UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

From Tower to Bower:

Constructions of Gender, Class, and Architecture in Middle English Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

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ABSTRACT

From Tower to Bower:

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by

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Starting with the Biblical *Song of Songs*, architectural structures of the castle and tower have served as a metaphor for women's bodies. Throughout the Middle Ages, this metaphor continued to stand in for the female body, emphasizing a desire in the cultural imagination that the female body should be impenetrable, their sexuality carefully controlled. With the advent of castle architecture in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the castle tower also became metonymically linked with the female body as women historically occupied this deepest—that is, the most architecturally inaccessible—space of the castle. This dissertation considers the trope of the female body entowered in romance, Middle English lyric, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, and in the Paston letters.

The architectural theory of access analysis contends that the deepest spaces of architecture, those that take the most architectural steps to reach, are the highest status spaces in an architectural structure. Aristocratic women were placed in these spaces both historically and in the literature of medieval England. Gaining access to these spaces and to the female bodies that inhabited them thus conferred status on the men who were lucky enough to do so. Social status was highly fluid and often contested in high to late medieval

England. The highly charged tower with its association with high status therefore became a site around which social status could be contested.

In this dissertation, I examine how authors whose status was contested—the cleric and the civil servant—manipulated the trope of the entowered woman to negotiate their own status. I do so by first situating the tropes as part of a real, historical understanding of castle architecture, rather than as part of an allegorical program. I then build on New Historicist theories that imagine the text as entering contemporary social conversations, but I further those theories by following so-called New Materialists, who argue that objects can have material effects in the historical world. Following Pierre Bourdieu, I consider texts not just as art qua art, but commodities jockeying for status in an economic and social world. I bridge the divide between discursive, ideological "effects" theorized by New Historicists and the material effects of what I consider to be the complex assemblage of the text, which is not reducible to the physical material of the text or the discursive/linguistic "matter" of the text. I argue that texts are a special kind of commodity, one in which the labor of the maker, the author, is not abstracted in the exchange process. The text, as it circulates via manuscript, carries with it, in the linguistic signs on the page, the intention of the author. As male authors imaginatively accessed the high status space of tower and its female occupant in the literature they produced, they thus made a radical claim for increasing their own social status. The dissertation concludes with a consideration of the women of the historical Paston family, who serve as a counterpoint to the ubiquitous trope of the entowered woman, as they chose to live in the lower status architectural program of the gentry manor house, where women were not relegated to the inaccessible space of the castle tower.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction

In Trinity College Cambridge MS 323, a poem written in both Latin and English occupies an unassuming place in the jumble of unorganized items filling the rather unassuming manuscript:

WEn þe turuf is þi tuur,
& þi put is þi bour,
Þi wel & þi wite þrote
ssulen wormes to note.
Wat helpit þe þenne
al þe worilde wnne?[1]

In every study of this poem, from Rosemary Woolf's monumental survey The *English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages*, to introductions and anthologies of Middle English lyric, the lyric is categorized as religious, and by implication ahistorical. Undoubtedly it is. But packed into this simple, six-line poem is a system of tropes that connect it with secular, political, aristocratic life. Rather than universalize the experience of death, as most memento mori do, this poem speaks to an audience of a very particular gender and status: the aristocratic woman. Its pointed mention of the throat evokes the throat of the bride in the *Song of Songs*, called there the tower of David ("Sicut turris David collum tuum, quae aedificata est cum propugnaculis" ["Thy neck is as the tower of David, which is built with

[1] All lyrics will be quoted from Carleton Brown's *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932).

bulwarks"]),[2] and the white throat is a motif used to describe the women throughout lyric, religious and secular, and the secular genre of romance. Moreover, the poem's double insistence on aristocratic domestic space, through the rhyming bour and tour, suggest a very particular critique of aristocratic life. As we shall see, bowers were often in towers, and both were constructed as high status spaces, both historically and in the literature of the period. This dissertation will take a materialist approach to texts such as "WEn þe turuf is þi tuur," reading such towers in the context of historical practice that linked women with towers, and that linked both with value within a social hierarchy. In the romances circulating in medieval England; in the lyrics of Harley 2253, Digby 86 and Trinity College 323; and in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, women are repeatedly placed in relation to the architectural construct of the tower. This dissertation examines each of these representations of women in towers, situating them within the historical, material context that produced them.

As this lyric demonstrates, and as I will argue throughout the dissertation, there is an inextricable link between class and gender constructs in the architecture of the period. Domestic architectures of differing status coded spaces gendered masculine or feminine in different ways. I argue that imagining women's bodies both in and as the interior space of the castle tower allows the texts' male authors to imagine various kinds of access: to women's bodies, to spaces gendered feminine, and to high status spaces that would have been inaccessible to lower status authors and readers. Though literary texts can ever only be a representation of the material world, they nevertheless give us a way to understand how

[2] Latin and English translation quoted from the *Canticle of Canticles*, *The Vulgate Bible*, Vol. 3, Douay-Rheims Translation, ed. Swift Edgar and Angela M. Kinney (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 4:4.

their authors, readers and patrons experience, comply with or resist that world and its "redundant materialism."[3] I contend that the trope of the woman contained in castle architecture was used by medieval authors to make claims on the material world in which they lived. Access to those spaces represented the possibility of raising these authors' social status. Thus the spaces they imagined both relied on the historical spaces that they occupied and sought to influence the way those spaces could be used.

This dissertation will map the spaces of these texts in order to demonstrate that their conception is based on contemporary architecture, that they can be read as real, and not just allegorical, spaces. Further, it will place these texts in their historical milieu in order to demonstrate that their authors are manipulating contemporary understandings of architecture, class and gender. Finally, I suggest that the rhetorical manipulation of the trope could enter the marketplace, not just as art, but as commodities that carry with them the intention of their creators, thereby containing within themselves the possibility of affecting the historical, material world in which they circulated.

While begging to be read in the context of thirteenth-century social and political culture, texts like "WEn þe turuf is þi tuur" do also draw on a long tradition in religious writing of metaphorically associating women with towers, often using that architectural construct in an allegorical way. While I will be reading these texts as operating within a secular milieu, devotional literature bolstered the simultaneously secular notions of the female body as valuable, closed, and enclosed. I will show that towers in the high to late Middle Ages were also metonymically linked to women, but the metaphorical association of women with towers begins with the Old Testament and the *Song of Songs*: "Thy neck is as

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[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge,

the tower of David." Where the towers in this study contain women, the tower to which the bride's neck is compared is her body, or a part of her body. The metaphor constructs the body itself as the container. In addition to being a tower, the bride's body is a "hortus conclusus," or a closed garden.[4] Again, garden as body is container. Medieval exegesis read the bride as a figure for Mary: her body is closed and inaccessible, yet miraculous and high status because it is where Jesus was conceived.[5] This was increasingly happening in the twelfth century, the period during which the earliest texts I study were being written.

This metaphoric tradition continued into the literature of the Middle Ages, where the association of Mary with tower or closed space becomes an association with the most high status and inaccessible contemporary architecture: the castle. The castle was developed in the high to late Middle Ages as both a military and domestic structure, and it was meant to be impenetrable, its towers being the most impenetrable of its spaces. Thus, with its advent, the castle could take on the same role as towers as metaphor for the female body. The Middle English translation of Robert Grossteste's *Chasteau de Amour*, for example, employs the extended metaphor of Mary as castle:

> This castil of solas and of socour
> Is hir blissed body that bar our saueour.
> Hit was made for refuyt to all manes kynde;
> Whoso fles therto, socour sal he fynde.
> The roche whit and fair with his stablenes

Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 88.

[4] *Canticle of Canticles*, 4:12.

Is the hert of hir in al halynes,

That sette hir to serue God withouten any drede

In souerayne clene meknes and clene maydenhede.

The grene colour bi the ground, that wil so wele last,

Is the treuth of our lady, that ay was stedefast.

The meyne colour in the myddest of this castil walle

Was stable hope to come to grace, that saue mankynd sall.

The rede colour abouen, brennand in the si 3 t,

Was brennand loue of God and man, that gyues mykil li 3 t.

No wonder [i]f this castil ware ful whit withinne,

For the hert of that may was neuer foulyd with synne.

The four toures gret and strong, that fair were to se,

Ware gastly strenght and sobernes, ri 3 t and sutilte; (395-412)[6]

Though the text does not explicitly say so, Mary's "maydenhede" is guaranteed by her being a castle: the mention of the "castil walle" makes clear that the integrity of the Marian body is dependent on the integrity of the architectural structure.

In texts such as these, Mary and her association with towers registers the way that closed or chaste body becomes a closed or inaccessible space. Both body and space are closed, inaccessible. Moreover, this transference of metaphoric vehicle from simply tower

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[5] For a discussion of the medieval tradition of reading the bride as Mary, see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 151-77.

[6] Quoted from *The Middle English Translations of Robert Grossteste's Chateau d'Amour*, ed. Kari Sajavaara (Helsinki: Société Néophilogique 1967).

or garden to castle in these cases situates these texts within a contemporary milieu that values the castle, and more specifically the tower, as a sacred and valuable space. While both medieval exegesis and the scholarly tradition have focused on Mary's body, I will argue that this more general association of women with towers in literature, which develops in part out of this tradition, will be appropriated by clerical authors of both religious and secular texts as a useful model for conceptualizing issues of access to spaces like towers and castles and the female bodies that occupy them.

The Marian lyrics provide the ideal against which this high status female is judged by these poems. She represents the ideal love object, and the courtly lady becomes spoken of in a courtly idiom. She is a "maide milde" in "Look on Me With Thy Sweet Eyes," and the "feirest flour of eni felde" in "Mater Salutaris." But read in the context of these lyrics, the love lyrics of Harley 2253 labeled secular in fact register a religious valence that lies entirely outside of debased sexuality. In "I Sing of One That is Matchless," she is "wit-uten sunne and wit-uten hore" [defilement] (5). In "Gaude Virgo Mater Christi," the immaculate conception is figured as having "bar him seluen into is clos." Mary's womb, then, is an enclosed place, but the ideal enclosed place, not accessible to anyone but Jesus, both her son and the ideal man. Mary is also the ideal companion to the speakers, and to Jesus. They are the only men with whom Mary interacts. When read against these, the courtly love lyrics that long for access to a woman might be read as the clerical authors' longing for the appropriate kind of access to the best kind of woman.

The thirteenth-century *Hali Meiðhad*, a text written for religious women, and virgins in particular, participates in this tradition by situating virgins in relation to towers. In this text, the tower is no longer a metaphor for the body of the virgin, but is a metaphorical spatial representation of the place of virgins in a hierarchy of women. In it, the virgin's

occupation of the tower of Jerusalem signifies her place at the top of the hierarchy of women, with married women and widows falling below her in this hierarchy. Though the tower draws on the contemporary understanding of towers as high status, it remains not a tower in the material, historical world, but the tower of Jerusalem. This tower does not in fact represent the historical tower of the period. Furthermore, the tower stands in a void landscape, both spatial and social. There is no description of the tower's placement in a larger landscape comprised of land or buildings, and no people beside the virgin occupy this tower. While the text puts virgins in the highest space of the tower to signal their place within the hierarchy, the tower remains allegorical, since, when women fall from the top of this tower, they fall straight to hell.

While *Hali Meiðhad* places women in a tower isolated from its castle context, another medieval English devotional text, *Ancrene Wisse*, exhorts its enclosed, anchoritic female audience to view their bodies as castles. This advice depends on the fact that the castle—aristocratic and heavily fortified—operated as an impenetrable site of power in the landscape of medieval England, both symbolically and materially. The figure of body-as-castle imagines a double barrier to the anchorite herself. She already has an anchorhold, whose interior she is told should be inaccessible to men, including clerics, and even obscured from sight through the use, for instance, of dark curtains. And with her body imagined as a castle and anchorhold, it is projected outward as distinct from herself in a second layer of fortification. This has the further effect of creating an inside to that structure. A particular kind of feminine interiority is thus produced: doubly barred from the outside world, it is meant to be unviewable and unknowable to that outside world.

All of these texts, wholly religious, draw on the contemporary perception of castles, and in particular towers, as high status spaces. Nevertheless, they remain allegorical, castle

and tower working as extended metaphor for Mary or for social place. Architecture itself remains simply a metaphor for the body, and does not gesture toward the actual secular use of the historical, material tower of the Middle Ages.

In the line of religious texts discussed above, scholarly treatment of architecture has been limited to allegorical readings. In his seminal *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard demonstrates how powerfully imaginative literature produces the image of domestic space as a mirror of the structure of our unconscious.[7] He writes that "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home":[8] "Topoanalysis, then, would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives."[9] House is not a house but the representation of the unconscious. In "Allegorical Buildings in Mediaeval Literature," Jill Mann restricts herself to religious texts that explicitly use architecture as allegory. She traces the roots of allegorical buildings in texts such as *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Piers Plowman* as well as the already mentioned *Chasteau d'Amour* to the buildings of the Old and New Testaments.[10] What interests her, she says, is these representations' "static qualities[,]" that "the building does not do anything itself [and that] it seems difficult for the writer to do anything *with* it, other than to attach labels to its various parts which will identify them with appropriate abstract qualities[.]"[11] In the texts examined in this dissertation, buildings are not static, and writers do much with them beyond allegorizing

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[7] Trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

[8] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 5.

[9] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. 8.

