985), 107.

Night then becomes the cover of service to that which is evil and rebellious. The Bad Souls acknowledge that they have never served God. The cycle would have reminded its audience of the importance not only of obedience to God, but also specifically of not transgressing one's social position. In other words, once a year the cycle's audience would have been reminded that division of night and day was the direct result of Lucifer's aspiring to heights beyond his reach. Emphasizing the division of night and day as the result of hubris, this first pageant serves to introduce the theme of social stratification to a cycle meant to celebrate the body of Christ.

The performative nature of the cycle produces yet another layer of temporal significance to the cycle as a whole and to this pageant in particular. As the first pageant presented in the cycle, *The Fall of the Angels* not only depicts the division of day and night, but also utilizes the time of the performance, dawn, as a natural backdrop that serves to reinforce thematic elements being performed.

> According to the Proclamation of 1415, performance of the cycle as a whole was scheduled to begin at 4:30 a.m., and in the giving of this first play at the first station the dramatist achieved a masterstroke of theatrical effect, combining the themes of creation and light with the dawning of Corpus Christi day. (Beadle and King 2)

The primary position of the pageant in the cycle thus emphasizes its significance. Beadle imagines the scene as follows: "The rising of the sun was greeted at the first station outside the gates of Holy Trinity Priory, Micklegate, by God's opening speech in the Barkers' pageant, creating his bright angels and the first heavenly light" ("York Cycle" 93-94). The narrative time, daybreak, coincides with the natural time of the cycle's setting at the first station. Day begins, creation begins, and the cycle begins in a perfect alignment of temporal systems.

The beginning time for the cycle could be harkening back to an earlier natural

temporal system that had largely been replaced by an equal hour time system. Chris

Humphrey argues that mechanical clocks were present in York as early as 1324 with the

Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary's as one of the earliest institutions to make use of the new

technology. [34] Writing about *The Ordinal and Customary of the Abbey of Saint Mary,*

York, Humphrey notes that

> the office of prime, the first service of the day and originally celebrated at
> dawn, should begin when the clock struck seven at all times of the year.
> The significance of this shift was that the abbey's services were no longer
> synchronized with a twelve-fold division of night and day: instead they
> were to begin at an abstract signal determined by the clock. The severing
> of the link between dawn and the first service of the day represents a
> crucial first step in the demise of a traditional system of time-keeping that
> was based around the observation of religious services at the
> corresponding hours of daylight. (110)

The *Ordinal* is thought to have been composed between 1398 and 1405.[35] The temporal

hour system still seems to have existed alongside the equal hour system of clock-time,

but in this instance, we see that clock time actually sets the ensuing temporal hours of the

day. By beginning at dawn, then, the cycle harkens back to this natural reckoning of the

division of night and day, that of the first sign of morning. The outdoor setting of the

---

[34] Humphrey's argument is based on an entry in *The Chronicle of St. Mary's York*, in which the sacristan
Stephan de Austerwick notes that a new *orologium* and bell had been made. Humphrey acknowledges the
ambiguous meaning of *orologium*, which could mean any time-telling device such as a sundial, a water
clock, or a mechanical clock. His argument for the St. Mary's clock as mechanical is based on the fact that
other cathedrals and monastic institutions, such as Norwich and Lincoln Cathedral, were acquiring
mechanical clocks around this time. See *The Chronicle of St. Mary's, York,* ed. H.H.E. Craster and M.E.
Thornton, Surtees Society 148 (Durham: Surtees Society, 1934), 73. For more about the Norwich and
Lincoln clocks, see F.C. Haber, "The Cathedral Clock and the Cosmological Clock Metaphor," *The Study
of Time II*, ed. J.T. Fraser and N. Lawrence (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1975), 399-416.

[35] See *The Ordinal and Customary of Abbey of Saint Mary, York*, ed. L. MacLachlan and J.B.L. Tolhurst,
Henry Bradshaw Society 73 (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1936), vii.

cycle would thus have provided a natural and powerfully symbolic setting for the action unfolding on the pageant wagon.

The dividing of time into twenty-four equal hours rather than twelve-hour units dividing the length of day and night represents perhaps one of the greatest shifts in temporal reckoning in late medieval England. While Humphrey and J.D. North remind us that the notion of equal hours existed before the advent of mechanical clocks, the proliferation of those clocks, in combination with the rising power of the merchant class who required a more accurate measure of time, certainly aided in the institutionalization of equal hours as the example from the Abbey of Saint Mary in York cited above illustrates. Liturgical hours and clock hours are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact, clock hours were often used to regulate liturgical hours. The pageant's emphasis on service to God suggests to the audience that to challenge the social hierarchy was nothing less than an attempt to usurp God's authority.

The end of time, depicted in the *Last Judgement*, occurs during the day, a fact that is emphasized by the eleven references to "day" throughout the pageant.

> DEUS. Þis day þer domys þus haue I dight
>   To ilka man as he hath serued me. (XLVII. 79-80)

Each man's behavior is judged in accordance to his obedience and service to the divine authority. The repetition of "this day" combined with present tense verbs serves to reinforce the immediacy of judgement day and God's purview in determining when that day will be/is.

> DEUS. Þe dredfull dome þis day is dight. (XLVII. 186)
> 1 DIABOLUS. Þe dredefull dome þis day is dight. (XLVII. 219)
> DEUS. The day is comen of kaydyfnes,
>   All þam to care þat are vnclene,

36

> Þe day of bale and bittirnes—
> Full longe abedyn has it bene;
> Þe day of drede to more and lesse,
> Of ire, of trymbelyng, and of tene,
> Þat ilke wight þat weried is
> May say, 'Allas, þis daye is sene'. (XLVII. 237-44)
> DEUS. Þis dredfull day þis sight to see. (XLVII. 274)

The repeated use of the present tense and the word "day" also serves to highlight the fact that this last pageant is the only one to depict future events rather than events from the past. But rather than using future tense verbs to portray the coming or approaching day of judgement, the use of present tense serves to cast the audience into the future, a future they experience in the present performance of the pageant. Furthermore, the repetition serves to link time to God's authority over time. Theologian Oscar Cullmann, author of *Christ and Time*, reminds us, "This his Lordship is shown in the fact that he alone knows the *kairoi* or seasons of his redemptive action, that he alone knows *the* day and *the* hour, which are unknown to 'the angels in heaven' and even to 'the Son' (Mark 13:32)" (70). God not only creates the division between night and day, but also determines the final day of creation, the end of days.

The two pageants that most prominently depict acts of physical labor, the Shipwrights' *Building of the Ark* and the Pinners' *Crucifixion,* are also pageants in which time plays a dominant role in terms of both narrative and theme. In the *Building of the Ark*, the association between the labor of the Shipwrights and the redemptive work of the cycle is made explicit. As Beadle explains:

> It is the closing words of the script which embellish what has been the playwright's intention throughout, to blend the daily labour of the York Shipwrights with the divine scheme of redemption, for they revolve around a felicitous play on the word 'craft', which signifies both the play-Ark, the vessel which has just taken shape before the audience's eyes, and

at the same time the divinely-inspired craft or 'mystery' of shipbuilding
which God has taught Noah. ("York Cycle" 87)

These lines at the end of the pageant also portray God as the master craftsman, a theme

depicted throughout the Creation pageants:

> NOE. He þat to me þis Crafte has kende,
>   He wysshe vs with his worthy wille. (VIII. 150-151)

Writing on these same lines, Beckwith elaborates further on the function of "work" in the

pageant in particular and cycle at large: "The meaning of the word for 'work,' then, is

densely encoded to mean at once humanity as the object of God's work, the work of

making humanity, the work of restoring it, and Noah's work of ark building and

salvation" (44). The work of the cycle—redemptive, practical, and theatrical—is

inextricably bound to time. It is not that the work merely unfolds within time, rather, the

timing of the events must be precise and accurate in order to imbue them with their

sacred meaning. The overt references to the reckoning of time throughout the pageant

serve to heighten the tension between the performance of the work and the time in which

the work is being performed. This tension between work and time is explicitly linked to

the theme of obedience and authority.

The two pageants depict a collapse or acceleration of time wherein a long period

of time flashes before the eyes of the audience.[36] In the *Building of the Ark,* Noah is

instructed by God to build an ark. He labors in front of the audience as one hundred

years pass by in a matter of seconds:

> NOE. Full trewe it is, who will take tente,
>   Bot faste my force begynnes to fawlde.
>   A hundereth wyntres[37] away is wente

---

[36] This 'bending' of time also occurs in the Chester Corpus Christi Cycle's version of the Noah pageant.
[37] Marking yearly cycles by the winter season is a tradition commonly found in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

> Sen I began þis werk, full grathely talde,
> And in slyke trauayle for to be bente
> Is harde to hym þat is þus olde.
> But he þat to me þis messages sent,
> He wille be my beylde, þus am I bowde. (VIII. 112-119)

But the collapsing of time in the *Building of the Ark* pageant is more than a simple theatrical device to depict the passing of a long period of time. A few lines earlier when Noah laments that he is too old to undertake the task God has bestowed on him, God responds by reversing his age so that he can perform the grueling labor involved in constructing the ark:

> NOE. Fyfe hundreth wyntres I am of elde—
>   Methynk þer   eris as yesterday. (VIII. 91-2)

While God has simply given Noah the strength of a younger man, Noah interprets the miracle as a bending of time: five hundred years have become one day. That God's relationship to time differs from man's is made clear in the bible: "unum vero hoc non lateat vos carissimi quia unus dies apud Dominum sicut mille anni et mille anni sicut dies unus" (2 Peter 3:8). According to Cullmann, "the purpose is to assert, not the timelessness of God, but rather the endless character of time of God, which he alone can grasp and which can be expressed only by saying that for God the standards for measuring time are different" (69). In other words, man lacks the capacity to understand God's omnipotence, especially in regards to his authority over time. In regards to God's authority in the realm of time, Cullmann continues:

> it may be said that God alone rules over time, for he alone can survey it in
> its entire extension, and measure it with measures which are as different
> from ours as the duration of a day is different from the duration of a
> thousand years. He as Lord over time can 'compress' it (I Cor. 7:29: "the
> *kairos* is shortened"), inasmuch as he determines the duration of the
> different periods of time, the 'ages.' He, accordingly, in the exercise of

the Lordship over time, can 'shorten' the days, as it is said in Matt. 24:22.
He alone fixes the terminal points of his *kairoi*. (79)

In this respect, then, the collapsing of time during the plays serves not only as a convenient theatrical device, but also as a reminder of God's ultimate authority over time. Furthermore, the fact that Noah, as God's chosen worker, is the beneficiary of God's ability to bend time highlights the relationship between employer and worker. Noah, as laborer, is subject to God's timeline and is subject to his standards for measuring time.

As one hundred years of ship-building pass by in a matter of seconds in the *Building of the Ark,* so too do nine months on the ark in the *Flood.* Noah instructs his sons about caring for the livestock and within the space of a few lines, nine months have passed:

> NOE. My sonnes, se e mydday and morne
> To thes catelles takes goode heede;
> Keppes þam wele with haye and corne;
> And women, fanges þes foules and feede,
> So þat þey be no t lightly lorne
> Als longe as we þis liffe sall lede.
> II FILIUS. Fadir, we ar full fayne
> Youre biddyng to fulfille.
> ix monethes paste er playne
> Sen we wer putte to peyne. (IX. 171-180)

A short while later, Noah reiterates that they have indeed been on the boat for nine months:

> NOE. IX monethes here haue we bene pyned,
> But when God wyll, better mon bee. (IX. 218-219)

The repetition of the period of time serves the broad didactic purpose of the cycles as vehicles for educating the laity about the biblical narrative. But nine months is also the length of time for human gestation; the time period symbolically links the ark to

regeneration, thereby emphasizing the act of salvation over that of destruction. The ark is literally pregnant with God's creation to be delivered after laboring for nine months.

While the nine-month cycle would seem most naturally obvious to the female characters in the pageant, it is only the men who mark time in this way. When Noah's daughter-in-law reckons the time, she relates it to an annual cycle, a year rendered in months, and employs a mathematical equation that not only requires computation, but also evokes symbolic numerical perfection:

> III FILIA. A twelmothe bott xij weke
>   Have we be houerand here. (251-252)

The daughter-in-law's reckoning of time emphasizes the number twelve and, in so doing, draws attention to the religious significance of the number. But in order to employ the number twelve, she needs to mix months, a unit of time based on the lunar cycle, with weeks, a unit of time established in Genesis which harkens back to the creation of the world. Without a doubt, the daughter-in-law's reckoning is far more complex in structure. The reckoning requires the audience to consider the length of year, linking the action in the pageant to the annual nature of the cycle's performance, and then work backwards in time. Furthermore, the unit of time being subtracted from a year, because it is smaller than a month, is much more difficult to conceptualize in relation to a year. A twelve-week period is roughly equivalent to three months, a much easier unit of time to consider in relation to a year, but to render the period of time as three months would be to lose the symbolic link the passage makes to the creation of the world.[38]

---

[38] The Genesis story reckons time in years, months, and days; there is no mention of weeks. Furthermore, the biblical story puts Noah and his family on the ark for a little over a year. The rains are said to have begun on the seventeenth day of the second month of the six hundredth year of Noah's life. The earth is

The Wakefield cycle goes one step further in establishing a link between the earthly hierarchy and heavenly order. As Kolve points out,

> For the Wakefield Master adds to the serious context a new detail and uses it to make explicit a philosophical significance merely latent in the others. It is signaled by Noah's speech concerning the urgency of departure, made before what we may call the 'domestic storm' begins:
>
>> Behold to the heuen / the cateractes all,
>> That the open full euen / grete and small,
>> And the planettis seuen / left has thare stall,
>> Thise thoners and levyn / downe gar fall
>>> Fful stout. (343-47).
>
> The seven planets have left their places in the sky; all is chaos and lack of order. (The Vulgate speaks simply of torrential rains). And to this macrocosmic anarchy the drama relates the microcosm. God's great world is turned upside down just as is man's little world, and for the same reason: proper *maistrye* has been destroyed. Just as fallen man is rebellious to his master, God, so too is the wife rebellious to her husband, and only when the proper human relationship is re-established does the universal order begin to reconstruct itself. (150)

The difference between the sexes in reckoning time in the York cycle seems to point to a difference in how the genders perceived time. When Noah's wife learns that the world is coming to an end, she is devastated not by the prospect of the world's destruction as much as she is upset with her husband for not sharing this knowledge with her—knowledge he has had for one hundred years:

> VXOR. Noye, þou myght haue leteyn me wete.
>   Erly and late þou wente þeroutte,
>   And ay at home þou lete me sytte
>   To loke þat nowhere were wele aboutte. (IX. 113-116)

The Wife's main concern is that by not knowing of the world's looming destruction, she has wasted the last one hundred years of her life. Noah, however, is not moved by his wife's protest. From his point of view, her ignorance has not cost her anything.

---

described as having dried enough for Noah and his family to leave the ark on the twenty-seventh day of the second month in the six hundred and first year.

> NOE. Now dame, þou thar no t drede a dele,
> For till accounte it cost þee noght.
> A hundereth wyntyrs, I watte wele,
> Is wente sen I þis werke had wrought.
> And when I made endyng,
> God gaffe me mesore fayre
> Of euery ilke thyng;
> He bad þat I should bryng
> Of beestis and foules þynge,
> Of ilke a kynde a peyre. (IX. 131-140)

The use of the verb "cost" is particularly interesting here because it not only points to a commodification of time, but also, more specifically, it reveals the economic exchange of Noah's labor. The use of "deal," "account," and "measure" further establish Noah's labor in economic terms. By reprimanding his wife that her ignorance of the world's destruction did not "cost" her anything, Noah implies that his knowledge has, namely through his physical labor in the construction of the Ark.

The theme of time passing quickly is further emphasized by the sense of urgency throughout both pageants. Time really does pass quickly in these passages, highlighting the theme of how time flies. This urgency is understandable in *The Flood* with the destruction of the world looming. Dramatically, the urgency is used to create a comic tension when Noah's wife won't obey his orders. As husband and father, Noah is the pageant's leading authority figure, further authorized because he is acting on orders from God. He directs his sons to collect their mother before the flood and later gives them feeding directions for the animals. Noah's wife directly challenges her husband's authority, subverting the social order; the wife usurps the role of her husband, an action that is highlighted by the staging.[39] It is important to remember, however, that in this pageant, Noah's wife is reluctant to board the ark not simply for the sake of being

---

[39] This staging is also present in the Chester Cycle.

difficult but because she will miss her friends and feels that she has wasted the last century of her life. Her reasons are touchingly human, but the didactic message of the scene has less to do with the social order of marriage, though that is certainly at play here, than it does with the importance of not wasting one's time. The audience is reminded of the importance of living one's life as if the end is near, a message that will be reiterated in *The Last Judgement*. Although the reason behind the wife's reluctance to board the ark may seem sympathetic to the audience, the consequences of her disobedience make clear the lesson of the scene; not obeying her husband could potentially cost the wife her life.

The significance of the urgency in *The Building of the Ark* is somewhat more difficult to understand when considered literally. Noah has one hundred years, so why does God insist that he work quickly? What exactly is the rush? Here we see not only the moral of not wasting one's time, but also the commodification of time. But the value of time isn't necessarily financial. This is a troubling passage because it is not exactly clear what the one hundred years of labor has cost Noah—it is never explicitly mentioned nor depicted in the pageant. Here, even though the lines emphasize that he labors alone,[40] there is no sense of social estrangement or social cost to performing his task. As an old man, it could be argued that the labor has cost Noah further wear and tear on his body, but even that issue is resolved within the pageant. Noah does not have to 'pay' with physical pain and suffering or public humiliation.[41] If anything, he profits from his labor

---

[40] His sons help him in the building of the ark in Chester Cycle.

[41] In some versions of this play, the neighbors laugh at him.

when God restores his body to that of a young man, yet he reckons his period of labor in economic terms.

The intersection of work time and liturgical time in the York *Crucifixion* pageant creates a tension that is at once disturbing and comical. But the conflation of the quotidian and the cosmic does not profane the subject of Christ's crucifixion; in fact, it does quite the opposite. By conflating the two time schemes, the effect is similar to that of the Noah pageants. Everyday time, specifically the time of work, takes on cosmic significance. In the Noah pageants, his one hundred years of labor "in hie" saves mankind from ultimate destruction. Likewise, the soldiers of the *Crucifixion* pageant are depicted as hurrying to complete their work by the allotted deadline in order to align the present action being performed with the historical, biblical, and liturgical timeline. As in the Noah pageants, the work depicted in the *Crucifixion* is rendered as everyday labor, but with both the Noah pageants and the *Crucifixion* pageant, the real work being performed is nothing less than the salvation of mankind.

The labor of the presenting guild of the *Crucifixion* adds an eerie layer of realism to the events depicted in the pageant. The Pinners are "makers of pins or pegs used to fasten boards together" (Bevington 570). According to Beadle,

> The tools of their trade—hammers, nails, ropes, wedges, timber—are all studiedly displayed to the audience and constant reference made to them in the dialogue, largely to enhance the realistic impact of the presentation, but also because some of these objects later become the 'Instruments of the Passion' displayed by the angels at the Last Judgement (mentioned as properties in the Mercers' inventory). ("York Cycle" 101)

The difficulty in pinning Christ to the cross in the pageant has to do with where the boards were bored, a labor for which the pinners might not necessarily have been

45

responsible. The division of labor affects the time necessary to perform some tasks.[42]

Working in groups, rather than saving time and aiding the speed of production, is

portrayed as slowing the action.

The urgency in trying to get Christ on the cross also reveals an anxiety about

ripping his body apart—a symbolic image fraught with social implications. The purpose

of the cycle is to celebrate the body of Christ and symbolically the social unity

represented therein, but, as Beckwith points out, the cycle is more divisive than unifying.

The *Crucifixion* pageant makes this point exceedingly and uncomfortably clear.

But if the rhetoric of labor surrounding the act is disturbing, the fact that the

characters are in such a rush to finish the job only intensifies the scene's tension. In order

for the central icon, the crucified body of Christ, to attain potency for late medieval

Christians, the soldiers must meet a specified deadline—a deadline the audience would

recognize as historically determined, but one that the soldiers only know as determined

by their superiors who, though absent, are repeatedly referenced throughout the pageant.

In the Noah pageants, God is depicted as the director of the action and it is He

who impresses upon Noah the urgency of his task. First, he is to build the ark quickly in

order to fulfill the one hundred year deadline.

> DEUS. Nooe, as I byd þe, doe fulfill:
>   A shippe I will haue wrought in hye; (VIII. 45-6)

And later, Noah is to collect his family and the animals marked for salvation quickly:

> DEUS. Therefore to my biddyng be bayne,
>   Tille all be herbered, haste þe faste; (VIII. 136-7)

---

[42] See also Legend of the Rood, though the soldiers in the pageant blame Christ's sorcery for their inability to nail him.

Similarly, the opening lines of the *Crucifixion* pageant waste no time in establishing the pageant's sense of urgency as the first soldier calls his fellow soldiers to complete the task at hand.

> I MILES. Sir knightis, take heede hydir in hye,
> This deed on dergh we may noght drawe.
>   ee wootte youreselffe als wele as I
> Howe lordis and leders of owre lawe
> Has geven dome þat þis doote schall dye. (XXXV. 1-5)

The first soldier not only collects the workers in haste, but also, even before he states the nature of the work, he emphasizes that they cannot take their time in the completion of this particular task. This statement is significant in two ways. First, it reveals the significance of the task at hand by stating that it needs to be completed with dispatch. Second, and perhaps more interesting in terms of the cycle's depiction of labor and class, the statement seems to suggest that these 'knights' tend to take their time with other tasks they have been assigned. It could be argued that perhaps the knights are accustomed to taking their time on other tasks out of interest in the quality of their work. The first interpretation clearly emphasizes the cosmic significance of the task being performed, a significance which would have been obvious to the viewing audience. The second interpretation of the same line emphasizes the quotidian use of time in relationship to labor.

The urgency seen in the Noah and Crucifixion pageants reveals a clear hierarchical structure. God commands Noah to perform his task quickly not so much because there is an immediate need for the ark, but because he is his superior. When Noah's wife refuses to board the ark, she is not only disobedient, but her disobedience slows the action. She does eventually acquiesce, but she does not come immediately

47

when called. Writing about the comic battle between Noah and his wife in the Corpus Chrisi Cycles, Kolve states:

> it is simply the notion that all things exist in their proper degree and that the lower shall be subject to the higher. God is greater—stronger, more worshipful—than the angels; the angels, in turn, are above man, man is above woman, human beings above animals. So the progression goes, with obedience as its binding force, and stability as the proper condition within it. The alternative was understood to be chaos and sin (147).[43]

As in the *Fall of the Angels* and the Noah pageants, here in the *Crucifixion* too we see the intersection of time, labor, and authority as the passage also points to the superiors who have ordered the action. When the first soldier tells his coworkers, "ee wootte youreselffe als wele as I" in the above passage, he is addressing not only the other soldiers on stage with him, but also the audience who would have known that the "lords and leaders of our law" have ordered Christ's execution. But the question is, if the characters on stage already know, and the audience already knows, why articulate this point? The passage is significant in that it links urgency with the authority of superiors. The soldiers must hurry their work and not dawdle because, as everyone knows, the "lords and leaders of our law" have ordered it be done. The passage draws attention to the fact that the soldiers are not working for themselves and that their labor is directed by superiors and therefore, their time is not their own. Like Noah, they are workers and must work within a timeframe established by their superiors. Laborers must hurry their labor in order to conform to the time set by those above them.

When the first soldier attempts to assume a position of authority over his coworkers, the clear line of command only serves to slow down the action. The first

---

[43] The disobedience of Noah's wife was a popular image for discussions of "maistrye" in late medieval English literature. See especially the reference to her in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*.

soldier's attention to those ordering the action reveals his role as middle management and

his attempt to align himself with the authority of their superiors, a position his fellow

soldiers do not seem to respect entirely. Throughout the pageant, it is the first soldier

who directs the action of his coworkers, usually with negative, though somewhat comic,

results. Indeed, it is the first soldier who calls the workers together and instructs them

throughout the play.[44] This hierarchy, rather than facilitating the completion of their

task, creates conflict that serves to heighten the task's urgency while at the same time

slowing their pace. The first soldier's attempt to get his fellow workers back on task is

met with resistance that is expressed as a challenge to his authority:

> I MILES. Why carpe   e so? Faste on a corde
>   And tugge hym to, by toppe and taile.
> III MILES.   a, þou comaundis lightly as a lorde;
>   Come helpe to haale, with ille haile.
> I MILES. Nowe certs þat schall I doo—
>   Full snelly as a snayle. (XXXV. 113-8)

The workers end up cursing one another and the resentment born from being ordered

about only results in the slowing down of the task at hand, an urgent task, as we are

informed in the opening lines of the pageant.[45]

The soldiers' speech is as hurried and frenzied as the labor they are describing.

They speak to one another quickly, usually in one or two short lines and rarely exceeding

four lines. Their dialogue is crowded with references about their need to hurry: "But let

us haste him for to hang," "And I have gone for gear good speed," "Have done belive,

boy, and make thee boun," "Let no man spare for special speed," "So shall our space be

---

[44] See lines 101, 105-6, 113-18, 135-6, and 153-56.

[45] See also the example of when the 4th soldier, anxious to report to superiors, is directed by the first soldier to wait (153-6)

speedily spend" (ll. 27, 29, 73, 91, 124). Every time a soldier states the need for urgency,

he links it back to their task at hand. As the soldiers discuss their assigned task, they are

aware of the necessity of completing the task within a specified amount of time:

> IV MILES. Late here howe we schall doo,
>   And go we tyte þeretill.
> I MILES. It may no t helpe her for to hone
>   If we schall any worshippe wynne.
> II MILES. He muste be dede nedelyngis by none.
> III MILES. Þanne is goode tyme þat we begynne. (XXXV 11-16)

On a literal level, the soldiers are faced with the problem of completing their work within

a specified schedule because Christ must be dead by noon. In one sense, this is an

external deadline that is imposed on the soldiers because of history: Christ died at noon.

According to Cullman, "It is not the attainment of our salvation that is elevated above

time; on the contrary, this attainment is completely bound to stages in time: divine

foreordination—Christ's atoning death—the final glorification. But God is superior to

time. He rules over time. From the beginning he is in control of these stages"

(Cullmann 70). In another sense, the soldiers are establishing, i.e. "making," the tradition

that Christ died at noon through their hurried labor. The York cycle establishes religious

tradition through the performing of that tradition, a reading that supports and augments

Beckwith's argument for Corpus Christi theater as sacrament.

Whereas the soldiers are in a hurry, Christ speaks as if he has all the time in the

world. The two speeches given by Christ in the pageant contrast the hurried staccato-like

dialogue of the soldiers:

> JESUS. Almyghty God, my fadir free,
>   Late þis materes be made in mynde:
>   Þou bade þat I schulde buxsome be
>   For Adam plight for to be pyned.

50

> Here to ded I obblisshe me
> Fro þat synne for to saue mankynde,
> And soueraynely beseke I þe
> That þai for me may fauore fynde.
> And fro þe fende þame fende,
> So þat þer saules be safe
> In welthe withouten ende-
> I kepe noght ellis to craue. (XXXV. 49-60)

Christ's first speech is not only unrushed, it also refers to the resulting action of the crucifixion being performed in the present: eternal salvation. Ironically, however, the soldiers mock Christ for not being able to keep quiet.

> I MILES. We, harke, he jangelis like a jay.
> II MILES. Methynke he patris like a py.
> III MILES. He has ben doand all þys day. (XXXV. 265-7)

In fact, it is the soldiers, not Christ, who have been talking all day. Their dialogue about the need to hurry their labor has actually slowed down their action. Mocking Christ for what they themselves are guilty of further serves to heighten the comic presentation of labor in this gruesome scene.

That Christ's body does not conform to the pre-set holes in the wood would seem to suggest the literal incompatibility of liturgical time and work time.[46] Yet, I would argue that although the body must be stretched and pulled, the labor of the soldiers is able to reconcile the body to the board and able to do so within a religious and quotidian time frame. The labor and urgency of the soldiers is not so much at odds with, but rather integral to, the fulfillment of the scripture.

In 1426 the City Council of York decided to move the performance of the cycle to the vigil of the feast day. Records from the city register of York from this year seem to

---

[46] This depiction of Christ's body not conforming to the cross beams is not original to the York Cycle but is drawn from the 'Legend of the Rood.' The 'Legend' presents the cross as shape-shifting. Here the cross is stable, but the holes have been bored incorrectly.

suggest that this was a unanimous decision on the part of both the Council and the

church. An excerpt of that tract follows:

> Upon which the aforesaid mayor convened the citizens together in the said hall, the 10th day of the month aforesaid and the same year, and made proclamation in a solemn manner, where it was ordained by the common assent that this solemn play of Corpus Christi should be played every year on the vigil of the said feast, and that the procession should be made constantly on the day of the said feast, so that all people being in the said city might have leisure to attend devoutly the matins, vespers, and the other hours of the said feast, and be made partakers of the indulgences in that part by the said Roman Pope Urban the fourth most graciously granted and confirmed. (Clarke 87)

This rescheduling of the cycle appears to have lasted only six years, as documents

indicate that in 1432 the performance was moved back to Corpus Christi day. Yet the

problem of holding the procession and the cycle on the same day continued until the late

fifteenth century,[47] when the cleric-led procession was moved to the day following the

feast day, where it remained until the last recorded performance in the sixteenth century.

In his evaluation of the moving of the Chester Corpus Christi Cycle from the feast day to

Whitsunday, Lawrence Clopper suggests that the move was prompted by "some desire to

move the plays away from the celebration of the eucharistic sacrament and toward the

salvific words of Christ, away from the body of Christ (Corpus Christi) and toward the

words of Christ" ("Civic Religious Drama" 111). In the Chester cycle, the ritual event of

the cycle was relocated temporally in order that its mythic intent could be more fully

realized. And it was a similar instance in York, though the consequences and intent were

varied. The displacing of the religious ceremony in York attests to the remarkable power

---

[47] Records indicate that this separating of events could have begun as early as 1468 and was more solid by 1476, remaining that way throughout the sixteenth century. For more details refer to Margaret Dorrell, "Two Studies of the York Corpus Christi Play," *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 63-111. See also Alexandra Johnston, "The Procession and Play of Corpus Christi in York after 1426," *Leeds Studies in English* 7 (1973-4): 55-59.

of the civic authorities as well as to the incredible grip the cycle must have held over the city of York and its citizens. By moving the procession to the following day, the cycle was able to maintain its temporally symbolic link to the day and establish its preeminence over the officially religious ritual of the procession. As a popular tourist attraction that drew in populations from out of town, the cycle was a great boon to the city's economy. Extending the celebration over two days in which one day was the religious observance and the next was the cycle would have resulted in visitors needing to lodge in York an extra night or two and would have increased the consumption of food, drink, and other goods. Also, by distinguishing between the religious observance of the feast and the civic performance of the cycle, audience members would be more comfortable to drink and not worry about getting drunk during what could be considered a sacred ritual.

The sense of urgency found in the Noah pageants and the *Crucifixion* is, curiously enough, almost entirely absent from the *Last Judgement* in the York cycle.[48] The Wakefield cycle presents a number of demons, whose rhetoric is quick, lively, and constantly shifting. The Wakefield cycle's the *Last Judgment* presents a fast-paced and highly frenetic end of the world. In contrast, the York cycle is much more solemn in tone and unrushed in its portrayal of Doomsday. One of the most striking aspects of the *Last Judgement* is its lack of the chaotic and violent imagery one would expect to find associated with the end of the world. The York *Last Judgement* takes the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel as its main source to depict the end of time. The solemnity of the York cycle is a far cry from the Wakefield cycle, which is based on the York

---

[48] The exception being when Angel 1 says God's will "shall be fulfilled in haste" (83).

cycle.[49] In the York cycle, the representation of evil is extremely conservative and

highly controlled. The three demons are only allowed four lines each in the York text

whereas in the Wakefield text two demons alone fill over 200 lines of dialogue, not

including the lines of Tutivilus, the "prime" demon, a character who does not even appear

in the York cycle. The York *Last Judgement*, in contrast, portrays a doomsday that is

controlled and ordered, one in which God and Jesus prevail and evil forces are confined

and limited in their ability to perform.

The cycle itself is structured in such a way as to perform social status and rank;

each guild in the city is responsible for a pageant appropriate or related to its craft. The

Mercers' guild, however, contrasts with the other guilds in that its members do not

actually produce any product in their work. By far the wealthiest and most powerful

guild in York, the Mercers were in the business of marketing textile goods, a very

lucrative enterprise during the fourteenth and fifteenth century and one for which York

was especially known. But it is clear from the records that they were on the trading end

and not directly involved in the manufacturing of the product.

> The complex structure of civic government by councils made an apparent
> distinction between the trading crafts (particularly the Mercers and
> Merchants) and the manufacturing crafts. However, all the crafts,
> including the Mercers, were subject to the jurisdiction of the mayor and
> the civic councils who ratifies their ordinances, set standards of weights
> and measures, and regulated market and prices. (Johnston and Dorrell,
> REED xiii)

This statement implies that the distinction being made is not horizontal, but rather vertical

in nature with a preference allotted to the trading crafts. What is particularly interesting

about this distinction with regards to this present study is the different meaning or value

---

[49] Lines 145-84 and 229-372 from the York "Last Judgement" are also contained in the Wakefield "Last Judgement" (Beadle 463).

that time carried for each of the distinct crafts. The bottom-line for manufacturing crafts

is the rate of production, the amount of time required to manufacture a said product.

Once work clocks are introduced, it becomes possible to divide and mark smaller units of

time, creating a sense of urgency that becomes attached to the work and solidifies the

relationship between time and money. But the merchant's relationship with time is more

complicated, as is the issue of the status of merchants in late medieval English society.

The pageant reveals that while time is clearly commodified, time does not exclusively

function as an instrument of economic exchange. However, the ideological function of

time, here, is also concerned with delineating the divisions of social class; the use of time

reveals status and identity, as it did in the *Fall of the Angels*, the *Noah*, and the

Crucifixion plays.

The power of the Mercers extended beyond their capital success and was manifest

directly within the realm of civic authority. "Of the eighty-eight mayors between 1399

and 1509, sixty-eight were mercers. In some years they dominated the city council; for

example, in 1420 twenty of the twenty-nine members of the council were mercers"

(Johnston and Dorrell 11). The city records reveal a startling correlation between the list

of mayors, the city chamberlain, and the master of the Mercers Guild. With the exception

of one individual, every master of the guild of Mercers was either mayor or city

chamberlain and sometimes even both between the years 1432 and 1598. Of the sixty-

seven masters during this period, fifty-two held the office of mayor at least once (11). In

the passage cited from REED earlier, Johnston and Dorrell state that "all the crafts,

including the Mercers, were subject to the jurisdiction of the mayor and the civic

councils"[emphasis mine] as if this were indeed of some consequence to the guild. But

clearly we can assess from the records that the Mercers dominated the offices of civic

leadership and as a result enjoyed a great deal of political authority if not an outright

oligarchy. Not forgetting that the City Council controlled the Corpus Christi Cycle, it is

plain to see who exactly was running the show (11).

"There is evidence that the Mercers hired clerks to choose the players and direct

the play" (Johnston and Dorrell, YMPTD 12). As civic leaders, most members of the

guild would not be able to participate in the actual production of the pageant because the

mayor and the city council were obliged to entertain visiting dignitaries and view the play

along with them. The mercers are as distinguished in their participation in the Corpus

Christi Cycle as they are as a guild in the city. By not actually participating in the

production as players, however, their true roles are more important in terms of the cycle

as a whole. For, even as a part of the audience, they are distinguished from the other

audience members and must play the role of host to any visiting dignitaries.[50]

The final pageant of the cycle, the Mercers' *Last Judgement*, concludes with the

division of souls at the end of time. First, this pageant depicts the end of historical time.

Second, as the final pageant, the *Judgement* marks the end of the performance of the

cycle. Finally, the role of the Mercers, the production guild of this pageant, looms large

in both the civic affairs of York and the overall production of the cycle.

Its position in the cycle denotes that not only is it the end of the cycle, but, as the

title of the pageant implies, it is a pageant concerned with the end of the world, the very

end of time itself. Notably, it is the only future event that is portrayed in the cycle which

in itself creates a certain temporal tension in representing events that have not yet taken

---

[50] The fact that the Mercers can sub-contract out their work further reflects their social status—they are
powerful and, therefore, outside the "time" of labor.

place within history but nonetheless belong to the historical narrative and the narrative of typological history.

In the *Last Judgement*, the word "time" is mentioned five times, and "day" occurs no less than eleven times. This is perhaps not surprising in a pageant that portrays the last day of history, the literal end of time. The first reference to time within the pageant occurs during God's opening speech when he is recalling the pageant of "Adam and Eve in the Garden." During this passage, God reiterates the warning given to Adam and Eve towards the beginning of the cycle.

> DEUS. What tyme þou etis of þis,
>   Manne, þou spedes þiselue to spill –
>   Þou arte broght oute of all blisse. (XLVII. 14-16)

Like the *Fall of Angels*, it is the action itself that will result in the fall. God will not need to deliver any punishment because the punishment is inherent within the crime. Here, however, Adam is given a warning whereas Lucifer never received one. The first two words, "what time," indicate an action definitively located in time rather than conditional. In other words, even more than warning, God is telling Adam what will happen 'when' he does this, not if. The action is already located in time, and, as God is recounting earlier events, and the audience has already witnessed the earlier pageant depicting man's fall, the event is in the past.

When God recounts his words to Adam in the last pageant, it is notable because His speech emphasizes the theme established in the *Fall*: that one's transgressive behavior automatically and instantaneously entails punishment. In other words, people are responsible for their own downfall and status as a direct result of their behavior; God does not punish people for their sins, but rather, people choose their fate by their actions

57

and behavior. The theme frames the cycle opening with the first pageant, the *Fall of Angels*, where night is created and divided from day and concluding with the *Last Judgement*, that depicts the good souls separated from the bad on the day of doom, literally at the end of time.

God is reflecting on the past of the historical narrative of the cycle and the immediate past of the audience as they have all witnessed the pageant of *Adam and Eve in the Garden* earlier in the day. But in the historical narrative time of the cycle, God is uttering these words in a future that is merely being experienced in the present. The time for mercy, in the temporal structure of the play, has passed, but for the audience, the time of mercy is still present. For the audience, there is still time to choose whether they will be one of the saved or one of the damned. The time of mercy in the pageant may be past, but as a future event being performed in the present, there is still time. This situation is typical of the typological system; present, past, and future are all interconnected.

The *Last Judgement*, though being experienced by the audience in the present, is in the future time of the historical narrative. The audience views this scene from the ground, the temporal present, while the future is enacted on the stage before them. In line 180, Jesus transcends the temporal distinctions established in the play and circulates amongst the audience.

> DEUS. To deme my domes I woll descende;
>   Þis body will I bere with me – (XLVII. 180-1)

Jesus, with his wounds from the crucifixion still depicted on his body, descends to earth to mingle with the audience and his apostles. In descending from the stage, he enters the physical space of the audience, a space which represents the world of the here and now.

Moreover, in the 1433 indenture for the Corpus Christi Cycle, it is clearly stated that all

pageant wheels on the *Last Judgement* pageant wagon were to be covered with curtains,

thereby preventing the audience from actually seeing the stage meet the ground and

further emphasizing the distinction between the realm of the future and the present

(Johnston and Dorrell 14).

The thematic emphasis in this cycle in regards to work relates more to the realm

of business in purchasing and fulfilling promises than in depicting physical labor. This is

perhaps not surprising given the fact that the guild producing this pageant, the Mercers,

were businessmen in trade not craftsmen in production. Jesus is repeatedly portrayed as

having purchased or ransomed the salvation of the world through his suffering on the

cross. He has "bought" (30) and "buys" (252) the bliss of the world through his time

spent suffering on the cross. In fulfilling the promise He made earlier in the cycle, God

proclaims in his last stanza:

> DEUS. Mi blissid childre, as I haue hight,
>   On my right hande I schall þam see (XLVII. 75-6)

Jesus continually states that he has come as fulfillment of the promise: "How I shall hold

that I have hight" (188). "Come forth, I shall sit you between, /And all fulfil that I have

hight" (216). In order to fulfill his "hight," Jesus descends from his height on the stage to

the audience's level. Jesus's height also refers to his elevated position in the kingdom of

God, a height from which Lucifer falls in The Fall of Angels because he sought an even

higher status. Lucifer uses the word "height" to describe his desire to be like God. In the

line preceding his fall, he states, "I shall be like unto him that is highest on height" (91).

In this pageant, Jesus's 'job' is to fulfill a promise made earlier in Christian history and depicted earlier that day in the cycle. His physical labor in the cycle has included being tortured, crucified, and harrowing Hell, scenes which have all been depicted in the preceding pageants; it is work that facilitates his ability to save the good souls at the end of time. This absence of physical labor in a traditional sense in the final pageant can be understood in two ways. First, the absence of the depiction of labor further emphasizes the theme of not wasting one's time, a theme introduced in the Noah pageants, because the day of doom is near at hand. For the audience, doomsday is present, being acted out in front of them as a reminder of how close they are to the day of judgement. The pageant serves to remind the audience that while time is running out, there is still time for redemption. For the good and bad souls in the pageant, the time to serve God has run out, and it is now time to reap the reward and punishment.

The second way of understanding the absence of labor is to consider the relationship between the work that is depicted here, namely the fulfillment of a promise, and the work of the sponsoring guild, the Mercers. This association between the sponsoring guild and the action depicted in the pageant runs throughout the entire cycle. The shipbuilders perform the building the ark, for instance, and the pinners depict the crucifixion of Christ. Mercantile exchange, however, does not involve physical labor or production. The work of merchants is the work of fulfilling promises as set forth in contracts.[51]

---

[51] Their "work" is also about dividing society into the haves and have nots. In the cycle, as in society, the Mercers directed the action of York and its citizens.

That time has run out for the audience is highlighted by the use of present tense early in the pageant. Still lamenting His creation, God states that

> All þat euere I saide schulde be
> Is nowe fulfillid thurgh prophicie,
> Therefore nowe is it tyme to me
> To make endyng of mannes folie. (XLVII. 53-6)

Because everything God has said has been fulfilled, now it is time to bring mankind to an end. To be saved is to not know an end, to be without deadlines.

In listing the deeds that resulted in salvation, Jesus situates them in time—like God does with his discussion of original sin, associating deeds of night with Satan. Jesus informs the Good Souls, "When I was hungry, ye me fed" (285), "When I was clotheless, ye me clad" (287), and "When I was will and weariest / Ye harboured me full heartfully" (293-4). The Good Souls are those who fed Christ in his time of hunger, clothed him in his time of nakedness, and harbored him during his time of need. Their actions, having already been performed, have resulted in the reward of salvation on the day of doom. Their 'works of mercy' have paid for their salvation at the end of time.

The Good Souls, however, question Christ's account of their personal histories. Seeking evidence of the deeds for which they have been granted salvation, the Good Souls ask Christ to locate their deeds temporally.

> I ANIMA BONA. Whanne hadde we, lorde þat all has wroght,
>   Meete and drinke þe with to feede,
>   Sen we in erþ had neuer noght
>   But thurgh þe grace of thy Godhede? (XLVII. 301-4)

Jesus responds, emphasizing that their deeds were performed within time, though not limited to any specific or particular time of the day or night.

> DEUS. Mi blissid childir, I schall ou saye

What tyme þis dede was to me done:
When any þat nede hadde, nyght or day,
Askid   ou helpe and hadde it sone.
Youre fre hartis saide þem neuer nay,
Erely ne late, mydday ne none,
But als oft-sithes as þei wolde praye (XLVII. 309-15)

This passage is interesting because it shows that although night is associated with Lucifer

and evil doing in the *Fall of the Angels* and elsewhere in the *Last Judgement*, it is also

cited as the time ("night or day") when good deeds can be done. But it is not just the

good deeds that are situated within a temporal framework. Jesus chastises the bad souls

for neglecting their service to him whenever they neglected those in need.

DEUS. Whanne I had mistir of mete and drynk,
    Caytiffis,   e cacched me fro youre   ate.
    Whanne   e wer sette as sirs on benke,
    I stode þereoute, werie and wette;
    [………………………………]
    Whanne I was seke and soriest
      e visitte me noght, for I was poure;
    In prisoune faste whan I was feste
    Was none of you loked howe I fore.
    [………………………………..]
    Whenne I wiste neuere where for to reste,
    With dyntes   e draffe me fro your dore (XLVII. 325-7; 333-5; 337-8)

The bad souls, however, cannot recall the time when they encountered Christ in need,

despite the specific examples he provides.

I ANIMA MALA. Whan had þou, lord þat all thing has,
    Hungir or thirste, sen þou God is?
    Whan was þat þou in prisoune was?
    Whan was þou naked or herberles?
II ANIMA MALA. Whan was it we sawe þe seke, allas?
    Whan kid we þe þis vnkindinesse?
    Werie or wette to late þe passe,
    When did we þee þis wikknesse? (XLVII. 349-6)

62

Their error is in their literal-mindedness and in understanding time as only a linear

progression. From their perspective, they are not living in the age of Christ and,

therefore, they reason, when could they have performed such wickedness? They fail to

see Christ as a figure of "everyman," distributed throughout daily time. The bad souls do

not deny that they neglected the needy or were wicked; rather they use the nature of time,

as they understand it, to attempt to force Jesus to situate the events within time, thereby

providing the evidence of them having happened or not happened. And the time has

come for the bad souls to pay for their behavior.

> DEUS. Þerfore schall   e nowe be forsaked. (XLVII. 348)

The pageant never shows Jesus or the Angels in the active role of judging the

souls or physically dividing them. They are divided, rather, through a series of

commands and instructions.

> III ANGELUS.   Standis noght togedor, parte you in two! (XLVII. 169)

The angel directs the action, but there is no dialogue to suggest any of the souls are

individually judged or separated. The sense throughout the pageant is that, even though

both the good and the bad souls seek to have their status clarified by Jesus, their goodness

and badness has already been inscribed on their souls and they know on which side of

salvation they should stand.

While the pageant does not depict any acting out of physical labor, it does still

make references to work, specifically citing work as the cause for salvation or damnation.

> DEUS. Of mercy nowe may no   t be mente,
> Butt, aftir wirkyng, welth or wrake. (XLVII. 199-200)

Jesus's statements support the notion that reward or punishment is the result of one's work not only on earth, but even at the end of time. Noah and his family were saved because of his work building the ark. But, again, division seems to be the result of actions and are so inscribed on the body that they seem require no external reading or reckoning.

> DEUS. And I am come as crouned kynge.
>   Mi fadir of heuene, he has me sente
>   To deme youre dedis and make ending.
>   Comen is þe day of judgement; (XLVII. 232-35)

But Jesus is never really depicted as doing the work of judging. Even the souls seem confused by the criteria of salvation, another suggestion that there was no active judging, but that judgement was the direct result of their deeds without the need of any active adjudication.

> DEUS. Commes to þe kyngdome ay-lastand
>   Þat   ou is dight for your goode dede;
>   Full blithe may   e be where   e stande,
>   For mekill in heuene schall be youre mede. (XLVII. 281-4)

Eternal salvation, a world without end, is the reward for good work completed on earth. And once again, though the good souls are directed, the direction is more welcoming in tone than commanding.

The good and bad souls in the pageant are made aware of the end of time in the same way they would have 'read' time in late medieval England, by hearing it. The end of time is announced by the blowing of the angels' trumpets.

> DEUS. Therefore myne aungellis will I sende
>   To blawe þer bemys, þat all may here
>   The tyme is comen I will make ende. (XLVII. 62-4)

The audience would have been very familiar with the idea of hearing the time as the sound of bells could reach a larger audience throughout the city and as clocks were few

64

and far between. The act of reading time aurally establishes yet another layer to the power structure of late medieval England. Today, if we want to know what time it is, we can look at a clock or our watch, but we are not forced to hear the time. Two exceptions to this are the bell system in school that was designed to establish discipline and order by directing and regulating student movement throughout the school. The second institution which still announces time through sound is, not surprisingly, the Church.[52] God determines the end of time because all He has said has come to pass and because man is so wicked. And sound is recognized by a Bad Soul:

> I ANIMA MALA. I here wele be þis hydous horne
>   Itt drawes full nere to domesday.
>   Allas, we wrecchis þat are forlorne,
>   Þat never   itt serued God to paye (XLVII. 115-18)

In our world today, time is omnipresent on computer screens, VCRs, and cell phones. Consider how bell time would not allow the Pinners to know how much time they had before the deadline. Without the concept of minutes, workers would simply always feel the weight of needing to finish before the bell rang. The York Corpus Christi Cycle incorporates this anxiety and weaves it into the Christian narrative, reminding the audience that the final trumpets will blow and forcing them to ask themselves if they have made good use of their time.

---

[52] There was a heated legal battle in Michigan over a mosque that announces the Muslim call for prayer several times a day. See "Mosque Prayers Irk Michigan City" *CBS News* 20 April 2004. 8 January 2005. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/20/national/main612805.shtml>

CHAPTER 2

TIME'S BOUNDARIES: THE ENDS OF TIME IN *PEARL*[53]

"Literary space cannot, in my mind, be understood as stationary or atemporal when it occurs in narrative poetry. Rather, space reveals itself in time, as the poet or narrator simultaneously discovers, and in effect creates that space."[54]

Perhaps no other poem from late medieval England better illustrates the relationship between the transience of human life and the permanence of spiritual salvation than the Middle English poem *Pearl*. Meditating on the death of a young child, the poem shifts between descriptions of a mutable earthly realm and an eternal heavenly realm. As the dream vision progresses through different locales, the poet imbues the narrative with landscapes, seasons, temporally loaded biblical allusions, and the medieval calendar scheme. In *Pearl*, time reveals itself in space. As the *Pearl*-poet employs various complex temporal systems and symbols, he links the religious and the economic, the spiritual and

---

[53] All citations come from Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, ed., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript* (Exeter: U of Exeter P, 1999).

[54] Laura L. Howes, "Narrative Time and Literary Landscapes in Middle English Poetry," *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe,* ed. John Howe and Michael Wolfe, (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2002) 193.

the social. In so doing, the poem addresses the unsettled status of the rising mercantile class in late medieval England.

The significance of temporal schemes in *Pearl* remains relatively unexplored in the scholarship about the poem.[55] While the notion that the poem is concerned with the economic and political realities of late fourteenth-century England has gained traction in the literary scholarship, the poem's sophisticated use of time more often than not is treated as peripheral to those concerns when it is addressed at all. Medieval historians have come to view time as intrinsically linked and bound to economic, political, and social development.[56] Literary scholars may be able to separate out the notions of temporality from their work on the economic and political implications of the poem, but for the poet, time itself was an important economic measure, especially in regards to the regulation of the work day, and one with political and social implications.

John Bowers' book, *The Politics of* Pearl, traces the economic, theological, and aristocratic influences within the poem.   Bower's work, however, is mainly centripetal, looking primarily at how the political events of late-fourteenth-century England may be acting upon, and reflected within, the poem. This chapter, while owing a great debt to Bower's work, situates the political reading of the poem centrifugally, and, thus, seeks to explore how the poem not only reflects economic realities of the period, but also actively

---

[55] Notable exceptions to this include Helen Barr's *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 40-62; Lynn Staley Johnson, "The *Pearl* Dreamer and the Eleventh Hour," *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the* Pearl-*Poet*, ed. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, Julian N. Wasserman (Troy, NY: Whitson. 1991) 3-16.

[56] See especially Joel Kaye, *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

negotiates those values, thus promoting an ideological understanding of time in which the very nature of time functions to express, as well as enforce, notions of rank and status. As I will argue, the representation of time in *Pearl* expresses an existing confusion about the socio-economic position of the mercantile class within the hierarchical confines of the three estate system.

The narrative of *Pearl* opens in a rural setting on the earthly plane, moves to an otherworldly riverside, and continues into the heavenly realm of New Jerusalem before concluding back in the earthly garden where it began. Because the poem's discussion about time shifts throughout the poem, I have organized my analysis around the "spaces" in the poem where the topics of time and class are most relevant to the narrative. First, I examine the scene of the jeweler pining over the loss of his pearl in the garden. I then draw my attention to the fields being harvested in the background. Next, I explore the issue of time and status in the "otherworld" of the dream vision. Turning my attention to the role of the Pearl maiden, I address the intersection of time and class as evidenced not only by the parable she recounts, but also in an analysis of her physical appearance. Finally, I conclude with a discussion about the representation of New Jerusalem.

Time and the Garden

In the poem, the earthly realm of decay and loss is juxtaposed with the stable and unchanging heavenly realm. Significantly, the pearl has been lost in a garden, a setting that allows the narrator to meditate on the transience of human life and the hope of heavenly resurrection. The garden setting also functions typologically, representing corporeal

temptation and spiritual redemption.   The opening stanzas present the distraught jeweler

lamenting the loss of his pearl. Initially, the earth is the object of the jeweler's anger:

> O moul, þou marrez a myry juele,
> My priuy perle withouten spotte. (23-4)

From the jeweler's earthly perspective, the degenerative force of nature has

swallowed the pearl, now lost and buried in the mud. But the regenerative nature of the

garden setting also comforts the jeweler, reminding him that what decays can also

fertilize plants that will bloom and blossom:

> Þat spot of spysez mot nedez sprede,
> Þer such rychez to rot is runne,
> Blomez blayke and blwe and rede
> Þer schyne ful schyr agayn þe sunne.
> Flor and fryte may not be fede
> Þer hit doun drof in moldez dunne,
> For vch gresse mot grow of graynez dede;
> No whete were ellez to wonez wonne.
> Of goud vche goude is ay bygonne:
> So semly a sede mo t fayly not,
> Þat spryngande spycez vp ne sponne
> Of þat precios perle wythouten spotte. (25-36)

From death comes life. Moreover, the seed must die for the grass to grow. The wheat is

then in turn harvested. These lines function on two levels simultaneously, the earthly and

the heavenly. On the one hand, the description of the garden's regenerative properties

reminds the audience of the earthly laws of nature by which all living things are bound;

that which lives will one day die, but death and decay allow for new life and growth. On

the other hand, this garden description also hints at the spiritual law of resurrection, the

end of time when all who have fallen will rise again. The intersection of the laws that

govern the earthly realm and the spiritual juxtapose two time schemes: the natural and the eternal, the corporeal and the spiritual.

The intersection of these laws is highlighted in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard recounted by the pearl maiden later in the poem. According to the poem, the tension traditionally associated with these laws resides not in the laws themselves, but rather in the narrator's and laborers' perception of those laws. Although the corporeal and the spiritual appear to be in conflict, upon closer examination, they share a crucial interpretation of temporal authority, especially as it relates to the notion of ownership and possession, and it is this perspective that provides an interpretive insight to the poem. In linking, and at times conflating, the earthly and heavenly systems, the *Pearl* poet reveals an important underlying principle: the relationship between social rank and time.

A jeweler, like the narrator, would have been associated with the liminal mercantile class, belonging neither to the aristocratic class nor the peasant class. The narrator, as a jeweler, is an artisan who works with jewels, but those jewels pass through his hands temporarily before they are eventually sold to their final owner. The use of the verbs in the opening section of the poem that describe the loss of the pearl further suggest that the pearl was never the jeweler's to lose, sell, or have stolen in the first place. The narrating jeweler, however, seems confused about this issue of ownership and possession—a confusion that would no doubt have been shared by many other merchants and artisans in his position. The issue of the jeweler's loss of the pearl, of course, is meant to be understood as an allegory representing a father's loss of his young daughter. In this opening scene, the vexed issue of the jeweler's wealth is linked to the notion of time. In *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages*, Le Goff

writes, " 'Property,' then, belongs to men, but time belongs to God, and to Him alone" (40). Precious items are transitory, they flow through the hands of artisans and merchants and into to the hands of their final owners, just as, according to medieval theology, children are born to their parents but ultimately belong to God.

The anxiety over the pearl's ownership in the poem is central to the narrator's ensuing confusion and misdirected communication with the Pearl maiden. In the garden scene, the pearl was thought to have been lost, but the agency and volition of the pearl suggests that it was not property, not an object of one's possession. The jeweler did not lose the pearl out of carelessness, nor was the pearl purchased or stolen. The pearl, strangely, seems to have acted of its own volition:

> Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
> Þur gresse to grounde hit fro me yot. (9-10)

A few lines later, the narrator describes how the pearl "Syþen in þat spote hit fro me sprange" (13). The narrator's anxiety over his ability to hold onto the pearl continues when he encounters the Pearl maiden. His first thoughts upon seeing her is his fear that she might slip away:

> I dred onende quat schulde byfalle,
> Lest ho me eschaped þat I þer chos,
> Er I at steuen hir mo t stalle. (186-8)

When the narrator bemoans his loss, the Pearl maiden responds with a chidingly impatient tone, informing him that the pearl was, in fact, never really lost:

> "Sir, e haf your tale mysetente,
> To say your perle is al awaye,
> Þat is in cofer so comly clente
> As in þis gardyn gracios gaye,
> Hereinne to lenge for euer and play,
> Þer mys nee mornyng com neuer nere" (257-62).

Writing about these lines, Paul Piehler observes the ambiguity of the term *cofer*, which was used to mean treasure chest and coffin during the time of the poem. Further, he notes the juxtaposition of what would seem to be incongruous imagery:

> The identification of these very disparate images—the claustrophobic, brutally physical coffin of the body's last resting place, and the joyous paradise garden prepared for the souls of the innocent—is the first of a series of shocks that should jolt our earthbound preconceptions into the beginning of an understanding of the realities of the pearl maiden's transcendent world, its "strengþe of ioye," its infinite richness of dimension. (149)

The narrator's profound sense of loss, of course, stems from the death of his young daughter, as represented by the pearl. I discuss the theological issues of rank and resurrection in later sections, but for my purpose here, I will pursue how the poem links the notions of earthly, transient time and the heavenly, eternal through the idea of ownership and possession.

Many scholars have written about the allegorical significance of the jeweler and the pearl, but Felicity Riddy was the first to fully consider the jeweler's literal significance in the poem. She observes: "The high culture sustained by the luxury system is the product of exchange between craftsmen, merchants and aristocrats: between the court and the city" (149). The space of the garden, as a natural setting, emphasizes the transitory and cyclical nature of the jeweler's occupation, and it does so by drawing attention to the effects of time on the vegetation present within. Flowers and plants are transient, just like the jewels that pass through his hands but never fully belong to him.

The Pearl maiden makes the link between the jeweler's occupation and the activity of the garden space explicit when she continues to correct him. First, she informs

him that the pearl, which never belonged to him in the first place, was, in fact, not lost. She further reveals that the pearl was not really a pearl after all. She instructs him:

> "For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose
> Þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef;
> Now þur kynde of þe kyste þat hyt con close
> To a perle of prys hit is put in pref" (269-72).

The symbol of the rose functions to remind the reader of the earthly laws of regeneration expounded upon earlier in the garden scene when the jeweler first loses his pearl. And, as in the lines describing the necessity of death for growth, the earthly temporal scheme is not in opposition to, or in conflict with, heavenly eternity; rather it is represented as related and linked. The narrator's initial mistake of thinking he has lost a pearl is clear; however, the Pearl maiden does admit that he has indeed suffered a loss. What he believed to be a pearl was, according to the maiden, a rose and therefore subject to the earthly temporal laws of death and decay. The earthly laws, however, function to remind man of the heavenly law of resurrection as represented in the presence of the Pearl maiden standing before him.

The narrator's misunderstanding in the poem revolves around his perception of the symbol of the pearl and his relationship to it. His difficulty surfaces in reckoning the shifting nature of the symbol (rose/pearl) and its rapid change in status (child/queen on first day). Surprisingly, however, he does seem to understand, or at least gain some understanding of, the temporal shift that occurs when moving from the earthly to the heavenly realm. In section XV, he is still not entirely clear what the Pearl maiden is:

> "I am bot mokke and mul among,
> And þou so ryche a reken rose,
> And bydez here by þys blysful bonc
> Þer lyuez lyste may neuer lose" (905-8).

At this point in the poem, the maiden has explained her relationship to Christ and her position as a queen of heaven. While the last line suggests that the narrator understands the eternal nature of her residence there, it also reveals that he identifies her from his own transient perspective, a perspective he struggled with at the beginning of the poem. This identification suggests that he gained a certain understanding of the relationship between earthly regeneration and heavenly resurrection, between the natural and the eternal. Furthermore, the line indicates the link that binds them. When he identifies himself as a jeweler, she is a pearl; when he is "mokke and mul," she is a rose. Even when he stands on the bank and can see the celestial city, his perspective is still very much rooted in the garden.

The earthly corruption presented in the garden scene is traditionally interpreted in contrast to the eternal salvation symbolized by the Pearl maiden. The *Pearl*-poet's use of setting, however, is more complex. The notion of loss as expressed by the earthly decay in the garden is linked to the jeweler's mourning for his lost pearl. His comfort is to be found in the literal reality of his occupation as a jeweler; he cannot lose what he never owned. Further, while the jeweler has been mourning his loss in the garden, peasants have been busy harvesting the August wheat. The intersection between status and time extends beyond the garden and into the activity of the surrounding fields.

Time and the Harvest: Labors of the Months

There are several temporal layers at play in the poem's discussion of harvest: the poem opens in the month of August as workers harvest the crop in the background; the Parable of the vineyard depicts laborers being hired to harvest the crop; and the resurrected Pearl Maiden in the dream vision represents a spiritual harvest, the final reckoning often depicted as a harvesting of souls. Thus, the time of harvest functions as a literal timeframe for the poem, but it also extends throughout the poem infusing all of the images with figural and spiritual significance.

In the opening section of the poem, the narrator recounts how his pearl "from me yot" (10) while he was in a garden during the month of August, the season, "Quen corne is coruen with crokes kene" (40). Linking the month of August with the labor typically depicted for that month in a medieval calendar, namely harvesting, the poem renders time in terms of labor with particular attention to the activity being performed. But the significance of the harvest extends beyond merely the seasonal setting.   Harvest time not only functions as the temporal frame for the dream vision, but is also laden with allegorical significance within the vision. Further, the time of harvest figures later in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard that is recounted and explicated by the Pearl maiden.

Identifying the month by pictures depicting labors typically performed during that time was common practice in the Middle Ages and is often referred to as the "Labor of the Months."[57] While most often depicted in medieval Books of Hours, representations

---

[57] For more about the "Labors of the Months" tradition, see Bridget Ann Henisch, *The Medieval Calendar Year* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) and "In Due Season: Farm Work in the Medieval Calendar Tradition," *Agriculture in the Middle Ages: Technology, Practice, and Representation,*

of the "Labors of the Months" were also "an iconographical commonplace in medieval miniatures, sculptures and stained glass" (Bishop 86). Time, in other words, could be found etched on the very walls, windows and pews in medieval churches. Images of the laboring body indicating the time of the year could also be found illustrated in books of hours and woven into tapestries. Depicting time with images of physical labor, these iconographical images, in essence, inscribed time on the laboring body.

The fourteenth-century Middle English translation of Bartholomew's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* presents a calendar of labors that is at odds with that of *Pearl*. Book IX catalogs the years and months and the Feasts of the Church. According to this text, August is described as too late to harvest wheat:

> In this moneth corn is igadred into bernes and therefore he is ipeynt with a fleile throsching corn and maketh therthe bare and sp[o]ilith hit of corn and of fruyt. And therefore hit is iseide that the sonne in the myddis of August cometh into the signe that hatte *Virgo* 'the mayde'; for as a maide is bareyne and withoute fruyt, so therthe is bareyne and bare whanne he is ispoiled of corn and fruyt. (IX.16.28-34)

In other words, August is too late for harvesting because the heat will have destroyed the crop. The month presented as ideal for reaping is July: "That tyme by ful greet heete comynge inward and wastigne moisture and humour, corn ripith. And therefore *Iulius* [July] is ipeynt with hook repinge corne, for thane is couenable repinge tyme" (IX.15.20-3).

---

ed. Del Sweeney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) 309-336; James C. Webster, *Labors of the Months* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1938); Roger S. Wieck, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1988); Rosemund Tuve, *Seasons and Months: Studies in a Tradition of Middle English Poetry* (Paris: Librairie Universitaire, 1933) 122-70; Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter, *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (London: Elek Books, 1973) 131-60; Ian Bishop, Pearl *in Its Setting* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968) 86; Theodore Bogdanos, Pearl: *Image of the Ineffable* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983) 27.

The discrepancy between Trevisa's text and the depiction in *Pearl* is central to

Lynn Staley's argument that

> by shifting the seasonal context of the dream, the poet offers an implied commentary upon the dreamer, the nature of his problem, and the Parable of the Vineyard, through which the maiden examines the proper use of time, a medium the dreamer seems initially to squander without regard for its limits. (*Dreamer* 3-4)

According to the conventions of the genre, dream visions do usually occur in the late

spring or early summer.[58] But is the *Pearl* poet really "shifting the seasonal context of

the dream" as Staley suggests?