[10] Mann, "Allegorical Buildings," *Medium AEvum* 63:2 (1994): 191-210.

[11] Mann, "Allegorical Buildings," p. 191, original emphasis.

abstract qualities. I do not seek Bachelard's "sphere of pure sublimation,"[12] or Mann's allegorical buildings, but rather am interested in how the subject encounters the material, external world. Indeed, one aim of my project is to demonstrate how much the representations of architecture in these literary texts depend on contemporary architecture to suggest that these represented spaces can to some extent be mapped. Pierre Bourdieu's observation that social place is tied to physical place, discussed below, prompts a resituating of the trope of women in towers in literature into the material cultural context of the high to late Middle Ages. Architectural metaphors in relation to Mary and to religious women more generally deserve a study in their own right, but this dissertation will move away from those writings to consider the popular trope of lay aristocratic women.

While *Hali Meiðhad* especially uses space metaphorically to locate women's place within a religious hierarchy, this linking of space to place can play out with literal spaces and social hierarchy. Architecture was then as it is today a key way in which people organize space: it is not just a material with which historical, material human agents interact; it is a material that contains those human agents and projects the ideal world of those human agents in a complex dialectic. Drawing on Erwin Panofsky's argument that Gothic architecture is a material manifestation not of scholastic content but of the scholastic modus operandi, Bourdieu initiated a materialist approach to understanding social constructs in developing the concept of *habitus*, whereby social structures are maintained and propagated by the material conditions in which they are lived. It is through everyday practice, unspoken and unquestioned by the subjects that enact it, that a "commonsense world endowed with the

[12] Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. xxix.

objectivity secured by consensus of meaning" is produced.[13] Inhabited spaces are a particularly rich site for such social production, because they establish relations between people, things, and practices.[14] According to Bourdieu, architecture is part of a coherent system; it is a "redundant material" that has a "rationale."[15] He uses the idea of "social position" to demonstrate the inextricable link between the material and the social.[16] Thus social *place* is established through a particular location in *space*. Position in place is no longer a metaphor for place within a hierarchy, but is the material condition that established place.

Of course, while material architectural spaces are static, the way in which people might both use and experience them is not necessarily predetermined. After all, active human agents have the option of resisting the use prescribed by the built environment. My project brings a fresh way of examining this tension between intended and actual use by employing a materialist approach to study the medieval texts that foreground architectural space and embodied subjects. It aims in the first place to situate the representation of architecture in these literary texts within the context of architectural practices to suggest that these represented spaces can to some extent be mapped. I then consider how literary texts can also offer their authors and audiences space for imagining alternatives and even affect, through those imaginings, the social world into which the texts entered. In addition to reading architectural constructs as material, as real things in a historical world, I want to link

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[13] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline*, p. 80.

[14] Bourdieu, *Outline*, p. 89.

[15] Bourdieu, *Outline*, p. 88.

[16] Bourdieu, *Outline*, p. 82.

the representation of those real spaces to the very real, material vehicles that sent those representations out into the world: the material manuscripts.

I want to read literature as a material in this sense, as agential, but to place it back within a specifically dialectical materialist framework. My thinking is influenced by "New Materialist" thinkers, who insist that we recognize that objects can affect the material world. Therefore my intervention is to consider texts in this way. I build on Marxist literary critics' analysis that shows texts participating in class struggle, but I intend to show that they can have an effect on that class struggle, and not just reflect it. In particular I am responding to Paul Strohm's critique of New Historicism, wherein he argues that the New Historicist methodology fails to connect rhetorical struggles within texts to the struggles happening in those texts' contemporary historical worlds.

Recently, neo-Marxists have sought to expand the potentials of a Marxist materialist approach by, for instance, considering cultures not driven by pure capitalism, by retheorizing the commodity, or by tracing the historical emergence of the fetish as a concept. At the same time, thinkers like Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett have raised the status of the object, crediting it with ontological equality with the human, in opposition to the traditional Marxist move of relegating human belief in object agency to mere false consciousness. "New Materialist" theorists have expanded the notion of what might count as material, what we might think of as having agency, and how that agency might work.

The "material" has long been engaged by literary theory. Certainly the power of texts, of the discursive, has been attested by any number of critical approaches in terms of constituting subjects and subjectivities, whether we are talking about gendered subjects, post-colonial subjects, or the like. And "textual" cultures like bureaucracy, law, and advertising, have been shown to have powerful effects on the behaviors and social

organization of populations. Since the advent of New Historicism, literary critics have amply demonstrated that literary texts also enter into contemporary political and social conversations, but the level at which they are considered remains primarily discursive. In a recent review of a trend of "post-historical" essay collections, Paul Strohm defends New Historicism while offering a critique of its "under-theorization of the relation between text and context," stating "that its problem with history was not being nearly historical enough."[17] He faults New Historicism for being "reliant…upon an unacknowledged belief in some kind of historical spirit-medium or ether in which unexpected cultural affinities might emerge and repetitions occur, by an unexplained process of effortless transmission."[18]

Marxist literary critics could be accused of the same, though they have offered compelling methodologies by which to read class or social consciousness in texts. Frederic Jameson argues that we can read a dialectical process in texts, in which class tensions and disenfranchised voices can be read in between the lines, but those voices and tensions must be recovered, because the texts themselves employ narrative strategies to write over those tensions to produce hegemonic order: he offers "a perspective and a method whereby the 'false' and the ideological can be unmasked and made visible."[19] According to Jameson, texts only maintain the status quo. Texts are read as sedimentations of social processes, or, if Jameson sees texts as participating in social processes, at best they are working to squash them. They register a history already made by a dominant social class; they do not

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[17] "Historicity without Historicism," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 1 (2010): 381.

[18] Strohm, "Historicity," p. 381.

[19] Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 53.

themselves make history. Strohm, eminent medievalist and valiant defender of the use of theory in a field that has long resisted it, offers something of an apology for Jameson's approach in an essay that explicitly alludes to Jameson's title: "Chaucer's Lollard Joke: History and the Textual Unconscious."[20] He claims to be looking for "gaps, traces, and other derivatives of a textual unconscious."[21] He acknowledges that texts "certainly have a conscious too," and he finds their self-declarations worth attention, as well. But in "solicit[ing] theory's support in addressing what a text leaves unsaid—not just what it means to say, but what it cannot know, or especially, knows but will not or cannot say,"[22] he imagines what a text might say "unconsciously" and what a text implicitly, perhaps, but purposefully, says, to be mutually exclusive. He does not imagine the text to be meaning to say something, but in an inexplicit way. He does gesture toward the idea that the text might contain content that lies at the boundary of the conscious and unconscious, that it might be preconscious, but he doesn't assign agency to anyone in particular, not the author, not the text, nor even the reader: the text simply "reveals traces of [its] aggressive charge."[23] Who or what put those traces there? He also does an extensive job of putting Chaucer's "Lollard joke" in its historical and cultural context, but he stops short at imagining an audience's response, and only imagines this response at a purely ideological level, without suggestions of material consequences to such a joke. He says simply that he is "suggest[ing] that

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[20] *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995): 23-42.

[21] Strohm, "Lollard Joke," p. 23.

[22] Strohm, "Lollard Joke," p. 25.

[23] Strohm, "Lollard Joke," p. 36.

Chaucer's joke *enters* a period of social unrest that complements its own restless textual center," and the text's "'thought' is hostile to emergent Lollard theology."[24]

Raymond Williams' Marxist hermeneutic is much more congenial to my methodology. For Williams, texts can register what he calls "structures of feeling," that is styles and modes not yet formalized and appropriated by any hegemonic structure. Cultural materialism's engagement with marginalized groups and its desire to locate hegemony and potentials for its subversion also informs my methodology, and I especially subscribe to Williams' definition of fluid social processes, wherein individuals can maneuver with flexibility and creativity within dominant hegemonic structures. But where he looks for texts' registration of emergent forms, I look for the ways that texts can create emergent forms.

I want to further theorize the "relation between text and context," in a move that is admittedly speculative, in what I take to be the spirit of some "New Materialists." While I do not see so-called New Materialisms as a radical break from the old ones, I think they provide something that old materialisms do not: that is their insistence that we find new ways to account for what objects do to and for us in material, lived, often quotidian ways. I suggest that we put literature in this narrower context and not leave it in the "ether," as Strohm puts it. I want to do this by connecting rhetorical and poetic strategies within texts to the possible material effects that those texts in circulation might have on audiences, in a way that accounts for the intentions of texts. I want to bridge the divide between discursive, ideological "effects" within society at large and material effects in the micro, individual daily dialectic described by people like Bourdieu, Althusser, and de Certeau, amongst others.

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[24] Strohm, "Lollard Joke," p. 37.

Texts are of course a very special kind of material, insofar as the "matter," or contents—textual, linguistic, imaginary—are not reducible to the materials that make the object that bears them: parchment, paper, ink, letters, words, and their physical placement on the page. I want to think materiality in a way that combines these definitions of matter. On the one hand, I want to think about these texts as objects that travel in the world, that are written, that fall into the hands of others, that are then read by others. At the same time, I want to think them as complex assemblages, having agential capacities that are not reducible either to the physical materials that make up the text or the discursive/linguistic "matter" of the text, but to think both together on a continuum constituting the materiality of the text.

In "Medieval Materialism: A Manifesto," Kellie Robertson reminds us that such a conception of materiality is not in fact wholly new.[25] Aristotelianism first conceived of matter as inextricable from metaphysical form, or to put it in the terms of this study, the "material" of the textual object and the immaterial textual contents. Aristotle's philosophy was deemed too material by the medieval church:[26] it was seen as giving not enough agency to matter, but also too much, in that he considered change an innate principle of matter itself. "Rupture narratives," locating modern notions of materialism in the so-called early modern period's rediscovery of the mechanistic atomism of Lucretius, posit a break away from the Aristotelian Middle Ages. But Robertson demonstrates that throughout the medieval period Aristotle was "an engaged interlocutor," not "oppressor," of atomistic materialism. Following Latour, she questions the definition of the material as "pure" matter and advocates for a dialogism in defining materialism.

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[25] *Exemplaria* 22:2 (2010): 99-118.

[26] Robertson, "Medieval Materialism," p. 105.

The material and immaterial, conceived both in the medieval and post-modern moments, are thus a two-way street. Robertson suggests that "Instead of seeing a thing as reducible only to its physical properties or matter reducible to extended substance, we might be able to see an object as determined in part by the sedimented notions of thinghood operative at the moment of its own production."[27] In particular she notes that pre-modern science depended on metaphor to describe its observations, that natural philosophy and poetics shared a rhetoric dependent on metaphor in struggling with "the problem of delineating a continuum from corporeal to cosmological," and that "medieval natural philosophy contributed substantially to the 'horizon of expectation' [borrowing from Jauss] that educated medieval readers brought to the poetic texts they read."[28]

The notion of an author's individuality inhering in the text is one I would like to insert into a neo-Marxist conception of the commodity. Traditional Marxism tends to see the medieval as a pre-capitalist, even utopian period in which laborers were not abstracted from their work. This narrative has largely been overturned in terms of most kinds of made objects, but I want to think of texts as an exception, especially as conceived in the medieval period. I follow Arjun Appadurai's lead in redefining commodity as "any thing [that is] intended for exchange,"[29] whether that's in a system of monetary or cultural capital. Appadurai refers not to commodities as a delimited category but to the "commodity potential" of any given object over the course of its "social life." I argue that in the medieval

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[27] Robertson, "Medieval Materialism," p. 110.

[28] Robertson, "Medieval Materialism," p. 111.

[29] "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 9. [3-63].

period, texts could be thought of as commodities, operating both as they were exchanged (in some cases in purely social, one might say "gift," contexts, in others within a system of patronage) *and* as they were consumed, *that is, read*. In a strictly Marxist sense, texts do abstract the labor of the authors into objects insofar as those objects (manuscripts) then circulate and organize the social lives of those who read them, but unlike other objects, manuscripts carry with them, on their surface, the presence of those who authored them, in the complex of meaning that I am considering part of the assemblage of the text. Because the labor of the author is not overwritten entirely by the entrance of the textual object into circulation, the dialectic relationship of material to social world is not necessarily one of negation, that is, the materiality of the work and body of the author is not completely lost when the made object becomes a commodity. Texts, unlike other commodity objects, make at least one moment of their own prior "histories" available on their surface and suggest possible uses.

Robertson discusses how this particularly happened in the fourteenth century in the wake of labor laws that responded to the new problem of social and geographical mobility of laborers enabled by the labor shortage brought on by the plague: "Poets like Chaucer (among others) responded to the labor laws' demand for visible work by representing the intangible work of writing in ways designed to show that written work (like carting or plowing) was also available for correction and control; vernacular writers were thus forced to embody their own work within their texts."[30] Moreover, "By conceiving of labor as something that could be located in various literal and figurative 'containers'—for example, a literary text…—… writers…found ways of investing labor and its products with new social, literary, and

metaphysical power."[31] While pre-plague texts did not explicitly engage a discourse of material labor, I think that we can take the strategies of post-plague texts as drawing on the potential of authors to be materially embodied in their texts already implicit in medieval culture. Indeed Robertson notes that the much earlier author of *Havelock the Dane*, while not interested in "a nexus of everyday exchange," nevertheless is invested "in staging his own work within the poem."[32] While earlier poets could disavow the material and economic in their "immaterial" work,[33] Robertson argues that a "fiction of presence" that was always there only becomes "strategic" and particularly interested in avowing the material in the fourteenth century.[34]

I want to suggest that the author's presence, which originates with the author outside of the text, nevertheless comes to reside in the text, in a way that does not completely alienate the maker of the object, the author, from the object itself, that the intent of the author is in fact on the object, on its very surface. Where most objects tell us nothing about who made them, where or how, tell us nothing about how their makers imagined or intended them being used or consumed, texts might register some or all of these things, and we as literary critics might sometimes find it.