The question of how to categorize *Pearl* has long been under debate and remains

unsettled.[59] Drawing from several genres, the poet seems comfortable employing

whichever conventions best suited his artistic and thematic purpose. The poet's break

with the literary convention for dream visions that places them in late spring or early

summer is significant to our understanding of the poem. By invoking the month, the poet

---

[58] Dante's *Inferno* begins in the middle of Easter season. Piers Plowman opens "In a somer seson […] on a May morwenynge" (1, 5). In Chaucer's dream poem, *The Book of the Duchess,* the narrator is not entirely clear about when he falls asleep but is somewhat sure of the time in his dream: "Me thoghte thus: that hyt was May" (291). Chaucer's translation of Guillaume de Lorris' and Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose* also depicts the season within the dream as May: "That it was May me thoughte tho -- / It is five yer or more ago -- / That it was May, thus dremed me" (49-51). The original and Chaucer's translation repeat the month several times and spend about 50 lines of poetry devoted to describing the season. Staley's reading of *Pearl* places the poem within the genre of the love vision in which the dream normally occurs during the late spring or early summer. But other dream visions occur during other parts of the year. Chaucer's *The House of Fame*, for instance, takes place in the Winter on December 10. Furthermore, while the poem's opening may suggest a dream vision in the courtly love tradition, the vision of New Jerusalem presented at the end of the poem is clearly an apocalyptic vision that relies heavily on its biblical source.

[59] Critics in the early twentieth century argued over whether to read the poem as allegory or elegy. See especially Jefferson B. Fletcher, "The Allegory of the Pearl," *JEGP*, 20 (1921), 1-21, and R. Wellek, "The *Pearl*: An Interpretation of the Middle English Poem," *Studies in English* 4 (Prague: Charles UP, 1933) 1-33. E.V. Gordon's edition of the poem who reads the poem as elegy.   See E.V. Gordon, *Pearl* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1953) xviii. J. Stephen Russell cites the poem as "the Middle English poem least understood by modern critics" and recounts how Sir Robert Cotton's librarian catalogued the poem "Vetus poema Anglicanum, in quo sub insomnii figmento, multa ad religionem et mores spectantia explicantur." See Stephen J. Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1988) 159. Andrew and Waldron place the poem with the dream-vision genre, but they also note the poem's "deep similarities" with literary homilies (29).

explicitly links the labor being described, the harvesting of wheat, to time. August is clearly stated as the time of harvesting. The relationship established here in these early lines of the poem lays the foundation for the parable of laborers in the vineyard—a parable specifically concerned with the relationship between labor and time—that the Pearl maiden recounts in the mid-section of the poem. Shifting the time of the dream vision to late summer, the *Pearl* poet chooses a time scheme that is based in the agricultural practices of his day. In other words, he chooses the time of peasants' labor over the time scheme of the courtly literary convention.

But why would the poet choose August when Trevisa so clearly states that that month is too late for the harvest? Staley's argument that the poet shifts the seasonal scheme of the poem relies exclusively on Trevisa's text as the sole source of the English medieval agricultural calendar. But, as we shall see, there are some significant problems with using this text as a definitive, not to mention exclusive, source about agricultural practices in late medieval England. The original text of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* was produced around 1240 by the English Franciscan friar Bartholomew when he was teaching in Paris. Keeping in mind that Trevisa's text is a translation of a mid-thirteenth-century text written in France, it is entirely likely that the text is operating from a different agricultural calendar. In fact, James Carson Webster's survey of the depiction of the labors of the months in art to the end of the twelfth century indicates that the English cycles introduce the summer agricultural activities of mowing, reaping, and threshing "a month later than in the characteristic French cycles" (89). When considering other English calendar sources from closer to the period of the poem, August is indeed depicted as the month when wheat is harvested. Harvest season lasted several months in

England, beginning as early as June and July with the harvesting of hay and followed by wheat in July or August (Henisch *Calendar* 111-12).[60] A calendar contained in the early fourteenth-century *Queen Mary's Psalter* depicts three men reaping corn and a farmer directing them in the month of August (25, pl. 137). By situating the action of the poem in August, the poet roots the poem's setting in the agricultural reality of his day and, in so doing, foregrounds the conflict surrounding wage labor associated with the harvest, a conflict that is later depicted in the parable recounted by the pearl maiden.

Staley argues that the vineyard parable invokes the month of September—the time when grapes are harvested. Her interpretation offers an interesting point about the vineyard parable (harvest of grapes) as linking the poem to September or the sign of Libra. "When Virgo gives way to Libra, the season changes from one of growth to one of reckoning" (8). Indeed, most calendars do include twenty-four images, twelve astrological signs and twelve labors for each month. Likewise, Trevisa's translation includes an explanation of the astrological sign and its significance for each month. It is likely that the medieval audience would have had a profound understanding of astrological symbols and their significance, but that knowledge is not exploited by or expanded upon by the imagery present in the poem. The poem never explicitly invokes the image of Virgo or Libra. For a poet so concerned not only with the meaning of symbols, but also with their presentation (the elaborate descriptions of the pearl, garden, and river), such an omission suggests that he simply is not engaging with this significance of the zodiac here. The Pearl maiden's account of the parable emphasizes

---

[60] The thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Walter of Henley's Husbandry* also suggests August as the appropriate month for harvest. See especially "How one must pay labourers in August and in time of haymaking" in *Walter of Henley's Husbandry*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Lamond (London: Longmans, Green, 1890) 69.

the act of harvesting, specifically the laborers' complaints about their wages, and her

ensuing commentary concerns the relationship between rank and time. The crop of

grapes is not highlighted in the parable or the ensuing commentary, as wheat was earlier

in the poem.

The harvesting scene in the opening section of the poem allegorically links to the

scene the jeweler encounters in his dream vision, and it does so through the literal and

allegorical significance of the wheat that is being harvested. The crop of wheat functions

on a literal level, reflecting a staple in English agricultural production, and on an

allegorical level, pointing to the winnowing of souls that will occur during the Last

Judgment. This reading is continued when he is able to view New Jerusalem, the city

where the souls who were saved reside. After wheat is harvested, the edible grains in the

ear of the plant must be separated from the husk, or chaff, surrounding them before they

are ground into flour. In the Middle Ages, this process was performed in two stages:

threshing and winnowing. According to Bridget Ann Henisch,

> This grain was the all-important harvest, the precious *pearl* found in the
> dust of the threshing floor. The careful separation of grain from chaff was
> not only a familiar sight in everyday life; it was also a familiar image of
> the separation of the saved souls from the damned, because it had been
> used in the Bible as a metaphor for the Last Judgment. (112, emphasis
> mine)

The final product of the crop, bread, is also significant to the temporal scheme of the

poem. "Bread and harvest were linked together by the Church of England, in the ancient

feast of Lammas ('Loaf Mass') on August 1, when loaves of bread made from the first

ripe wheat were blessed, but no direct acknowledgment of such a link is to be found in

the usual calendar scheme" (Henisch 115). In fact, three editions of the poem identify the "hy   seysoun" of line 39 as the feast of Lammas.[61]

What is perhaps most fascinating about this first reference to the time of harvest is the contrast between the labor being described, the back-breaking harvesting of wheat, and the narrator's immediate actions and setting, his leisurely mourning in an aristocratic spice garden. The fact that he is not in the field could also be read as a problem within the context of the parable told in the poem. While the parable is to be understood allegorically, the detail the poet provides in setting the narrator in a situation like it in terms of vegetation and generation, but unlike it in terms of labor, seems significant in that it draws attention to the contrast between his status and those of the laborers. The garden and the spices described as growing within further this distinction by drawing attention to the class of the narrator—the narrator is a jeweler and, as such, is not participating in the labors of the month. This raises the question: does the narrator's class status also exempt him from the figurative work of harvest? The time of the harvest is significant as the narrator's mourning turns to sleep. The landscape of the dream vision he enters removes him from a land of decay and labor to an otherworldly realm where nature is depicted in hyper-real images that seem to suggest no need for maintenance and upkeep. In this realm, the narrator feels he has all the time in the world.

---

[61] The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 15 is offered as a candidate because of the poem's subject, namely the pearl maiden's newfound status as a Bride of Christ. See Derek Brewer *English Gothic Literature* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983) 166, and Charles Osgood, *Pearl: A Middle English Poem* (Boston: Heath & Co., 1906). Gollancz, Gordon, and Andrew and Waldron favor the Feast of Lammas (August 1) because of the feast's association with harvest. See *Pearl: An English Poem of the 14th Century*, ed. and trans. Sir Israel Gollancz (London: D. Nutt, 1891); *Pearl*, ed. E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1953); and *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript,* ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: U of Exeter P, 1978).

Time and the Otherworld: Inscribing Time and Status on the Medieval Landscape

Before the narrator encounters the Pearl maiden, the very landscape of his dream renders him uncomfortable, and his unease is apparent as he seeks a ford to cross over the river.

> To fynde a forþe faste con I fonde,
> Bot woþez mo iwysse þer ware,
> Þe fyrre I stalked by þe stronde;
> And euer me þou t I schulde not wonde
> For wo oþer welez so wynne wore. (150-54)

Andrew and Waldron remark in a footnote to these lines that *wothez* and *wo* "appear to connote the risk of discovery, rather than physical danger" (61). The editors further interpret the narrator's state of mind at this point in the poem as "that of a social inferior trespassing in the grounds of a castle" (61). While nothing in the passage explicitly points to the narrator as a social inferior, the magnificence of the grounds, coupled with the river boundary he is unable to cross, contribute to the sense that the narrator, at the very least, feels he does not really belong here.

In "Courtly Language in *Pearl*," Charlotte Gross argues that the narrator's use of courtly diction "functions ironically" and "convey[s] the dreamer-narrator's pitiable but often comic misapprehension of spiritual matters" (79). The narrator's description of his surroundings in aristocratic terms, however, is not merely a byproduct of his corporeal perception, his potential inferiority complex, or his "misapprehension of spiritual matters." The narrator's use of courtly language is, in fact, appropriate given the setting and the regal status of the maiden he encounters there. The presence of jewels on the attire of the maiden serves to reinforce the notion of this otherworldly realm as courtly in

nature. Concerned solely with the courtly diction in the poem, Gross overlooks a main issue in the poem's analysis of class and status, namely, the occupation of the narrator as jeweler. As a member of the mercantile class, a jeweler would have had dealings with the aristocratic class and, as a result, should be at least somewhat familiar with courtly conventions and discourse. As Felicity Riddy reminds us, "To read the narrating voice only as that of a mourner in the opening stanzas overlooks the fact that it is simultaneously identified as a jeweller's; in fact, the language of the jeweller's craft and trade precedes that of the courtly lover" (Riddy 145). The use of both dictions, mercantile and courtly, serves to highlight the poem's intense concern with, and anxiety over, the social status of the jeweler. As a jeweler, the narrator is allowed only certain kinds of access to the aristocratic realm through his role as artisan. The narrator's clumsy attempts at courtly discourse, far from being a "comic misapprehension of spiritual matters," reveal his own uncertainty about his exact place in this realm.

The narrator is well aware of his inability to communicate and express what he sees:

> More of wele watz in þat wyse
> Þen I cowþe telle þa   I tom hade. (133-4)

Commenting on lines 133-6, Andrew and Waldron note that this failing is a common theme throughout the poem, appearing in lines 99, 223-6, and in 1189. They attribute the recurrence of this theme to "the inadequacy of the human body and mind to perceive and comprehend paradisal and heavenly experience" (61). He has entered a realm where, though welcome to a certain extent, he ultimately does not belong. Interestingly, the narrator indicates that lack of time is not the issue in his inability to express what he sees.

83

Acknowledging that he does not feel pressed for time in this otherworldly setting

suggests that he knows what it is to be without enough time to express himself. Having

just left the August harvest, the narrator has left a time of labor and entered a time of

leisure.

But the narrator is not the only one who struggles to render the heavenly

experience into human language. When the Pearl maiden describes her own experience

in New Jerusalem, the heavenly city where she resides, she continually defers to the

account provided by John in the Book of Revelation. Both instances reveal that the issue

is not merely the barrier of understanding between the corporeal and the spiritual, rather

it is the ability, or inability, of language to express the relationship between the two. The

boundaries the narrator encounters in his exploration of this otherworldly landscape are

real and they do separate the two realms, but they also function to bind the realms

together and the narrator's descriptions of the otherworldly landscape emphasize this

function.

The landscape of the otherworld presents geographical boundaries that further

symbolize the narrator's limited access to this realm. In this sense, the space reflects the

jeweler's liminal social position within late medieval English society. Nature is

intensified in this realm of crystal cliffs, silver leaves, and brightly hued birds. The

intensity marking this landscape comforts the narrator in a way that the harvest scene

cannot. As Blenkner writes, "The landscape has such a powerful effect on the narrator

that not once before he encounters the maiden is the lost pearl mentioned, and grief is

alluded to only in a negative way:

> The adubbemente of þo downez dere
> Garten my goste al greffe for ete. (85-6)

As a jeweler, he understands the 'nature' of gems and precious metals, that they are constant and permanent. The begemmed nature of his surroundings establishes an environment that does not appear subject to the progression of time. Ironically, it is within this space that appears to exist outside of time that the jeweler expresses his feeling of having enough time. In this way, the environment comforts the jeweler in his time of sorrow.

The narrator appears free to roam about the ground of this otherworldly estate, but he remains limited in his movements by the natural boundary of the river. This boundary, however, is not merely physical in nature, but also temporal. The river functions as a border between the Earthly paradise in which the dreamer has "awoken" in the poem and the eternally present heavenly realm on the other side. The narrator is unable to cross the river because he is still living and is only able to visit this place, which is outside of time, with his spirit. The river is fluid and, like time, constantly flowing. On the one hand, it serves to separate the two realms. On the other, it functions to link the two sides.

In one of the most beautiful examples of the poet's use of temporal discourse, the narrator describes stones on the bottom of the river that separates him from the maiden and heavenly realm. The pebbles on the bottom of the river not only create an association with the jeweler and the Pearl Maiden as precious gems, but they also introduce the symbolic nature and position of time in this poem.

> In þe founce þer stoden stonez stepe,
> As glente þur glas þat glowed and gly t—

As stremande sternez, quen stroþe-men slepe,
Staren in welken in wynter ny t; (113-16)

Describing the brilliance of the stones on the bottom of the riverbed constructs a tripartite temporal scheme: the heavenly clock of celestial constellations, the annual cycle of the seasons, and the diurnal cycle. All of these temporal elements (starlight, wintertime, nighttime) reinforce one another and point symbolically to the river's deeper meaning: death.[62] The jeweler cannot cross the river yet because he is alive; he cannot cross until the time of his death.

First, the passage compares the light reflected off the precious stones to the light emanating from stars. In the late middle ages, stars were important tools used to determine time. The movement of the stars through the night sky was interpreted astrologically and these astrological signs were in turn associated with the labors of the months throughout the year. Night is longest during the winter season and is therefore most appropriately associated with that time of year. In Book IX of *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, winter is described as the season most similar to night: "Þe ny t is cooled and moist, in qualities most liche to þe wyntir" (539). The winter evoked by the stones at the bottom of the river, however, serves to contrast with the actual time of the poem, the season of summer during which the dream vision occurs. Writing about the contrasting relationships between time of day and seasons of year, medieval historian A.J. Gurevich writes "The contrast between day and night is the contrast between life and death. [...]

---

[62] The poem's use of a river as a boundary that separates the living from the dead has its roots in the Classical tradition. Homer, for instance, writes of the great rivers that intersect the lower world of Hades: Styx, Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon, and Pyriphlegethon. The post-Homeric tradition includes Lethe, a river of oblivion whose waters, when consumed, help the souls of the dead forget their earthly existence. A ferryman, Charon, is depicted as carrying souls of the departed across the river. See Oskar Seyffert, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art* (Avenal: Grammercy Books, 1995) 264.

The contrast between summer and winter was seen in the same light. And all of these

contrasted pairs had ethical and sacral significance" (107-8). In the natural cycle, winter

is the time of death, the season when all that blooms in the spring and flourishes in the

summer fades away and dies. The river represents death, and no living being is able to

cross it as the narrator later learns when he attempts to do so. The description of the

stones at the bottom of the river represents death, and transience of life, and it does so by

using the symbolic vocabulary of time.

For the medieval Christian, however, the season of winter would have also

represented the season of Advent and Christmas in the liturgical calendar year. As the

season that awaits the arrival of Christ, Advent is a time of expectation for the faithful. It

is a season that looks to the past and the future simultaneously, "a celebration of the past

arrival of Christ and a preparation for the future one. […] In sum, the season of Advent

can be described as an image of the present age, the age between the two arrivals of

Christ. Christ *has* arrived, and Christ *will* arrive" (Borgehammar 28). This time frame of

the season, one that looks to the past and the future simultaneously, mirrors that of the

poem. The narrator's mourning over the death of his young daughter looks to the past

while his dream vision presents him with a vision of the future: the end of time when his

resurrected daughter has become a bride of Christ. Advent, then, becomes a kind of a

temporal boundary that binds the past with the future in much the same way as the river

serves as a geographical boundary that binds the otherworldly estate on one side to the

image of New Jerusalem on the other. Likewise, the living narrator, dreaming in the

season of summer, is bound to, though separated from, his deceased daughter by the

wintery waters of the rivers. Here is yet another example of the complex time scheme of

the poem at work. Advent, the celebration of the coming of Christ, looks forward to the end of time, the time of resurrection. The evocation of winter, the season of Advent, in the description of the stones at the bottom of the river are consistent with the scene of resurrection. The setting reminds the reader of the time of the dream vision, the resurrection at the end of time, while simultaneously drawing a contrast with the time of the poem, the time of summer harvest.

The time of night was also associated with evil-doing and sin during the middle ages. As seen in the previous chapter, night was described as having been created as a result of Satan's failed attempt to usurp God's authority and rise to his status in the *Fall of the Angels* pageant from the York Corpus Christi Cycle. Writing about this association between night and evil, Trevisa observes:

> And it more, ni t of itself bringiþ in horriblenes and fere and conteyneþ fantasies and deceitis for more fantasies ben iseen by ny t þan by day. […] And ofte ny te eueþ to yuel doers hardiness and suerte, for by day þeues and reuers drediþ to be take and ben by ny te bolde and hardy to alle yuel dedes, as Gregor seiþ (540)

Night was viewed as a time when humans were susceptible to the forces of evil, though the poem does not explicitly portray night as a particularly sinister or dangerous time. In the passage above, night is simply described in terms of human activity: sleep.

At this point in the poem, the narrator is sleeping and dreaming of a landscape that appears to require no labor and exist outside the pressures of time. The geography here presents boundaries that bind the two realms and reflects a time frame that looks to the past and future simultaneously. But being in this realm is not the same as belonging to it, as the Pearl maiden reminds him throughout the poem. He may be sleeping in the

garden while others toil in the fields, but he is not exempt from the labor of the vineyard as the Pearl maiden explains in the next section.

Time and the Vineyard: Reckoning Status

Situating the time of the poem at harvest season and linking that time with the activity central to the parable of the vineyard recounted by the Pearl maiden later in the poem not only evokes, but also emphasizes, a major political and economic crisis of late-fourteenth-century England, namely the dispute between landowners and laborers over the harvesting of crops. The petitions presented to Richard II's first parliament illustrate the basis of this dispute: "The common declare that they are impoverished by the outrageous wages demanded by labourers and ask for inquiry by the justices twice a year, strict enforcement of the wage laws and prohibition of holidays with pay. […] Failure to reap the corn is causing grievous loss." (McKisack 338). The demographic shift as a result of the plague provided laborers unprecedented negotiating power in terms of wages and length of employment. In the 1351 Statute of Labourers, landed gentry tried to freeze wages at pre-plague levels. In an attempt to stabilize the workforce and prevent peasants from wandering in search of the highest bidder, Parliament "insisted workers should be hired for the year or some customary seasonal term, but not by the day" (Bowers 43). Regulating hiring practices in this way, Parliament, in effect, sought to limit the peasants' newfound negotiating strength.

The maiden offers the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in an attempt to resolve confusion over class and status, not labor and wages. The homiletic tradition surrounding the parable in late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century England is

consistent with the maiden's reading of class and status in the parable. In *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England*, Helen Barr argues: "the parable also engages with concerns relevant to the mercantile challenge to social stratification dramatized by the figure of the jeweller" (59).[63] Specific to those concerns, according to Barr, are the poem's references to time and the methods used in reckoning that time. The notion of time, specifically the divine reckoning at the end of time, is central to both the narrator's discomfort with the Pearl maiden's status and the laborers' cry of injustice in the parable.

The significance of the maiden recounting the parable of the laborers in the vineyard when she is accused of acting beyond her station reinforces the intersection of time and status. Most sermons from the period that treat the subject of this parable do so in such a way as to link the times of day the workers are called to the three estate system. The very fact that the maiden preaches a homily challenges some of the most basic principles of social hierarchy in the middle ages. She is a daughter correcting her father, a female preaching to male, a youth instructing an elder. But as a resurrected figure now bound in holy matrimony to the lamb of God, the maiden's authority is greater than anything subject to death and decay. Her eternal status translates into temporal authority, authority over all things earthly, all things unable to cross the river.

The maiden's explication of the parable of the vineyard is central to breaking *Pearl* scholarship out of a closed hermeneutic reading of the poem that reinforces, though rarely interrogates, the binaries of the literal and the figurative, the earthly and the

---

[63] The notion that the parable and the Pearl Maiden's recounting of the parable in the poem mirror and reinforce earthly notions of status and class is supported by a number of critics. See especially A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain-poet* (London: Cambridge UP, 1970) 101; W.A. Davenport, *The Art of the Gawain-poet* (London: Athlone Press, 1978) 45; Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the Gawain-Poet* (London and New York: Longman, 1996) 171-3; Sandra Pierson Prior, *The Pearl-poet Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994) 47-8.

heavenly, and the material and the spiritual (Barr 41). Spearing observed that the literal

level of the Gospel parable is "as applicable to the agricultural society of fourteenth-

century England as to that of first-century Palestine" (Spearing 101). The poet, however,

does not allow the parable's significance to be assumed by the audience. In case the

audience was not able to make the connection between the literal level of the parable and

the economic reality of late fourteenth-century England, the maiden's reckoning of the

figurative meaning of the parable specifically situates it within an earthly economic

reality—a reality in which there is an appropriate time to perform certain labors and a

reality in which the employers determine the length of the work day and the wages for

labor.

When *Pearl* scholarship does engage with the historical context of late-fourteenth

century England, the parable of the vineyard tends to figure centrally in the reading. In

particular, Bowers (2001) and Watkins (1995) are among the first scholars to pursue a

reading of the Vineyard Parable within the context of the 1388 Statute of Laborers, a

statute that attempted to quell the heated debates over the increasing negotiating power of

agricultural workers. Bowers, in particular, traces the economic and political upheaval

surrounding the disputes between landowners and laborers during the time of the poem's

composition, but he never fully integrates his historical findings into a coherent reading

of the poem. The statute attempted to regulate the wages of labourers in order to remove

that negotiating power from the workers and put the power back in the hands of the

landowners. What is at stake historically during this period, and literally in the poem, is

the power to determine the value of labor within time, specifically who regulates and

measures time.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard, (Mt 20:1-16), was the subject of

Gregory the Great's homily for Septuagesima Sunday.[64] The homiletic tradition

surrounding this parable draws heavily from Gregory, whose exposition focuses

primarily on the significance of the temporal scheme found in the gospel passage. For

Gregory, the vineyard represents the universal Church, and the times of day during which

the laborers are called represent the biblical historical ages: Adam to Noah, Noah to

Abraham, Abraham to Moses, Moses to the coming of the Lord; and the eleventh hour

represents the present age, the period from the coming of the Lord to the end of the

world. But Gregory elaborates further, suggesting that these same hourly periods can

apply to the lifespan of an individual:

> Morning is the childhood of our understanding. The third hour can be
> taken as our youth, because the sun is advancing on high as the
> impetuosity of age increases. The sixth hour is that of your adulthood,
> because when we reach our full strength it is as if the sun is in the center
> of the heavens. The ninth hour we take to be old age, because like the sun
> descending from its zenith, this age lacks the warmth of youth. The
> eleventh hour is the age that is called infirm or old. (79)

In terms of the ages of man, the Pearl maiden has died in the eleventh hour, the

time of the poem and the time in which the narrator lives. But her death at so young an

age does not square with the schematic set forth by Gregory in regards to an individual

lifespan. The Pearl maiden has been 'called' to the vineyard in the sense that she has

been baptized, but, dying before she was even able to recite prayers, can she claim to

have ever labored in the vineyard at all? Gregory is clear on this issue, "To bear the

---

[64] The time-reckoning of Septuagesima raises mathematical and numerical inconsistencies. The term, septuagesima, is Latin for seventieth, and yet it designates the ninth Sunday before Easter, the third before Lent. The following Sunday is designated as Sexagesima, though clearly ten days have not passed. The discrepancy between the name and the temporal period it is supposed to designate has been a matter of dispute among writers. In Amalarius' *Liber Officialis, I.I.1-2* cited by Aelfric, Septuagesima mystically represents the Babylonian Captivity of seventy years.

burden of the day's heat means for each individual to be exhausted by the passions of his

body throughout a long life" (81). In other words, the length of a person's life was a

measure used to reckon one's eternal reward. It is this very line of reasoning, from

Gregory's sermon, that the narrator employs when he challenges the maiden's sudden

ascension to the position of queen:

> What more honour moᵹte he acheue
> Þat hade endured in worlde stronge
> And lyued in penaunce hys lyues longe
> Wyth bodily bale hym blysee to byye?
> What more worschyp moᵹt he fonge
> Þen corounde be king by cortaysé? (475-80).

The narrator is concerned that the maiden has not labored long enough in the vineyard to

collect such a high reward as the status of queen.

In the English sermon tradition, Bede (*ca.* 673-735) cites the parable in his

homily 11.16 for the Sunday after the Ascension. Bede's homily is based on John 15:26-

16:4, but it refers to Matthew's vineyard parable for the significance of its numerical

symbolism. Remaining true to Matthew, Bede's account has the laborers paid a denarius,

a Roman silver coin worth ten copper coins, for their work. Writing in Latin and

retaining the Roman coinage from the gospel, Bede glosses the denarius as designating

> The perfection of heavenly life, in which *surveying the glory of the Lord,*
> the supreme king, *we are transformed into the same image,*[65] not only
> from the fact that it bears the image and inscription of a king, but also
> from the fact that it is the equivalent of ten obols, which is a perfect
> number and the one from which it derives its name. (159)[66]

---

[65] 2 Cor. 3:18

[66] Bede continues elucidating the mystery of numbers in order to explain the mathematical precision of the
final reckoning: "Seven multiplied by seven suggests the perfection of that rest which will never be
brought to an end [or] marred by any blemish, but which will be made perfect by the more abundant gift of
the reception of our bodies when the day of universal judgment and resurrection arrives. One is added to
seven-times-seven, (that is the day of Pentecost Sunday, on which the primitive Church received the Holy
Spirit), and thus the number fifty is perfectly completed. It shows that time of judgment and resurrection of

The symbolism of the numerical system, based on Roman coinage, is central to Bede's

reading of the passage.

The translation of the payment from the Roman denarius to the English penny in

the maiden's account of the parable further links the labor issues in the parable to the

economic realities of medieval England. The parable, then, becomes a close

representation of the wage issues of late-fourteenth-century England. In a husbandry

manual written in the thirteenth century, an anonymous author writes "How One Must

Pay Labourers in August and in Time of Haymaking." Providing a straightforward

formula for how to determine the pay of laborers, the author writes, "You can well have

three acres weeded for a penny, and an acre of meadow mown for fourpence, and an acre

of waste meadow for threepence-halfpenny, and an acre of meadow turned and raised for

a penny-halfpenny, and an acre of waste for a penny-farthing" (*Walter of Henley* 69).

The author continues to provide a formula for determining payment based on the number

of bands reaped if the audience resides in a region that does not reap by the acre. The

most interesting piece of advice in the husbandry, and the most applicable to the parable,

comes when the author instructs the reader how to reckon the payment if the workers take

longer than the formulas he has provided.

> And see then how many acres there are to reap throughout, and see if they
> agree with the days and pay them then, and if they account for more days
> than is right according to this reckoning, do not let them be paid, for it is

all [people], when the rest of holy souls, which is now going on in that life, will be doubled by the
reception of their immortal bodies, and that utterance of the Apostle will be fulfilled: *But if the Spirit of the
one who restored Jesus to life from the dead dwells in you, he who restored Jesus to life from the dead will
also bring to life your mortal bodies through his Spirit dwelling in you.*" (159-60). Bede's use of the
parable emphasizes numerical perfection and points specifically to the theology of bodily resurrection. See
Bede the Venerable, Homilies on the Gospels, Book Two: Lent to the Dedication of the Church trans.
Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst. Cistercial Studies Series 111 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications,
1991).

their fault that they have not reaped the amount and have not worked so
well as they ought. (69)

The husbandry indicates that, even as early as the thirteenth century, landowners in

England were not necessarily clear about how to pay their laborers. Specifically, the

issue of wage labor and its potential for exploitation by lazy peasants, a common

stereotype in late medieval England, was already a concern for English landowners. The

demographic shift after the Black Death of 1348-9 only served to heighten the anxiety

and further stress the fragile estate system.

      Sermons from the period, like the maiden in the poem, also use the English

currency as opposed to the Roman. Two Middle English sermons contemporary to the

composition of *Pearl*, in particular, link the times of the days the workers are called to the

three estate system. After echoing Gregory's reckoning of the times of day the workers

are called as the historical and individual ages of man, the Lollard sermon and

Wimbledon's sermon then continue to interpret and elaborate on the significance of the

estate system and their labor assignments.

      Like Bede, the author of the Lollard sermon is interested in the symbolism of the

coin of payment. In the Lollard sermon, though, the coin is significant because of its

shape rather than its value: "for þe roundenesse þat bitokeneþ euerlastyngness" (ln 55).

Rendered in native coinage, the penny of the Lollard sermon represents the everlasting

bliss of heaven. But as in Bede's account, the image on the coin also renders significance

worth comment. The author of the Lollard sermon continues to state that the penny is

significant

for þe blessed si t of þe kyngis face þat is in þat peni, and also for þe
Scripture þat is þerinne, þat is: þe Booke of Li f, in which al þo þat
schullen see þat si te beþ euerlastyngli written. (56-58)

According to the Lollard sermon's explication of the parable, the first called are

the lowest estate in the Church, "þe comyne peple, whos occupacions stondeþ in

grobbyng aboute þe erþe, as in erynge, and dungynge, and sowynge, and harwynge, and

oþer ocupacions þat longeþ to þe erþe" (207-09). The next group of workers called are

knights and, finally, clerks. The sermon explicitly describes the labor assignments for

each of the estates beginning with the peasant class.

Þe first beþ þo þat remouen þe olde erþe, and openeþ þe rotis, and after
leien to dunge and newe erþe, to make it þe bettere to growe, and þe
plenteuousere bere his frute. And þese moun be vnderstonde bi þe lowest
estate of holi chirche, þat is: þe comyne peple, whos occupacions stondeþ
in grobbyng aboute þe erþe, as in erynge, and dungynge, and sowynge,
and harwynge, and oþer ocupacions þat longeþ to þe erþe. And þis
schulde be do iustli and for a good ende, wiþoute feyntise, or falsede, or
grucchynge of hire estaat. (203-11)

The lowest estate, the peasant class, is assigned the most backbreaking labor, the digging

of the earth. Most importantly, however, the sermon singles out the lowest estate to

exhort them to perform their labors without "grucchynge of hire estaat." Furthermore,

the commoners are singled out when their labor is described while "þe oþere tweie parties

of þe chirche, þat is: kny tes and clerkis," are considered together (213-14).

The sermon continues to explain the spiritual significance of each estate's labor.

The rooting by the peasants is meant to represent the "openynge of þyn herte in which

schulde stoned þe rote of ri tis dedis, wiþ trewe confession of þi synnes […] and leie

þerto dunge of scharpe penaunce, as fastynge, wolward goynge, har liggynge, sore

disciplines, and oþer dedes of penaunce" (216-21). But even the significance of the labor

contains a harsh indictment of the lowest of the estates as the sermon continues to remind

the common man that "þou art but a sac ful of dritte, keuvered vndir cloþes" (227). The

narrator echoes this sentiment in the concluding sections of the poem when he states: "I

am bot mokke and mul" (905).

Wimbledon's sermon, likewise, interprets the times the workers are called to the

vineyard in terms of the three estate system. This sermon, although contemporary to the

Lollard sermon, enjoyed a much wider popularity and distribution. Writing about the

sermon in *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England,* G.R. Owst states "There can be no

single sermon by an Englishman of our two centuries [14th and 15th] of which so many

copies in contemporary manuscript, and later printed book, can be found than one of the

favourite text: 'Redde rationem villicationis tuae'" (360). This sermon is less clear about

the exact role of each estate in the vineyard saying

> … summe kuttyn awey
> þe voyde branchis; summe maken forkes and rayles to
> beren vp þe veyne; and summe diggen awey þe olde erþe
> fro þe rote and leyn þere fattere. (28-31)

Whereas the Lollard sermon was explicit in breaking down the exact physical labor

demanded of each estate in the vineyard, Wimbledon's sermon merely describes the labor

without linking it to a particular estate. And rather than focus on the "grouching" of the

peasants, this sermon instead preaches the importance of harmony and interdependence:

> And alle þeise offices
> ben so nescessarie to þe veyne þat   if eny of hem fayle
> it schal harme gretly or distroye þe vyne. […]
> And certis þis shulde be o cause why euery staat
> shul loue oþer and men of o craft shulde neiþer hate ne
> despise men of anoþer craft siþ þey beþ so needful euer-
> ych to oþer. (31-3; 82-5)

The mention of "craft" alludes to the guilds of the rising mercantile class, but the sermon does not elaborate on their position in relation to the estate system. Laborers, craftsmen, and merchants are mentioned in a list of biblical passages cited to illustrate that every man

> see to what astaat God haþ clepid
> hym and dwelle he þer inne. (98-9)

While the estate of the laborers, craft men, and merchants, is never made explicit, the sermon groups them together, suggesting that they are separate from the knights and priests mentioned a few lines lower.

The Wimbledon sermon provides more insight into the social role of each estate than the abstract interpretation of the spiritual significance offered in the Lollard sermon.

> Ryȝt so in þe chirche beeþ needful þes þre offices:
> presthod, knyȝthod, and laboreris. To prestis it falliþ
> to kutte awey þe voide braunchis of synnis wiþ þe swerd
> of here tonge. To knyȝtis it falliþ to lette wrongis and
> þeftis to be do, and to mayntene goddis lawe and hem þat
> ben techeris þer of, and also to kepe þe lond fro ene-
> myes of oþer londes. And to laboreris it falleþ to
> trauayle bodily and wiþ here sore swet geten out of þe
> erþe bodily liflode for hem and for oþer parties. (37-46).

The economic dynamic in the maiden's recounting of the parable varies dramatically from the narrator's understanding of both time and economic exchange. For the narrator, physical labor can "buy" bliss, a perception shared by the workers in the vineyard who have been laboring all day. According to a fair rate of economic exchange, their labor should be worth more than the labor of those who arrived later in the day because they have exerted more physical effort by working longer; they have done more and are therefore entitled to a higher rate of exchange. This is the economic principle the

narrator invokes when he expresses his concern abou the Pearl maiden's rapid ascension in rank. The problem, according to the parable, is that the workers and the narrator have attributed a certain standard of value to their physical labor based on their notion of fair exchange, much as Walter of Henley encourages his readers to see, but the contract the day laborers in the parable have entered into with the lord was not based on this economic principle of exchange. They agreed to work for, and have been paid, the flat wage of a penny.

But in explaining the economic principles at work in the parable, the maiden's language reveals an altogether different perspective of the exchange. According to her, God

> Lauez Hys gyftez as water of dyche,
> Oþer gotez of golf þat neuer charde. (607-8)

God pours out "gifts" as evidence of his largesse, not as payment in fulfillment of a contract. In this system of exchange, then, the laborers have not sold their labor for a wage, but, rather, they have served their duty in the vineyard; they came when they were called, and God has granted them the "gift" of salvation as represented by the penny. In this sense, the laborers have received a gift generously given and, therefore, have no right to challenge the terms. This understanding of the parable, when applied literally to the historical context of the day, strengthens the position of landowners in late medieval England by maintaining their discretion of what they "give" laborers for their service. This language of gift-giving is emphasized in its repetition in the closing lines of the poem:

> He gef vus to be His homly hyne
> Ande precious perle   vnto His pay. (1211-12)

99

The last line echoes the first line of the poem, repeating the notion of pearls as payment, but the context of the last two lines support the economic principles established in the maiden's explanation of the parable. God's gift is to allow us to serve him as humble laborers and precious pearls. The direction of exchange does not flow toward the workers, however, but toward God.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard not only engages with the historical context of the disputes between landowners and agricultural workers, but also draws from a rich homiletic tradition steeped in the reckoning of time. From understanding the hours the workers are called as ages of man to periods of an individual lifespan, the commentary surrounding the parable has sought to answer the question of eternal salvation in terms of earthly labor and temporal progression. The contemporary sermons on the parable reveal an interest in class and status designations, readings that are consistent with the Pearl maiden's exposition. The gift of salvation is not negotiable, and neither is the assignment of one's rank at the time of resurrection.

Time and the Body: Rank and Resurrection

In addition to alluding to temporal schemes, the physical boundaries on the otherworldly estate symbolize and reflect the class boundaries separating a jeweler from an aristocrat in late fourteenth-century England. The jeweler, as a member of the mercantile class, is allowed limited access to the estate, though he is not allowed to reside there. The narrator's anxiety over status is perhaps best illustrated by his obsession with the social degree of the maiden. The figure of the Pearl maiden provides the poem yet another space in which to express the relationship between time and status.

The narrator may indeed feel himself an inferior in these grand surroundings, but his anxiety expresses itself mostly toward the position of the Pearl Maiden. Encountering the maiden for the first time in his dream vision, he states

> At þe fote þerof þer sete a faunt,
> A mayden of menske, ful debonere;
> Blysnande whyt watz hyr bleaunt;
> I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere. (160-164)

From the narrator's first glimpse of the Pearl Maiden, the reader is made aware of four things: age, class, attire, and his familiarity with her. The first thing the narrator notices is that the maiden is a "faunt," a child. Second, she is courteous and gracious of manner. Her attire is consistent with her behavior. Dressed in a white silk garment, she is clearly identified as a person of elite status. The first depiction of her class status is interesting because, though she is not depicted as interacting with anyone else, she is nonetheless courteous and full gracious in manner—behavior consistent with someone of elevated, aristocratic status. As if her demeanor were not enough to convey the elevation of her

status, she is dressed in a white silk garment, attire indicating a high degree of social status.

Sumptuary laws regulating attire on the basis of social status sought to prevent the counterfeiting of status.[67] Felicity Riddy, the first literary scholar to apply the sumptuary laws to a reading of *Pearl,* summarizes the laws as follows:

> The sumptuary laws of 1363, which were aimed at consolidating hierarchy and degree, laid down, for example, that no-one below the rank of a knight with an income of over one hundred pounds, or below a merchant or artisan with an income of over five hundred pounds, was allowed to wear jewellery of gold set with precious stones. (Riddy 144)[68]

The legislation was repealed the following year, but, as Riddy suggests, the fact that the legislation was implemented reveals a certain interest in regulating and maintaining clear distinctions between the classes. What is interesting about the statutes of 1363 is that income is considered in addition to social position. The statutes reveal a commodification of status that allows for a more fluid interpretation of social position. This is perhaps not surprising considering that sumptuary laws originated from the House of Commons, which was comprised primarily of representatives from the affluent middle social groups (Sponsler 11).

Before he identifies her status, however, the first thing the narrator identifies about the maiden when he encounters her in his dream vision is that she is a child. Yet, as the poem progresses and the maiden engages in debate with the narrator, the maiden seems to defy normative temporal schemes by aging before the readers' eyes. The issue of the maiden's age matters to the narrator because he is concerned that she has assumed

---

[67] See especially Frances E. Baldwin's *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1926).

[68] See *Statutes of the Realm* (London, 1810-28), I, 380-1:37 Edw. III, c. 8-14.

a status beyond her years, but it also raises the question of the age of the resurrected

body. In Augustine's *City of God*, Book 22, Chapter 15, a passage addresses the issue of

age and the resurrected body:

> Atque illud quod commemoravit apostolus de mensura aetatis plenitudinis Christi aut propter aliud intellegamus dictum esse, id est, ut illi capiti in populis Christianis accedente omnium perfectione membrorum aetatis eius mensura compleatur aut, si hoc de resurrectione corporum dictum est, sic accipiamus dictum ut nec infra nec ultra iuvenalem formam resurgent corpora mortuorum, sed in eius aetate et robore usque ad quam Christum hic pervenisse cognovimus—circa triginta quippe annos definierunt esse etiam saeculi huius doctissimi hominess iuventutem; quae cum fuerit spatio proprio terminate, inde iam hominem in detrimenta vergere gravioris ac senilis aetatis—et ideo non esse dictum in mensuram corporis vel in mensuram staturae, sed *in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi.*[69]

Although not entirely sure of the age at resurrection, Augustine suggests here that we will

rise at age 30 because this is the ideal age—the age when Christ was resurrected as a

model for all humanity.

Augustine's theory of our age at resurrection is repeated in a sermon for Advent

Sunday from Mirk's *Festial*, an English collection of sermons written between 1382 to

1390.[70] "The xv. day heuen and erþ schull be made newe, and all men and woymen and

childyrne schull aryse vp yn þe age of xxx[ti] ere and come to þe dome" (3). Having

been resurrected to the age of 30, the Pearl maiden would not be overstepping her station,

---

[69] "And we must understand that what the Apostle says about 'the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ' was spoken for another purpose, that is, that the measure of his age will be completed when to him as head all Christian people are added to complete his members. Or, if this had reference to the resurrection of bodies, we should understand that the dead do not rise with bodies either older or younger than the state of youth, but have bodies of the age and strength that we know Christ reached here. For even the learned of this world have defined youth as reaching to thirty years, stating that when that limit is reached, then man begins to decline into the worse conditions of a burdensome senile age. Hence it was not said 'into the measure of the body,' or 'into the measure of the height,' but 'into the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ.'" Translation from David S. Wiesen, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1968).

[70] See "Mirk's *Festial*" in Siegfried Wenzel, *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2005) 58-65, especially page 65.

at least not in terms of her age. That the narrator first identifies her as a child could then

serve as another example of his anxiety over his position. As a father, he initially sees

her as a child rather than the full-grown woman, and heavenly queen, she has become

through her resurrection. The narrator's earthly-based temporal perception, as

represented in his inability to read the pearl maiden's age, is already brought into

question during his first sight of her. And it is this earthly-based perception of time,

specifically how it challenges the laws of the heavenly realm, that prompts the pearl

maiden's exposition of the parable of the laborers.

The best dates we have for MS Cotton Nero A.x., Art. 3, the manuscript that

contains *Pearl*, are late-fourteenth-century, putting the poem after the Black Death of

1348-49. With a population decline estimated between one-half and two-thirds, the

poem's meditation on death and resurrection is not surprising.[71] During this period,

people were intimately acquainted not only with death, but also familiar with the bodies

of the dead, as most people would have died in their homes among loved ones. The

image of an immaculate body after resurrection, as depicted in the poem, would have

been of great comfort to the grieving survivors. The death of a child would have resulted

in a particularly painful sense of loss, but preachers of the period cast the grief of parents

as sinful, a state that interfered with an understanding of the reward of salvation:

> Churchmen reiterated this ban [about mourning excessively for the death
> of a child] both directly and obliquely in their sermons. In the latter case,
> they tried to explain the death of children as an act of divine mercy. They
> condemned exaggerated mourning of parents more directly as the
> expression of lack of faith and piety. Even when the preacher condemns
> the sins of the current generation as the possible explanation for the death
> of children in a plague, he adds that, even so, the Lord is not chastising

---

[71] These statistics are based on John Hatcher's *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348-1530.*
London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977.

them when he frees them from imprisonment, exile, and suffering in this world and restores them to the glories of the other world (Shahar *Childhood* 151)

In Wimbledon's sermon, *Redde rationem vilicationis tuae*, the author is equally unsympathetic to the plight of mothers who have lost children. Mothers in particular are rebuked for their love of the flesh and their sin of not caring for the souls of their children:

> But certis now it is soþ þat Seynt Jon Crisostome seiþ: Moderis beþ lowynge þe bodies of here children, but þe soule þey dispiseþ. Þey desireþ hem to wel fare in þis world, and þey takeþ noon hede what þey shul suffer on þat oþer. Summe ordeynen fees for here children, but noon ordeynen hem to Godwar. Þe lost of þer bodies þey wolleþ dere bygge, but þe helþe of here soule þe reccheþ nou t to take of ifte. if þey see hem poore, þey sorweþ and sykeþ; but þou þey see hem synnen, þey sorwen nou t. And in þis þey sheweþ þat þey brou ten forþ þe bodies but nou t þe soules. (195-205)

In another fourteenth-century sermon, John Wyclif chastises mourning parents but singles out mothers in particular. He reminds them "It is gret mercy of God to take a child out of þis world; for if it schal be saaf, it is delyverid out of woo into blisse, lest malice turnyd þe undirstondynge of þe child to synne, and þat is gret mercy of God, and herefor alle men schulden be glade" (199-200).

Sermons were not the only medium for disseminating this warning to mothers against grieving. In the Brome *Abraham and Isaac* pageant, the Doctor singles out mourning mothers for chastisement:

> And thys women that wepe so sorrowfully
> Whan that hyr chyldryn dey them froo,
> As nater woll, and kind!
> Yt ys but folly, I may wyll awooe,
> To groche a-gens Goed or to greve yow,
> For ye schall never se hym meschevyd, wyll I know,
> Be lond nor watyr; have thys in mynd. (447-55)

While much of the religious devotional literature addressing the loss of a child focuses on the anguished mother, *Pearl* does not. Interestingly, in this poem, it is the maiden's father, not mother, who has been mourning excessively over his loss. Some scholars suggest that "the simplest explanation [for the absence of the mother] would appear that the mother died in childbirth, or soon after. The surviving child would thus have become particularly precious to its father as and a comfort to him" (Bishop 7-8).[72] That there is no mention of the girl's mother, even a deceased mother, seems an odd omission, especially given the poem's meditation on death. With such a young child, the narrator's loss would still be fairly recent, and having lost yet another member of his family, his grief would be conceivably fresh enough to warrant some mention, especially given the circumstances of the scene he is describing. Searching for a biographical explanation, other scholars propose that perhaps the poet was a priest who had an illegitimate child, not uncommon with the shortage of priests after the Black Death and the widespread willingness to overlook violations of canon law. Writing about these children, Peter Heath notes that "the records are singularly laconic, a feature which suggests that they were accepted without much difficulty or embarrassment by society" (Heath 106).

Offering yet another alternative, Bowers advances the theory that the poet may have been a married cleric who had remained in lower orders and that the daughter was legitimate. He posits that

> For such a clerk, the death of a child, especially an only child, would have meant more than the personal loss described with such poignancy in *Pearl*. In an age when birth-rates had drastically declined, it would also have

---

[72] See also René Wellek "The Pearl," *Studies in English* (Prague: Charles University, 1933) 5-33. See especially page 10 for an argument against this position.

> dealt a serious blow to any dynastic aspirations he may have harbored, even for a girl. (61)

This suggestion that the death of a daughter would have presented a father with the loss not only of a child, but also of the potential to marry her to someone of a higher status, seems consistent with a close reading of the poem's anxiety over issues of status.

The main problem with Bowers' line of reasoning, however, is that it reads the poem as an autobiographical expression of loss, an argument I do not necessarily accept. The poem could just as easily have been commissioned by a wealthy merchant who had recently lost a child. Lynn Staley goes so far as to suggest Thomas of Woodstock as a likely patron for the poem but theorizes the occasion of the poem "commemorates not a girl's death, but a girl's oblation, or rather her father's oblation of her" ("Contingencies" 111). While the idea of oblation, and not death, as the occasion of the poem is interesting, the poem does not explicitly support such a reading. The idea that the poem was commissioned by a grieving parent, perhaps devastated by the loss of potential dynastic aspirations for his daughter, is consistent with a close reading of the poem and a distinct possibility. But what is all too often lost when considering these fascinating, yet ultimately unprovable theories is how our acceptance of them could change our understanding or reading of the poem. Medieval dynastic aspirations (i.e., the desire to ascend the social class by marrying off a female offspring to someone of higher status) are much more interesting, as well as fruitful, backgrounds to the poem when we consider the narrator's status as jeweler in the poem rather than speculating about the identity and social position of the poet. For in the poem, the maiden marries the highest degree possible. She has assumed the role of heavenly royalty. This ascension, however,

provides narrative tension within the poem because the narrator is not able to gain earthly profit from this union.

      While the maiden's status is always clearly represented as aristocratic, the exact nature of her degree is less clear. Describing the maiden's beautiful complexion, the narrator demotes her status from that implied in the first two lines of the poem:

> Her semblaunt sade for doc oþer erle,
> Her ble more bla t þen whallez bon. (211-12)

Whereas the pearl he has lost in the opening lines of the poem is suggested as worthy of a prince, this maiden has a face dignified enough only for an earl or duke. Her value, however, is still rendered in terms of exchange, i.e. fit for a prince, duke, or earl, reinforcing the notion that status has gradations within the ruling male aristocratic class.[73] Furthermore, the fact that the maiden is described as fit for prince, duke, and earl, seems to suggest that the poem's jeweler, not necessarily the poet as Bowers maintains, held some hope of his daughter's ability to marry up. But the fact that she has attained such a high status in heaven proves unsettling for the narrator. It is this very issue of the maiden's status, specifically whether or not she is qualified to serve as queen, that the narrator finds most difficult to reconcile. And it is the issue of her status that leads to a discussion of time.

---

[73] While the word "prince" could stand for "nobleman" in Middle English, I interpret the poet as using it specifically to mean someone in the royal succession. My conclusion is based on two main lines of reasoning. First, the fact that the pearl, in the form of the Pearl maiden, is indeed found to be fitting enough for the Prince of Peace. Second, the poem speaks explicitly about rank and status in such a way as to suggest a specific, rather than general, understanding of the term.

In one of his sermons, Augustine assures us that rank and hierarchy will be found in heaven.[74] The narrator is initially delighted to see that his daughter has risen in rank, and he informs her that her status is the foundation for all his joys:

> For I am ful fayn þat your astate
> Is worþen to worschyp and wele, iwysse;
> Of alle my joy þe hy e gate,
> Hit is in grounde of alle my blysse. (393-96)

But while he is delighted by her high rank in heaven, he is taken aback when she announces her status as queen. He isn't upset that she's been saved, but that she has achieved so high a rank so quickly through marriage. That he is delighted to find she has risen in rank, coupled with his references to how the Pearl is fit for a prince, duke, or earl, does seem to support Bower's suggestion that the narrator's loss is more than grief over the death of a child, and that it also concerns the loss of a potential to marry her to a member of the aristocracy, thereby elevating her status. Seeing his daughter as queen, however, presents too far and too fast of a leap on the social scale for the narrator's comfort:

> Þow wost well when þy perle con schede
> I watz ful ong and tender of age;
> Bot my Lorde þe Lombe þur Hys godhede,
> He toke myself to Hys maryage,
> Corounde me quene in blysse to brede
> In lenghe of dayez þat euer schal wage[75] (411-16)

That the maiden was so young at death and has ascended so quickly in heaven concerns the narrator, something the maiden is well aware of and something she mentions before

---

[74] See Sermon 132, Chapter 3, par. 3 (PL 38, col. 736).

[75] The use of the word "wage" is curious here. Andrew and Waldron do not know exactly what to make of it and have glossed it as a verb meaning "? Continue, ? bring reward" (358). Neither of these meanings, however, correspond with the MED.

she reveals her status as queen. But the narrator is still worried that she has transgressed

her status and overstepped too much. He tells her,

> Þyself in heven over hiȝ þou heve
> To make þe quen þat watz so ȝonge. (473-4)

But the maiden's young age at death is not the only problem for the narrator. He is also

concerned that in assuming the status of queen so quickly, on her first day, she has

overstepped the temporal bounds of rank and degree that normally exist on earth:

> Þou lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede;
> Þou cowþez neuer God nauþer plese ne pray,
> Ne neuer nawþer Pater ne Crede –
> And quen mad on þe fyrst day!
> I may not traw, so God me spede,
> Þat God wolde wryþe so wrange away.
> Of countes, damysel, par ma fay,
> Wer fayr in heuen to halde asstate
> Oþer ellez a lady of lasse aray –
> Bot a quene!—hit is to dere a date. (483-92)

The maiden's exalted position of queen in this heavenly realm causes the narrator anxiety

for two primary reasons, both of them temporal in nature. His first objection to her status

is her youth, specifically, that she died when she was a child of two, too young to have

earned such a high reward or even to have married at all. Second, he is concerned that

she has ascended the social hierarchy far too quickly, on only her first day.

Interestingly, the concatenation word "date" is used for this section, a word that is

concerned with status and with time. The word appears nine times within this section and

once again in Section XVIII, and its meaning varies just about every time it appears. At

issue in this section is the value of time, the reckoning of status, and means of measure.

Coming in the important final position of this stanza, the word "date" highlights the

intersection of these issues in this section and throughout the poem. The Middle English

dictionary lists no less than six main meanings for the word.[76] Andrew and Waldron

gloss the word as meaning "limit, (point of) time, beginning, end, date, season, rank"

(312).

It is curious that Andrew and Waldron gloss "to dere a date" in line 492 as "too

exalted a rank," because, while such a reading is consistent with the context provided in

the previous lines, the MED does not cite "rank" as one of the definitions for date. But if

we continue reading to the next line, a more likely translation for the word would be a

period or stretch of time, implying a period of time with a beginning and end. It is this

sense of limit or temporal boundary that the Pearl maiden counters when she replies

"There is no date of Hys godnesse" (493). This usage seems to suggest that the narrator

has used the term as a measure of finitude, a misguided notion that the maiden is quick to

correct.

While the poem is explicit about the maiden's age at death, it is less clear as to

exactly how long the maiden has been dead. In Section V of the poem, when the narrator

is still trying to determine the identity of the Pearl Maiden, he asks her,

'O perle,' quoþ I, 'in perlez pyʒt,

Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,

---

[76] 1. At the end or the beginning of a document: given, issued, or executed (at a certain place and time by a certain person). 2. (a) The date (of the execution of a document, agreement, etc.) specifying the day, the month, and the year; at ~ of, in ~ of; bering ~; (b) the signature (affixed to an agreement or other piece of writing); (c) in the date of the devel, in the name of the Devil; also as an oath. 3. A point in time (day, month, and year) specified with reference (a) to the Christian calendar; ~ of Crist (God), ~ of our lord (drighte); (b) to some other system of reckoning time; laien ~, to fix a time, date (sth.). 4. (a) Any point in time; of neue ~, recently; of latter ~, lately; in due ~, in due time; bi no ~, at no time, never; stonden on ~, to be imminent; (b) the date (of one's) birth, (one's) age; of on ~, of one and the same age. 5. A period or stretch of time, a season, an age; ~ of time; long ~, a long time; of olde ~, of the past; in endeles ~, eternally; lasten bi no ~, not to last any time; holden ~, to spend (one's) time; maken long ~, extend the time, delay. 6. (a) A point of time within a certain period; ~ of daie, time of day; er ~ of daie, before dawn; the dai was passed ~, the day had ended; (b) lives ~, the end of life; (c) ther is no ~, there is no limit or end (to God's grace).

> Regretted by myn one on ny t?
> Much longeyng haf I for þe layned,
> Syþen into gresse þou me agly te.' (241-45)

The narrator emphasizes that he has mourned very much since the maiden's passing, but this excess of mourning does not necessarily translate into a specific duration of time. Andrew and Waldron gloss "on ny t" as a prepositional phrase "at night" (336). Another possibility for the line is "one night," a translation which makes more sense given the fact that she has risen to the status of queen on her first day.

The narrator's main objections to the Pearl Maiden's newfound heavenly status, namely her age and the immediacy of her ascension, speak directly to the central issue of the poem: the intersection of time and status. As the narrator begins to chastise the maiden for usurping a position he believes she has not earned through age and passage of time, his language reflects his confusion over his own status. Courtly, mercantile, and religious diction are combined with the language of labor as the narrator attempts to make sense of the maiden's newfound status.

> What more honour mo te he acheue
> Þat hade endured in worlde stronge
> And lyued in penaunce hys lyues longe
> With bodyly bale hym blysse to byye?
> What more worschyp mo t he fonge
> Þen corounde be kyng by cortaysé? (475-80)

The use of "buy" in line 477 harks back to the opening lines of the poem when the narrator asserts that the pearl was fit payment for a prince. Now that he witnesses her ascent to the status of queen, however, the narrator is uncomfortable with that premise. It is not merely a "long life lived in penance" that will "buy bliss;" in the metaphorical

"market" of salvation; he believes that it is only a "long life with physical suffering" that can be exchanged for bliss.

The "bodily bale" of which the narrator speaks refers not only to the physical act of aging, but also to the physical suffering of Christ crucified on the cross. But as with so many of the lines in *Pearl*, there is yet another layer of meaning here that resonates throughout the poem: the representation of physical labor. It is this final meaning that the maiden perceives and exploits in her explication of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

The age and rank of the resurrected Pearl maiden causes the narrator to confront his own anxieties about time and status. Her shifting age, from child to adult, reveals a heavenly experience of time at odds with an earthly perception of time. Her rapid ascension to the status of queen on her first day concerns the narrator and reflects late medieval English notions of social mobility. Most of all, her ascension is definitive and serves to emphasize further the jeweler's ambiguous status in the social hierarchy.

Time and the City: The Final Reckoning

In the final sections of the poem, the narrator is allowed a glimpse of New Jerusalem. The concatenation of "Jerusalem" throughout section XIV highlights the importance of the city, both the Old and the New. Andrew and Waldron contend that "its association with earthly Jerusalem continues the contrast and juxtaposition of earthly values with their heavenly counterparts" (91). But the relationship between the two cities is not just one of distinction and opposition; rather the cities, the earthly Jerusalem and

heavenly City of God, are connected and bound together by the significance of reckoning status and time.

These sections, in particular, are heavily laden with multiple layers of reckoning. The apocalyptic vision provided at the end of the poem reveals the results of the final reckoning. The final judgment has determined the Pearl maiden worthy of her "penny," and she has ascended to join the 144,000 virgin brides of Christ.[77] What is perhaps most striking about the vision is how neglected it remains in *Pearl* scholarship.[78] A primary reason behind the dismissal of the vision of New Jerusalem is that it is highly derivative of its source, the Book of Revelation. The poet does not try to conceal his heavy reliance on the source text but instead highlights it as the Pearl maiden and the narrator continually mention John as the source for their vision. When the narrator is recounting his first sight of New Jerusalem, the section uses the concatenation phrase "þe apostel John." Writing about the poet's reliance on his source, Rosalind Field argues that "it is at the very least a bold stroke on the part of the *Pearl* poet to combine the vision of St John the Divine with that of his own not-very-sanctified narrator" (7). She continues, arguing,

> For the moment our medium of information is not the fallacious and
> faltering Dreamer, but the apostle who speaks with an authority stronger
> than even that of the Maiden. The effect is to validate the Dreamer's
> visionary experience with a point of reference in the reliable apostolic
> vision. The poet is, of course, careful to follow his source accurately here,
> for its authenticity must not be put at risk. To dismiss Section 17 as

---

[77] Line 786 reads "A hondred and forty þowsande flot, / As in þe Apocalyppez hit is sene." Gollancz and Gordon add "fowre" after "forty" to render the line compatible with Rev. 14:3. Andrew and Waldron, however, leave the line as is, pointing out "the line is metrically more regular as it stands" (91).

[78] Exceptions include Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*." *Modern Language Review,* Vol. 81, No. 1 (Jan, 1986) 7-17; Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977); Muriel A. Whitaker, "*Pearl* and Some Illustrated Apocalyse Manuscripts," *Viator* 12 (1981): 183-96. See also Sandra Pierson Prior, "*Patience*—Beyond Apocalypse" *Modern Philology,* Vol. 83, No. 4 (May 1986) 337-48.

Finlayson does as "an authority-ridden vision" (p. 334) is to misunderstand its purpose. (8)

The Dreamer, however, is not the only one to rely on John's account. The Pearl maiden is the first of the poem's two speakers to invoke John's vision of New Jerusalem. The fact that she invokes John's account at all seems strange since she is relying on his text to describe what is her present and eternal experience. The authority she demonstrated earlier when she explicated the parable of the laborers in the vineyard seems to have diminished when it comes to rendering an account of her own experience in the heavenly city. She resides in New Jerusalem and the narrator can see the city from his vantage point, but neither is able to directly communicate their experience to the reader; both speakers filter their experience through John's eyes as recorded in the Book of Revelation.

As Field and others argue, the close application of the source material does lend credibility and authority to the Pearl poet's depiction of the heavenly city. But in doing so, the description of the city becomes a site for a multiple layer of reckoning within the poem. In this section, I examine the passages taken from the Book of Revelation and consider them in light of the earlier descriptions of space in the poem. To be clear, the description is John's, but my purpose here is consider how the poet uses John's reckoning of the end of time to further illuminate his own considerations of time and status. The narrator's and Pearl maiden's reliance on John's account creates a narrative distance—their experience must be filtered through someone else's perspective. This filtering also establishes a temporal distance. The narrator has moved from his present corporeal state in the garden and traveled in spirit to view the City of God established at the end of time.

115

His glimpse of the future city, however, must be negotiated through the past, through the

vision of St. John as recorded in the Book of Revelation. Status and rank are reckoned

through the classification of gems and the listing of the names and dates of the children of

Israel. Fruits blossom in this realm and they do so on what could be interpreted as a lunar

cycle. But no labor is required for their generation. Moreover, though they bloom

according to the lunar cycle, they are represented as not being governed by it. The river

continues to function as a natural boundary demarking temporal realms; when the

narrator attempts to rush into the future, celestial scene, he awakes to find himself back in

the present moment of the garden scene.

The text of the Book of Revelation functions as an indication of wealth and status

in its own right. Equating the text to the *Roman de la Rose,* Riddy explains that it "was

in many ways a high-status text in the later Middle Ages. In the second half of the

thirteenth and for much of the fourteenth it had a particular vogue in England as

devotional reading in sumptuous manuscripts. These Anglo-Norman Apocalypses were

luxury objects commissioned by aristocratic clerical and lay patrons, female and male"

(146).[79] Medieval art historian Michael Camille observes the phenomenon of the

growing popularity of the images associated with this text:

> In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the ways in which people saw
> and heard were multiplying in both scale and medium. In addition to
> illustrated manuscripts in Latin and in prose and verse vernaculars,
> tapestries, sculptural programs, individual statues, and later, printed books
> all served to convey the phantasmagoric forms of Dragons, locusts, the
> Woman clothed with the sun, and extraterrestrial battles to an audience
> whose expectations, approaching the years 1400 or 1500, were of
> witnessing these things for themselves. Late medieval representations of

---

[79] See also Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl,*" *The Modern Language Review* 81 (1986): 7; Muriel A. Whitaker, "*Pearl* and Some Illustrated Apocalyse Manuscripts," *Viator* 12 (1981): 183-96; Sandra Pierson Prior, "*Patience*—Beyond Apocalypse," *Modern Philology* 83 (1986):338.

the Apocalypse either transform earlier models or evolve novel means of representing revelation in this climate of heightened popular enthusiasm. (276)

Images of the apocalypse take their place alongside images of the labors of the months as luxury artifacts signifying wealth and status. Found on tapestries, stained glass windows, illuminated manuscripts, sculptures, and carvings, the prevalence of these images reminded the late medieval audience not only of its relationship to time, but also that time was coming to an end.

From his vantage point, the narrator is able to see the twelve layers of gems that make up the city's foundation. Though the gems are present in John's account, their presence here serves to remind the audience of the narrator's occupation in the earthly realm: he is a jeweler. Rather than rely on his own knowledge of gem identification, however, he defers to John's authoritative account:

As John þise stonez in writ con nemme,
I knew þe name after his tale. (997-98)

According to Riddy, "information about the significance of jewels was assembled in encyclopaedias, as well as in the specialized handbooks known as lapidaries, written in Latin and in the vernaculars, which discuss the properties of the precious stones from which the Heavenly City in Revelation is constructed" (146). On the one hand, the reference serves as an educational footnote: his knowledge of the precious gems was acquired from texts that framed the information about them around the foundation of New Jerusalem as found in the Book of Revelation. On the other hand, the passage reveals the narrator's anxiety to be in a position of classifying gems, especially the gems that are used to construct the heavenly city. By relying on John's account, the narrator

117

abdicates what would have been an everyday activity for a jeweler. The narrator defers to John for the act of ranking the gems. Though he is a jeweler, it is clear that he does not possess the proper authority to classify and rank these particular celestial stones. He has been allowed permission to see them, but he is not worthy to interpret their value. Their value is fixed, and they do not require an agent to validate their worth.