Manuscript studies are one way in which literary scholars have tacked the "material." These tend to do so in two ways. The first is in terms of "textuality," that is, how the text in

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[30] Kellie Robertson, *The Laborer's Two Bodies: Labor and the "Work" of the Text in Medieval Britain, 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 4.

[31] Robertson, *Laborer's Two Bodies*, p. 6.

[32] Robertson, *Laborer's Two Bodies*, p. 40.

[33] Robertson, *Laborer's Two Bodies*, p. 44.

question within its literary or paratextual context, i.e. the other linguistic signifiers, and the way they are organized on a page or across a manuscript, produce meaning. The other tends to consider kinds of manuscript, like luxury or plain, vellum or paper, how they were disseminated, and by whom they were owned or possibly read. This second strand of manuscript study especially informs my methodology.

It is my conviction that the work of New Historicists and Marxist historical materialists are right to see the literary as caught up in, and registering political, social, and other historical events and processes. I want to go a step farther, however, in order to connect rhetorical and poetic strategies within texts to the possible material effects that those texts in circulation might have on its audiences, in a way that accounts for the intentions of a text, immediate effects those texts might have on its audiences, and the wider social repercussions those effects might have. Again, citing Strohm, New Historicism has tended to "treat the text as naïve," and he advocates instead for "due attention to form and authorial choice."[35] As Strohm has argued, historicists assume material effects, but I argue that they do not show what those effects might be. I pay particularly close attention to what I think are authorial choices attempting to have very particular effects on particular readers, and where there is evidence, to suggest how readers were actually affected. I want to bridge the divide between discursive "effects" within society at large and effects proper, that is, those at a micro-, individual level.

If we follow Bourdieu, we can argue that their very entrance into the realm of literature qua literature, or art, enters them into a field where the relations between social

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[34] Robertson, *Laborer's Two Bodies*, p. 40.

[35] "Historicity," p. 386.

agents are objectified by their literary productions.[36] The texts I study, and so their authors, enter into a struggle: "The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces,* but it is also a *field of struggles*, tending to transform or conserve this field of forces. The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement their struggles to defend or improve their positions…, strategies which depend for their forces and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations."[37]

Bourdieu also makes clear how the economic and power relations inherent in artistic production are nevertheless only effectively negotiated by being disavowed by those productions:

> The art business, a trade in things that have no price, belongs to the class of practices in which the logic of the pre-capitalist economy lives on…. These practices, functioning as practical negations, can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing. Defying ordinary logic, they lend themselves to two opposed readings, both equally false, which each undo their essential duality and duplicity by reducing them either to the disavowal or to what is disavowed—to disinterestedness or self-interest. The challenge which economies based on disavowal of the 'economic' present to all forms of economism lies precisely in the fact that they function, and can function, in practice—and not merely in the agents' representations—only by virtue of a constant, collective repression of narrowly

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[36] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 30.

[37] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 30.

'economic' interest and of the real nature of the practices revealed by 'economic' analysis.[38]

I then consider how literary texts can also offer their authors and audiences space for imagining alternatives and even affect, through those imaginings, the social world into which the texts entered. This is how I intend to bridge the gap between "text" and "context." Texts are not simply a series of signifiers on a page, reflecting a static world. They imagine other ways of being in the world. As they travel through the historical world and are consumed, or read, they bring with them those imaginings. Architectural constructs were static, but texts could travel in ways that bodies could not. While architecture made certain spaces inaccessible to lower class bodies, texts could circulate through those spaces, bringing with them a new way of conceptualizing the use of them.

The symbolic status of the tower and its use as residential space began with the Norman Conquest. In the Anglo-Saxon period, houses were wooden and single storied. The term bower, or bour in Middle English, comes from the single storied sleeping chamber, called *bur* in Old English. In early Norman domestic architecture of the twelfth century, archaeologists have identified a bipartite structure, with the hall on one end of the house, and the solar, or chamber block at the other. This chamber block would have been two-storied.[39] At this point the room became known also as the *camera* in Latin, or the *chaumbres* in French. Often this chamber block incorporated a service room below it. Thus, already the private space for living is higher than that for the more mundane tasks of service, and

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[38] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 74.

[39] Some evidence exists that these existed pre-Conquest, but they were most likely brought over by Edward the Confessor's Norman favorites. See M.W. Thompson, *The Rise of the Castle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 12.

separates from the public space of the hall.[40] This higher status of the solar block is also evidenced by the fact that the end of the hall closest to it had a dais, literally a raised platform on which lord and lady would sit, and sometimes this would be accompanied by a canopy, thus marking the space off from the lower end of the hall, conceived as the space for people of a lower place in the social hierarchy. It is also with the Norman Conquest that stone begins to be regularly used for castle or manor house building. With the need to subdue the population, and the difficult upkeep of wooden structures, stone became the favored building material. Stone was therefore also a sign of high status, as it was used explicitly to build the high status structures of the aristocracy.

In the eleventh century, we begin to see the attempt to put all of the rooms of the building under one single roof. This is called a "proto-keep" by M.W. Thompson.[41] The most striking example of this is of course William the Conqueror's White Tower, a rectangular stone block that housed everything from domestic apartments to chapel. These "proto-keeps" were designed specifically as defensive structures, and would develop into the large, thick walled and highly defensible Norman keeps of the twelfth-century. Large stone keeps were developed by the Normans after they arrived in England since they do not appear for some time after the conquest. These keeps were not just meant to be defensible, however; they were also signs of status and power as the local population had to be subdued.

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[40] Also extant are what are known as upper or first floor halls, where ground floor was used for storage, and the upper floor was the public hall space. Some debate exists about whether these were in fact the solar block, with a wooden hall built adjacent but no longer extant. For the debate, see Jane Grenville, *Medieval Housing* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pp. 69-72.

[41] Thompson, *The Rise of the Castle*, p. 72.

In studying the royal castles of the thirteenth century, Phillip Dixon and Beryl Lott come to the conclusion that the function of the keep was as much status symbol as defensive structure.[42] By this time royal castles were concentric, and so the tower keep was one structure amongst many within the castles outer wall. The royal castles of Edward I and Edward II had central tall towers meant to house royal officials, which expressed the dominion of the king more than focusing on architectural embellishment. In the case of towers in Wales, for example, they demonstrated to the defeated Welsh aristocracy just how powerful the kings of England were. All of this leads Dixon and Lott to surmise that royal towers of the thirteenth century "were clearly defensible, but the emphasis seems to be more on the signaling out of the lord's apartments above the roofs of an adjacent building range."[43] The incorporation of towers into the specifically residential spaces of the castle continues into the fourteenth century, including either the solar block, more inaccessible and physically higher than the rest of the structures of the building, or sometimes specifically a tower.[44] The idea of the chamber as high status and inaccessible develops out of its location in towers, in contrast to the open public space of the hall.

As archaeologists have shown, either explicitly in the case of Dixon and Lott, or implicitly in the case of other histories of the castle tower, it was a high status space for multiple reasons. It was located higher in space than the other buildings, it housed the most

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[42] "The Courtyard and the Tower: Contexts and Symbols in the Development of Late Medieval Great Houses," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 146 (1993): 93-101.

[43] Dixon and Lott, "The Courtyard and the Tower," p. 95. The discussion comes from this essay, pp. 93-95.

[44] See P.A. Faulkner, "Castle Planning in the Fourteenth Century," *Archaeological Journal* 120 (1963): 219.

important residents of the castle, whether the family itself or the representative of the lord or king, and it was the most defensible. The repeated placement of women in literature and in history in these high status places marks their bodies as high status and valuable, as well.

While the devotional texts produce a feminine interiority that imagines multiple spatial steps to access that interiority, archaeological evidence shows that the interiors of actual castles materially enacted social and gender constructs through their strongly coded series of spaces. Theorizing the way spaces reflect and influence the social relationships of people moving through those spaces, architects Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson paved the way for archaeologists to analyze how medieval spaces influenced social interaction. Their major contribution to how archaeologists think about space is access analysis, which describes the ease and manner of access (or restriction thereof) within a building.[45] They theorize that the more architectural steps it takes to reach a space, the higher the status of that space and thus the higher the status, or value, of the bodies residing in that space. Late medieval English architecture was highly normalized to the extent that archaeologists can

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[45] Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, *The Social Logic of Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). They note that structuralist anthorpologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss had difficultly arriving at a way of understanding the principle of space itself, since, while some societies clearly invested much social significance in their spatial forms, and so space in those cases could be understood as projecting "social and mental processes" externally onto spatial forms, other societies do not seem to invest anything in space at all (pp. 4-5, quoting Lévi-Strauss). They also take issue with semiologists, who are "for the most part...attempting to show how buildings represent society as signs and symbols, not how they help to constitute it through the way in which configurations of buildings organise space" (p. 8). They instead seek to understand the logic underpinning all human use of space, to use local examples to come to a global rule rather than the other way around. Their system for analyzing space develops out of the observation of one society "that structure had by implication been conceptualised in terms of restrictions on an otherwise random process [of space aggregation]" (p. 10). They arrive at a system of analysis by considering spatial arrangements as a "morphic language" whose syntax, which allows for variation, can be studied.

refer to a typical and even "idealized" plan for high status domestic architecture.[46] This plan is in fact highly attested in extant medieval buildings. And just as *Hali Meiðhad* uses the architectural element of the tower to represent its value system, the medieval hall used space to symbolically represent the social status of its inhabitants and visitors. The lord and lady sat at the "high" end of the hall, their table even sometimes raised on a dais.[47] This end of the hall often also provided access to the sleeping chamber and later the parlor when it developed.[48] Lower status people, on the other hand, sat at the "low" end of the hall where the service rooms were also located.[49] That low status people had a place in the hall demonstrates its relatively high accessibility. As spatial analysis reminds us, this accessibility worked simultaneously materially and socially: the hall took a relatively low number of architectural steps to reach and was accessible to a wide range of people of differing social status.

While the high status but very public high end of the hall was the prerogative of the lord, the spaces beyond were coded both more intimate and feminine. In these spaces, the overlap of status and gender constructs becomes particularly visible. Every hall had a great chamber, a far less accessible and higher status space than the hall, being reserved for

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[46] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, pp. 89-90; Mark Gardiner, "Buttery and Pantry and their Antecedents: Idea and Architecture in the English Medieval House," in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 37-65.

[47] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, p. 89.

[48] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, p. 115.

[49] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, p. 89-90.

sleeping quarters or private audience with the lord or lady.[50] While both men and women would have slept, ate, and received high status visitors there, women's exclusion from the activities of the hall and relegation to the chamber led them to be closely associated with that space. As Mark Girouard notes, "[o]n the occasions of great feasts ladies, if involved at all, often ate in a chamber, separate from the men in the hall--perhaps because it was taken for granted that men would get drunk."[51] Studying probate inventories of the later medieval bourgeoisie, P.J.P. Goldberg writes"[w]hereas expenditure on the hall and the parlour or summerhall, the more public areas of the house, were probably as much priorities of the husband as the wife, expenditure on the chamber or, where there were plural chambers, the principal chamber represents investment in the most intimate space within the house."[52] His evidence suggests that "this represents the wife's priority and that the chamber...can also be seen to represent space particularly associated with the wife."[53] The higher the status of the household, the greater this segregation of women's quarters into even more private and inaccessible spaces.[54] Roberta Gilchrist has shown that amongst nobles women often had their own separate households, which were often positioned in the upper ends of halls or the

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[50] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, p. 115.

[51] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 45.

[52] P.J.P. Goldberg, "The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Later Medieval England: A Material Culture Perspective," in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 137-38.

[53]Goldberg, "Fashioning," pp. 138.

[54] Roberta Gilchrist, 'Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body', in S. Kay and M. Rubin (eds.), *Framing Medieval Bodies*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 53.

highest parts of castles, many times incorporating towers into the female quarters.[55] In these largest households, there were multiple chambers, but the chamber as a symbolic space nevertheless remained associated with women. Just as *Ancrene Wisse* constructs an inaccessible feminine interior within the castle, the architecture of the period coded the inaccessible interiors of castles as feminine. The literature of the period thus reflects and intensifies the cultural association of women with these most interior, inaccessible and high status spaces, particularly the chamber and the highly symbolic tower. The historical practice that placed women there, as a sign of men's power and status, was both drawn upon in representing women and towers and reinforced by the literature.

The literature of Medieval England provides a perfect example of how this might operate both materially and imaginatively. Women resided in these deep spaces, and the literature of the period also placed them there. Accessing them, then, could become a sign of status in its own right. I argue that the trope of access then became a locus for negotiating the status of those who imagined it. To bring us back to Bourdieu as well as Hillier and Hanson, a body's location in space was also an indication of social place. Achieving a physical place in these spaces could raise the status of an individual in hierarchical place.

While women were associated with the tower and bower, they were not, in fact, the only people who occupied them. Aristocratic men, too, would have lived in these spaces. As the texts that I engage imagined access to the bodies of women who lived there, they also enacted a negotiation of status on the part of their authors with aristocratic men. As manuscripts carrying texts that imagined access to women's bodies circulated amongst the lay elite as art objects, nevertheless negotiation of social status playing out in those texts

[55] *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 125, 137.

allowed for the negotiation of social status between author and reader. Thus clerics, Chaucer, and the middling classes from which they came could enter into negotiation through the art they produced.

Class in high to late medieval England was quite fluid. Over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the knight shifted from being merely a landed soldier in the service of a lord to being a member of an elite group within the aristocracy. At the same time, clerics were fighting to be recognized as of equal status with knights. Knights lay claim to an ideal masculinity, and they worked to actively exclude clerics from any claims to masculinity or a place within the male hierarchy of the period, which was in part constructed around achieving ideal masculinity. Clerics were seen to be hiearchically ranked amongst themselves, but the close contact of secular clerics with their lay counterparts means that a negotiation of their status within a lay male hierarchy was ongoing. Chapter 2 engages this struggle between the knightly class and the secular clerics who lived and worked amongst them. By the fourteenth century, a class of civil servants emerged who worked closely with the nobility. In this period, social hierarchies were becoming even more fluid, as members of civil society found themselves upwardly mobile, gaining the ranks of gentitlity, and in some cases, nobility. Chapter 4 sees Chaucer actively engaged in his own upward social movement.

When space was so hierarchically structured, literature could act as a conduit for negotiating social status because it could move across and through those spaces. Playing with how architecture operated in structuring contemporary society allowed these authors to connect the imaginary worlds they were constructing with the world as it existed. Although castle architecture is "recalcitrant" to use Jane Bennett's term, or "redundant" to use

Bourdieu's, texts can move across hierarchical boundaries—as they were read aloud in the hall or as they were read privately, their readers retreating to their inner chambers.

This dissertation moves through two parts, the second building on the first. The first part, chapters one and two, demonstrate that class could be negotiated rhetorically within the text. The first chapter on medieval romance establishes that architecture was thought of as gendered and that class could become realized through representations of the female body. The second chapter on Middle English lyric shows a negotiation being carried out between clerics and knights, and, following Bourdieu, considers the text as a work of art also operating within economic market. The second part demonstrates two responses to the possibilities inherent in the trope of the female body entowered. The third chapter on Geoffrey Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* shows Chaucer taking advantage of this tradition and realizing its possibilities. The final chapter on Margaret Paston shows a female response to this trope, as Margaret negotiates her own status via her response to the gendered architecture she encounters.

Chapter 1 traces the emergence of the trope of female body not just as linked to tower/bower, but also as metonymically linked to that space in the romances of Marie de France, Chretien de Troyes, and the Middle English *Floris and Blauncheflur*. In the earlier French romances, the valuable aristocratic female body lends its value to the also valuable space of the luxurious tower. Thus, the value of that body and tower space are mutually constituted. In *Floris and Blauncheflur*, on the other hand, the undervalued body of Blauncheflur, daughter of a slave, achieves value through her association with the fantastic tower of the Emir of Babylon. The tower then becomes a space where social class can be negotiated. Access to the high status tower space can therefore constitute a rise in social status. Thus a fantasy of accessing tower space is enacted wherein lower class clerical

authors who wrote and copied the romance and those of the middle classes that would have read them, imagine a way to increase their social status if they could gain access to the tower space.

Chapter 2 examines the programmatic treatment in the lyrics of Harley 2253, Digby 86, and Trinity College Cambridge 323 of the courtly love motif established by romance that places women in towers. It argues that across a series of lyrics, secular clerics repeatedly place women there, thus naturalizing the feminization of that space, and imagine access to that space in order to negotiate their status with the lay male elite who did have access to the tower. Firstly, they do this by critiquing the tower as a space where morally suspect activities can occur between women and the knightly class. Metonymic association of women and towers allow clerics to simultaneously imagine spatial access to both. This struggle over access shifts then, to realign women metaphorically to tower, so that access to female body also becomes access to female soul. Moreover, clerics criticize the use of stone as a means of hierarchically organizing physical space, and by devaluing that building material, enact a breaking down of the physical barriers that might deny them access. Thus clerics claim a rightful access and superior status, one in a religious rather than secular register, to knights. Once this negotiation is enacted in the lyrics, that negotiation entered the world under the auspices of art, which Bourdieu tells us never actually excludes a relationship to economics and politics. The textual object, or manuscript, itself becomes a fetish object always linked to the clerics who produced it, and through its circulation, the claims made by the texts inscribed on it could carry the intentions of its authors into the world of the lay elite who would also have consumed those texts.

Chapter 3 follows Geoffrey Chaucer as he insinuates himself, through his poem the *Book of the Duchess*, into the space of his patron and social superior, John of Gaunt, moving

socially from son of a vintner to a member of the king's inner household. The poem elegizes Gaunt's duchess Blanche, and although she is dead and notably absent in the poem, through a series of metaphors linking her material body and the material architectural spaces of the castle she become associated with the space of the chamber, already shown by earlier chapters to be feminized and a space to which access was desirable as a means of claiming social status. Read as a figure for Chaucer himself, the narrator awakes from a dream in such a chamber, thus imagining access to it and thus to Blanche's body. As he moves from this space into the park, also a figure for Blanche's body, he ultimately gains access to his higher status patron Gaunt, who has taken his place there to lament his duchess. It is therefore through the fantasy of moving into the chamber space, and then through the park, that Chaucer can spatially reach his patron. Drawing on the theorizing of the manuscript as fetish object in chapter 2, this chapter speculatively suggests that Chaucer's poem, as it imagined his movement into the interior space of the upper aristocracy, affected his aristocratic readers, his imagined access becoming real in his historical life.

Chapter 4 offers a reader response to the trope of the woman ensconced in her tower through the life and writings of Margaret Paston, a member of the lower aristocratic Paston family. The Pastons were avid consumers of romance, so the trope is one that Margaret would have known well. During her lifetime, the Pastons came to possess Caister Castle, and Margaret spent some time there. She found that with the increase in social status of owning a castle came the more restrictive movement necessitated by castle life: she repeatedly expresses concern over the large numbers of male retainers whom she could not trust. While living in her manor houses, Margaret made herself accessible to all manner of people, as long as she could trust them, and manor house architecture itself expressed a gender ideology of equality, as no particular spaces in the manor house were more difficult

to access than others, and as no particular spaces were feminized in the way that the castle tower was. In the castle, on the other hand, anxiety over who could access her must have compelled her to restrict access to her person and retire to the castle tower that most likely comprised her living quarters. After living only several months at Caister, Margaret returned to live at her ancestral manor home at Mautby. The chapter argues that through this move, Margaret was actively rejecting the higher status position of the upper aristocracy and the restrictive gender ideologies laid out by castle architecture and chose instead to remain part of the lower aristocracy, its gender ideology of greater female freedom witnessed by both the more equal accessibility of spaces within the manor house, and by Margaret's relative ease of movement and accessibility there.

Having read these texts in this way, we might think, not in ways wholly different from medieval authors, of their texts as constituting a field of immanence,[56] a complex assemblage containing within it a number of productive possibilities. In my readings, those possibilities are on the authors' behalf, in the material social world that they inhabit and seek to change through the suggestion of those possibilities. Where authors' social lives were quite prescripted, the potentials registered by their texts are wholly "unprescripted."[57] In the case of these authors, seeking to change their own social positions within a material context, their texts register, in the words of Brian Massumi, "the immanence of [themselves] to [their] still indeterminate variation, under way."[58]

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[56] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 76.

[57] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 9.

II. Bodies, Architecture, and Value in Medieval Romance

In medieval literature, one encounters women ensconced in towers over and over again: from the early romances of Chrétien de Troyes and the lais of Marie de France, to the late Arthurian cycle the *Mort d'Arthur* of Thomas Mallory, women are found living in as well as imprisoned, trapped, or restricted by the castle tower space. Medieval romance establishes the trope of tower and female body in which the two are so closely related that one will be able to stand in for the other, sometimes in the romance itself, and certainly in the literature that plays on this romance trope. In fact, I will suggest that the key way that romance breaks away from the tradition of tower/garden as metaphor for the female body that we have seen in the *Song of Songs* is in shifting the relationship between them, from one of not only metaphor to one of metonymy, as well. Metaphor as a figural construct relies on the difference between two things; it explicitly denies contiguity between the two things. Metonymy, on the other hand, is built upon contiguity, and bodies and towers in these texts are contiguous. Bodies in these texts are not towers; they are *in* towers. Women in these towers are living and breathing; they are not reduced to body parts made of stone, as in the *Song of Songs* and *Ancrene Wisse*. Furthermore, the genre engages in provocative ways the material architecture of castles, a new architectural feature of the high Middle Ages that becomes a material sign of status. Unlike the towers of the *Song of Songs* or even *Hali Meiðhad*, the materiality of these towers is especially insisted upon. Now, the tower becomes not just a figure for the closed female body or the superior state of virginity, but a space in which that body can be placed. Along with this, the romance texts I study

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[58] Massumi, *Parables*, p. 9.

specifically feminize the castle tower space. But the shift to a metonymic relationship allows for a mutually constitutive value of body and tower space. The trope of high status female bodies in high status architecture can then become, not just a trope of sexual purity, but also a locus for representing status. Mobility of the female body in relation to the tower and its surrounding landscape is in fact a reflection of the texts' relative concern with social mobility. This use of the relationship between female body and tower to negotiate status is a function that the authors of texts I examine in later chapters will use to negotiate their own status.

Romance as a genre has traditionally been constructed as fantastical, in the influential phrase of Frederick Jameson, a "magical narrative." He has claimed it is a "place of heterogeneity and of freedom from that reality principle" to which "oppressive realistic representation" can be completely opposed.[59] These "magical narratives," he contends, offer a way out of, or a specific reaction to, difficult social realities. Scholars of medieval romance, on the other hand, have recognized in romance manifold engagements with contemporary social structures and ideologies: its working out of feudal relationships, its concern with good kingship and right rule, its engagement with the inner workings of the court system, its attempts to work out constructions of gender and sexuality. In his seminal work, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, Robert Hanning describes how romance constituted a way to explore new conceptions of the individual. He writes, "Moving through time and space which [the chivalric hero] both organizes (for the audience) around his personal quest and experience or perceives in a subjective and limited way, the romance hero

[59] Frederick Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 104.

deliberately opens himself to experience in all its variety and unexpectedness."[60] In this chapter, I too will explore the individual, but by thinking about how social class defines the individual. Social class in these texts is constructed particularly through articulations of architectural space, and so social class of individuals is related to the kinds of architectural spaces they inhabit, the way they move through these spaces, and their experiences of them.

These discussions have primarily been concerned with ideology and not with materiality, but one of the most striking intrusions of "reality" into romance is the specificity of architectural detail offered by the poems. This chapter does not suggest that metaphor and metonymy are mutually exclusive. Just as metaphors about women's bodies as closed containers sought to contain their sexuality, so too the material historical architectural construct of tower serves to contain that sexuality. The figure of the tower does always work metaphorically on some level to contain women's sexuality, but the function of the tower is not exhausted by this relationship. Rather than just relying on the twin realms of fantasy and metaphor that imagine that a body as impenetrable architectural construct can remain pure, romance plays upon what archaeologists have shown to be a common practice of locating high aristocratic women in towers. Archaeological approaches to medieval architecture have long accepted the methodology of access analysis, which posits that the more architectural steps required to access a space, the higher the status of the space, and thus the more valuable the bodies inhabiting those spaces. Perhaps obviously, castles were meant to be impregnable, with their towers, especially the central tower keep, having the best defensive architectural features. Meant to be inaccessible, towers thus represented the highest status space in the highest status architectural feature in medieval Europe, the castle.

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[60] *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

Archaeologists have further shown that aristocratic women often occupied these spaces.[61] Concurrently, in the literature of the period, the women who occupy those spaces are constructed as desirable, so desirable as to be hoarded away in towers by the men who attempt to control them. Thus, the hypothesis of access analysis appears to be borne out historically and literarily: highest status and most valuable bodies are housed in those spaces most difficult to access, castle towers.

Difficult access to these bodies has traditionally been read as a response to the value those female bodies have to patriarchal culture.[62] Feminist scholars have made a compelling case for understanding romance tropes of enclosure as a way to contain problematic sexuality. Moreover, these texts were used to instruct young aristocratic men *and* women,[63] and so their message that women's desires and bodies needed to be controlled permeated medieval aristocratic society. Enclosure as trope offered a narrative way of achieving just that. Geraldine Barnes, Felicity Riddy and Sheila Fisher have all pointed out that in Middle English romance the chamber or "bur" is constructed as a private space properly occupied by

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1977), p. 3.

[61] Towers were high status, not just because they housed high status individuals, but also because they were made of stone as opposed to wood, and they rose symbolically over the surrounding landscape. Furthermore, access analysis posits that the number of architectural steps required to reach a place reflect its status. Towers were meant to be difficult to access, a fact that this chapter will discuss, and Roberta Gilchrist has shown that towers built as part of women's quarters were especially difficult to access.

[62] For a discussion of how important women's bodies were to twelfth-century practices of primogeniture, and for the passive roles set out for women by didactic treatises of the period, see Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 19-20, 23.