After the classification of gems, the narrator's attention is drawn to the inscription of the names of the children of Israel:

> Vchon in scrypture a name con plye
> Of Israel barnez, folewande her datez,
> Þat is to say, as her byrþ-whatez;
> Þe aldest ay fyrst þeron watz done. (1039-42)

The inscription of the names of the children of Israel can indeed be found in chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation. The poet, however, embellishes the description and what he adds is of particular interest in light of the narrator's earlier confusion over and anxiety about the age of the Pearl maiden. In the lines above, the dates of the children of Israel are added to the inscription of their names. Furthermore, the oldest is listed first, establishing a heavenly ranking system that seems to honor the earthly progression of time. The ranking system has no foundation in the biblical account of the city, and it seems to contradict the reading of the parable of the vineyard. Why would the *Pearl*-poet make an emendation that undercuts an earlier established, and central, understanding of time? The answer, according to the poem, is that the authority to reckon, to classify and rank, is solely the responsibility of the Lord. As in the parable, the lord decides the value of the gift he bestows to his laborers. Rank still exists here in the celestial city, but it is God's purview to determine its value and measure.

The ensuing lines shed more light on the role of time in this realm. The names of the children of Israel may be organized according to the dates of their birth, but this realm exists at the end of time where such markers are ultimately irrelevant. In particular, the sun and the moon are unnecessary as the light of God shines eternal:

> Such ly t þer lemed in alle þe stratez
> Hem nedde nawþer sunne ne mone. (1043-4)

The uselessness of the sun and moon is emphasized through its repetition as the concatenation phrase in this section. This description is, once again, found in the Book of Revelation. Rosalind Field observes, "From the biblical passage that the City of God has no need of sunlight or moonlight, because of the light that issues from God (Apocalypse 22.5), the poet develops an important statement on mutability and eternity" (9). Field's reading of the section follows the traditional interpretation of the poem that views the mutability of the earthly realm in opposition to the eternal status achieved in the heavenly city. While this is certainly the case, it is not the end of the story. The poem's rendering of time is more sophisticated and subtle, as my previous discussions have shown.

The passage makes clear that God governs this realm, not the cycles of the sun and moon, and yet these celestial orbs are still employed to mark time:

> Aboute þat water arn tres ful schym,
> Þat twelue frytez of lyf con bere ful sone;
> Twelue syþez on er þay beren ful frym,
> And renowlez nwe in vche a mone. (1077-80)

The fruits on the trees still bloom according to the lunar calendar despite the fact that the moon is said to have no power in this realm. The authority to determine the blooming of the fruits resides with God. What is significant in this passage is how it relates to, and deviates from, the labors of the months. The fruit blooms once a month presumably to

119

provide food for the residents of the heavenly city, though this is never explicitly stated. Nature follows the schedule of the calendar, a schedule ultimately created by God, but it does not correspond to the labors. The fact that the fruit blooms on a regular schedule eliminates the need for labor. With God providing the city with constant light, there are no seasons and no need to differentiate between the months. Every month is the same and therefore no labors are required to signify the time of year.

From this heavenly space that exists outside the confines of time, the narrator will return to the garden in the month of August. The narrator is never allowed entry to the heavenly city, and it is his attempt to cross the river, to rush ahead of his time, that sends him back to the earthly garden aware of his identity as a laborer in the figurative vineyard. His status in that vineyard, however, remains unsettled still at the end of the poem. The poem concludes with the knowledge that he has been called to work and has answered the call, though it is not clear when he has answered the call.

Concluding Remarks

For all its formal brilliance, the poem leaves the question of the jeweler's status as largely unresolved. He is unable to cross the river at this time, but he is allowed to see the river and venture up its bank to glimpse the glory of New Jerusalem. But for all the access to the heavenly realm he is permitted during his sleep, it all slips away when he rushes into the waters and awakes back in the garden where the poem first opened. The poem's journey returns to where it started, leaving the reader on the one hand feeling as if the narrator has made no progress. On the other hand, traversing through the various spaces of the poem has shown us the prominent role time plays in the mercantile class's

struggle to situate itself within the declining three estate system of late medieval England.

He has lost his pearl, but he has found the true jewel of Christ:

> For I haf founden Hym, boþe day and na te,
> A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin. (1203-4)

Though the poem never resolves the precise rank of the jeweler in terms of social status,

the final two lines are clear about our relationship the Lord:

> He gef vus to be His homly hyne
> Ande precious perlez vnto His pay. (1211-12)

CHAPTER 3

TRICKS OF TIME: THE POWER OF TIME-RECKONING IN THE

CANTERBURY TALES[80]

> Our Hooste saugh wel that the brighte sonne
> The ark of his artificial day hath ronne
> The ferthe part, and half an houre and moore,
> And though he were nat depe ystert in lore,
> He wiste it was the eightetethe day
> Of Aprill, that is messager to May;
> And saugh wel that the shadwe of every tree
> Was as in lengthe the same quantitee
> That was the body erect that caused it.
> And therefore by the shadwe he took his wit
> That Phebus, which that shoon so clere and brighte,
> Degrees was five and fourty clombe on highte,
> And for that day, as in that latitude,
> It was ten of the clokke, he gan conclude . . .
>
> *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale* 1-14[81]

Time is told by just about every imaginable means throughout *The Canterbury*

Tales. In the opening lines of the *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale* cited above, host

---

Harry Bailly performs what appears to be a rather complicated astronomical periphrasis[82] involving the position of the sun, the day of the month, the length of shadows, and the latitude of the party in order to conclude that, "It was ten of the clokke" (14).[83] Likewise, in the opening lines of *The Parson's Prologue*, three different methods (position of sun, shadow length, and the zodiac) are employed consecutively to calculate the time of day as about four o'clock.[84] In the entry for Chaucer's Time Signatures in *The Chaucer Encyclopedia*, Dan Ransom lists all of the time schemes found in Chaucer's writings: three types of years (ecclesiastical, seasonal, and conventional), seasons (Chaucer is the first writer known to make use of the word *autumn* in English),[85] months (including the Latin term *ides*), weeks, three different types of days (natural, artificial, and vulgar), and the complex divisions of days (dawn, morning, prime, undern, curfew, "quarter-nyght," "quarter before day," to name a few). Furthermore, Chaucer also uses the length of

---

[82] Chauncey Wood defines astronomical periphrasis, also referred to as *chronographia*, as follows: "This rhetorical device, in which the time of day, or time of year, is indicated by a circumlocution involving some reference to the motions of the heavens." See Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970) 70-102; Peter Travis, "Chaucer's *Chronographiae*, the Confounded Reader, and Fourteenth-Century Measurements of Time," *Disputatio* 2 (1997): 1-34; Martin Camargo, "Time as Rhetorical Topos in Chaucer's Poetry," *Medieval Rhetoric: A Casebook*, ed. Scott D. Troyan (New York: Routledge, 2004) 91-107. For an historical overview of the use of astronomical periphrasis from antiquity to Shakespeare and Goethe, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1963) 275-76.

[83] Linne R. Mooney writes that this passage serves to strengthen the argument that "clock time" had become the accepted norm in late-fourteenth-century England despite the fact that historical and archaeological data suggests the relative scarcity of clocks in England during this period; see Linne R. Mooney, "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 15 (1993): 91, 101.

[84] For an astronomical analysis of these lines, see J.C. Eade, *The Forgotten Sky: A Guide to Astrology in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 137-141. See also Marijane Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe in* The Canterbury Tales (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2002) 64-87.

[85] According to Dan Ransom, Chaucer introduces *autumn* into English by transliterating and explaining Boethius's use of *autumnus* in the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

shadows and traveling distance, (i.e. a furlong) to measure time.[86] These signatures

represent a vast array of the methods by which people in late-fourteenth-century England

calculated time.

      Chaucer's use of time signatures is perhaps not so surprising given what we know

of his interest in, and knowledge of, reckoning time as demonstrated by his authorship of

The Treatise of the Astrolabe. What is surprising is how Chaucer uses time signatures as

way to reveal something about the economic shifts occurring in late fourteenth century

England, specifically in regards to the rising mercantile class. As Linne Mooney reminds

us, "In Chaucer's time people calculated time of day by a number of methods, depending

on their learning, their occupation, or their proximity to time-telling devices" (91-92).

While this may seem simple enough, I would go further to argue that the methods used for

telling time in Chaucer's tales function in such a way as to make explicit intangible

conflicts and tensions over social rank and status, specifically in regards to the relationship

between the rising mercantile class and the clergy. Although these categories evoke

LeGoff's framework of merchant's time and Church time, my analysis of the tales'

engagement with the telling and use of time reveal an altogether different dynamic from the

binary proposed by LeGoff. In this chapter, I discuss Chaucer's use of *chronographia*, a

rhetorical technique that involves the telling of time, in the frame narrative of the

Canterbury Tales. In this introductory section, I closely examine three examples of this

technique, also referred to as astronomical periphrasis, that occur in the frame narrative of

---

[86] Ransom argues that it is unlikely the use of furlong as a time signature was intended as a precise use of measure. He writes, "a furlong is 1/8 mile and therefore it is two and a half minutes of time. For one thing, the mile as a unit had various lengths in medieval England, ranging from 5000 to 7500 feet. For another, walking speed was obviously approximate, not standardized to an exact velocity, the 20-minute mile. So the furlong would likewise be variable, and as a time signature probably meant nothing more precise than a couple of minutes or so."

the *Tales*: *The General Prologue,* the *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale,* and *The Prologue* to *The Parson's Tale*.[87] I then turn my attention to the *Miller's Tale* and the *Shipman's Tale*, two tales where the telling of time figures most prominently in the negotiation of the status of the merchant and artisan class.

The Rhetoric of Reckoning Time

Geoffrey, the pilgrim, is shown as interested in time in the opening lines to the *General Prologue*. The frame narrative of the pilgrimage is situated within the calendar year (month), season (spring), and celestial sign (zodiac):

> Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
> The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
> And bathed every veyne in swich licour
> Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
> Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
> Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
> The tender croppes, and yonge sonne
> Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
> And smale floweles maken melodye,
> That slepen al the nyght with open ye
> (So Priketh hem Nature in hir corages),
> Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages… (1-12)

Time is important enough to Chaucer, or Geoffrey, to situate the frame narrative temporally before locating it geographically. Although the tales are most famously known by the pilgrims' destination, Canterbury, the city is not mentioned until line 16, after the introductory *chronographia* has been established. Reading the lines rhetorically,

---

[87] For an analysis of the astronomical periphrasis in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* see J.C. Eade, *The Forgotten Sky: A Guide to Astrology in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1984) 134-41; Linne R. Mooney, "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 15 (1993): 91-109; Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970) 270-97; Peter Travis, "Chaucer's *Chronographiae*, the Confounded Reader, and Fourteenth-Century Measurements of Time," *Disputatio* 2 (1997): 1-34; Martin Camargo, "Time as Rhetorical Topos in Chaucer's Poetry," *Medieval Rhetoric: A Casebook*, ed. Scott D. Troyan (New York: Routledge, 2004) 91-107.

Martin Camargo argues that "Chaucer's invocation of the season is structured as a compressed argument or what could be called a 'temporal enthymeme': eleven lines of seasonal cause ('Whan that Aprill': I.1; 'Whan Zephirus eek': I.5) generate seven lines of volitional effect ('Thanne longen folk': I.12)" (96). It is within the volitional effect of the temporal enthymeme that Chaucer, or Geoffrey, plays with the temporal perspective of literary conventions to subvert the expectations of the readers. The references to spring prepare the reader for another genre entirely: a *reverdie*, or a love poem. But in line 12, Chaucer switches gears and shifts the thematic trajectory of the frame narrative from one of human desire to human salvation.

The first lines of *The General Prologue* introduce issues that will persist throughout the tales until the last lines of the retraction: who is controlling the narrative, and how reliable is that perspective? Clearly, Chaucer as author is responsible for the shaping of the tales; however, he is a writer known to enjoy playing with the role of the narrator, especially narrators whose interpretive skills or reckoning abilities might be somewhat suspect. When analyzing the lines from the *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale* cited at the beginning of this chapter, most scholars take Geoffrey's account at face value and do not question the fact that it is Harry Bailly, not the pilgrim Geoffrey, who is the one reckoning time.[88]

---

[88] See J.C. Eade, *The Forgotten Sky: A Guide to Astrology in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)123-126; Marijane Osborn, *Time and the Astrolabe in* The Canterbury Tales (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2002) 64-87; Peter W. Travis, "Chaucer's *Chronographiae*, the Confused Reader, and Fourteenth-Century Measurements of Time," *Disputatio* 2 (1997): 1-34; and Muriel Bowden, *A Reader's Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer* (New York: Noonday Press, 1964) 95. J.D. North does admit that "the Host revealed an unusual astronomical instinct" in reckoning time in the *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale*, but nonetheless attributes the reckoning to him. See J.D. North, *Chaucer's Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 484-498. Linne Mooney also attributes these lines to the Host writing "the Canterbury pilgrims' Host Harry Bailly must have used tables like Nicholas's [of Lynn] in determining that is was time

In *Time and the Astrolabe in* The Canterbury Tales, Marijane Osborn goes so far as to suggest that the Host is actually carrying an astolabe with him on the journey that allows for him to read the time:

> Though Chaucer is actually obtaining his details of the sky from his friend Nicholas of Lynn's *Kalendarium* [. . .] one must conclude that at the story level both the Host in the first passage and Chaucer the Pilgrim in the second are indeed to be imagined "armed with a measuring device," that is, having an astrolabe in hand.[89] Chaucer does not advertise that detail, however, for those who do not wish to be bothered with it. (65-66)

The image of the Host and Geoffrey carrying an astrolabe with them on the journey, let alone using the instrument while on horseback, is one that strikes me as problematic if not comical. In *The Forgotten Sky: A Guide to Astrology in English Literature*, J.C. Eade does suggest that while "On the face of it Chaucer seems to give us no warrant for supposing that he [Chaucer the Pilgrim] is equipped with tables or with some instrument," the precision of the calculation arrived at in the *Prologue* to *The Parson's Tale* would not have been possible without the aid of an instrument (138). Osborn, however, extends Eade's claim to also include the passage attributed to the Host in the *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale*. Regardless of whether an instrument is being used to reckon the time of day, a claim with which I do not agree, Harry is not the one responsible for the *chronographia* in the opening lines of the *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale*. I contend that the author responsible for the *chronographia* in the *Introduction* is the same author responsible for the *chronographia* presented in the

---

that the Man of Law began his tale." See Linne R. Mooney, "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer,* 15 (1993): 99.

[89] See J.C. Eade, *The Forgotten Sky: A Guide to Astrology in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)138.

opening lines of the *General Prologue* and the *Prologue* to *The Parson's Tale*: the pilgrim and bookish narrator, Geoffrey.

We must remember that these lines are from the narrator Geoffrey's perspective and, as such, are merely assuming or projecting what the Host actually saw: "Oure Hooste saugh wel that the brighte sonne / The ark of his artificial day hath ronne" (1-2). How, for instance, does Geoffrey know that the Host saw the sun's position well and knew that it was the eighteenth day of April? How does Geoffrey know that Harry Bailly concludes that it is 10 o'clock? By associating the astronomical periphrasis with the narrator of the Canterbury "game," Chaucer juxtaposes the reckoning of time and the reckoning of tales. Is the audience to trust Geoffrey's educational status and training as the carpenter in *The Miller's Tale* trusts Nicholas's? Still attributing the lines to Harry Bailly, Eade writes: "There is a distinct element of parade in all this—one designed to match with the Host's blustering personality" (125). I would argue that the lines do not indicate a "blustering personality," but rather the use of the rhetorical technique suggests a speaker who is bookish and learned, a description that would seem to be more appropriate in describing the narrator, Geoffrey, than the Host. Harry's interest in time as depicted in the *Tales* reveals his interest and concern over the use and value of time, not the calculation or measure of time. When Harry interrupts Geoffrey and prevents him continuing with his tale, he accuses him of wasting time: "Thou doost noght elles but despendest tyme" (930). In this scene, Harry asserts his authority as master of the tale-telling game, and he does so by preventing the participants from wasting everyone's time.

Reading further in *The Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale*, we see another example of Harry's purported interest in the use of time. The words that Harry Bailly is

128

quoted as saying are actually more interesting in terms of the philosophical function and

purpose of time than they are in terms of precise time-reckoning:

> "Lordynges," quod he, "I warne yow, al this route,
> The fourthe party of this day is gon.
> Now for the love of God and of Seint John,
> Leseth no tyme, as ferforth as ye may.
> Lordynges, the tyme wasteth nyght and day,
> And steleth from us, what pryvely slepynge,
> And what thrugh necligence in oure wakynge,
> As dooth the streem that turneth nevere again,
> Descendynge fro the montaigne into playn.
> Wel kan Senec and many a philosopher
> Biwaillen tyme moore than gold in cofre;
> For 'Los of catel may recovered be,
> But los of tyme shendeth us,' quod he.
> It wol nat come again, withouten drede,
> Namoore than wole Malkynes maydenhede,
> Whan she hat lost it in hir wantownesse.
> Lat us nat mowlen thus in ydelnesse. (16-32)

Whereas Geoffrey sees the Host as an educated man capable of reckoning the

scientifically precise time of day, the Host's words reveal him to be a character more

interested in ruminating proverbially about the use of that time. Specifically, the Host is

concerned with warning the other pilgrims on the journey to make the most of their time

by emphasizing for them how easily time is lost. It is interesting to note that in

remembering the Host's meditation on the importance of not wasting time, Geoffrey

concludes that such a perspective and understanding must necessarily mean that he

possesses the ability to calculate the time of day by such elaborate means. The

astronomical periphrasis at the opening of the *Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale*,

while attributed here to the Host, is more consistent with Geoffrey's use of the technique

in *The General Prologue* and *The Prologue* to *The Parson's Tale*.

After the manciple has concluded his tale, the narrator of *The Canterbury Tales*

observes:

> The sonne fro the south lyne was descended
> So lowe that he nas nat, to my sighte,
> Degreës nyne and twenty as in highte.
> Foure of the clokke it was tho, as I gesse,
> For ellevene foot, or litel moore or lesse,
> My shadwe was at thilke tyme, as there,
> Of swiche feet as my lengthe parted were
> In six feet equal of proporcioun.
> Therwith the monnes exaltacioun—
> I meene Libra—alwey gan ascende
> As we were entryng at a thropes ende. (2-12)

The complexity of the *chronographia* in the lines from the *Parson's Prologue* cited

above echoes the lines that open *The General Prologue*. Commenting on the relationship

between the two passages, Camargo notes: "Time as beginning is balanced by time as

ending at the two extremes of the frame narrative, so that the *Canterbury Tales* as a

whole is enclosed within and perhaps even constituted as an argument from time" (96).

Osborn reads the progression from the *General Prologue's chronographia* to the

Parson's Prologue as evidence that the *Tales* in their entirety are meant to figuratively

represent the arc of the day's passage. But as scholars who have taken the time to reckon

Chaucer's *chronographia* point out, the calculations simply do not add up: the pilgrims

depart from London on April 18[th,] according to *The General Prologue,* and near

Canterbury the afternoon of April 17th.[90]

At the 2006 New Chaucer Society panel "Time, Measure, and Value in Chaucer's

Art and Chaucer's World," an audience member posed the question: "How could

---

[90] For an excellent analysis of Chaucer's *chronographic* missteps, see Peter Travis, "Chaucer's *Chronographiae*, the Confounded Reader, and Fourteenth-Century Measurements of Time," *Disputatio* 2 (1997): 1-34.

Chaucer, who was so knowledgeable, make a mistake in his reckoning of time as he does in his astrological periphrasis?" Carolyn Collette, moderator of the panel, responded by saying, we can never answer the question of authorial intent, which is the nature of the question as to why Chaucer would make such a mistake. My response at the time, and one that I still think merits the most fruitful discussion, is to ask instead, why does Chaucer have the narrator make this error? What purpose, if any, does the mistake serve on the level of narrative? We will never know for certain and are, therefore, left with options that it was a genuine oversight—an answer not entirely satisfying given what we know of Chaucer's knowledge and not nearly as exciting as the other possibility—or that the mistake was intentional. If intended, the question remains, "For what purpose?" While I agree with Dr. Collette that we will never know for certain, we can look for any clues to be found in Chaucer's other examples of time-reckoning.

While the use of astronomical periphrasis has its roots in antiquity, Chaucer's use of the rhetorical device speaks to the true power behind the ability to reckon time. As Peter Travis writes, "Each *chronographia* encourages rigorous scientific inquiry, but each eventually throws into doubt the possibility of any verifiably 'truthful' conclusion" (28). The mistakes Chaucer makes, intentional or not, establish a relationship between the narrator and the audience in which the audience must trust the reckonings of the narrator. The errors reveal how easily that relationship can be exploited—exploitation clearly and cleverly depicted in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Shipman's Tale*.

Timing Tales

The two tales, fabliaux both, present husbands (a carpenter and a merchant)

associated with the artisan and mercantile class who travel for business. Moreover, in both

tales, characters associated with the Church (a clerk and a monk) engage in adultery with

their hosts' wives. In *The Miller's Tale*, Nicholas is a boarder while in *The Shipman's*

Tale, the monk Don John is a frequent guest. Both husbands are, by all accounts, wealthy

and successful in their endeavors, even if the merchant's wife in the *Shipman's Tale* does

appear to be spending beyond their means. The wives in the tales act as willing

participants in the adultery, and the husbands unwittingly provide their wives the

opportunity to commit that adultery by their absences.

The most interesting commonality between the tales, and perhaps the most subtle

and rarely discussed, is the role time-reckoning plays in the duping of the husbands.[91] The

Miller's clerk is obsessed with the stars and owns a state-of-the-art time-reckoning

instrument (an astrolabe), while the Shipman's monk relies on his portable sundial to direct

the action in the merchant's house. Both characters use their educational status and

training in time-reckoning in order to direct the action of the story. In other words, their

access to time-telling instruments not only allows them more agency within the tales, but

also affords them a certain amount of power over the actions of others in the tale. Time is

the means by which both characters hatch their plans and carry them to their fruition.

Chaucer's use of time as the device by which these tricks are played reveals an

increasing commodification of time during this period and also a new understanding of

---

[91] Paul Strohm does treat the issue of time in *The Miller's Tale*, but his argument is primarily interested in
the role of time and narrative form. When he does discuss the tale, his analysis compares and contrasts it to
the narrative time employed in *The Knight's Tale*. See Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard
UP, 1989) 133-43.

how that commodity could then be translated into social power, specifically in regards to rank and status. The ability to reckon time distinguishes characters in terms of their educational background and, perhaps even more importantly, in terms of their social status. One's knowledge of time can authorize an individual and provide him or her a certain power over another. In *The Miller's* and *Shipman's Tale*, time-reckoning functions both as a signifier of social relations and the tool by which those relationships are established and reinforced.

Miller's Time vs. Clerk's Time: The Trick of Time in *The Miller's Tale*

Chaucer's work, in particular, reveals the complexity and subtlety of class distinctions in the late fourteenth century, and he often invokes time-reckoning as a means to explore those distinctions. Sylvia Thrupp's study of London merchants in the fourteenth and fifteenth century reveals that the economically productive use of time was not exclusive to the merchant class.[92] Paul Strohm observes that, "merchant's time was not the sole possession of merchants, or even the slightly more inclusive group comprised by 'the bourgeoisie,' and that church's time did not belong to the church alone" (*Social* 124). Likewise, Craig E. Bertolet asserts that, while he agrees with Le Goff's designation of "merchant's time" in general, when talking about the late fourteenth century, the definition should be expanded to include nobility, clergy, and most peasants.[93]

Strohm and Bertolet both argue for expanding the definition of "merchant's time" to include those outside the merchant class and, oddly enough, to include members of the

---

[92] Sylvia Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1948), 234-287.

[93] Craig E. Bertolet, " 'My with is sharp; I love no taryinge': Urban Poetry and the *Parlement of Foules*." *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996): 369.

clergy. The need to expand the definition in this way, however, reveals an inherent

weakness within Le Goff's basic premise that the two ways of understanding time

(merchant's time and Church's time) are necessarily in conflict with one another. Closer

examination of the historical evidence and the literature of late-medieval England,

however, reveals an interplay between these two notions of time.[94] In late-medieval

England, an individual's understanding and use of time was not necessarily confined to a

single system. Furthermore, the crossovers between these two understandings of time are

so profound as to ensure a collapse of the categories the moment they are invoked. In what

follows, I consider Chaucer's depiction of the relationship between status and time-

reckoning as well as discuss the implications of that relationship through a close analysis of

the two main characters in the *Miller's Tale*.

When the Miller introduces the two main characters of the tale, John the carpenter

and Nicholas the clerk, he describes them first, and foremost, in terms of their economic

status. According to the Miller, John is "A riche gnof, that gestes heeld to bord, / And of

his craft he was a carpenter" (3188-89). In other words, he is rich but of lower class, and it

is clear as the tale unfolds that he is uneducated and simple-minded. He is wealthy enough

to afford a servant for himself and a maid for his wife. In terms of property, he has enough

space in his home to let out a room.

Within the tale, John is identified more often by his trade as a carpenter than by his

name. John's dual income, as landlord and carpenter, was not uncommon in late medieval

---

[94] See especially Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders.*
Trans. Thomas Dunlap (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996); Chris Humphrey, "Time and Urban Culture,"
Time in the Medieval World. Ed. Chris Humphrey and W.M. Ormrod. (Rochester: York Medieval Press,
2001), 105-117.

England.[95] A statute of 1363 required craftsmen to limit their enterprise to a single craft,

but in practice the legislation appears to have gone largely unenforced by urban

authorities.[96] The tale does not disclose if John's wealth is a result of his skill as a

carpenter or his position as a landlord, and perhaps it is a combination of the two. What is

clear from the outset of the tale is the monetized relationship that exists between John and

Nicholas. As his tenant, Nicholas owes John rent. The nature of this relationship exposes a

breakdown of the estates as Nicholas, a clerk, is beholden to John, a mere carpenter—a

situation that was increasingly familiar and problematic in late-fourteenth-century England.

Yet John's status as a landlord is what enables Nicholas to unfold his plan. As landlord,

John would not only notice the absence of his tenant, but also be in a position to

investigate, or send his servant to investigate, what was going on inside Nicholas's room.

John's surveillance of Nicholas's room, therefore, is precisely what puts Nicholas's plan

into motion.

John's boarder, Nicholas, is described a "poure scoler" (3190). The epithet is

generally understood to be conventional. Yet, in this case, it seems misapplied because of

the fact that he is able to afford a private room and because of the items found in that

room.[97] Formulaic or ironic, the description of Nicholas as "poor" intensifies the social

---

[95] I.S.W. Blanchard, "Labour Productivity and Work Psychology in the English Mining Industry, 1400-1600," *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 31 (1978): 2-3; M.K. James, *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 196, 199-203; S.A.C. Penn and C. Dyer, "Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England: Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws," *Economic History Review* 2nd ser. 43 (1990): 361-2; Heather Swanson, *Medieval Artisans* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 6, 117; Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1948), 5-6, 12.

[96] See R.H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 164-5.

[97] The Riverside Chaucer notes that this usage is most likely formulaic and points to Chaucer's use of the epithet again in describing the two young clerks in the Reeve's Tale (see RvT I.4002 and n.). J.A.W. Bennett suggests that if not formulaic, then perhaps ironic, since Nicholas "is not too poor to have a room

gulf of rank and status that exists between this "riche gnof" and "poure scoler." Even the

length devoted to describing the characters establishes a great social difference between the

two.[98] Whereas John's initial introduction is limited to two lines, the description of

Nicholas extends over the next thirty. In addition to the length, the content of the two initial

descriptions immediately polarizes the characters. There are the obvious differences of

wealth described above: John is a wealthy landlord while Nicholas is his (supposedly)

poor boarder. Other differences emerge as the tale progresses: John is old and Nicholas is

young; John is lewd, Nicholas is educated; John is married, Nicholas is unattached. And,

of course, the most important distinction emphasized throughout is the one that provides

Nicholas with the opportunity to hatch the plan to outwit the carpenter in the first place;

John's trade requires him to be away from home, leaving his wife unattended for much of

the tale and vulnerable to Nicholas's advances. A final distinction, subtle but significant,

between the two characters also comes to play a crucial role in Nicholas's ability to pull off

his scheme: John and Nicholas have two completely different understandings about and

relationships with time.

    For someone so poor, Nicholas owns some very expensive and rare items.

> His Almageste, and bookes grete and smale,
> His astrelabie, longynge for his art,
> His augrym stones layen faire apart,
> On shelves couched at his beddes heed. (3208-11)

---

to himself." Bennett also notes that Nicholas's shelf full of books, psaltery, and astrolabe give us "the
fullest inventory of a scholar's belongings before the sixteenth century." See J.A.W. Bennett, *Chaucer at
Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 31-34. For the availability of beds and practice of scholars
sharing rooms, see Edith Rickert, *Chaucer's World,* Ed. Clair C. Olsen and Martin M. Crow (New York
and London: Columbia UP, 1948), 131.

[98] Scholars tend to be more interested in the length disparity between *The Knight's Tale* and *The Miller's
Tale.* See especially Strohm, 130-143, and Peggy Knapp, *Chaucer and the Social Contest* (New York:
Routledge, 1990), 37-8.

Astrolabes were rare and costly. As Bennett describes in *Chaucer at Oxford*, "even the

Fellows of Merton had at this time only three between them" (33-34). If this were the case,

then the portrait of Nicholas as sole owner of this expensive piece of time-reckoning

equipment not only distinguishes him in terms of his educational status, but also

communicates something about his economic status.[99] The other items found in Nicholas's

room would seem to support this conclusion. According to Bennett, Nicholas's copy of

Ptolemy's *Almegeste*, the major astrology book of the day, would have cost about seven

shillings (31).

The Miller's depiction of the expensive and rare time instruments further

emphasizes that, although Nicholas may reside under the carpenter's roof and within his

space, he is not necessarily beneath the carpenter in social rank and status. In his analysis

of three "street-level" narratives involving Chaucer, Usk, and Hoccleve, Paul Strohm

argues that

> traversed in each of these narratives is a more figurative and less distinct
> "social" space, the invisible space that separates city residents according to
> considerations of rank and status. Even as the walker in the city moves from
> one of its locations to another, so does he continually renegotiate his own
> place within a less tangible (but still implicitly felt) positioning based on
> vocation together with forms of earned and unearned recognition. (*Theory*
> 11)

For Nicholas, as a boarder residing in a carpenter's house, movement is not the medium by

which he is able to "renegotiate his own place," rather, it is his vocation as clerk, his

---

[99] For more on astrolabes see A.J. Turner, *The Time Museum*, ed. Bruce Chandler, vol. 1, pt. 1, (Rockford:
The Time Museum, 1985); Edgar Laird, "Astrolabes and the Construction of Time in the Late Middle
Ages," *Disputatio* 2 (1997): 51-69; *A Treatise on the Astrolabe,* ed. Sigmund Eisner, vol. 6, pt. 1 (Norman:
U of Oklahoma P, 2002), 3-12; Marijane Osborn *Time and the Astrolabe in* The Canterbury Tales
(Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2002); Sigmund Eisner and Marijane Osborn, "Chaucer as Teacher: Chaucer's
Treatise on the Astrolabe," *Medieval Literature for Children*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (New York and London:
Routledge, 2003), 155-187.

proximity to valuable time-telling instruments, and others' recognition of his ability to reckon time. In other words, it is not only the figurative "social space," geographically demarked, that separates citizens according to rank and status, but also the ability to reckon time.

What is perhaps most remarkable about these items—the major astrology textbook of the day, an expensive and rare time-telling instrument, and counting stones—is the fact that they are mentioned at all, for Nicholas is never shown putting them to use.[100] The instruments he owns and keeps in his room support his reputation for being able to reckon time, but, once described, they disappear from the tale. The instruments themselves, coupled with Nicholas's training in their use, are enough to establish his reputation for time-reckoning, thereby enabling him to dupe the carpenter.

For a character who reportedly spends so much of his time studying astrology and the art of time-reckoning, Nicholas is depicted most often as using another instrument in an altogether different activity. In addition to the time-telling instruments and devices that crowd his room, Nicholas also owns a psaltry "On which he made a-nyghtes melodie / So swetely that all the chambre rong" (3214-15). Nicholas' "fantasye" may indeed be "turned for to lerne astrologye" (3191-2), but the tale shows him spending his time occupied in other activities, namely making music and pursuing his landlord's wife. Whereas the time-telling instruments are described as simply occupying space in his room, the psaltry is described as enjoying frequent use. The psaltry's location above all other instruments in

---

[100] Benson glosses line 3209, "longynge for his art," as "belonging to, necessary for (his *art*, astronomy)." But the line could also be understood simply to mean that the instrument longs for or desires use. See María Bullón-Fernández, "Private Practices in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006):158.

Nicholas's room reflects its prominence in terms of spatial organization.[101] Furthermore,

Nicholas is shown to be singing and playing his psaltry during the evening, a time when the

study of astrology would seem most appropriate.[102] One of the greatest advantages in

using an astrolabe is that the instrument can reckon time precisely day *and* night. If

Nicholas is so interested in astrology, why does he spend his evenings in the carpenter's

house playing music instead of studying the stars?