[63] For a more general review of how romance inculcated its lay male audience, see Helen Phillips, "Rites of Passage in French and English Romances, " in *Rites of Passage: Cultures of Transition in the Fourteenth Century,* ed. Nicola F. McDonald and W.M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 83-107.

women, whereas the hall contains the public sphere, a sphere to which women are largely excluded.[64] In *King Horn*, for example, Rymenhild, love object of the eponymous hero, occupies a space of intimacy within her bur, but is barred from speaking in the hall. Here the bur "is not only a place, but a state of feeling: it is where the emotional dynamism of the plot is generated."[65] At the same time, Rymenhild recognizes that she cannot speak at all with Horn in the hall. Riddy concludes that "[i]n this narrative, as in many others, the woman has no life outside the home, but simply moves, plotlessly, from daughterhood to wifehood."[66] Where women attempt to leave the bower and enter the public sphere, it seems they are duly punished: in the late fourteenth-century *Athelston*, Athelston's queen, another Rymenhild, moves into the space of the hall, challenging her husband's tyrannical rule there and thus aligning herself with "the values of justice and the rule of law[.]" But with a punitive kick to her belly, Athelston causes her to miscarry her child, the only loss for which the romance does not offer reparation.[67] Scholars have also recognized that this restriction of women to the architectural space of chamber, and the general enclosure of women in built architectural spaces, is a literal rendering of romance's wider need to contain women's wills and sexuality. Roberta Krueger writes of Old French courtly romance that many "display

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[64] Geraldine Barnes, *Counsel and Strategy in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), pp. 53-54; Sheila Fisher, "Women and Men in late medieval English romance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 150-164; Felicity Riddy, "Middle English romance: family, marriage, intimacy," in *Camb. Comp to Medieval Romance*, pp. 235-52.

[65] Riddy, "Middle English romance," p. 240.

[66] Riddy, "Middle English romance," p. 240.

women's troublesome sexuality, their disruptive agency, or their resistant voices."[68] She concludes that these representations may nevertheless have been popular amongst young female readers dreaming of "autonomous adventures away from the confines of home or court[.]"[69] Romance could, then, express the desires of young female audience members who could not in fact live such lives of movement away from the domestic sphere, in contrast to their male counterparts. The general consensus of feminist scholars is that movement outside of the sphere of the enclosed tower space by women could pose a challenge to social order, which relied on the restriction of female sexuality and restriction of women from the public sphere.[70]

While I agree with these interpretations, what they do not explicitly address is the use of the tower space in relation to the value of female bodies within a social hierarchy. That value may be implicit in these readings, especially those concerning sexuality rather than a separation of public and private sphere; after all, those bodies would not need containing and controlling if they did not serve some specific purpose. But these readings also suggest that women were completely disempowered through a unilateral containment of their bodies, that women ultimately had no choice and no way out. In fact, the romances that I examine suggest that the movement of female bodies in relation to architectural spaces can give us a

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[67] The argument is Nancy Mason Bradbury's, in "Beyond the Kick: Women's Agency in Athelston," in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval Engalnd*, ed. Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 149-58.

[68] "Questions of gender in Old French courtly romance," in *Camb. Comp.*, p. 137.

[69] Krueger, "Questions of Gender," p. 139.

[70] See also Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's argument along these lines about the Anglo-Norman *La vie de Clement pape*, in "'Bet…to…rede on holy seyntes lyves…': Romance and

way to read the tower space, not just as feminized, not just as private or intimate, not just as barrier to entrance into the public sphere. These romances undoubtedly feminize the tower through a metonymic relationship with the female bodies that occupy them, but the tower can also be a place that women move through, and where value in a social hierarchy can be conferred between female body and tower space.

In this chapter, I will examine three sets of texts that feature women in towers: two lais of Marie de France, two romances by Chrétien de Troyes, and the Middle English *Floris and Blauncheflur*. In all of these texts, a female body is at some point trapped inside a tower by jealous husbands or potential lovers. And in all of these, difficulty of access for their lovers is thematized. While giving detail of towers that clearly imagines as their referents real towers, these texts present fantastic exemplars of that structure: the most impregnable, the most luxurious. They are meant to be completely inaccessible: no amount of architectural steps can be taken to move into them. In addition to the relative number of architectural steps required to access these towers, the number of narrative steps, that is, the plot points that are required to gain access, mirror architectural steps, thus further thematizing relative difficulty of access.

This should not suggest the trope of female enclosure is static. All of these texts in fact play with the trope, through the place of the tower both in the chronology of the narrative and within the diegetic space of the narrative, the tower's relative ease or difficulty of access, its relationship to its surrounding landscape, and the female's movement in relation to tower and landscape. The differences between these texts further amount to differences in the way that the metonymic relationship between female body and tower can

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Hagiography Again," in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 83-97.

be read. Mobility of the female body in relation to the tower and its surrounding landscape is in fact a reflection of the texts' relative concern with social mobility. The early works of Marie and Chrétien do not use the tower to confer status onto the female body; the status of that body is uncontested and only reflected in the nature of the tower as impenetrable and fantastic. In *Floris and Blaucheflur*, on the other hand, different values inhere in different towers, and the value of those spaces can be conferred onto the body of the woman. Once value can be conferred by the tower, occupation of that tower can constitute the place of the body that occupies it within a social hierarchy.

In Chrétien and Marie's narratives, the mobility of the female protagonists in relation to the tower has an inverse relationship to concern with social mobility: tower, while a high status space in its own right, cannot ultimately contain the valuable body of the high status woman. As these women are able to leave their towers of their own free will, the tower, neither central to narrative, except in the case of Cligés, nor central to diegetic space, functions as one space amongst many, no more and no less high status than any other. If the tower cannot contain the value of the protagonist's body, the tower cannot contain the value of the female body; therefore, the tower cannot lend its value to the female body. Thus, tower itself is not a conduit for social status. Rather, the tower, historically a symbol of status, becomes here more of a reflection of the status of female body that occupies it.

The later thirteenth-century *Floris and Blauncheflur*, which began as an Old French romance and was transmitted into Middle English, changes the trope so that tower can now confer value, thus shifting the function of the tower to a space where status can be negotiated. A tower where Blauncheflur is held for the second half of the romance takes center stage, spatially occupying the center of the Babylonian cityscape, as well as being the space of the climax. And towers in this romance contain bodies for very different reasons

than the earlier texts—commercial and hierarchical. *Floris and Blauncheflur* builds on the metonymic link established in earlier romances by developing the tower as itself a space that can confer a place within a social hierarchy. Some towers are used for trade, but the main tower, difficult to access, and thus constructed as a high status space, can lend its status to the female body. These facts together suggest that the tower can become a locus for representing social status. The lower class Blauncheflur's body is circulated through a series of mercantile trades, metonymically linked to towers used for trade, that equate her body with monetary value, but ultimately that body is transferred to the highest status central tower, and the value of that body is elevated, transcends, that particular way of valuing bodies through its—the body's—association with the extraordinariness of the central tower that contains her. And this romance was extremely popular, appearing in four extant manuscripts from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, which suggests that imagining the use of the tower to negotiate social status continued to resonate with medieval audiences.

Chrétien de Troyes

In Chrétien's narratives, the shift to what will become a metonymic association is apparent as female bodies occupy towers that are described with architectural detail of contemporary castles. The towers in his stories are to some degree fantastic, but his towers are not only metaphors for the female body; they are meant to be representations of actual, material towers. The second half of the story of *Cligés* revolves around housing Cligés' love interest Fenice in such a tower. In the *Knight of the Cart*, Guinevere is locked in a tower by the evil Meleagant, but so is Lancelot, in a playful move on Chrétien's part to reverse gender

roles.[71] Thus these towers are extremely important, but as we shall see, do not only function to contain the problematic sexuality of these characters, a function which body as tower seeks metaphorically to do. In a metonymic relationship to the tower, women are embodied—their actual experience of the towers they occupy is treated by these texts, where it is not by the religious texts that treat female body *as* architectural space. The texts also play on the role of towers in medieval Europe: they present examples of the exemplary tower, completely impenetrable, and the space most appropriate for housing high status women. The status of the space derives somewhat from the difficulty of access to it, but more than this, it derives its value from the value of the female bodies that occupy it.

The first half of *Cligés* tells the story of the son of the emperor of Greece, Alexander. Alexander wishes to travel to the court of Arthur to demonstrate his prowess, learn honor and gain fame. Once there, Alexander travels to Brittany with Arthur, and falls in love with the only maiden on the ship, Soredamor. With the king and queen's blessing, they are married, and not long after conceive Cligés. Amidst these joyous events, Alexander hears that his father has died and his younger brother, Alis, has taken the throne meant for Alexander. Alexander travels back to Constantinople and confronts Alis, upon which a pact is reached: Alis may remain emperor as long as he does not marry and have an heir. This way, Cligés will remain heir to the empire. Nevertheless, Alis breaks his promise and marries Fenice, the daughter of the emperor of Germany.

In the way of courtly love, Cligés and Fenice fall desperately in love, but Fenice refuses to be, as she says, an Iseult; she will not sleep with both her husband, whom she does

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[71] I will return to how the narrative plays with Lancelot's occupation of the tower, a move that certainly feminizes Lancelot. Additionally, as I shall argue, the narrative ultimately displays a discomfort with Lancelot's placement there.

not love, and with Cligés. She also does not want an heir that will disinherit Cligés. For these reasons, she has her nurse, Thessala, concoct a potion that will make Alis believe he is his wife, but it will only be an illusion.[72] Further to the end of separating herself completely from Alis and finally uniting with Cligés, she devises a plan. She will take another potion of Thessala's that will make her appear to be dead. At the same time, Cligés asks his servant John for a residence where Fenice can live undetected. Presumed dead, Fenice will live here, forever according to the plan, it seems, where Cligés can visit her. John informs Cligés that he has already built a house that no one has ever seen:

> "[In a secluded spot below the town, John had labored with great skill to construct a tower, and it was there that John led Cliges. Guiding him through rooms with beautiful and well-illuminated wall paintings, he took him everywhere, pointing out the rooms and the fireplaces. In this remote house, where no one stayed or resided, Cliges continued to look about as went from one room to another until he thought he had seen everything.
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> "Cliges found the tower very much to his liking, and said it was fine and beautiful. His young lady would be safe there all her life, since no man would ever know of it.

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[72]Peggy McCracken argues that Fenice's "ruse" "revealed the illusory nature of symbolic integrity." She writes that "Cligés suggests that the meaning of the queen's body is never self-evident, but always contested and negotiated. The symbolic system that equates integrity of the queen's body with the state of the kingdom defines the queen's adulterous body as the site of royal legitimacy and of contests for political power, but Fenice's deliberations about the rhetorical structure of her body suggest that the integrity that guarantees political stability is always illusory and that the recognition of the king's legitimate sovereignty depends on the queen's ruse." *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 51.

> "Truly, sir, she will never be found. Do you now think you have seen the entire layout of my tower? There are still some hiding places no man could discover. And if you are allowed to test this by investigating as best you can, you never find them. No one is wise and subtle enough to discover more rooms inside unless I clearly point them out to him. All is here, be certain, including everything a lady needs. There is nothing left to do but come here. This tower is comfortable and beautiful, and as you will see, there is a wide level underground. You will never be able to locate an entrance or opening anywhere. The door is made of solid stone with such skill and craft that you will never find the joints.]" (pp. 154-155)[73]

Unable to believe it, Cligés has John show him this invisible door. This tower, is, in fact, unbelievable, but not because it stands as an allegory for something else. Instead, it is the epitome of what a tower should be: absolutely impenetrable and of the highest status. The high status is evident in the number of rooms, the fireplaces, wall paintings, and running water. The tower's function does differ slightly from towers of the period, which were designed to rise above the landscape and be visible to everyone as a sign of the lord's power. This tower, on the other hand, has not been seen by anyone. Still, this invisibleness constitutes a way in which the tower will not be breached. This tower is also a little different from towers of the period in that the most unbreachable part of the tower is not the highest part of the tower, but still more difficult to access even though the most impenetrable part of the tower is a hidden underground room. Nevertheless, the space that can house Fenice with the most security is an inner space which is impossible to access by anyone other than John and then Cligés after John demonstrates how to get in.

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[73] All quotations from Cligés are from *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*,

While the tower is being constructed to house Fenice, she feigns death and is deposited in a tomb, also built by John, whose construction, like the tower, is dwelt upon by the text:

> "[He set up the tomb so that nothing else was inside, sealing all the joints carefully, then shutting the tomb. Then could the man be proud of himself who knew how, without damaging or breaking something, to open John's work or separate the joints.]" (161-162)

Fenice herself specifies a part of the construction: "[your task is to arrange the preparations for my tomb. Apply all your efforts to the design of the bier and the tomb so that I do not suffocate to death.]" (152). The tomb, like tower, is imagined as a real space, housing a real body that needs air to breathe.

From this tomb, Cligés and John sneak Fenice away and deposit her in the tower, where Cliges and Fenice can be united in love. In this case, she is not imprisoned by the tower. Not only does she go willingly, she herself devised the plan. This, coupled with the fact that John insists that the tower contains everything a lady could need, certainly suggests that the text considers the tower space to be the most appropriate place to accommodate women. Furthermore, Fenice's choice to go there perhaps reflects in literature the findings of archaeologists that aristocratic women historically often choose to build towers into their already more secluded suites of rooms.[74] Nevertheless, after being in the tower for fifteen months, she begins to complain that she feels confined, and would like to have an orchard in which she might wander out of doors. John, it turns out, has anticipated her desire, and an

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trans. David Staines (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

orchard is already built. He must again show Cligés and Fenice the door, because it is so hidden: it is so well hidden that the narrator notes that he cannot even describe how it is designed.

The impenetrability of the tower could point to a concern on the part of the narrative to keep Fenice's sexuality limited for Cligés only. And by the end, there is a clear concern for containing the potentially loose sexuality of the Greek empresses, given that the narrator tells us that after Cligés every emperor keeps his empresses guarded by eunuchs. But the problem of lineage does not follow the expected pattern: Fenice's illicit union with Cligés *preserves* the proper lineage, it does not break it. However, the violence inhering in reaching this happy ending problematizes it. The tower is a safe space until breached by a retainer of the king. The fact that it is a safe space is underground might have something to do with this. The contested body of Fenice is not in the highest reaches of the tower, but resides below the tower, hidden away rather than in the space more visible to the outside observer. Moreover, it is the lovers' tryst in the garden that ultimately gives them away. Inside the tower is constructed as a space where their union is not illicit: it is fully condoned by the text. It is outside this space that the text plays up the fact that their union is in fact illicit in the eyes of the other characters in the text.[75] The narrative's concern with

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[74] Roberta Gilchrist, "Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 53.

[75] Hanning writes of the "love tower," that it "suggest[s] the love relationships in the romance are all illusory and that love as Cligés and Fénice must practice it is a trap, a death of the individual to society and the external world, the appearance of a private, self-fulfilling relationship without the reality of security or legitimacy. There is, finally, a radical dichotomy between the public activities and situations—the outer identities, in short—of the major characters and their inner, imagined fulfillment. In this sense, Cligés and Fénice share

preserving lineage with the trope of the impenetrable architectural space as metaphor for woman's body is minimized, if it is there at all. It is the potion, after all, and not the tower, that keeps Fenice untainted by sex with her husband. The potion, moreover, is devised by Fenice and her nurse Thessala. It is the choice and formulation of women, not men, who, according to the theory of protecting lineage through confining women, would presumably build the spaces that confine those women. And the potion protects, it does not confine, Fenice.

In fact, instead of using tower to confine women, the narrative makes much more of the tower as a material space to house the most valuable body in the story. The value of the tower is reflected by the fact that Fenice is valuable, desired as she is by two men, both of the highest status and therefore of value themselves. The story spends a large amount of time describing the materiality of the tower, its physical makeup, its engineering, and the amenities it houses, as fantastic as these things are. This tower thus relies on twelfth-century towers—joints, heavy doors, fireplaces, multiple chambers, running water, and wall paintings that would have decorated the otherwise drab stone walls—even as it constructs the tower as the exemplary tower, a tower that could never really exist, but that epitomizes what tower builders wished towers could do and be: ultimately impregnable and of the greatest luxury, both impossible to get into, thereby rendering it high status according to access analysis, and that high status reflected and confirmed in the luxurious amenities. The tower in *Cligés* offers a fantasy of the highest status and most inaccessible tower possible. That the tower is broken into acknowledges that a completely impregnable tower can never exist, but the tower nevertheless plays on the materiality of actual towers.

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the anti-romance situation of Tristan and Isolde, whose fate Fénice is so anxious to avoid" (*The Individual*, p. 116).

Even the construction of the tomb reveals an interest in material architectural spaces as spaces that contain, not metaphorize, bodies: a sealed tomb might in fact suffocate an occupant; this tomb must be constructed not to do so. The nature of tomb and tower also point to the way that women might experience such spaces. Again, these spaces do not represent the body of the woman; they house that body in a material space. The women themselves are embodied; their bodies are living and breathing, not turned into the static stone of the tower by metaphor. They can inhabit the tower; they can look out from the tower; they can find the tower constricting. In the metaphor of tower as body, an interiority of subjectivity can be constructed, but Fenice's subjective experience is directed outward. She finds the space constricting, a fact never suggested by religious writings that metaphorize the body. She wants an orchard in which to move about. This orchard is not the enclosed garden of the *Song of Songs*; instead, it is a space outside of herself that will allow for a more pleasant embodied experience.

Though the tower occupies a central place in the narrative, the status of the tower is not primary in the relationship between it and her body. Already a high status space, the tower's difficulty of access, according to access theory, functions to make it even more so. But the tower is built in the form of the high status tower to reflect how much Cligés loves and values Fenice. Her body is clearly the valuable thing in this story; the tower only houses that body to keep it as hidden as possible. Thus, high status is not conferred on Fenice through her occupation of the tower. Its high status follows from hers. Thus in *Cligés* the tower reflects the high status of its female occupant. It is a locus for representing status; status does not follow from it.

Chretien's *Knight of the Cart* suggests the same function for the tower, that it takes its value from the high status of the bodies occupying it. The story follows Lancelot as he

travels through the land of Gorre in order to win back Guinevere from the evil Maleagant, son of the king of Gorre. Meleagant has challenged Arthur to send a knight to combat him for both the queen and for the many knights and ladies that he is imprisoned from Arthur's realm. Lancelot runs into towers throughout the narrative, and there are two principal towers, and each houses one of the two most valuable bodies of the story: Guinevere and Lancelot. Though Lancelot rides through a fantastic land, the details given about the towers suggest that not all of the text is fantastical, that some of it relies on the material constructs of the Middle Ages, and suggest a close relationship between women and towers, that is that women are the primary occupants of towers. But again, tower is not guarantor of social status; its value is mutually constituted by the value of the bodies occupying them.

The first tower that Lancelot encounters on his trip is set within a fortified town, which has a tower keep on a granite cliff. The detail follows the function of the keep as the center fortification, and one whose defenses are made even stronger by being inaccessible on at least one side, the side of the cliff. And Lancelot finds within this tower keep only a young aristocratic lady with two maidens. This first tower will set up what continues to be a major trope of the romance: the feminization of the space of the tower.

The next tower that Lancelot encounters is also occupied by a lady without a lord.[76] We discover that she has male retainers, but no mention of them is made until they appear as

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[76] Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner refers to this character as the "Hospitality Damsel" and argues that she represents an analog to Queen Guenievre. She argues that the damsel sets up the rape scene to "confirm Lancelot's valor in battle" (165). Because Lancelot adheres to the competing virtues of honor and love, Bruckner argues that "Within the network of associations generated by the Immodest Damsel, Lancelot seems to emerge completely triumphant: valiant knight, faithful lover, honorable participant in the custom of Logres—in short, heroic reconciler of competing 'goods'" (169). ("An Interpreter's Dilemma: Why Are There So Many Interpretations of Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*?", *Romance Philology* 40:2 (1986): 159-80).

part of Lancelot's ordeal within the castle. After crossing a perilous bridge, Lancelot meets this lady who offers him lodging for the night. Her home is described as a fortified residence, with high walls and a deep moat, in other words, a castle. The castle is also described in detail: there is a great hall, there are beautiful rooms, and there is a table laid out with the finest fare. And the narrator makes a point to tell us that Lancelot is the only man inside. While Lancelot is out in the castle yard, he hears screaming. Following the sound, he enters a room, and sees through a door another room where a man is attempting to rape the lady. The detail of multiple architectural steps—from courtyard to hall, from hall to room, and room to deeper chamber—is noteworthy and indicative of an interest in real castle architecture. In twelfth-century France, keeps were multiple-storied and were used as private living chambers of the lord of the castle and his family. These square keeps could be organized in two ways: they could contain a dividing wall that produced an antechamber and chamber behind, each requiring a further architectural step from the outside of the building. They could also have rooms built into the thickness of the walls, allowing for antechambers and chambers, again needing successive steps from antechamber to chamber.[77]

It is implied that the lady's chamber is the innermost room, the place where her body resides; as the most private space, and one associated with her body, it is also the place where her body is most vulnerable to the attempted rape. The knight ostensibly raping her has thrown her across the bed, an even more intimate space, "[and was holding her / quite

[77] Halls in France began in the tenth and eleventh centuries as multi-storied keeps built at the end of halls, but in the twelfth century, the central tower keep was introduced from England to France by Henry I (M. W. Thompson, *The Rise of the Castle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 35-39, 66.

naked across the bed]" (1066-67),[78] exposing her body even more, but this is the place where she would have dressed and undressed anyway. Thus, her body is intimately connected to this space already.

This space also turns out to be highly inaccessible to Lancelot. Here we learn about her guards, who prevent Lancelot from entering the room to save her: "[Furthermore, doormen guarded the entrance: / Two well-armed knights / With drawn swords; / Behind them four men-at-arms, / Each holding an axe-- / The kind with which one could split / A cow's spine / As easily as a root / Of juniper or broom]" (1087-1095). There is therefore not one, but two layers of armed men that Lancelot must get through. These human barriers mirror the architectural steps from outside room into inner chamber of the lady, making it doubly difficult for him to access the space. The text then describes in detail the sword fight that he has with these guards, making explicit the extreme difficulty he encounters in trying to reach the lady.

We also learn that this episode has been a test for Lancelot. Once Lancelot has made his way into the inner chamber and placed himself in defense of the lady, she immediately dismisses her men. The presence of the male guards in the innermost space is not surprising. Members of the household were trusted and allowed access to most of the castle. But for Lancelot, the male stranger, the innermost chamber becomes extremely difficult to access as the guards prevent him in the outer chamber from entering the inner chamber. The oddest part of the ordeal is the fact that the lady has set up a bed in the hall in which to lie with Lancelot. She has insisted that Lancelot sleep with her. Thus she makes her body available,

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[78] All quotations are from Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot, or the Knight of the Cart (Le Chevalier de la Charrete)*, ed. and trans. by William W. Kibler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981).

but only really available in the outermost and public space of the hall. When Lancelot will not sleep with her, she retires to her own chamber. This suggests that the chamber in which she was not in fact in danger of being raped is indeed the place where her body and sexuality should be inaccessible. It is in the hall that she can be accessible. This episode is illuminating, and suggests that the text is going out of its way to focus on architectural space and the relation of female body to it. And bizarre as the events of this episode are, they suggest that a tower is a space that can house and protect a lady. It also, however, suggests that that lady can have ultimate control over who accesses her. She enjoys free movement inside and outside of the tower, as well. Her sexuality is certainly at play, but the episode does not suggest that it must be contained. Roberta Krueger reads this episode, Lancelot's predicament of having to protect the lady, and then her vulnerability to this very protection, in terms of "a custom [that] describes how a system which may seem to protect damsels regulates instead the ascription of honor to knights," since the lady asks him to protect her after the rape ordeal.[79] Thus the lady becomes an object of exchange for Lancelot as she is under his protection. What Krueger does not address, and what my reading does differently from hers, is the agency that the lady has in putting herself into that position in the first place. The lady uses her domestic space of the tower to attempt to control Lancelot, and certainly makes use of it to her own liking. She controls it completely, and it is not a static construct but one that she deploys differently depending on the architectural space that she is in.

The first of the castles to contain Lancelot occurs next when he is prevented from joining the fight of the people of his homeland Logres against the people of Gorre. Unlike

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[79] "Love, Honor, and the Exchange of Women in *Yvain*: Some Remarks on the Female

the tower keep where the young lady resides, however, very little is mentioned of this castle, only its moat and high wall. No tower is mentioned, and no detail of the interior is given. Moreover, Lancelot and his men are trapped here; this is not their proper place. The women in the narrative are never said to be trapped, and in fact some of them explicitly choose to be housed within the space of the tower. The tower for these men, however, is a space that must be escaped. It is a space that should not contain them. And ultimately it does not. It is quite easily that the men escape the tower, using their swords to break through the bar across the postern gate.

After a number of other ordeals, Lancelot finally comes upon the castle where Meleagant is holding Guinevere. The narrator says of it that it is the largest and finest tower Lancelot has ever seen. While no characters state that the tower is meant to protect Guinevere's sexuality, the king of Gorre, Bademagu, repeatedly insists to Lancelot that the queen was not mistreated by anyone and no lustful men were allowed access to her.[80] Thus the tower, or some space within it, is explicitly a site for the proper containment of the valuable body of the queen. Later Kay tells Lancelot that since Noah's Ark, no watchman has guarded a frontier tower the way that the king has guarded Guinevere. In this moment, a tower is a metaphor for Guinevere's body, but it does not refer to the tower that Guinevere actually occupies. The tower draws on the tradition in religious texts to compare the body of

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Reader," *Romance Notes* 25:3 (1985): 305.

[80] Peggy McCracken devotes an entire monograph to tracing the way the bodies of queens in French romance were subject to trials of their sexual purity. One conclusion of her study is that queens in these romances were, and had to be, barren, as they were accused of adultery, in order to obviate the possibility that they might corrupt the king's patriarchal line. (*The Romance of Adultery*).

a woman to a tower, but it does not represent the principal way in which Guinevere is related to towers in the text. In fact, the shift to this religious allusion foregrounds the fact that towers in this text do not primarily operate metaphorically, that they are secular structures metonymically related to women, and not metaphorically standing in for them as they do in Marian lyrics or the *Song of Songs*.