The first thing the Miller tells the audience about this "poure scolar," even before he

divulges his name, is his knowledge of, and reputation for, reckoning time. The Miller

informs his audience that John's boarder is a student, who

> Hadde lerned art, but al his fantasye
> Was turned for to lerne astrologye,
> And koude a certeyn of conclusiouns,
> To demen by interrogaciouns,
> If that men asked hym, in certein houres
> Whan that men sholde have droghte or elles shoures,
> Or if men asked hym what sholde bifalle
> Of every thyng; I may nat rekene hem alle. (3191-98)

Although Nicholas has a liberal arts education, his main passion is for the study of

astrology. The Miller's presentation of Nicholas's knowledge of time-reckoning is

significant in that he uses hypothetical and conditional terms to describe it. The Miller

informs his audience that Nicholas knows some scientific astrological calculations *if*

asked about the weather, future events, or anything else. Yet, the tale never requires his

---

[101] Chaucer provides a careful and detailed account of the use of space within *The Miller's Tale.* J.A.W. Bennett has mapped out the carpenter's house based on the tale. See Bennett, 28, 35-40. Applying Lacanian analysis to *The Miller's Tale*, Gila Aloni argues that the tale's fictionalization of privacy functions "as part of a structure in which inside and outside always turn into one another." See Gila Aloni, "Extimacy in the *Miller's Tale*," *The Chaucer Review* 41 (2006): 163-184. Arguing along similar lines, María Bullón-Fernández observes how the tale's emphasis on privacy foregrounds its exploration of the construction of and transgression against social boundaries (public/private) and physical boundaries (outside/inside). See Bullón-Fernández, 141-174.

[102] Chaucer writes of using the astrolabe at night in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*. See Part II, section 3.

knowledge to be put to the test. The description of Nicholas's ability to forecast "shoures" foreshadows the ensuing trick that Nicholas will play. But Nicholas never actually has to employ any of his knowledge and training in order to dupe his victim. He fabricates the entire story, including the detailed timeline. His reputation for reckoning time, founded on his educational status and ownership of sophisticated time-reckoning equipment, is enough to dupe "sely" John.

The Miller's use of the word "rekene,"[103] in line 3198 is significant in that it deflects attention away from Nicholas's reckoning of time and turns it toward the Miller's reckoning of the tale. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "rekene" could mean calculate and measure, but it also meant to narrate as in to give an account of events in narrative form. The character, Nicholas, is described as being so well-versed in the art of telling time that the narrator, the Miller, "may nat rekene hem alle" (3198). In this instance, "rekene" is used to describe the ability of a storyteller to "tell" or "list" something about the character, but it appears immediately following lines describing another kind of reckoning altogether. Being able to read the stars lends Nicholas credibility in terms of his ability to foretell future events, and Nicholas exploits this credibility to reckon a tale designed to trick the carpenter. And the tale he devises is based on what he is known for being able to reckon: the coming of showers.

Given the fact that Nicholas's introduction emphasizes his reputation for, and interest in, time-reckoning, it would seem to follow that this trait will play an important

---

[103] "Reken" had many meanings during the Middle Ages. The *Middle English Dictionary* lists: calculate, add up (figures); work out (astrological conclusions); allow for (a variable) [quot: Chaucer *Astr.* 2nd]; to count up (money, a group); establish a measure for (time); mark out (the horizon in divisions); to give an accounting, render an account; to answer for one's conduct, also assess one's conduct; To relate, recount, narrate (a story). The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists: to include in a (*or* the) reckoning; hence, to place or class; To calculate, work out, decide the nature of value of; To judge; To go over or settle accounts.

role in the ensuing narrative. It is Nicholas's reputation for time-reckoning, not necessarily his actual ability in that art, that serves as the basis by which the clerk is able to trick the carpenter into providing an ideal situation for his wife' infidelity. At the very least, the trick does not require Nicholas to make use of his ability—only to pretend to do so. In fact, the real talent Nicholas seems to possess is one of reckoning tales, not time. The tale the clerk fabricates is pure fancy—the stars do not portend an upcoming flood. Rather than drawing upon his education, Nicholas invents a ridiculous tale. Futhermore, the tale he invents plays upon a story associated with carpenters: the story of Noah's flood. The carpenter's guild was one of the guilds responsible for the *The Noah Play* in the mystery cycles, the other being the shipbuilders. As a carpenter and member of the guild, John should have been very familiar with the story.[104] Yet, when Nicholas asks him, "Hastow not herd how saved was Noe, / Whan that oure Lord hadde warned hym biforn / That al the world with water sholde be lorn?" the carpenter's reply, though affirmative, is not altogether convincing: " 'Yis,' quod this Carpenter, 'ful yoore ago'" (3534-37). The carpenter's unfamiliarity with the original tale provides Nicholas the opportunity to invent his own version, all while trading on his reputation for being able to forecast the weather.

Nicholas's educational status allows him to use time in two ways: first, it places him in a position of authority over others by providing him the means to control access to time; second, he recognizes the economic value of time as something that can be spent, wasted, or invested—he knows how to make good use of his time. The trick Nicholas plays on the carpenter hinges on that which "this sweete clerk [has] his tyme spente" (3219),

---

[104] See Kelsie B. Harder, "Chaucer's Use of the Mystery Plays" *MLQ,* 17 (1956), 194.

namely the study of time and playing of music. He assures John that a flood is approaching based on his reading of the celestial clock—a reading that his training enables him to manipulate for his own personal gain. Further, he times the trick to occur during the new moon, when night will be at its darkest. This darkness provides the perfect cover for his sinister plan. Nicholas is conscious of his use of time. He states: "A clerk hadde litherly biset his whyle, / But if he koude a carpenter bigyle: (3299-3300). The *Riverside Chaucer* glosses the line "litherly biset his whyle" as "wasted his time" (69).   The *Middle English Dictionary* defines "litherly" as "poorly, feebly, contemptibly," rendering a more literal interpretation of the line to read "A clerk had poorly used his time." In other words, Nicholas reckons the value of his use of time in terms of his ability to outwit a carpenter.

When Nicholas discusses his use of time, he uses the third-person, identifying himself by his status as a clerk. Furthermore, John is not a "person" or his "landlord" but rather a "carpenter." Status, in terms of both occupation and age, are offered as another justification, in addition to his age and jealous nature, for the trick Nicholas plays. However, when Nicholas articulates his justification, the emphasis is placed on the status of the individuals involved, not the individuals themselves. The trick, in other words, seeks to renegotiate and reestablish the proper ranking of the carpenter and the clerk; it is meant to put the carpenter back in his proper place.

The Miller's unfolding of the narrative events, as opposed to the Knight's, is tightly controlled. Nicholas first approaches Alison on an unmarked day:

> … so bifel the cas
> That on a day this hende Nicholas
> Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye,
> Whil that hir housbonde was at Oseneye. (3271-4)

Despite her husband's absence, and what appears by all accounts to be a perfect

opportunity for infidelity, Alison warns Nicholas:

> "Myn housbonde is so ful of jalousie
> That but ye wayte wel and been privee,
> I woot right wel I nam but deed," quod she.
> "Ye moste been ful deerne, as in this cas." (3294-97)

Nicholas agrees to defer his pursuit until he finds a better opportunity for discretion. The

deferral of their consummation is important enough for the Miller to repeat it a few lines

later: "And thus they been accorded and ysworn / To wayte a tyme, as I have told biforn"

(3301-2).

This repetition on the part of the Miller is uncharacteristic, but it serves to

highlight the fact that the two lovers have agreed to wait an undetermined amount of time

and watch for a more opportune moment before they proceed with their plan to spend the

night together. The action then immediately follows Alison to church where the parish

clerk, Absolon, falls under her spell. The Miller is not clear about how much time has

passed from Alison's pledge to Nicholas, but the abrupt shift in scenes and continuity of

action lends the appearance that these events occur within a short space of time. The

Miller does, however, provide some temporal markings to help the reader determine the

duration between Absolon's late night visit and Nicholas's trick. When Absolon attempts

to woo Alison, he does so when the moon is very bright and therefore, presumably, full

or almost full:

> The moone, whan it was nyght, ful brighte shoon,
> And Absolon his gyterne hath ytake;
> For paramours he thoghte for to wake.
> And forth he gooth, jolif and amorous,
> Til he cam to the carpenteres hous
> A litel after cokkes hadde ycrowe. (3352-57)

Whereas Nicholas is willing to defer his pursuit of Alison until a more appropriate time,

Absolon seizes the moment and pays her a late night visit. The timing of Absolon's visit

is problematic in a couple of ways. First, Alison's husband is home, and Absolon's

singing rouses the married couple from their sleep. Second, Absolon visits the

carpenter's house on a night when the moon "ful brighte shoon." The light of the moon

does not provide Absolon with any degree of discretion or secrecy. Furthermore, the full

moon indicates the lunar cycle, which provides a timeline for the duration between

Absolon's disastrous attempt at serenading Alison and the hatching of Nicholas's scheme

to spend the night with Alison.

The narrative continues to follow Absolon and his pursuit of Alison. After his

late-night visit, Absolon experiences the usual symptoms of love-sickness, most notably,

insomnia:

> Fro day to day this joly Absolon
> So woweth hire that hym is wo bigon.
> He waketh al the nyght and al the day (3371-73)

Unable to sleep, Absolon is awake all night and all day, but the Miller isn't explicit as to

how many days or nights this lasts. The timeline, however, does become clear once

Nicholas hatches his plan.

Turning his attention from Absolon to Nicholas, the Miller describes Nicholas's

scheme that begins on a Saturday and, as we later learn, climaxes on Monday night:

> And so bifel it on a Saterday,
> This carpenter was goon til Osenay;
> And hende Nicholas and Alisoun
> Acorded been to this conclusioun,
> That Nicholas shal shapen hym a wyle
> This sely jalous housbonde to bigyle;

> And if so be the game wente aright,
> She sholde slepen in his arm al nyght. (3399-3406)

By the Miller's account, the carpenter is a jealous old man who controls his new, young

wife, holding "hire narwe in cage" (3224). Yet this is the second time in the tale when

John is off to Osney, leaving his wife unattended and vulnerable to Nicholas's and

Absolon's advances. John's absence allows Nicholas and Alison the time to set their plan

in motion. The lines further reveal Nicholas's measure of success. The object of the trick

is not merely the physical consummation of Nicholas's and Alison's desire for one another,

although that is certainly an important part of it. The definition of success, proof that the

"game wente aright" is measured in terms of time: "She sholde slepen in his arm al nyght."

The emphasis is on the duration of their time together, rather than the mere opportunity for

a quick consummation—opportunity that John seems to provide with his business trips to

Osney. Nicholas's desire to be with Alison is soon eclipsed by the elaborate nature of the

hoax he concocts. In other words, Nicholas seems to value his opportunity to dupe the

carpenter as much, if not more, as his opportunity to spend the night with Alison.

Timing is an important consideration for Nicholas. On Saturday, he stocks his

chamber with "mete and drynke for a day or tweye," waiting for John's return (3411).

On Sunday, after the "sonne gooth to reste" (3422), the carpenter begins to express his

concern for the health of his boarder:

> "God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!
> This world is now ful tikel, sikerly.
> I saugh today a cors yborn to chirche
> That now, on Monday last, I saugh hym wirche." (3427-30)

John's concern for Nicholas is framed in time. His immediate response is to consider that Nicholas has died and to offer a proverb about the mutability of this world.[105] The carpenter's knowledge of the dangers presented by the plague is practical, not philosophical. He has seen the speed with which the plague claims its victims firsthand. The carpenter renders the theme of "here today, gone tomorrow" by situating his experience temporally within the days of the week. Speaking on Sunday evening, he recounts how he has seen the corpse of a man brought to church whom he saw working just last Monday. Nicholas's absence causes the carpenter to consider the harsh realities of his age—and those considerations, based on his personal experience, are framed within a narrow timeline.

But the carpenter's common knowledge of his days of the week, as cited above, is no match for Nicholas's astrolabe and knowledge of the celestial clockwork. Nicholas's studies at Oxford would have prepared him for a career in the church or employment as a bureaucrat. Whether he chose the ecclesiastical or secular path, both would have held a certain amount of prestige and authority within fourteenth-century England and certainly would have placed him in a position socially superior to that of a carpenter. Nicholas, however, views his education, specifically his time spent studying, as that which enables, if not entitles, him to dupe a member of the peasant class. But John's social rank as a carpenter isn't clearly delineated either in the fictional world of the tale or the reality of late-fourteenth-century Oxford. Financially he is wealthy, but his status is clearly low. Furthermore, the tale seems to suggest that his ignorance and jealous nature make him undeserving of his current financial position.

---

[105] See John Norton-Smith, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1974), 139.

The trick Nicholas plays on John is timed for the phase of a new moon, a phase when the moon is roughly aligned with the sun and therefore not visible in the night sky.[106] When John's servant spies on Nicholas, he finds Nicholas staring out the window: "This Nicholas sat evere capyng upright, / As he had kiked on the newe moon" (3444-5). Nicholas's timing contrasts with that of Absolon; unlike Absolon, Nicholas is willing to wait until the night sky will be at its darkest. On a narrative level, the new moon suggests a schedule for the tale as well as the trick. Alison goes to the church and attracts the attention of Absolon shortly after Nicholas makes his initial move. We know that Absolon appears at Alison's window when the moon "ful brighte shoon" (3352). Nicholas's trick culminates on the Monday after a new moon, which would put the entire timeframe of the tale at around a couple of weeks.

The new moon also functions symbolically in the tale. Nicholas is described "As he had kiked on the newe moon," but he is not actually staring at the new moon. The new moon is not actually visible to the naked eye during this phase. So, in effect, Nicholas is staring at nothing, at least nothing John's servant can discern in the night sky. While most people should be able to determine the phase of the new moon by the moon's absence from the night sky, only people trained in the art of astrology would actually know where to look for it. By focusing on a fixed point in the night sky, Nicholas creates the illusion that he is gazing on the new moon.

Actions are quick and events are timely in the *Miller's Tale.* Even the time of Nicholas's flood is significantly condensed from the biblical account. When Nicholas informs John of the approaching flood, he provides a timeline for the devastation:

---

[106] The illuminated half of the moon faces away from the earth leaving the dark side of the moon facing the earth.

As I have looked in the moone bright,
That now a Monday next, at quarter nyght,
Shal falle a reyn, and that so wilde and wood
That half so greet was nevere Noes flood.
This world," he seyde, "in lasse than an hour
Shal al be dreynt, so hidous is the shour.
Thus shal mankynde drenche, and lese hir lyf." (3515-21)

The narrative has progressed from a world where a man's life can come to an end in

under a week, to a world that will be destroyed in under an hour. In the biblical account

of Noah's flood, it takes forty days and forty nights to flood the world. This flood that

Nicholas supposedly foresees is twice as large, but its devastation is felt within a fraction

of the time. Nicholas's version of the flood is a dramatic redaction of the biblical tale on

which his version is based and one in which the intensity is amplified as the timescale is

diminished. The *Miller's Tale* shares a similar relationship with *The Knight's Tale*. Both

tales involve two men pursuing the same woman. The contest for the affections of

Emelye in *The Knight's Tale* spans years and takes on an epic scale; the contest for

Alison, in contrast, spans weeks and maintains a domestic scale.[107]

The Miller interrupts the proceedings of the game set forth by the Host and begins

his tale as a response to *The Knight's Tale.* Lee Patterson writes: "In displacing the

Monk whom the Host had chosen to follow the Knight, the Miller transforms a

hierarchically organized order into a *quiting* game very like the fabliau that he himself

tells" (40). Part of that *quiting* game has to do with the Miller's use of narrative time, as

discussed by Paul Strohm:

> Of direct interest here is the sense in which the *Miller's Tale* is a requital
> or "reply" to that of the Knight not simply in respect of different

---

[107] For more about the temporal contrast between *The Knight's Tale* and *The Miller's Tale*, see Strohm, *Social Chaucer*, 130-143. See also Knapp, 32-44.

components of narrative, but *as* narrative—as a different form of narrative with entirely different presuppositions about the nature of human action in time. (*Social* 133-34)

The action of *The Knight's Tale* spans years whereas *The Miller's Tale* happens within a tightly controlled schedule, as I discuss below. Comparing the two tales, Peggy Knapp has observed that, "The *Miller's Tale* takes close note of time and measures it in days, hours, and minutes, rather than years" (37). The Miller, whose livelihood depends on his productive use of time, understands the importance of being concise and not wasting time—a trait that is reflected in the very economy of his narrative. In explaining why so many modern critics find *The Miller's Tale* to be a "supreme achievement of Chaucer's art," Richardson points to the "mathematical perfection of the plot culminating in the flawless bit of timing which unites in one hilarious moment the two themes previously developed" (159).[108]

The Miller's use of narrative time, then, directly contrasts with the Knight's. *The Knight's Tale* is told over 2249 lines, while *The Miller's Tale* is complete within a mere 667 lines—less than one-third of the length of *The Knight's Tale*. The Knight is aware of the length of his story and his slowness in unfolding its narrative action. He tries to hurry the narrative at moments as demonstrated when he begins to describe Diana's Temple: "Now to the temple of Dyane the chaste, / As shortly as I kan, I wol me haste, / To telle yow al the descripsioun" (2051-53). The Knight's attempts to make haste, however, are unsuccessful as the description of the temples (1918-2088) only serves to delay the

---

[108] The critics include: E.M.W. Tillyard, *Poetry Direct and Oblique* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1945) 215; John Livingston Lowes, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1958) 222-3; E.T. Donaldson, *Chaucer's Poetry* (New York: Ronald Press, 1975) 906; Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition; a study in style and meaning* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: U of California P, 1957) 224; Robert Root, *Poetry of Chaucer; a guide to its study and appreciation* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1957) 176-7.

149

ensuing action.[109] The progress of the narrative is also halted by the Knight's accounting

of Arcites' and Palamon's complaints (1219-1333). Writing about the eagle's complaint

in *The Parliament of Fowls*, Fradenburg observes the following: "The courtly complaint

is valuable because it wastes time. It spends time magnificently; the economy of

complaint is that of aristocratic display. It encodes aristocratic leisure, *otium*—surplus

time, a form of wealth—by refusing to economize time" (125).[110]

It is not that the Knight refuses to economize time as much as he simply seems

unable to do so in the telling of his tale. Aware of the length, he attempts, once again

unsuccessfully, to draw the narrative to its conclusion: "But shortly to the point thane

wol I wende / And maken of my longe tale an ende" (2965-66).[111] This line comes after a

particularly long digression in which the Knight catalogues all of the details of Arcite's

funeral obsequies, a digression that spans from line 2919 to 2966. What is more, the

detailed descriptions provided by the Knight are performed by way of him stating what

he will *not* describe:

> But how the fyr was maked upon highte,
> Ne eek the names that the trees highte,
> As ook, firre, birch, aspe, alder, holm, poplar,
> Wylugh, elm, plane, assh, box, chasteyn, lynde, laurer,
> Mapul, thon, bech, hasel, ew, whippeltree—
> How they weren feld shal nat be toold for me; (2919-24)

---

[109] Paul Strohm also lists Arcite's and Palamon's complaints (1219-1333) and Arcite's funeral (2853-2966) as scenes that disrupt the narrative progression. See Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989) 131.

[110] See also Craig E. Bertolet, "'My wit is sharp; I love no taryinge': Urban Poetry and the *Parlement of Foules*," *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996): 370.

[111] The effect is not unlike the language of haste employed by the knights in the Crucifixion pageant of the York Cycle discussed in Chapter One; for all their insistence that they hurry, their hurried dialogue only serves to delay the action.

All of this is done in the service of not saying what he has just said, namely cataloging the trees used in Arcite's funeral pyre. The Knight then goes on to list a series of actions he will not describe, using long *occupatios*. He will not tell his audience about the movement of the gods and animals when the trees are felled, the lighting of the funeral pyre, the scene of mourning that ensues, and the wake that follows. In recounting how he will not be describing these happenings, the Knight provides a detailed account of each. Employing this rhetorical technique slows the action and adds value to the Knight's telling of the tale through its opulent waste of time.[112] The Miller, however, does not waste any time in the telling of his tale, nor does Nicholas waste any time in setting the timeline of his trick into motion.

Nicholas's timeline for the trick as beginning on "Monday next," in line 3516, is especially, if not intentionally, confusing. The confusion is born from the unclear point of reference. According to the *OED*, "next" designates "the time season, etc., following directly after one described, spoken of, etc." Nicholas's conversation with John occurs on a Sunday night, which means that "Monday next" could refer either to a week from Monday or the next day. Again, according to the *OED,* "next" could refer to either: "Applied to the days of the week, with either the current day or (more usually) the current week as the implicit point of reference." This ambiguity increases Nicholas's power to manipulate the carpenter in that it points out John's dependence on Nicholas to explain a referent to a day of the week—a simple referent the carpenter has invoked a few lines earlier. Nicholas resolves the confusion by informing John:

> "This ordinance is seyd. Go, God thee speede!

---

[112] *Occupatio* is also sometimes referred to as preterition.

> Tomorwe at nyght, whan men ben alle aslepe,
> Into oure knedyng-tubbes wol we crepe,
> And sitten there, abidyng Goddes grace.
> Go now thy wey; I have no lenger space
> To make of this no lenger sermonyng." (3592-97)[113]

In the *Miller's Tale* the urgency seems to make sense given the timeline Nicholas has established—John has one day to prepare for the approaching showers. In the Genesis version of the flood, God does not require Noah to make haste as Nicholas does here.[114] But in that version, God is the one directing the action. In the *Miller's Tale*, Nicholas plays God by instructing John to prepare the tubs and demanding that John do so quickly to conform to a fictitious timeline Nicholas has construed.

The flood, according to Nicholas, will recede as quickly as it appears. Whereas the biblical account puts Noah and his family in the ark for about a year, Nicholas's version has the group out and about in around a day's time:

> "Anon go gete us faste into this in
> A knedyng trogh, or ellis a kymelyn,
> For ech of us, but looke that they be large,
> In which we mowe swymme as in a barge,
> And han therinne vitaille suffisant
> But for a day -- fy on the remenant!
> The water shal aslake and goon away
> Aboute pryme upon the nexte day." (3547-54)

Nicholas's knowledge of time-reckoning allows him to direct the actions of his landlord John. Nicholas's reputation for learning, based on his educational training, not only allows him to convince John of a ridiculous tale about an approaching flood, but also places him in a position of authority over John. In these lines, Nicholas directs John to gather the tubs

---

[113] The sense of urgency in preparing for the flood is also seen in the Noah pageants of the York Corpus Christi Cycle.

[114] God does, however, command Noah to hurry his labor in the York Cycle.

and to collect some food for the flood's duration. Further, his instructions are accompanied

by specific orders: make sure the tubs are large and pack only enough food for one day.

Nicholas is able to be specific about the amount of food because, according to his supposed

calculations, the water is scheduled to recede by prime the next day, Tuesday.

For all of John's hurried actions preparing for the flood showers, the action is

ultimately delayed. John hurries only to end up waiting for a rain that will never come:

> And on the Monday, whan it drow to nyght,
> He shette his dore withoute candel-lyght,
> And dressed alle thyng as it sholde be.
> And shortly, up they clomben alle thre;
> They seten stille wel a furlong way. (3633-3637)

The group has been sitting for only a few short minutes when the carpenter begins to snore

loudly, having fallen into a deep sleep. Having timed the trick just right, Nicholas and

Alison are able to climb down and enjoy one another's company for the duration of the

night:

> And thus lith Alison and Nicholas,
> In bisynesse of myrthe and of solas,
> Til that the belle of laudes gan to rynge,
> And freres in the chauncel gonne synge. (3653-56)

After the church bells announce lauds, the narrative shifts from the scene in John's house

to Absolon on a visit to Osney. The shift, however, is temporal as well as spatial.

Leaving John, Nicholas and Alison in the carpenter's house early Tuesday morning, the

Miller returns to a scene earlier on Monday. This shift presents a problem for Paul

Strohm's argument that the tale is "relentlessly temporal" with "one episode succeed[ing]

another in time" (*Social* 134). He explains in a footnote: "Despite this narrative

arrangement, however, Chaucer's clear temporal indications permit the audience to retain

a firm sense of the 'natural' sequence" (219) It would have been just as easy for the

Miller to follow, or for Chaucer to have the Miller follow, a strictly chronological, or

"natural sequence," by switching the scene to Absolon in Osney at line 3611, after John

has told Alison about the flood and before they ascend to the hanging tubs. This

temporal shift in the narrative, a shift that jumps backwards in time rather than

progressing in a forward linear direction, reveals a certain degree of narrative

sophistication on the part of the Miller. In this sense, he commands time and directs the

narrative in terms of what best suits his priorities as a storyteller. He is able not only to

delay the action, but also to displace it temporally. The sequence of the tale's final scene

is anything but natural. It is carefully constructed and devised to result in a greater build

up to the tale's denouement. John's fate is literally left hanging while the Miller reverses

time to show what Absolon was up to earlier that very day.

Having learned his lesson from his first failed attempt to woo Alison, Absolon

asks around about John's whereabouts before he undertakes another visit. The

information he receives from a cloistered monk is less than conclusive:

> "I noot; I saugh hym heere nat wirche
> Syn Saterday; I trowe that he be went
> For tymber, ther oure abbot hath hym sent;
> For he is wont for tymber for to go
> And dwellen at the grange a day or two;
> Or elles he is at his hous, certeyn.
> Where that he be, I kan nat soothly seyn." (3664-70)

Ultimately, the monk does not know where John is, but instead of offering that

information up front, he methodically lists a timeline of the last time he saw him and

posits where he might be. The day is Monday, but the monk hasn't seen the carpenter

since Saturday. The abbot has sent the carpenter for timber, and John is known to spend

a day or two in the grange, which may explain why Absolon wasn't concerned about him

being home during his first late-night visit. But the monk does consider that he might be

home and admits that he just can't say because he really doesn't know.

 This information, far from discouraging Absolon, actually convinces him that

"Now is tyme to wake al nyght," because he cannot recall seeing him around his house

that morning (3672-4).   Planning his late-night visit to Alison, Absolon rehearses it in his

mind. Before he plots out his positioning, he considers the schedule for his visit:

> "So moot I thryve, I shal, at cokkes crowe,
> Ful pryvely knokken at his wyndowe
> That stant ful lowe upon his boures wal." (3675-77)

Sure enough, when the cock crows, Absolon readies himself for his rendezvous with

Alison:

> Whan that the firste cok hath crowe, anon
> Up rist this joly lovere Absolon,
> And hym arraieth gay, at poynt-devys. (3687-89)

Absolon's timing is demarked by the crowing of the cock on three separate occasions.

Even when he is plotting his timeline for the second visit, he renders time in this way. In

The Parliament of the Fowls, the cock is described as a time-telling device for small

villages: "The kok, the orloge / is of thorpes lyte" (350). Linne Mooney notes that

Chaucer's use of "(h)or(o)loge," meaning literally hour-teller, is the first recorded in the

English language.[115] Absolon's reliance on the cock is telling in terms of his status in the

tale.

---

[115] Linne R. Mooney, "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 15 (1993), 103.

The cock is a rural animal associated with rural time. What is more, it requires no training or knowledge to hear a cock crowing and know what it means in temporal terms. In *Troilus and Cresede*, the cock is described as a communal time-piece: "But whan the cok, comune astrologer / Gan on his brest to bete and after crowe" (1415-16). The notion of the cock as astrologer is also presented in the character of Chaunticleer from *The Nun's Priest's Tale*:

> Wel sikerer was his crowyng in his logge
> Than is a clokke or an abbey orlogge.
> By nature he knew ech ascencioun
> Of the equynoxial in thilke toun;
> For whan degrees fifteen weren ascended
> Thanne crew he that in myghte nat been amended. (2853-58)[116]

Here we see the second use of "(h)or(o)loge" in the English language used to highlight Chaunticleer's accuracy in the matters of telling time.[117] These descriptions of cocks show a transferal of astrological training and reckoning onto the nature of a creature. Metaphorically, cocks are the astrologers of the day, and Absolon relies on them to mark the passage of time. But his need to invoke the cock reveals his own lacking in this area. Nicholas's training allows him to reckon time himself, putting him in control of his own actions and allowing him to direct the actions of others. Absolon needs to depend on an external, aural device (the cock's crowing) to determine his actions. Unlike Nicholas, Absolon appears unable to reckon time astrologically for himself. Also, Nicholas and Alison lie together until the bells of lauds ring, but Absolon must wait for the cock to

---

[116] The cock in Henryson's "The Cock and the Fox" is described as keeping hours during the night: "..scho had ane jolie cok, / Right courageous, that to this widow ay / Divided night and crew before the day" (19-21). See Robert Henryson, "The Cock and the Fox," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Middle Ages*, ed. M.H. Abrams, 7th ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 439-45.

[117] Mooney, 103.

announce when the time is right. Clearly the church bells are announcing the time, as Nicholas and Alison are able to hear them from the carpenter's bedroom. Absolon, however, relies on the crowing of the cock to direct his nocturnal visitation.

With the anticipation of seeing Alison curing his insomnia, Absolon decides to take a nap to rest up for his big night: "Therfore I wol go slepe an houre or tweye, / And al the nyght thanne wol I wake and pleye" (3685-86). Absolon imagines his reward in the same terms as Nicholas has imagined his: he believes he will be able to spend the entire night with Alison. But Absolon's "reward" is far from what he had imagined. Delighted that Alison has agreed to the kiss, Absolon is then rushed through the motions. She tells him: "Thanne make thee redy," quod she, "I come anon" (3720). The scene is fraught with hurried language as she directs the action:

> The wyndow she undoth, and that in haste.
> "Have do," quod she, "com of, and speed the faste,
> Lest that oure neighebores thee espie." (3727 -29)

The language associated with hurrying expresses Alison's desire to get it over with, but it also enacts a power dynamic in the relationship. As the party distributing the reward, she has the power to regulate its timing and duration.

Absolon's "reward" turns out to be a misdirected kiss, perhaps the most famous in the history of Western literature. From the moment Absolon realizes Alison's prank, the narrative rushes to its climax as each ensuing event lunges into the next: Absolon seeks out a hot poker to punish Alison only to scald Nicholas, who then cries out for "water" which the carpenter hears and, thinking the flood to destroy mankind is coming, cuts the rope to his tub and falls to the ground. The trick is intended only to cuckold the old carpenter, but

157

the results extend beyond its original intention. The carpenter's fall is literal and figurative;

he breaks his arm and loses his standing in the community. After he

> …brosten hadde his arm…
> The folk gan laughen at his fantasye;
> Into the roof they kiken and they cape,
> And turned al his harm unto a jape. (3829, 3840-2)

His injury is one that specifically hinders his trade, thereby interfering with his ability to

generate income. What's more, his humiliation is made public in a ridiculous spectacle

that destroys his social capital. Nicholas's reputation for telling time enables him to

concoct a story to trick the carpenter—a story that is, interestingly enough, based

incorrectly on the end of time—and also to orchestrate the course of action in such a way as

to make the carpenter a willing, albeit ignorant, participant in his own downfall.

In the *Miller's Tale*, Nicholas's ability to reckon time is more than a casual hobby.

His educational status and training in time-reckoning, coupled with his proximity to the

rare and expensive instruments used in that reckoning, allow him to direct the actions of the

other characters in the tale and establish the timeline for the narrative. When he agrees to

defer his pursuit of Alison, he is not just being patient, he is being calculating. His

understanding of the lunar cycles and his reputation for being able to forecast showers

provides him an advantage over the ignorant carpenter, an advantage he exploits for his

own personal gratification. His deferral of the action is not simply a decision to wait for an

unmarked time in the future. Rather, Alison's request to wait provides Nicholas the

opportunity to time his trick and have it unfold according to a carefully constructed

timeline. And doing so puts him squarely in control of how those actions unfold. We have

seen how the clerk is able to put his knowledge of time-reckoning to use for his own

advantage. In the *Miller's Tale*, to reckon time is to direct the actions and the actors; it is nothing less than the ability to control the narrative of one's own life.

Of Merchants and Monks: The Shipman's Tale

In *The Shipman's Tale*, a monk is presented as being knowledgeable about and interested in the telling of time, and it is this knowledge that allows him to outwit a merchant and his wife. His knowledge, and more importantly his use of that knowledge, allows him to direct the action of the household in which he is staying and, like Nicholas, dupe the husband and sleep with the wife. The monk's ability to reckon time by his portable sundial directly contrasts with the merchant's inability to keep track of the passing of the hours. Jacques Le Goff argues that the rise of the mercantile class and spread of commercial enterprise precipitated the need for measuring time in smaller, more precise units of time (49).[118] But in the *Shipman's Tale*, it is the monk, not the merchant, who benefits and 'profits' from this use of time.[119] The merchant is presented as more conscious of the daily and annual cycle, temporal schemes commonly associated with the agrarian and peasant population, than of the smaller measures of time such as hours normally attributed to the merchant class. Furthermore, both he and his wife are individually associated with typological time schemes—a definitively religious understanding of time. The trick hatched by the monk in *The Shipman's Tale* hinges on the

---

[118] See also Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1996) 127-8.

[119] Eric Jager argues that the tale also "raises questions about the nature, measurement, and value of time, satirizing the monk and the merchant for often confusing the two distinct temporal orders to which they supposedly belong." See Eric Jager, "The Shipman's Tale: Merchant's Time and Church's Time, Secular and Sacred Space" in *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of H.A. Kelly*, Ed. Donka Minkova and Theresa Tinkle (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003) 253-60.

monk's ability to 'time' his exchanges with the merchant and the merchant's wife in such a way that he fulfills the obligations of both contracts while making a profit at the expense of the merchant and his wife—the merchant loses his loan and the wife must pay her debt to both husband and monk.

The merchant's use of time is depicted typologically, linking him allegorically, and ironically, with a religious time scheme. The tale begins with the merchant sending a message to the monk inviting him "to Seint-Denys to pleye / With hym and his wyf a day or tweye" (59-60). The invitation contains a timeline that is repeated 14 lines later: "And thus I lete hem ete and drynke and pleye, / This marchant and this monk, a day or tweye" (73-74). While seemingly innocent, this timeline does more than mark the narrative time of the tale. Eric Jager argues that merchant's use of time during the monk's visit echoes a typological time scheme that "hints of Church's time in the coy reference to a resurrection." (254). Like the Lord, who rises on the third day, the merchant also rises on the third day: "The thridde day, this marchant up ariseth" (75). Of course, whereas the Lord rises after having suffered and died for the sins of mankind, the merchant rises after entertaining his houseguest, the monk Don John. After rising, the merchant disappears into his counting-house for the business of reckoning his accounts. As Jager points out, the merchant's occupation with his accounts, " 'reken[ing] with himself,' consulting his 'bookes,' and calculating his earthly 'tresor' [contains a] satirical double meaning [that] hints that the moral economy is not his most immediate concern, despite the many devout oaths that flavor his conversation throughout the tale" (254-55; lns. 78, 82, 84). The timing of the scene, the act of reckoning, and the language used to

160

describe that reckoning are all imbued with a religious overtone that invokes a religious time scheme for the commercial activity being described.

The scene of the merchant reckoning his accounts in his counting house also functions temporally on the narrative level. Leaving the merchant busy with his accounts, "And thus he sit til it was passed pryme," the narrator is then able to shift the audience's attention to the scene occurring outside in the garden. The merchant reckons his accounts in the counting house as his wife and the monk converse in the garden. The monk notices the time of day, "prime," at the end of his conversation with the merchant's wife. The two scenes occur at the same time only in different spaces. The marker of "prime" allows the audience to understand this simultaneity within the linear confines of the narrative form. Furthermore, the use of the hours of the Divine Office, the monastic *horarium*, is first used in reference to the merchant's reckoning. As a noun, "prime" could mean the canonical hour of daybreak, or it could stand for the period of time between 6 A.M. and 9 A.M. The association with the monastic hours once again links the merchant with a religious time frame. The perspective of the narrator is significant because even though the merchant is depicted as working within a Christian timeframe, he is also shown to be unaware of the time.

While the merchant is busy counting his money, another typologically laden scene is being played out in the space of the garden. The merchant's wife and the monk meet in the garden, a space that evokes a typological time scheme, to conduct a little business of their own. The transaction begins, interestingly enough, with the monk referencing time in hours, units generally considered as associated with "merchant's time." In the garden, the wife inquires, innocently enough, as to why the monk has risen so early. The monk's reply,

and his first words spoken in the tale, reveal, if not advertise, his ability to measure time in small units of hours: "'Nece,' quod he, 'it oghte ynough suffise / Fyve houres for to slepe upon a nyght'" (100-101). But his reference to the hours of sleep one needs at night is by way of leading into a sexually charged discourse:

> "But deere nece, why be ye so pale?
> I trowe, certes, that oure goode man
> Hath yow laboured sith the nyght bigan
> That yow were nede to resten hastily."
> And with that word he lough ful murily,
> And of his owene thought he wax al reed. (106-11)

His redness seems to indicate his awareness of the inappropriate nature of these lines. Although the remarks are inappropriate, they reflect the garden's typological significance as a space of both temptation and then salvation.[120] The monk plays the role of the serpent tempting Eve in the garden of Eden, but the wife then evokes the second meaning of the garden casting herself as Christ who suffered to pay the debt of mankind's original sin. After the wife hints about her suffering at the hands of her husband in marriage, the monk declares "He is na moore cosyn unto me" (150). Tempting the wife further, the monk continues to urge the wife to explain her distress: "Telleth youre grief, lest that he come adoun; And hasteth yow, and gooth youre wey anon" (156-7). The monk directs the pace of the wife's speech under the guise that her husband might reappear at any moment. But the lines also reveal the monk as in control of the wife's discourse: he has encouraged her to reveal more and is hastening her to do so.

---

[120] See Chapter Two for a more thorough treatment of this typological time scheme.

Though the reason for her debt could be attributed to vanity (she has spent money on clothing to look nice), she views her excessive spending as her wifely duty and associates her behavior with Christ's suffering:

> But by that ilke Lord that for us bledde,
> For his honour, myself for to arraye,
> A Sonday next I moste nedes paye
> An hundred frankes, or ellis I am lorn. (178-181)

Ironically, the wife's debt is a result of her desire to array herself in a manner worthy of his financial status. But her desire to serve as a public symbol of her husband's wealth is not hers alone. When her husband lectures her on his occupation as a merchant, he reminds her of the importance of their public image: "We may wel make chiere and good visage" (230). While the wife may simply enjoy dressing in expensive clothes, it is also true that her husband profits from her attention to fashion. The finer the clothes she wears, the more financially well-off the merchant appears, and the more likely their reputation will be looked upon favorably by creditors.

The wife's pursuit, however, has placed her in a debt she is unable to repay. She divulges her debt to the monk and states her need of a loan. This is a world that adheres to deadlines and due dates, as the wife's predicament makes clear. She states the deadline of her debt as "Sonday next" but leaves the date of repayment of her loan from the monk open. For that date, she suggests,

> "For at a certeyn day I wol yow paye,
> And doon to yow what plesance and service
> That I may doon, right as yow list devise." (190-3)

The monk, while not necessarily the driving force behind the sex-for-money scheme

offered by the wife, is comfortable with the terms of the agreement precisely because he

is aware of how to exploit the situation to his advantage and profit. The monk agrees to

loan her the money when the merchant is away in Flanders:

> "…whan youre housbonde is to Flaundres fare,
> I wol delyvere yow out of this care;
> For I wol brynge yow an hundred frankes." (199-201)
> .

As he controlled the pace of the wife's discourse earlier, so too he controls the timing of

the exchange to which they have agreed.

As in *The Miller's Tale*, the action takes place inside the victim's home. It can be

argued that, as a paying tenant, Nicholas has more claims to the space he inhabits than

does the monk Don John (although this claim certainly would not extend to the

carpenter's bed). Don John is a guest; a familiar guest, to be sure, but a guest all the

same. This lack of personal space in which to store expensive instruments does not

hinder this monk from relying upon and invoking his knowledge of time-reckoning to

direct the course of action in his host's household. Don John carries with him a

chilyndre, a portable sundial, which he uses after he has entered into the contract with the

merchant's wife. Checking the time, he directs the wife:

> And lat us dyne as soone as that ye may;
> For by my chilyndre it is pryme of day.
> Gooth now, and beeth as trewe as I shal be. (205-207)

The monk should be using his portable sundial to direct the action of his prayers, not to

remind his hostess of mealtimes. Like Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale*, the monk insists that

his instructions be carried out quickly. The wife responds to the monk's directions

happily; she "bad the cookes that they sholde hem hye, / So that men myghte dyne, and

that anon" (210-11). The monk, by using his timepiece, directs the meals in this household. The wife merely follows his instructions.

The monk's notice of the time follows the wife's confession that she is in debt for spending beyond her means. The monk's use of his portable sundial, while not for the purpose it was intended, places him in a position of authority in the tale whereby he can direct the actions of the household where he is a guest. The merchant and his wife are well aware of the economic implications of time: the wife is facing an approaching deadline for her loan, and the merchant believes that his time spent reckoning his accounts to be a solid investment. But the couple ultimately pays for not keeping closer track of time, and the monk profits by their loss.

The scene in the garden reveals the wife as irresponsible and not in charge as head of the household (meals are not timely). Further, she is a bad hostess (her guest must remind her of the time to eat). More importantly, however, the exchange between the monk and the merchant's wife in the garden foregrounds something about the management of time in this household that will be fully realized in the wife's exchange with her husband: this is a household that loses track of time. This inability to manage and keep track of time extends beyond the domestic sphere into the merchant's financial dealings. When the merchant neglects to set a date of repayment for the monk's loan and does not inform his wife of when he will return, the merchant opens himself up for the monk's exploitation.

Whereas the monk's knowledge of time-reckoning allows him to direct the action of the household by sending the wife to order the cooks to prepare a meal, the merchant has been so obsessed with financial reckoning that he has lost track of time—a trait that not

only makes him vulnerable to the monk's exploitation, but also serves as a source of marital discord. The wife interrupts her husband's work by knocking on the door of his counting house and asking,

> "What, sire, how longe wol ye faste?
> How longe tyme wol ye rekene and caste
> Youre sommes, youre bookes, and youre thynges?
> The devel have part on alle swiche rekenynges!" (215-18)

The wife views the merchant's reckonings as a waste of time, but the merchant knows that money is the business of merchants, as he informs the monk a few lines later: "ye know it wel ynogh, / of merchants that their money is their plough" (287-88). The merchant recognizes that his time spent reckoning his accounts is time well-spent, even if he loses track of time as he spends it.

After the wife interrupts her husband in the counting house, his response is to remind her of the importance of maintaining an outward appearance of well-being, while keeping their financial status private:

> We may wel make chiere and good visage,
> And dryve forth the world as it may be,
> And kepen oure estaat in pryvetee,
> Til we be deed, or elles that we pleye
> A pilgrimage, or goon out of the weye. (230-32).

The merchant understands well the importance of keeping up public appearances while guarding information about their financial status. Part of the merchant's success as a merchant is dependent upon his reputation and his ability to control that public reputation. No one will extend credit to a merchant whose finances are depleted. The monk is well aware of this necessary secrecy surrounding commercial endeavors and financial status.

When the wife interrupts her husband's financial reckoning, we witness the merchant handing his wife even more responsibility in the household. He informs her that "To Flaundres wol I go to-morwe at day, / And come again, as soon as evere I may" (240-41). While his date of departure is clear, his return is less so. As a merchant, he should understand the importance of specifying end dates and due dates. The wife, however, has already been able to seek the monk's assistance while the merchant is at home because he has been so focused on reckoning his accounts that he has neglected one of his greatest assets and liabilities—his wife. In holing himself up in his counting room, he has permitted her the space to pursue her own business dealings, dealings that will prove a liability to the very financial status he is so careful in protecting.

The merchant's wife, however, proves to be irresponsible as a business partner. The warning signs about her lack of ability to direct the household have already been demonstrated in the garden scene with the monk: she is in debt for spending beyond her means, she enters into a dubious business arrangement with the monk, and she needs to be reminded—by her guest no less—that it is time to eat. The wife does not heed her husband's warning about the need for privacy in their financial dealing; in fact, by the time her husband warns her, she has already disclosed her debt to the monk. The wife, however, is not entirely to blame for her mismanagement. The merchant's obsession with keeping their financial dealings private has, unfortunately, resulted in his neglecting to tell his wife about his loan to the monk.

The merchant's reputation is bruised when he inquires about the loan the monk has already "repaid" by fulfilling his initial contract with the wife. Visiting the monk on his way home from his business dealings, the merchant is in the awkward position of needing

167

to ask repayment from the monk for his loan. He does so delicately and indirectly, but the

monk presents him with surprising information.

> I thanke yow, by God and by Seint Jame!
> But nathelees, I took unto oure dame,
> Youre wyf, at hom, the same gold ageyn
> Upon youre bench; she woot it wel, certeyn,
> By certeyn tokenes that I kan hire telle.
> Now, by youre leve, I may no lenger dwelle;
> Oure abbot wole out of this toun anon,
> And in his compaignye moot I goon.
> Grete wel oure dame, myn owene nece sweete,
> And fare wel, deere cosyn, til we meete!" (355-64)

The debt has been repaid to the wife, but the timing is not entirely clear. The monk states

that he received the loan "so kyndely this oother day," but does not happen to mention

when he repaid the loan, only that he did repay it (353). The monk is playing, and preying,

upon the merchant's vague use of time referents. Here, the merchant seems to avoid

discussion of specific dates and deadlines because of his close relationship with the monk.

Furthermore, the merchant must maintain the appearance of wealth, and calling a friend on

a loan would seem to suggest a lack of funds—an image the merchant is careful to avoid.

But it is this sense of social nicety and concern for public reputation that the monk

is able to exploit. The monk's abrupt departure at the end of the conversation seems to

suggest that the monk has been somewhat insulted by the merchant's mention of the loan.

At home, the merchant gently reprimands his wife:

> By God, as that I gesse
> That ye han maad a manere straungenesse
> Bitwixen me and my cosyn daun John.
> Ye sholde han warned me, er I had gon,
> That he yow hadde an hundred frankes payed
> By redy token; and heeld hym yvele apayed,
> For that I to hym spak of chevyssaunce;
> Me semed so, as by his contenaunce. (385-392)

168

The merchant seems less concerned about the money itself and more upset about how his behavior seems to have insulted his friend the monk. The merchant has been so private in his financial dealings that he has excluded his wife not only from the space of the counting house, but also from the dealings of his business arrangements. He wants her to inform him of repayment for a loan which he has made to the monk yet not disclosed to her. This level of secrecy allows the monk to dupe them both. Exploiting the wife's anxiety over class status, the monk's handling of the exchange allows him to fulfill the wife's desire to dress herself to suit the role of a wealthy merchant's wife while at the same time ensuring that the exchange will deprive the merchant of the very wealth her clothes are intended to reflect.

The notion of spending or wasting time as discussed by Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale,* and as we saw discussed by the Host in *The Introduction* to *The Man of Law's Tale,* indicates, in part, an awareness of the commodification of time, or, in Le Goff's terms, the use of "merchant's time." For Chaucer, however, members of the mercantile and artisan class are not the only people aware of or capable of exploiting this notion of time for profit. As demonstrated in the discussion above, clerks and members of the church were just as capable of, if not more knowledgeable about, profiting from "merchant's time." The carpenter and the merchant, characters whose occupations place them directly within the class that should be most associated with "merchant's time," are cast in the role of victim to the scheming machinations of the Church's representatives.

CONCLUSION

THE END(S) OF TIME

"But if before heaven and earth there was no time, why is it asked, What didst Thou then? For there was no 'then' when time was not." Augustine *Confessions* XI, xiii.15

What does it mean to reach the end of time? Beginnings and endings are important to measurement. Spatially, an object is measured by where it begins and ends in space. How then are we to measure the end of time? We mark moments in time and measure the temporal distance between those moments—as in weeks, months, and years. We delineate time with bells, alarms, boxes on a calendar, lines on a day planner, and markings on an analogue clock. We designate those markings as beginnings or endings. But does the ringing of the bell indicate the end of the class or the beginning of break? Nights begin when days end, but what begins when time itself ends?

In the previous chapters, I have examined some examples of the practice and use of time-reckoning in late medieval English literature, especially as it relates to issues of status and rank.   At some point, each of the texts I have analyzed in the previous chapters has represented or alluded to the end of time, but I have reserved my concluding remarks about the apocalypse and eschatology for the final chapter. My reason for doing so is threefold. First, the topic of the end of time, as it was understood in late medieval

England, was profound and relevant in a way very different from today's notions about the end of time. The history and tradition of eschatology, especially the apocalyptic tradition, is fascinating and rich with implications for understanding all of the texts I analyze. But because its implications for these texts are so similar, discussions of them can be briefly concentrated in one place rather than scattered throughout various chapters. Second, the visions of the end that are presented in each of the texts I examine comprise what is perhaps the most significant component that links the texts and their writers together. Though the primary texts I analyze are drawn from various genres (drama, dream vision, and fabliaux), they all share a similar vision of the end and express the same perspective of time as being something that is defined by its end(s). Finally, I believe the influence of the Apocalypse is significant enough to warrant a discussion in and of itself. Analyzing the eschatological projects of each of the texts in the same section allows patterns to emerge in a way that would be less clear had I dealt with the issue seriatim in earlier chapters.

In what follows, I provide some historical context for the fascination with the Final Reckoning in late medieval England, providing a brief history of the theological tradition surrounding the notion of the end of time and discussing the role of the Apocalypse in late medieval England. Next, I turn my attention to the texts analyzed in this project and consider the relationship between the texts' narrative structures and their representation of the end.

A Brief History of the End of Time

Understanding the relationship between the eternal and the temporal is central to

comprehending the late medieval concept of the end of time because, according to

medieval thought, it is the eternal realm, either of salvation or damnation, that awaits all

humans at the end of time. In *Timeas*, Plato distinguishes between two modes of

existence and two levels of being: the unchanging and atemporal realm of Ideas and the

ever-changing temporal realm.[121] Augustine adopts Plato's two-fold distinction to

explain the difference between God's existence in the eternal realm and his creatures'

existence in the temporal realm.[122] Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, a work

Chaucer translated and was heavily influenced by, emphasizes the simultaneous nature of

eternity and the singular, linear, and sequential nature of the temporal:

> Eternite, thane, is parfit, possessioun and al togidre of lif interminable; and
> that scheweth more cleerly by the comparysoun or collacioun of temporel
> thinges. For alle thing that lyveth in tyme, it is present and procedith fro
> preteritz into futures (that is to seyn, fro tyme passed into tyme comynge),
> ne ther nis nothing established in tyme that mai enbrasen togidre al the
> space of his lif. (Bk. V, Pr. 6, 12-23)

Boethius continues, citing Plato as the source of this binary: "And forthi yif we wollen

putten worthi names to thinges and folwen Plato, lat us seyen thane sothly that God is

'eterne,' and that the world is 'perpetuel'" (Bk. V, Pr. 6, 95-98). According to Boethius,

eternity is the perfect compression of all things simultaneously while the temporal plane

must witness time pass and await the approaching end as history unfolds in a sequence of

---

[121] See Richard C. Dales, "Time and Eternity in the Thirteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 27-45.

[122] Augustine complicates the binary by introducing the idea that prime matter and angels, two created things, exist "outside the realm of time." For more on this, see *Confessions* 12.12 and *City of God* 12.16. For a discussion of Augustine's treatment of the theme of the Word of God making men "free from time," see Roland J. Teske, "'Vocans temporales, faciens aeternos': St. Augustine on Liberation from time," *Traditio* 41 (1985): 29-47.

events. For God, existing in the eternal realm, there is no beginning, middle, or end. For

the medieval Christian, time pursued the linear trajectory of history progressing to its

end, an end that was less of a conclusion and more of a liberation from the constraints of

time into the realm of the eternal.

So where does the notion of the end fit into all of this? According to McGinn,

"Every Christian view of history is in some sense eschatological insofar as it sees history

as a teleological process and believes that Scripture reveals truths about its End" (3).

Derived from Greek, the word "eschatology" simply means "last words" or, more

precisely, "last discourse." According to the OED, it is defined as "the department of

theological science concerned with 'the four last things: death, judgement, heaven, and

hell.'' The notion of the "End of time" would certainly have evoked images of all of

these "last things" and a medieval audience would, most likely, not have distinguished

among the individual aspects. The tendency of late-twentieth-century scholarship,

however, has been to study aspects of the End as distinct and separate from one another, a

product most likely the result of reactions to the widely influential publication of *The*

Pursuit of the Millennium by Norman Cohn in 1957.[123] Cohn's work prompted debates

concerning the extent to which, if at all, millennial movements grew out of or sought

revolutionary social change. From these debates emerged a confusion and conflation of

the notions of eschatology, apocalypticism, and chiliasm along with the tendency to

associate these End time notions with heresy, social unrest and totalitarianism (Van Der

---

[123] In this work, Cohn linked the ideas of last age movements in the middle ages with the totalitarian movements of the modern era as illustrated by the book's subtitle: "Revolutionary messianism in medieval and Reformation Europe and its bearing on modern totalitarian movements." Cohn later abandoned the connection and revised the subtitle to "Revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages" in the book's third edition in 1970. Richard K. Fenn, Professor of Theology and Society at Princeton Theological Seminary, resurrects the connection between notions of time and fascist movements in *The End of Time: Religion, Ritual, and the Forging of the Soul* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997).

Eerden 425). The backlash created from these debates focuses on individual aspects of

End time notions, most often treating them as separate and distinct categories. In his

essay "Introduction: The Apocalypse in Medieval Culture," Richard K. Emmerson offers

the following explanation:

> Scholarship has not fully appreciated the full extent of the influence of the
> Apocalypse on medieval culture, perhaps because to a large extent this
> influence is so pervasive that it has been easier for scholars to narrow their
> focus to examine more striking apocalyptic mentalities and Joachist
> expectations. (294)

Whether the trend in scholarship to focus on individual aspects of notions of the End time

resulted from a desire to clarify and define or as a way to break down such a pervasive

subject, the trend does appear to be shifting.

The 2000 publication of *Last Things: Death & the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*,

edited by Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, sought to reverse the trend in

scholarship "to treat separately concerns that both medieval intellectuals and ordinary

people would have seen as closely linked: death, the afterlife, the End of time (whether

terrestrial or beyond earth), and theological anthropology or the theory of the person"

(Bynum and Freedman 1).   In the introduction to the collection, Bynum and Freedman

contend that "none can be understood without the others" (1). This most recent trend in

eschatological scholarship examines the learned and popular representations of the End

and seeks to understand not only the spiritual currency of "the End," but also its social

relevance and significance. In the Middle Ages, "the End" would have been understood

to mean death, the Final Reckoning, and eternal salvation (or damnation, as the case may

be). For the medieval mentality, as the essays in Bynum's and Freedman's collection

suggest, these ideas would not have been held as distinctly different events but rather the

culmination and fulfillment of salvation promised throughout the events of Christian

history.

Apocalypticism is a specific category of eschatology and one pervasive in its

influence throughout the Middle Ages. The relationship between apocalypticism and

eschatology is one area where the overlapping of concepts has led to some confusion.

While all apocalyptic visions are eschatological in nature, not all eschatological projects

are apocalyptic. McGinn explains:

> Apocalypticism is a species of the genus eschatology, that is, it is a
> particular kind of belief about the last things—the End of history and what
> lies beyond it. […] Apocalypticism, from its origins, is a highly complex
> phenomenon. Single-minded interpretations are immediately suspect. To
> reduce apocalypticism to a clear and distinct idea may well be to sacrifice
> understanding for illusory clarity. Apocalypticism throughout its lengthy
> and rich history fused together a variety of interests and was invoked for
> various purposes. (3)

Understanding Apocalypticism in terms of genre has been a challenge for literary

scholars because there is not always agreement as to what that genre entails. One

influential attempt to define the field generically is that of John J. Collins, who has

comprised a list of consistent elements of "apocalyptic texts" that pertain to both

framework and content in order to offer scholars some tools to describe and identify texts

within that genre. Based on his findings, he defines the genre as "revelatory literature

with narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to

a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it

envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another supernatural

world" (Collins 9). In other words, apocalyptic literature includes three main

175

characteristics: a journey to the otherworld, a guide for that journey, and a vision of the end of time.

While Collins' work has benefited those studying representations of the Apocalypse, the question of genre still preoccupies scholars. The issue that remains unsettled is the fact that Apocalyptical literature was not considered a genre in the middle ages. In *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*, Morton Bloomfield admits that "it is doubtful whether such a literary form existed," though he still proceeds to categorize the poem as an apocalypse, "in a basic sense" (Bloomfield 9-10). Emmerson argues that the quest for genre has impeded scholarship from detecting the vast influence of the Apocalypse on medieval culture: "One reason why the immense influence of the Apocalypse on medieval culture has not been fully appreciated is that modern scholarship has primarily sought to discover an 'apocalypse' genre or form in medieval culture" (Emmerson "Introduction" 295). One of the difficulties encountered by scholars seeking a medieval apocalypse genre is the complicated issue of how to categorize the text on which such a genre would be based: the Apocalypse of John (Emmerson "Introduction" 299). The pervasiveness of apocalyptic imagery and allusions in medieval literature, however, does need to be addressed, and the quest to categorize and define a genre is one step in an attempt to analyze more fully the cultural influence of the Book of Revelation upon and within late medieval English literary culture.

My purpose here is not to argue for or against a definition of genre but rather to point out some of the challenges faced by scholars studying apocalypticism in the Middle Ages. Though Emmerson resists defining Apocalyptic literature as a genre, he does concede that there was what he terms a "Grammar of Apocalypse Imagery" (300). The

list of images and motifs he presents is appropriate given the fact that the Book of Revelation was written as a vision (i.e. it is John's vision of the End of time) and considering its primary mode of expression in the middle ages (i.e. illustrated manuscripts, tapestries, sculptural programs, individual statues, stained glass windows).[124] But his list misses what I believe to be one of the most important elements of the Apocalypse that is contained in Collins' definition, namely the way in which the texts seek to mediate the experience between the temporal and the eternal. According to the Apocalyptic program, time does not simply stop when it reaches the end; it transcends the temporal and dissolves into the eternal. The End of time is the beginning of the eternal, a realm with no beginning and no end.

The Apocalypse in Medieval England

Preaching at Paul's Cross in London at around 1388, Thomas Wimbledon declares that the End of the world is at hand: "Þis day of wreche is ny e" (813).[125] He continues, relating the date for the End as provided by an unnamed source:

> So it semeþ to þis clerk þat þe grete Anticrist schulde
> come in the fourtenþe hundred eer fro birþe of Crist,
> þe whiche noumbre of eeris is now fulfillid not fully
> twelue eer and an half lackynge. (895-98)[126]

---

[124] For more about the visual reception of the Apocalypse in the later middle ages, see Michael Camille, "Visionary Perception and Images of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages," *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992) 276-89.

[125] The date for the sermon is not definitive. Ione Kemp Knight cites 1387 as the earliest date of possible delivery and composition. Knight also notes that it is possible the sermon was preached in 1388 and 1389. See Ione Kemp Knight, *Wimbledon's Sermon: Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1967) 43.

[126] This sermon, known as "Redde rationem villicationis tue," emphasizes both the individual and universal nature of the Final Reckoning. Furthermore, it does so by addressing the salvation of each individual

177

The fact that the End of time loomed large in the minds of the English during the late fourteenth century is not so surprising when one considers the religious and political instability of the period. The English were burdened with heavy taxes to fund the long and expensive war with France. Rebellions threatened the borders with Scotland and Wales. After the deaths of the Black Prince and Edward III, England was under the rule of a ten year old Richard II. The Western Church was split over the Great Schism. The social upheaval of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 was followed by the natural disaster of an earthquake in May of 1382—an earthquake that coincided with a meeting of ecclesiastics in London to condemn the doctrines of John Wycliff. And the fourth major outbreak of the plague in England flared up in 1375.

While the literary history of the Apocalypse in the English Middle Ages remains to be written, scholars have devoted a fair amount of attention to the specific apocalyptic contents of two major Middle English dream visions: *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*.[127] In "Domesday Bokes: The Apocalypse in Medieval English Literary Culture," Penn Szittya offers a sketch of the history of the English literary tradition, tracing what he describes as

Christian in the present as well as that of all humanity at the end of time. See R.K. Emmerson and R.B. Herzman, "*The Canterbury Tales* in Eschatological Perspective," *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* Ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen (Belgium: Leuven UP, 1988): 404-24 and R.K. Emmerson, "Apocalyptic Themes and Imagery in Medieval and Renaissance Literature," *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*, Vol. 2 Ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1998): 402-441.

[127] On *Piers Plowman*, see Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1962); Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990); Mary J. Carruthers, "Time, Apocalypse, and the Plot of *Piers Plowman*," *Acts of Interpretation*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman: Pilgrim Press, 1982) 175-88; Richard Kenneth Emmerson, "The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic, and the Study of Medieval Literature." *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature,* ed. Jan Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1984) 40-54; Richard Kenneth Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1981) 193-203. On *Pearl*, see Muriel A. Whitaker, "*Pearl* and Some Illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts," *Viator* 12 (1981): 183-96; Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*," *The Modern Language Review* 81 (1986): 7-17; Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977) 156-204.

three important "moments" in which there were English contributions to the cultural history of the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages, namely the writings of the Anglo-Saxon homilists (including Bede's *Explanatio Apocalypsis*, Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, and Aelfric's *Catholic Homilies*, as well as the anonymous Blickling homilies and Vercelli homilies); the production of Anglo-Norman illuminated Apocalypse books; and the composition of Ricardian Poetry. Szittya spends only a few pages treating texts from the third "moment" of Ricardian Poetry, but his discussion about the relationship between the Apocalypse and medieval narratology proves promising.[128]

My reading of the York Corpus Christi Cycle, *Pearl*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, however, prompts me to move in another direction entirely, a direction that is simpler and concerns the relationship between medieval notions of time and the end of that time. In the York Corpus Christi Cycle, the Mercer's guild concludes the cycle with a production of the Last Judgment. The pageant portrays the End of time at the end of Christian history, at the end of the cycle, at the end of a feast day, at the end of a very long day. The "End time" pervades almost every aspect of the Middle English poem *Pearl*, from harvest season to the parable of the vineyard, from the death of a young child to the resurrection of the Pearl maiden in New Jerusalem. And finally, for Chaucer, a clerk tricks a carpenter into believing the world is coming to an end, and a merchant neglects his spiritual account books in focusing on his literal ones. In what follows, I consider the eschatological project of each of the texts' representation of the End and examine how the narrative structure of the texts underscores the tension between the

---

[128] Szittya encourages scholars who write about the influence of Apocalyptic culture in medieval England to consider Paul Zumthor's theory of *mouvance* or to pursue the implications of the fourth-century North African theologian Tyconius' sixth rule of interpretation of the obscurities of Scripture, the concept of *recapitulation*.

temporal (i.e. the linear understanding of time where events unfold in a progression to a teleological conclusion) and the eternal (i.e., God's realm where everything exists in a state of simultaneity).

The Cycle's Close: The End of Time in the York Corpus Christi Cycle

To medieval theologians, history matters because it is within history, within the unfolding of human events and the narrative of human life, that salvation can be attained. In the words of Mary Carruthers,

> History is significant only when understood as the working of divine providence through human lives and wills, through time. The essential life is that of Christ, who lived in a particular time, yet whose life provides the key to the inward significance of all time leading up to it and all time after, including the apocalyptic end. Significance in salvational history is achieved not beyond time but within time, in the temporal repetition of the salvation pattern. (176)

Although she is writing here about *Piers Plowman*, Carruthers' observations seem particularly relevant to the project of the Corpus Christi Cycles. In the cycle, the body of Christ is celebrated through the annual reenactment of human history in pageants that showcase the salvational work of everyday life. In *A Play Called Corpus Christi*, V.A. Kolve writes that the Corpus Christi drama is timeless:

> …all its actions are past or to come, and we are alive in the sixth age still—but its deeper address to the audience moment has dated it in unique and interesting ways. By means of a pervasive anachronism and anglicization it furnished a critical image of moral and social life as lived in the later Middle Ages. (104)

The biblical narrative, beginning with creation and ending with the End of time, unfolds within a cyclical form. But as an annual cycle, that end is only temporary. The cycle will be performed the following year, beginning again and ending again. The

nature of the cycle's performance, the fact that pageants are repeated at several stations

throughout the day and that the cycle is performed year after year, produces another

temporal layer to the linear history unfolding on the pageant wagons, one which allows,

and at points even actively encourages, the audience to image the simultaneity of the

eternal realm.