The night before Lancelot and Meleagant will meet in combat for her, Guinevere asks to be placed where she can have a bird's eye view of the fight. With Guinevere sitting at a window, we get here an inside view of the tower: as with Fenice, Guinevere is in a tower; the tower is not a closed space acting as a metaphor for the impermeability of Guinevere's body. The tower does, in another moment, stand in for Guinevere, but in this instance it is certainly metonymic and not metaphor. A maiden realizes as Lancelot is losing the fight that the sight of Guinevere will help him to rally. She has Guinevere call to Lancelot, who, upon seeing her, does indeed revive. The maiden then calls to him to tell him to turn around, that the sight of the tower, and not Guinevere, will help: "[Turn around so you'll be over here / Where you can keep this tower in sight / For seeing it will bring you succor]" (3701-33). Here tower is a metonymic stand-in for Guinevere. It is to the tower, and not her, that Lancelot will look. It is because tower houses her that this is the case. Looking at the tower is apparently equally as effective as looking at Guinevere, and so tower as container for Guinevere is integrated into the narrative as a natural substitution.[81]

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[81] This is not to say that Guinevere has no agency in this case. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner has argued that it is Guinevere who maintains control over the episode, as she sends messages to Lancelot to either do his best or do his worst. It is, in fact, Guinevere who recognizes Lancelot, and uses these messages to confirm her suspicions that it is he, since Guinevere, unlike the other characters, has recognized the *modus operandi* of Lancelot, in

While in this tower, Guinevere desires a rendezvous with Lancelot. She tells him that he will not be able to access her in the tower. That Guinevere's body is precious to Meleagant and to Lancelot is unquestionable, and the discourse of difficulty of access to the tower reflects this. The tower is not totally inaccessible, however. Guinevere herself is certainly not a barrier, as she says that the only way Lancelot will not enter is if she does not want him to. Moreover, Lancelot finds that part of the garden wall has fallen, and so getting into the garden and up to the tower is not difficult. Easy access stops here, though. There are bars on the window that constitute a material architectural barrier, and he also finds that Kay, who is injured, also sleeps in her room, which constitutes an extra narrative step that Lancelot must overcome. He must pull the bars from the window, and quietly as he does this, he injures his hand. While this does not prevent his entering the tower, the wound is a further indication that the tower should be highly inaccessible. Moreover, Lancelot says that he would rather lose limbs than not get into the tower. This further suggests the role of towers as military defenses, where life and limb could be lost in the attempt to access them. The narrative does not resort to Lancelot's maiming, but the potential difficulty of access to towers is made explicit.

The next part of the narrative does link Guinevere's sexuality with ease of access to her body in a move that again registers the metaphoric role of tower in religious discourse. In removing the bars from the window, Lancelot injures his hand and blood from his wound stains Guinevere's sheets. When Meleagant enters the chamber the next morning, he sees the blood on her sheets and blood on Kay's sheets from his reopened wounds. Maleagant

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the first instance hesitating before making a decision in favor of love in the cart episode. Bruckner therefore reads this episode as a repetition of the cart episode, and as Guinevere recognizing that as part of Lancelot's character. (*Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth,*

thus accuses Kay and Guinevere of sleeping together. Though Meleagant's assumption is wrong, that he would assume this suggests that easy access to the space of the tower equals easy access to the female body. Thus, for the lover who would take advantage of Guinevere's sexuality, difficulty of access must be maintained. Of course, that difficulty is overcome by Lancelot, but at great effort and loss. And he is punished for it.

His punishment consists of being locked up himself in the manor house of Meleagant's seneschal. From this point forward Chretien is clearly playing with the gendered ideology attached to towers. The story up to this point has quite clearly associated women with towers, and in the case of Guinevere, towers with imprisonment of women. Of course, imprisonment of men in towers happened historically, but in this narrative, locking Lancelot up feminizes him. He must be set free in the first instance by the seneschal's wife in order to attend a tournament. There he regains his masculine identity through his exceptional performance, but he has promised to return to the manor house.[82] When Meleagant finds out that he has managed to leave, however, he insists that Lancelot's movement must be completely restricted. He therefore enlists the best carpenters and masons to build a tower of stone, strong, thick-walled, broad and high. The doorways are sealed, and the masons are not allowed to ever mention the tower. There is only one narrow opening with no ladder or stairs. Like other towers in Chrétien's stories, this tower is described in terms of material towers that functioned historically to provide the best

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and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 76-82.

[82] The text does not specify this, but manor houses could be fortified (see P.A. Faulkner, "Domestic Planning from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Centuries," in *Studies in Medieval Domestic Architecture*, ed. M.J. Swanson (London: Royal Archaeological Institute, 1975). Although Faulkner gives English examples, architecture was being shared across the channel from the Norman conquest on.

defenses, and at the same time the best prisons. With this tower, Chrétien demonstrates his interest in material towers, their building and features. But he also describes it, like the tower in Cligés, as the exemplary tower, the tower that cannot exist. That the same kind of tower that houses Fenice is used to house Lancelot is further evidence that Chrétien is playing with the gendered ideology surrounding towers.[83]

Lancelot's rescue also suggests this. It is a maiden and not a man who goes questing in order to come to his aid. This is not a situation that can hold, however. The maiden comes to his rescue, but all she can do is throw him a pick-axe. This is an interesting role reversal, one in which the woman cannot get into the tower housing the man. He must free himself from the inside. Ultimately, this is not the proper place for a man. As with the earlier episode Lancelot is trapped; he laments being "[shamed]" (6524) "[(a)s grief gnawed away at his life]" (6531). His grief at being locked up might be natural, but in describing it as a disgrace, he suggests that his identity is being challenged. The fight over Guinevere that leads him here is a blatant contest of masculinity; in the context of this contest of masculinity, it seems that it is Lancelot's masculine identity that is at stake. He must be remasculinized through this act of freeing himself. Moreover, Chrétien refuses to take responsibility for Lancelot's being there. It is left to Godefroi de Leigni to finish the story

[83] Bruckner reads Lancelot as other in his ability to be both the best and the worst knight. She notes that "A hint of Lancelot's otherness is suggested in the mysterious reference to his childhood with a fairy….This is part… of his mobility as a character who crosses boundaries, sheds reputations and identities, even insofar as they would limit action" (*Shaping Romance*, p. 70). I read this as another way in which Lancelot crosses boundaries, and of course this shedding of boundaries limits action in that Lancelot is forced to remain locked for some time in a tower from which he cannot move.

starting with the part where Lancelot is imprisoned in the tower.[84] If tower properly houses women, Chrétien seems to feel uncomfortable situating Lancelot here. The retroactive breaking of the narrative at this moment further constitutes a break in the trajectory of the representation of towers, which builds from ladies occupying towers, creating a metonymic association between the two, to the moment when tower can actually stand in for Guinevere. We go immediately from that episode, but discover later that that will be the last episode in which tower and lady will be associated in the narrative.[85]

While this episode is a playful upending of gendered norms, it also confirms several things about Chrétien's texts. Chrétien is interested in material towers as potential containers for people, but not as metaphors for them. It also confirms that bodies are valuable in the first instance, with towers taking on the value of those bodies. The tower that imprisons Lancelot is only built once he manages to escape the less fortified manor house. The value of his body follows not from his sexuality, but from his exemplary masculinity, proven on the tournament field. And the tower contains that masculinity, as dangerous to Meleagant as women's sexuality might be to social order.

And because of this variation, with which the text, or Chrétien, is clearly uncomfortable, it is obvious that castles and towers are primarily proper places for women to

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[84] Bruckner notes that scholars have traditionally read this as a problem for Chrétien, that he was uncomfortable with his famle patroness, Marie de Champagne, asking for a story of an illicit love affair. She further notes that indeed, a parallel might exist between Marie's request and the commands of Guinevere to Lancelot at the tournament. Nevertheless, she argues that "If we allow ourselves to be guided by Lancelot's example in the tournament episode, we may be able to see that, whatever Marie de Champagne actually gave Chrétien, once the gift has been given, he is no more the hapless victim of a woman's manipulation than Lancelot himself" (*Shaping Romance*, p. 86).

[85] Brucker nevertheless notes that Chrétien is playing with his reader, that he has set up a narrative that can end in no other way than it does (*Shaping Romance*, pp. 87).

occupy. But these towers do not function to contain women's bodies or their sexuality, even when some men of the narrative might wish it. Guinevere is contained by the castle tower, but the castle's inaccessibility is no match for her desire. Her will trumps tower fortifications. In the case of the maiden who pretends rape, her control over her sexuality is linked to her ease of movement. Furthermore, that these bodies are all aristocratic and that aristocratic women are allowed to choose where they move and how they behave suggests that there is no concern over their status. Thus towers provide a locus for thinking about the value of feminine gendered bodies, but they do not contain those bodies to the purpose of thinking about social status in the way that *Floris and Blauncheflur* will.

Marie de France

While Marie does not offer quite the amount of architectural detail of towers that Chrétien does, her narratives play with the same themes. Towers are spaces for women to occupy, but not for containing them. In her *lais*, control over lineage plays a part that does not appear in Chrétien's stories. For Marie, women's mobility and choice are paramount,[86]

[86] Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Schichtman argue that romance played a part in the complex social matrix of patronage, where patronage was often a homosocial activity. They demonstrate that in Marie's *Lanval*, the sexual capital of Arthur's queen is pitted against the intellectual capital possessed by Lanval's fairy mistress, expressed through magic, but that Lanval must ultimately leave Arthur's court "because the kind of power that the fairy mistress possesses, a female sexuality unrestrained by a masculine sexual economy that requires the continual circulation of women and wealth, cannot be maintained for long with the Arthurian world without becoming subordinate to the sexual economy of feudalism" ("Magical Mistress Tour: Patronage, Intellectual Property, and the Dissemination of Wealth in the Lais of Marie de France," *Signs* 25:2 (2000): 500). Ultimately, however, they suggest that Marie is offering herself as just such a woman, a "new woman" who can use her intellectual property in the system of patronage more often used to enact negotiations of power between lower status knights and their higher status patrons. Through these female characters who remain mobile, Marie may be offering a further vision of this "new woman." Roberta L. Krueger remarks that the proliferation of romances dedicated to women in the

and as these women move from high status tower into and through other spaces, the value of the body, and not in the first place the tower, is confirmed. Like with Chrétien, tower space only reflects and does not confer status.[87]

In Marie de France's *Guigemar*, the eponymous hero finds himself on the shore beneath the tower in which his true love lives. Before Guigemar meets her, the narrator tells us that the lord of the city, whom we later discover to be of very high lineage, has a wife, also of noble birth, who is courtly and beautiful. Because his wife is so beautiful, he is very jealous of her and does not want to be cuckolded. This leads him to construct a garden at the foot of the keep, as well as a chamber and chapel.[88] The tower has already presumably housed her, but the addition of these architectural features makes this an even more feminine

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twelfth century does not necessarily mean that consideration for women shaped their contents, that romances remained misogynistic, and that at the time women were in fact losing power (*Women Readers and Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 3-14. Again, Marie may here be attempting to counteract that trend. H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., argues that in Marie's Lais, "good girls are the ones who have submerged their own desire in order to create socially effective simulacra of the desires of men" ("The Voice of the Hind: The Emergence of Feminine Discontent in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 160). This seems to me to be a reductive reading given the arguments that I will make about women's choices.

[87] Glyn S. Burgess makes the point that only men of noble birth play significant parts in Marie's lais, and that all of her female characters are noble. He traces these characters through the lais and finds that Marie did not "become more interested in rank and social status as her career progressed" ("Social Status in the *Lais* of Marie de France," in *The Spirit of the Court: Selected Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985), pp. 69-78).

[88] In "Gardens and Anti-Gardens in Marie de France's *Lais*," Logan E. Whalen and Rupert T. Pickens explore the role of the garden as *locus amoenus*, where lovers come together to experience *fin amors*, but also where men control women's sexuality. In *Guigemar*, they argue that first the garden operates as a *locus horrilibis*, since the lady is trapped there by her husband, but later transforms into a *locus amoenus*, as she and Guigemar meet there (*Romance Philology* 66 (2012): 185-210).

space.[89] It was common practice to build chapels constructed with upper levels directly accessible from women's chambers. Moreover, the text makes a point to say that there is only one point of entry, making these spaces accessible in the same way that chambers in towers are, only one step at a time. The lady is imprisoned in the chamber, having the lord's niece as a companion and a priest to guard the outside. Somehow through the garden walls she spies the ship carrying Guigemar that has landed on the shore below, and in spite of her guardians, leaves the garden to retrieve him. Moreover, in spite of the priest at the gate, she manages to smuggle Guigemar into her chamber. After confessing their love for one another and having sex, Guigemar remains with her for a year and half. On a premonition, the lady becomes afraid that they will be separated, and so they form a pact. The lady forms a knot out of his shirt and tells him that he may only love the woman who can untie the knot. Guigemar, in a parallel move, fashions her a chastity belt. That very day, they are discovered in bed together by her lord's chamberlain, who spies them through a window. The lord responds by putting Guigemar back in his ship and sending him off, and by imprisoning the lady no longer just in her enclosure, but in a more formidable architectural structure, a tower, made of marble. After mourning for two years, she one day wants to leave, and finding no lock, and apparently no priest, simply leaves. These feminized spaces are therefore constructed as permeable. The narrative ease with which she leaves means that this tower cannot contain her.