In the Mercer's production of the Last Judgement, the audience is divided into the

saved and the damned in the enactment of the Final Reckoning, allowing them to

experience the future event of "the End" in the present. During the pageant, God

recounts the warning he gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden:

> What tyme þou etis of þis
> Manne, þou spedes þiselue to spill--
> Þou arte brought oute of all blisse. (IV. 57-59; XLVII. 14-16)

The repetition of the lines during the Last Judgement not only serve to remind the

audience of a scene they presumably have witnessed earlier in the cycle, but also to point

to the specific time when man and woman fell from God's eternal grace into the temporal

realm. The salvational history represented in the pageants performed throughout the day

resulted from that first, original sin. In the first instance, the warning is directed to Adam

and Eve, with the audience merely watching as passive observers of the scene unfolding

before their eyes. But in the second instance, the character of God speaks directly to the

audience reminding the audience of what He has said earlier that day, in the past-time of

the temporal realm. Moreover, the pageant depicts the Final Reckoning, representing a

future event in salvational history. God has said the words before and will say them

again because, in a sense, He is always saying them to mankind. The warning,

originating from the eternal realm, is ever present and therefore must be repeated in the

temporal realm in order to bring mankind back to the state of bliss, back to the state of

eternal salvation. That is, his words are past, present, and future in the world of the

pageant.

Pearl

Out of all of the texts I examine, *Pearl* is by far the one with the most explicit and

detailed connection to the Book of the Apocalypse. The poem's apocalyptic vision,

beginning in Section XIV and continuing to Section XIX, relies so heavily on the account

given in the Book of the Apocalypse that many scholars do not even consider exploring

the poem's apocalyptic culture or its seemingly unoriginal representation of the End.[129]

While I have discussed the apocalyptic influence at length in chapter two, a couple of

further issues are worth addressing here.

First is the narrative framework of the poem. The form of the poem is insistently

circular, ending where it began both in terms of setting and concantenation. The narrator

journeys to the otherworld in a dream vision, only to awaken back in the garden where he

was depicted in the opening lines of the poem. Having been granted a vision of the End,

he gazes on the celestial city of New Jerusalem and is so drawn to the future that he

cannot restrain himself from trying to circumvent the temporal order and rush towards the

eternal. But it is in trying to escape time that he is pulled back into it. His salvation must

be found within time, not outside of it.

---

[129] Notable exceptions to this claim include Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977); Muriel A. Whitaker, "*Pearl* and Some Illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts," *Viator* 12 (1981): 183-96; Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*," *The Modern Language Review* 81 (1986): 7-17. See also Sandra Pierson Prior, *The Fayre Formez of the Pearl Poet* (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1996) 21-66.

Second, the content of the poem continually struggles to contend with the

relationship between the teleological trajectory of human life and the cyclical nature of

the temporal plane, a struggle most poignantly expressed by the jeweler's meditation on

death and decay in the garden (a view of linear degeneration) and the regenerative ability

of nature (a cyclical understanding of time). The very opening of the poem sets the stage

for the struggle as the narrator bemoans the loss of his pearl as workers harvest the field

in the background. While the profound loss of the pearl marks a specific moment in time

for the narrator, the scene of the harvest serves to transcend that moment. The August of

the harvest is any August and every August. The allegorical significance of the harvest

functions to contrast with the temporal concerns of the narrator: God has always already

harvested all souls in the Final Reckoning.

When the narrator first encounters the eternal realm as embodied in the presence

of the Pearl maiden, one of his first concerns is about her rank and status. The narrator's

own rank and status seem at issue throughout the poem, as I discussed in chapter two, and

do not seem to have been resolved by the poem's end. In a sense, there can be no

conclusion, no true sense of closure for the jeweler. His salvation must be achieved

within time and as such, he must return to the beginning always moving toward the end

but never attaining it in the world of the poem.

Chaucer and the Tales without End

> And Jhesu, for his grace, wit me sende
> To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage
> That highte Jerusalem celestial. (X. 48-51)

So speaks the Parson in the Prologue to his tale. The last voice we hear in the

Tales, before the retraction, is the one that reminds the audience that while the destination

of the pilgrims on that present journey might be Canterbury, the destination for everyone

on the pilgrimage of life is ultimately the celestial city of New Jerusalem. As Donald R.

Howard reminds us in *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and their*

Posterity, "A real live pilgrimage to any medieval man *was* a metaphoric one-way

journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem, and none the less real for that" (Howard 121).[130] The

Parson's words serve to remind the audience of that association, lest he or she has

forgotten the ultimate purpose of the pilgrimage having been distracted by the story-

telling game along the way. As Emmerson observes, "Awareness of this ultimate goal of

pilgrimage enunciated by the final speaker in the polyglot *Canterbury Tales* provides a

crucial eschatological dimension to Chaucer's great human comedy" ("Introduction"

314).

While Chaucer's eschatological concerns are most prominently portrayed in his

poem, the *House of Fame*, those same concerns can be seen surfacing in the *Canterbury*

Tales. Writing about the eschatological poetics of the *House of Fame*, Lisa Kiser

observes that Chaucer

---

[130] It is, of course, to be remembered that although the *Tales* only show the journey progressing in one direction, toward Canterbury, the game set forth by the host was originally meant to include stories told on the return trip as well.

> consistently restricts the interests of his text to the nature and destiny of human narratives, both spoken and written, in a comic attempt to avoid the problem of authority that he believed Dante and other visionaries faced. […] Chaucer takes the safer position of a commentator on the afterlife of words, not souls. (27)

A similar claim can be made about the eschatological perspective of the *Tales*, especially when one pays particular attention to Chaucer's use of *chronographia*. When Dante employs the rhetorical technique of *chronographia*, he does so in order to link Beatrice, specifically, the events of Beatrice's life, with the divine, celestial sphere.[131] But for Chaucer, the *chronographia* situates the *Tales*, the stories themselves rather than the life events of the narrators, within time, turning the audience's attention to the afterlife of the stories told along the way.

In the *Miller's Tale*, we have seen how Nicholas uses "the End" as a means to achieve his own personal ends, namely the pleasure of spending the night with the carpenter's wife. And while "the End" is clearly put to comic use in this tale, that does not abrogate the spiritual implications of its invocation. As Emmerson and Herzman argue,

> Although V.A. Kolve is surely right to emphasize the "fabliau justice" and the comedy of the tale, it does not follow that Chaucer deliberately sought to avoid invoking "to any serious religious end" the meaning of the Flood, especially its prefiguration of doomsday. (Emmerson and Herzman 418)

The carpenter, ignorant and ill-informed to be sure, believes himself to be living in the End times, a belief that is not entirely unsound given the fact that he sees himself surrounded by death. He is especially susceptible to Nicholas's story not only because of his lack of learning, but also because the tale Nicholas weaves, while preposterous to the *Tales*' audience's sensibility, is consistent with how John views the world. John's first

---

[131] See especially the *Vita Nuova*.

thoughts about Nicholas's absence over the weekend immediately turn to death as he recalls seeing a corpse just the other day.

The notions of the end in the *Shipman's Tale* have less to do with life and death and are more concerned with the end of economic dealings and exchange. The merchant in the *Shipman's Tale* is so obsessed with keeping track of his finances that he loses track of time. He counts his money, trades on credit, and yet does not know when to stop his reckoning and take a meal. The merchant's wife, on the other hand, is well aware of when her debts are due in this world if not the next. Her sense of urgency in raising the money to repay her debt and collecting her husband for dinner is not unlike her husband's reckoning of his accounts, though she cannot see the value in his use of time and resents him for it. For the merchant and his wife, the end is always approaching—the end of a line of credit or the end of a period of fasting—and they rush about to fulfill their financial and social obligations. And the monk, a character who, given his occupation, should be concerned with the spiritual reckoning, seems more interested in pleasure in the present than he is in life everlasting. Oddly enough, it is the tale's narrator, the Shipman, who seems to understand fully the significance of the end as he light-heartedly concludes his tale with the following pun: "Thus endeth my tale, and God us sende / Tailynge ynough unto oure lyves ende. Amen."

Whether we treat Chaucer's *Retraction* as ironic or as a sincere religious act of penance, these last lines of the *Tales* are consistent with the project's overall treatment of the end.[132] Although the *Tales* never reach a definitive conclusion and the pilgrims never reach the final destination of Canterbury, the end is present in the sense that the pilgrims

---

[132] Knapp argues that the *Retraction* is both ironic and "a religious act of penance." See Robert S. Knapp, "Penance, Irony, and Chaucer's Retraction," *Assays* 2 (1983): 48.

are always moving towards it. If we consider the *Tales* as a work that, in the words of

Donald R. Howard is "unfinished but complete," we are then left to wonder what it

means to be complete but without end (*Idea* 1). For while each individual tale has its

end, they exist as parts of a larger conversation that stops before reaching the end, a

conversation that is ultimately withdrawn by the author who first put it in motion.

Concluding Remarks

One of my aims in the preceding chapters has been to demonstrate the

significance of temporal discourse in late medieval English literature, especially as it

relates to the notions of status and rank. While there is no shortage of scholarship

addressing the theological notions of time, I have sought to emphasize in my analysis the

broader implications of practical and quotidian examples of time-reckoning in medieval

texts. In the introduction, I ask how time functions in late medieval English literature.

As my analysis in the previous chapters has shown, late medieval English literature not

only reflects the increasing commodification of time during this period but also

demonstrates how that commodity could in turn be used to negotiate social status,

especially as it applied to the position of the rising mercantile class. In other words,

time—specifically the ability to reckon time according to the variety of temporal

schemes—carried with it a social value that extends beyond the monetary.

Previously, scholarship has sought to locate the "discovery" of time in the

Renaissance. In *The Renaissance Discovery of Time*, Ricardo J. Quinones examines the

work of Dante of Petrarch but asserts that Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton are the first

English writers to be conscious of a sense of time within their writing. This view relies

heavily on the work of Alfred Wilhelm von Otto, who argues that the Renaissance

> Formulated the new interpretation of time which saw it as a value, as
> something of utility. […] It was realized that time was always short and
> hence valuable, that one had to husband it and use it economically if one
> wanted to become "the master of all things." Such an attitude had been
> unknown to the Middle Ages; to them time was plentiful and there was no
> need to look upon it as something precious. It became so only when
> regarded from the point of view of the individual who could think in terms
> of the time measured out to him. (16)

But this "shortness" of time can be seen in the rushed labor of the York *Cycle*, the quick

ascension of the Pearl maiden, and the brevity of the *Miller's* and *Shipman's Tales.* All

of the texts I have analyzed here in this dissertation demonstrate that medieval writers

could and indeed did think in terms of time being measured out and as something

precious and of value. Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton did not "invent" or "discover" a

new sense of time as much as they simply continued and expanded upon earlier, medieval

notions of time expressed in late medieval English literature. When Quinones writes that

"for Shakespeare, the sense of effective management of time that Hall acquires sets him

apart from the ruined monarchs, Henry VI or Richard II, who presume on the older

conception of natural, unimpeded processes or on a premature sense of being," he is

completely overlooking how Chaucer's the *Miller's* and *Shipman's Tale* shows two

different characters managing time for the purpose of playing a trick (3). The ability to

reckon time and manage its use translated into social power in England long before

Shakespeare. In the literature of late medieval England, time-reckoning functioned both

to signify and establish rank and status.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

Asser, John. *Asser's Life of King Alfred.* Trans. L.C. Jane. New York: Cooper Square, 1966.

Augustine, Saint. *The City of God against the Pagans.* Ed. and Trans. David S. Wiesen. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1963.

---. *The Confessions of St. Augustine.* Trans. John K. Ryan. New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1960.

---. *Sermons.* Ed. J.P. Migne, *Patrilogia Latine*. vol. 38.

Beadle, Richard, Ed. *The York Plays.* London: Edward Arnold, 1982.

Bede: The Reckoning of Time. Trans. Faith Wallis. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999.

---. *Bede the Venerable Homilies on the Gospels, Book Two: Lent to the Dedication of the Church.* Trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst. Cistercial Studies Series 111. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991.

Bevington, David, ed. *Medieval Drama.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer.* 3rd ed. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987.

The Chronicle of St. Mary's, York, ed. H.H.E. Craster and M.E. Thornton, Surtees Society 148. Durham: Surtees Society, 1934.

Dives et Pauper. Vol. 1, Part 1. Ed. Priscilla Heath Barnum. EETS. London: Oxford UP, 1976.

English Historical Documents 1327-1485, Ed. A.R. Myers. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969.

English Mystery Plays. Ed. Peter Happé. London: Penguin Books, 1975.

The Fabric Rolls of York Minster. Ed. J. Raine, Surtees Society 35. Durham: Society by
   G. Andrews, 1859.

Gregory the Great: Forty Gospel Homilies. Trans. Dom David Hurst. Cistercian
   Studies Series 123. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990.

Johnston, Alexandra F. and Margaret Rogerson, ed. and trans. *Records of Early English
   Drama: York.* 2 vols. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979.

Lollard Sermons. Ed. Gloria Cigman. London: EETS, 1989.

Middle English Dictionary. Ed. Frances McSparran. 18 December 2001. University of
   Michigan. 15 September 2006 <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med/>.

Middle English Sermons. Ed. Woodburn O. Ross. London: Early English Text Society,
   1940.

Mirk, John. *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies.* Ed. Theodor Erbe. Pt. I. London:
   Early English Text Society, 1905.

On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomæus Anglicus De
   Proprietatibus Rerum. Vol. I. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

The Ordinal and Customary of the Abbey of St. Mary York. Ed. L. MacLachlan and J.B.
   L. Tolhurst. London: Harrison and Sons, 1936.

The Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press. 5 April 2005.
   <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century. Ed. Norman Davis. Oxford: Oxford
   UP, 1971.

Pearl. Ed. E.V. Gordon. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1953.

Pearl: A Middle English Poem. Ed. Charles Osgood. Boston: Heath & Co., 1906.

Pearl: An English Poem of the 14th Century. Ed. and Trans. Sir Israel Gollancz. London:
   D. Nutt, 1891.

The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript. Ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron. Exeter:
   U of Exeter Press, 1999. (1978)

Queen Mary's Psalter. Ed. George F. Warner. London: Printed for the Trustees of the
   British Museum, 1912.

Statutes of the Realm. 1810-28; reprint, London: Dawsons, 1963.

A Treatise on the Astrolabe. Ed. Sigmund Eisner. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2002.

The Vulgate Bible. Index Librorum Liberorum. Ed. John Walker. 10 May 2007. 5 April
     2005. <http://www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/Vulgate/Genesis.html>

Walter of Henley's Husbandry. Ed. and Trans. Elizabeth Lamond. London: Longmans,
     Green, 1890.

Wimbledon's Sermon: Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue. Ed. Ione Kemp Knight.
     Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1967.

Wyclif, John. *Select English Works of John Wyclif.* Vol. III. Ed. Thomas Arnold.
     Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871.

York Civic Ordinances, 1301. Ed. M. Prestwich, Borthwick Papers 49. York: St.
     Anthony's Press, 1976.

York Memorandum Book. Ed. M. Sellers, 2 vols., Surtees Society 120 and 125. Durham:
     St. Anthony's Press, 1912-15.

Secondary Texts

A Companion to the Gawain Poet. Ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson. Cambridge:
     D.S. Brewer, 1997.

Adams, Robert. "Some Versions of the Apocalypse: Learned and Popular Eschatology
     in *Piers Plowman.*" *The Popular Literature of Medieval England.* Ed. Thomas J.
     Heffernan. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1985. 194-236.

Aloni, Gila. "Extimacy in the *Miller's Tale*." *The Chaucer Review* 41 (2006): 163-184.

The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages. Ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn.
     Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992.

Ashley, Kathleen. "Cultural Approaches to Medieval Drama." *Approaches to Teaching
     Medieval English Drama.* Ed. Richard Emmerson. New York: Modern
     Language Association, 1990. 57-67.

Backhouse, Janet. *Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter.* Toronto: U of Toronto P,
     2000.

Baldwin, Frances E. *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England.*
     Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1926.

Barr, Helen. *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England.* Oxford: Oxford UP,
     2001.

Beadle, Richard and Pamela M. King. *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern
     Spelling*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Beadle, Richard. "The York Cycle." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English
     Theatre.* Ed. Richard Beadle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
     85-108.

Beckwith, Sarah. *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus
     Christi Plays.* Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2001.

Beeson, C.F.C. *English Church Clocks 1280-1850: History and Classification.* Sussex:
     The Antiquarian Horological Society, London, 1971.

Bennett, J.A.W. *Chaucer at Oxford and at Cambridge.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.

Bertolet, Craig E. " 'My wit is sharp; I love no taryinge': Urban Poetry and the
     Parlement of Foules." *Studies in Philology*. 93 (1996): 365-389.

Bevington, David. *Medieval Drama.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975.

Bishop, Ian. Pearl *in its Setting.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1968.

Blackhouse, Janet. *Medieval Rural Life in the Luttrell Psalter.* Toronto: U of Toronto P,
     2000.

Blanchard, I.S.W. "Labour Productivity and Work Psychology in the English Mining
     Industry, 1400-1600." *Economic History Review.* 2nd ser., 31. (1978)

Blenkner's "The Theological Structure of Pearl" in *The Middle English* Pearl. Ed. John
     Conley. Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970. 220-
     271.

Bloomfield, Morton W. *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse.* New
     Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1962.

Bogdanos, Theodore. Pearl: *Image of the Ineffable.* University Park: The Pennsylvania
     State UP, 1983.

Borgehammar, Stephan. "A Monastic Conception of the Liturgical Year." *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church.* Ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001.

Bowden, Muriel. *A Reader's Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer.* New York: Noonday Press, 1964.

Bowers, John M. *The Politics of* Pearl: *Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II.* Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001.

Brewer, Derek. *English Gothic Literature.* New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

Britnell, R.H. *The Commercialization of English Society 1000-1500.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Bullón-Fernández, María. "Private Practices in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale.*" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006): 141-174.

Burke, Peter. "Reflections on the Cultural History of Time." *Viator.* 35 (2004) 617-626.

Camargo, Martin. "Time as Rhetorical Topos in Chaucer's Poetry." *Medieval Rhetoric: A Casebook.* Ed. Scott D. Troyan. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. 91-107.

Camille, Michael. *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

---. "Visionary Perception and Images of the Apocalypse in the Later Middle Ages." *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992. 276-92.

Carruthers, Mary J. "Time, Apocalypse, and the Plot of *Piers Plowman.*" *Acts of Interpretations: The Text in its Contexts 700-1600.* Ed. Mary Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk. Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1982. 175-188.

Charity, A.C. *Events and Their Afterlife: The Dialectics of Christian Typology in the Bible and Dante.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966.

The Chaucer Encyclopedia. Ed. Dan Ransom. (Forthcoming)

Cipolla, Carlo M. *Clocks and Culture: 1300-1700.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1967.

Clarke, Sidney W. *The Miracle Play in England: An Account of the Early Religious Drama.* London: William Andrews & Company, 1897.

Clopper, Lawrence M. *Drama, Play, and Game.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001.

---. "Lay and Clerical Impact on Civic Religious Drama and Ceremony." *Contexts for Early English Drama.* Ed. Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 102-36.

Cohen, Jeffrey J. *Medieval Identity Machines.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003.

Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millenium.* 2nd ed. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961.

Collins, John J. *The Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre, Semeia* 14 (1979).

Contexts for Early English Drama. Ed. Marianne G. Briscoe and John C. Coldewey. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989.

Cullmann, Oscar. *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History.* Trans. Floyd V. Filson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949.

Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.* Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1963.

Dales, Richard C. "Time and Eternity in the Thirteenth Century." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988): 27-45.

Davenport, W.A. *The Art of the Gawain-poet.* London: Athlone Press, 1978.

Davies, Karen. "Time, Gender, Science and Everyday Life," *Time—Utopia— Eschatology.* Ed. Charlotte Methuen. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1999. 91-104.

De Landa, Manuel. *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History.* New York: Zone Books, 1997.

Dobson, R.B. "Craft Guilds and City: The Historical Origins of the York Mystery Plays Reassessed." *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*. Ed. Alan E. Knight. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997. 91-105.

Dohrn-van Rossum, Gerhard. *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders.* Trans. Thomas Dunlap. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.

Donaldson, E.T. *Chaucer's Poetry*. New York: Ronald Press, 1975.

Dorrell, Margaret. "Two Studies of the York Corpus Christi Play." *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 63-115.

Duby, George. *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West.* Trans. Cynthia Poston. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1968.

Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Dyer, Christopher. "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revold of 1381." *The English Rising of 1381.* Eds. R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 9-42.

Eade, J.C. *The Forgotten Sky: A Guide to Astrology in English Literature.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

Eisner, Sigmund and Marijane Osborn. "Chaucer as Teacher: Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe.*" *Medieval Literature for Children.* Ed. Daniel T. Kline. New York and London: Routledge, 2003. 155-187.

Emmerson, Richard Kenneth. *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature.* Seattle: U of Washington P, 1981.

---. "Apocalyptic Themes and Imagery in Medieval and Renaissance Literature." *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture.* Vol. 2. Ed. Bernard McGinn. New York: Continuum, 1998. 402-441.

---. "Introduction: The Apocalypse in Medieval Culture." *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992. 293-332.

---. "The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic, and the Study of Medieval Literature." *Poetic Prophecy in Western Literature.* Ed. Jan Wojcik and Raymond-Jean Frontain. Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1984. 40-54.

Emmerson, Richard K. and R.B. Herzman. "*The Canterbury Tales* in Eschatological Perspective." *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen. Belgium: Leuven UP, 1988. 404-24.

Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other.* New York: Columbia UP, 1983.

Fenn, Richard K. *The End of Time: Religion, Ritual, and the Forging of the Soul.* Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997.

Field, Rosalind. "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl.*" *The Modern Language Review*, 81 (1986): 7-17.

Fletcher, Jefferson B. "The Allegory of the Pearl." *JEGP*, 20 (1921): 1-21.

Fradenburg, Louise Olga. *City, Marriage, Tournament: Arts of Rule in Late Medieval Scotland.* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991.

Gross, Charlotte. "Courtly Language in *Pearl*." *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the Pearl-Poet*. Ed. Robert J Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, Julian N. Wasserman. Troy, NY: Whitson. 1991. 79-92.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Gurevich, A.J. *Categories of Medieval Culture.* Trans. G.L. Campbell. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1985. (1972)

Haas, Alois M. "Otherworldly Journey in the Middle Ages." *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*. Vol. 2. Ed. Bernard McGinn. New York: Continuum, 1998. 442-466.

Haber, F.C. "The Cathedral Clock and the Cosmological Clock Metaphor," *The Study of Time II*, ed. J.T. Fraser and N. Lawrence. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1975. 399-416.

Harder, Kelsie B. "Chaucer's Use of the Mystery Plays in the *Miller's Tale*." *MLQ,* 17 (1956), 193-98.

Harper, John. *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Hatcher, John. *Plague, Population and the English Economy 1348-1530.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977.

Heath, Peter. *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969.

Henisch, Bridget Ann. "In Due Season: Farm Work in the Medieval Calendar Tradition," *Agriculture in the Middle Ages: Technology, Practice, and Representation.* Ed. Del Sweeney. Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 1995. 309-336.

---. *The Medieval Calendar Year.* University Park: Penn State UP, 1999.

Hilton, Rodney. *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History.* London and New York: Verso, 1990.

Howard, Donald R. *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1976.

---.   *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and their Posterity.*
         Berkeley: U of California P, 1980.

Howes, Laura L. "Narrative Time and Literary Landscapes in Middle English Poetry."
         Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Sense of Place in Western Europe. Ed. John
         Howe and Michael Wolfe. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2002.

Hoy, James F. *The Staging Time of the York Cycle of Corpus Christi Plays.* Emporia
         State Research Studies, Vol. XXI, Winter 1973, No. 3.

Hume, Cathy. "Domestic Opportunities: The Social Comedy of the *Shipman's Tale.*"
         The Chaucer Review 41 (2006): 138-162.

Humphrey, Chris. "Time and Urban Culture in Late Medieval England." *Time in the
         Medieval World.* Ed. Chris Humphrey and W.M. Ormrod. Rochester: York
         Medieval Press, 2001.

Jager, Eric. "The Shipman's Tale: Merchant's Time and Church's Time, Secular and
         Sacred Space." *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of
         H.A. Kelly.* Ed. Donka Minkova and Theresa Tinkle. Frankfurt: Peter Lang,
         2003. 253-60.

James, M.K. *Studies in the Medieval Wine Trade.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Johnston, Alexandra F. and Margaret Dorrell. "The York Mercers and their Pageant of
         Doomsday, 1433-1526." *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 11-35.

Kaye, Joel. *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange,
         and the Emergence of Scientific Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Kerby-Fulton, Kathryn. *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman.* Cambridge:
         Cambridge UP, 1990.

Kiser, Lisa J. *Truth and Textuality in Chaucer's Poetry.* UP of New England, 1991.

Knapp, Peggy. *Chaucer and the Social Context.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Knapp, Robert S. "Penance, Irony, and Chaucer's Retraction," *Assays* 2 (1983).

Knight, Ione Kemp. *Wimbledon's Sermon: Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue*.
         Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1967.

Kolve, V.A. *The Play Called Corpus Christi.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966.

Kraman, Cynthia. "Body and Soul: *Pearl* and Apocalyptic Literature." *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse.* Ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Herson Moreno-Riano. International Medieval Research, Vol. 9. Belgium: Brepols, 2003. 355-62.

Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time," *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989. 197-217.

Laird, Edgar. "Astrolabes and the Construction of Time in the Late Middle Ages," *Disputatio* 2 (1997): 51-69.

Landes, David S. *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World.* Rev. and Expanded ed. Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2000.

Last Things: Death & the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages. Ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2000.

Le Goff, Jacques. *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages.* Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

---. *Your Money or Your Life: Economy and Religion in the Middle Ages.* New York: Zone Books, 1988.

Lowes, John Livingston. *Geoffrey Chaucer.* Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1958.

Martin, Alfred Wilhelm Otto von. *Sociology of the Renaissance.* Ed. Wallace K. Ferguson. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

McGinn, Bernard. *Visions of End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages.* New York: Columbia UP, 1979.

McKisack, May. *The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959.

The Medieval Concept of Time: The Scholastic Debate and its Reception in Early Modern Philosophy. Ed. Pasquale Porro. Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2001.

Mooney, Linne R. "The Cock and the Clock: Telling Time in Chaucer's Day." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 15 (1993): 91-109.

"Mosque Prayers Irk Michigan City" *CBS News* 20 April 2004. 8 January 2005. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/04/20/national/main612805.shtml>.

Muscatine, Charles. *Chaucer and the French Tradition; a study in style and meaning.* Los Angeles and Berkeley: U of California P, 1957.

Nisse, Ruth. *Defining Acts: Drama and the Politics of Interpretation in Late Medieval England.* Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2005.

Nolan, Barbara. *The Gothic Visionary Perspective.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977.

North, J.D. *Chaucer's Universe.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

---. "Monasticism and the First Mechanical Clocks." *Stars, Minds and Fate: Essays in Medieval Cosmology.* London: Humbledon Press, 1989. 171-86.

Norton-Smith, John. *Geoffrey Chaucer.* London: Routledge and Kegan, 1974.

Osborn, Marijane. *Time and the Astrolabe in* The Canterbury Tales. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2002.

Owst, G.R. *Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England.* New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961.

Pearsall, Derek and Elizabeth Salter. *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World.* London: Paul Elek, 1973.

The Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Ed. R.B. Dobson, 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1983.

Penn, S.A.C. and C. Dyer. "Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England; Evidence for the Enforcement of the Labour Laws." *Economic History Review.* 2nd ser. 43 (1990).

Price, Huw. *Time's Arrow and Archimedes' Point*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.

Prior, Sandra Pierson. *The Fayre Formez of the Pearl Poet.* East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1996.

---. "*Patience*—Beyond Apocalypse." *Modern Philology,* 83 (1986): 337-48.

---. *The Pearl Poet Revisited*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994.

Putter, Ad. *An Introduction to the 'Gawain'-Poet*. London: Longman, 1996.

Quinones, Ricardo J. *The Renaissance Discovery of Time.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972.

Reynolds, Susan. *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.

Richards, E.G. *Mapping Time: The Calendar and its History.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998.

Richardson, Janette. *Blameth Nat Me: A Study of Imagery in Chaucer's Fabliaux.* Paris: Mouton, 1970.

Rickert, Edith. *Chaucer's World.* Ed. Clair C. Olsen and Martin M. Crow. (New York and London: Columbia UP, 1948.

Riddy, Felicity. "Jewels in *Pearl*." *A Companion to the Gawain Poet.* Ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997. 143-156.

Rifkin, Jeremy. *Time Wars: The Primary Conflict in Human History.* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987.

Robertson, D.W., Jr. "The Pearl as a Symbol." *The Middle English* Pearl. Ed. John Conley. Notre Dame and London: U of Notre Dame P, 1970.

Root, Robert. *Poetry of Chaucer: a guide to its study and appreciation.* Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1957.

Rossum, Gerhard Dohrn-van. *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders.* Trans. Thomas Dunlap. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1996.

Rubin, Miri. *The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture.* Cambridge UP, 1991.

Russell, J. Stephen. *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form.* Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1988.

Scoville, Chester N. *Saints and the Audience in Middle English Biblical Drama.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004.

Seidel, Linda. "Apocalypse and Apocalypticism in Western Medieval Art." *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*. Vol. 2. Ed. Bernard McGinn. New York: Continuum, 1998. 467-506.

Seyffert, Oskar. *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art.* Avenal: Grammercy Books, 1995.

Shahar, Shulamith. *Childhood in the Middle Ages.* London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

Shlain, Leonard. *Sex, Time, and Power: How Women's Sexuality Shaped Human Evolution.* New York: Viking, 2003.

Sobel, Dava. *Longitude.* New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Spearing, A.C. *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1970.

Spector, Stephen. "Time, Space and Identity in the *Play of the Sacrament*." *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*. Ed. Alan E. Knight. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997. 190-200.

Sponsler, Claire. *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.

Staley, Lynn. "*Pearl* and the Contingencies of Love and Piety." *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry*. Ed. David Aers. Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 2000. 83-114.

---. "The *Pearl* Dreamer and the Eleventh Hour." *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the* Pearl-*Poet*. Ed. Robert J Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, Julian N. Wasserman. Troy, NY: Whitson. 1991. 3-16.

Stevens, Martin. "Postscript." *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 113-115.

---. "The York Cycle: From Procession to Play." *Leeds Studies in English* 6 (1972): 37-61.

Strohm, Paul. *Social Chaucer*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.

---. *Theory and the Premodern Text*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000.

Swanson, Heather. *Medieval Artisans: An Urban Class in Late Medieval England*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989.

Szittya, Penn. "Domesday Bokes: The Apocalypse in Medieval English Literary Culture." *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992. 374-397.

Teske, Roland J. "'Vocans temporales, faciens aeternos': St. Augustine on Liberation from time." *Traditio* 41 (1985): 29-47.

Thrupp, Sylvia. *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*. Chicago: 1948.

Tillyard, E.M.W. *Poetry Direct and Oblique*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1945.

Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse. Ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Herson Moreno-Riano. International Medieval Research, Vol. 9. Belgium: Brepols, 2003.

Time in the Medieval World. Ed. Chris Humphrey and W.M. Ormrod. Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2001.

Travis, Peter W. "Chaucer's *Chronographiae*, the Confounded Reader, and the Fourteenth-Century Measurements of Time." *Disputatio* 2 (1997): 1-34.

Tuck, J.A. "Nobles, Commons and the Great Revolt of 1381." *The English Rising of 1381.* Eds. R.H. Hilton and T.H. Aston. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. 194-212.

Turner, A.J. *The Time Museum*: *Astrolabes and Astrolabe Related Instruments.* Ed. Bruce Chandler. Rockford: The Time Museum, 1985.

Tuve, Rosemond. *Seasons and Months: Studies in a Tradition of Middle English Poetry.* Paris: Librairie Universitaire, 1933.

Twycross, Meg. "The Theatricality of Medieval English Plays." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre.* Ed. Richard Beadle. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Tydeman, William. "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre." *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre.* Ed. Richard Beadle. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

The Use and Abuse of Time in Christian History. Ed. R.N. Swanson. Rochester: Boydell Press, 2002.

Van Der Eerden, P.C. "Eschatology in the *Boec Van Der Wraken*." *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Werner Verbeke, Daniel Verhelst, and Andries Welkenhuysen. Belgium: Leuven UP, 1988. 425-40.

Voigts, Linda Ehrsam. "Scientific and Medical Books." *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475.* Ed. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.

Ware, R. Dean. "Medieval Chronology: Theory and Practice." *Medieval Studies: An Introduction.* 2nd ed. Ed. James M. Powell. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1992. 252-77.

Watkins, John. " 'Sengeley in Synglere': *Pearl* and Late Medieval Individualism." *Chaucer Yearbook* 2 (1995) 117-36.

Webster, James C. *The Labors of the Months.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1938.

Wellek, René. "The Pearl," *Studies in English*. Prague: Charles University, 1933. 5-33.

Wenzel, Siegfried. *Latin Sermon Collections from Later Medieval England.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Whitaker, Muriel A. "*Pearl* and Some Illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts," *Viator* 12 (1981): 183-96.

Wieck, Roger S. *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life.* New York: George Braziller Inc., 1988.

Wood, Chauncey. *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970.