Yonec begins in Britain with a rich old man, who, because of his large inheritance, marries a woman who is noble and beautiful. It is on account of her noble lineage that he locks her in his tower in a chamber. He explicitly contains her to keep her from having sex

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[89] Gilchrist, "Medieval Bodies," p. 55.

with other men. As she laments one day, a hawk flies into her room and turns into a noble knight. The two immediately become lovers, and the knight is able to come to her every time that she wishes. Thus this tower is permeable from the outside, and the tower is a space where the lady can express her sexuality freely, in spite of her imprisonment by her husband. When the lord's sister discovers them together, the lord puts large barbed spikes on the window. The next time that the knight flies in, he is fatally wounded by the spikes. Before dying, he tells the lady that she has conceived a child, and that this child would take vengeance on her husband. Somehow, in spite of the spikes, the lady jumps from the tower window and follows him. He insists that she return, however, giving her a ring that would cause amnesia in her husband, and a sword which their son could eventually take possession and with which he can avenge them against the lady's husband. She returns to her husband, who believes that her son, called Yonec, is also his. Many years later, the family travels to a feast at an abbey. When she finds that a tomb in the abbey is that of her late lover, she tells her son that the knight in the tomb is his father, tells him of her husband's ill-treatment of the knight, gives him the sword, and then dies on the tomb. Yonec cuts off his step-father's head, and the people of the region make him their lord.

As in romance texts that other scholars have studied, the architectural spaces of these texts—garden enclosure, tower, Meriaduc's castle—all serve the purpose of containing the ladies' bodies, as well as their sexuality, especially in the service of maintaining a noble lineage.[90] In *Yonec*, maintaining a noble lineage is the explicit concern of the lord, and in

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[90] McCracken has written extensively about concern over the adulterous queens Guinevere and Iseut, pointing out that the potential for them to conceive children from their affairs is a direct threat to succession of the throne. She argues that "romance narratives about adulterous queens appropriate a lesson about status and legitimacy" (*The Romance of Adultery*, p. 22).

Guigemar, though no mention is ever made of procreation, and only a nod to possibility of sexual relations between the lord and his lady, there is an undercurrent of concern over lineage because of the insistence on the lady's nobility. For the lords in the stories, their lady's nobility is of paramount importance. Because of the noble lineage of the women in both stories, difficulty of access to the architectural space housing the female body begins the narrative. In each case, the lady is locked in an impermeable architctural structure and heavily guarded, so that no one may gain access. But that difficulty is not ultimately prohibitive. In *Guigemar*, the lady simply brings him into her chamber. In *Yonec*, access requires magic, but through that magic, access is at first easily possible. Only after they are discovered in their illicit relationships are both women contained more stringently. And if containment and protection of sexuality were the main purpose of the tower, however, not just access, but also escape, should be extremely difficult. But even after each is more imprisoned, in neither case does this prevent the women from leaving. In *Yonec*, the lady easily jumps from her tower, returns, but then leaves again, and the lady in Guigemar simply walks out. The tower's representation thus primarily feminizes the space, but does not turn it into an impenetrable container for these women's bodies. In both cases, the space of the tower does not ultimately prove to be an effective way to contain these women.

In fact, much more central to the story than the tower is the ladies' ability to choose their own paths. For the lady in *Guigemar*, though we have little detail of her life before meeting Guigemar, after she meets him, it seems only she can grant access to the space of her garden and to her body. The thing controlling her sexuality is, in the end, the belt that she voluntarily wears for love of Guigemar, not the tower. In *Yonec*, the lady also makes the choice to take the knight as her lover and to return to her tower. Her husband, as much as he may want to, cannot use the tower to totally control his wife and her body. It seems, then,

that the tower cannot bestow value on these female bodies, because of its inability to restrict access to or movement of the female body. It cannot itself create, through difficulty of access, the value of what lies inside it. In fact, the female bodies are the primary source of value in the first instance, with the architectural structures taking no role beyond the fact that, as I have demonstrated, towers were status symbols.

This is further demonstrated by the fact that the towers also do not stand central to the narrative or to the landscape within the narrative. In *Guigemar*, at no point is the tower absolutely central to the story, either spatially or narratively. We are not told anything about it beyond the detail of the marble, and we are never told where it is in relation to the lord's city. In terms of the action of the narrative, it does provide the space where the lovers enjoy one another's company, but it is only one in a series of architectural spaces within the narrative. Furthermore, it is only after the lady and Guigemar are discovered that the tower is built. The high status material marble out of which the tower is built of course renders the tower a high status space in and of itself; nevertheless, I would argue, the marble is more a reflection of the value of the body it contains precisely because it is built to contain that body. The tower takes on more importance in *Yonec*, as the lady begins there, and then returns. The union between her and the knight occurs there, as in *Guigemar*, but narratively it only provides bookends to the more important episode wherein the knight prophesizes the end. And the end does not come in the tower. Again, as in *Guigemar*, the climax comes in another space, the abbey within the magnificent castle to which the lady first follows her beloved. So again, the tower is one amongst a number of architectural spaces where major narrative events occur. And these spaces are all of the same status. The tower does not stand out as any more spectacular or high status than other spaces in the narratives. The town to which the lady follows her knight in *Yonec* is made entirely of silver, and the abbey

to which she travels with her husband and son lies within a castle that is said to be the most beautiful in the world. In *Guigemar*, the ship is made of the richest materials, made of ebony with silk sails. In neither story can the tower be considered the most important or high status figure, nor the space toward which the narrative moves.

The easy movement of woman from tower space out into world parallels the easy movement of woman from husband to lover. If all of the spaces within the narrative are of equal status, so too are the men between whom they chose. In both stories, the husband is a lord and the lover a knight, but nothing is made of this disparity. And in *Yonec*, the knight is referred to as noble. As there is no disparity between the men, neither is there disparity between the physical locations of the story. Thus the tower does not contain women for the purpose of conferring or maintaining their social status. [91]

That the tower is not central to either story, that value inheres in the female body in the first instance, and is no way constituted by the tower, and that easy access and escape characterize these towers all therefore suggest that the tower is not a space for negotiating social status. Nevertheless, the metonymic link between body and tower set up by Marie's, in addition to Chrétien's, narratives, that relies on the historical relation between women and towers, remains in the literary imagination so that future authors can manipulate the trope. The beginning of the devlopment of the trope into one where occupation of the tower can convey status appears in the next text I will examine, the Middle English *Floris and*

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[91] In "The Space of Epistemology in Marie de France's 'Yonec,'" Seeta Chaganti argues that space is material as she concentrates on movement through space as a way of forgetting that is crucial to the narrative of the lai. While she acknowledges space as a material thing through which bodies can move, and which reflects the troubled, shifting, and necessarily forgotten territorial boundaries in France and Wales, space is still ultimately symbolic, as Chaganti reads it as "represent[ing] a cognitive and epistemological process happening in the mind" (*Romance Studies* 28:2 (2010): 72).

Blauncheflur. The crucial movement that *Floris and Blauncheflur* makes is to suggest that female bodies can gain status from being in towers. This develops the trope of women in towers into one where a dialectical relationship of mutually constituting value between body and tower can emerge, and access to one, the other, or both can become a way to negotiate status.

Floris and Blauncheflur

Floris and Blauncheflur, on the other hand, displays a clear concern over social status through a series of metonymic relationships between the towers in the romance and the body of Blauncheflur. In this romance, Blauncheflur's body does not just move, it circulates. Her body does not begin in a tower, but moves through a series of mercantile exchanges, into the city of Babylon, whose walls have towers used for trade, and ultimately ends in the fantastic and thickly described tower of the Babylonian emir. Although Blauncheflur's body is valued according to monetary value by some characters in the romance, the narrator means us to read her body as inherently valuable. Recognition by everyone in the text of that value does not occur, however, until her body becomes associated with the central tower of the emir. That tower is both fantastical and extremely difficult to access. Thus by the end the status of tower and the status of Blauncheflur become mutually constituted. Ultimately the value of both are affirmed, but the fact that Blauncheflur's body ends in the tower suggests that the tower itself does function as a way to contain the social status that Blauncheflur's body gains through its final containment there. The text presents a fantasy of value inhering in a non-aristocratic female body, but circulation followed by stasis in the tower suggests value that needs to be contained and legitimated by the tower's status.

Floris and Blauncheflur is one of the most attested romances that we have, as well as being one of the earliest and one of the latest. The Middle English *Floris and Blancheflur* was composed sometime in the mid-thirteenth century in the East Midlands. The oldest manuscripts date to the second half of the century, and the language of the romance is similar enough to *King Horn* to suggest that it shares its date of composition with that text, generally agreed to be the middle of the century.[92] The popularity of the romance is witnessed by four extant manuscripts ranging through to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Moreover, the Middle English version is taken from Old French versions, although the textual history is hard to determine. Two Old French versions exist, and no Middle English version is a clear translation of either of them. In addition to enjoying great popularity in France and England, the story of *Floris and Blanchefleur* was retold in Italy, Spain, and Scandinavia in the late medieval and early modern periods.[93] Certainly the continued popularity in England suggests the way the trope of woman and tower is used as a way of negotiating social status was one that resonated with medieval audiences.

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[92] The discussion that follows, along with all quotations, are taken from *Floris and Blauncheflur: A Middle English Romance Edited with Introduction, Notes and Glossary,* ed. F.C. de Vries (Groningen: Druk. V.R.B., Kleine der A 3-4, 1966). This edition prints all versions of the manuscript.

[93] For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Patricia E. Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor and the European Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). What is generally considered the oldest attested version appears in Cambridge University Library MS Gg.iv.27.2, which dates to the end of the thirteenth century and includes a copy of *King Horn*. Contemporaneous, and possibly earlier, is MS Cotton Vitellius Diii, but the manuscript was damaged in the fire that swept the Cotton library. The most complete version is MS Egerton 2862, now at the British Library. It is also, however, the latest, dating to end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century. Finally, the romance also appears in MS Advocates' 19.2.1, National Library of Scotland, also known as the Auchinleck Manuscript, which dates from c. 1330.

The romance begins with Floris and Blauncheflur already united in the household of the Christian king of Spain. The beginning does not survive in any of the Middle English versions, but in the Old French versions, the king has enslaved the wife of a Muslim whom he slayed. Floris is the king's son, and Blauncheflur is the daughter of a slave woman working in the king's household bringing up the two children together. This Muslim slave is formerly a queen, but her movement into the household of the king and queen demonstrably reduces her status, and thus the status of her daughter. Both Floris and Blauncheflur are sent to school, were, we are told, their love grows to such an intensity that the king notices and becomes anxious that Floris's love for Blaucnheflur will prevent Floris from marrying another aristocrat. His solution is to kill her, but his queen, also anxious to have Floris married honorably, urges instead that Floris be sent away to the household of her sister. When Floris refuses to accept the separation, the queen agrees that only Blauncheflur dead will achieve the desired effect, but she suggests that they build a tomb to convince Floris of it and sell Blauncheflur off to merchants of Babylon. Blaunchefleur is first sold to a merchant for a magnificent cup, and then sold to the emir of Babylon, who keeps her in a tower along with all of his other maidens. This part of the narrative is achieved quickly, with no direct representation of Blancheflur being traded; instead she is whisked from court to Babylonian tower in a matter of 35 lines, and most of these are used to describe the cup for which she is traded.

When Floris almost dies from the loss of Blauncheflur, his mother and father confess what they have done, and this catapults Floris on a journey to find her. From here the poem's narrative drive is Floris's quest to free his beloved from the emir who has come by her through a series of mercantile trades. Floris meets the burgess, Darys, through whose home Blauncheflur travelled. Darys promises to devise a plan to gain access to the tower,

which involves tricking the porter of the tower into swearing fealty to Floris, making the porter completely at his command. Between the burgess and the porter, Floris will encounter a bridge-keep. The poem's quick pace reflects Floris's swift movements from place to place, but this continual movement is contrasted with the stasis that occurs with descriptions of the emir's towers, especially the one that holds Blauncheflur. In the middle of Floris's movements toward Blauncheflur, narration stops as Babylon's mural wall and its towers, along with the city's central tower, its building and properties, are described at length:

> An hundryd fathum it is hye.
> Who-soo beholdeþ hit, fer or nere,
> An hundred fathum it is yfere.
> It is made without pere,
> Of lyme and of marbulston;
> In all þis world is suche noon.
> Now is þe morter made so wele,
> Ne may it breke iren ne steele.
> The pomel þat aboue is leide,
> It is made with muche pride,
> þat man ne þar in the tour berne
> Nouther torchee ne lanterne;
> Suche a pomel was þer bygone,
> Hit shineþ aniȝt so doth þe soon." (E, 569-82)

This is proceeded by a description of the mural towers in which trading happens, which is proceeded by Floris's encounter with the porter guarding the tower. Blauncheflur has in fact

been left completely behind by the narrative. The narrative stasis around the tower itself reflects Blauncheflur's stasis in the tower during this extended period of time. As we see Floris moving from place to place through the public sphere, Blauncheflur has been placed in this tower. As opposed to the narratives of Chrétien and Marie, the trope of woman in tower has become one of immobility, as Blauncheflur disappears into the feminine space of the tower. The tower is described at length, while Blauncheflur's experience of the interior of that tower is never mentioned.

Once the porter has sworn fealty, he comes up with a plan: he will let the maidens gather flowers in the field. Once the baskets are carried in, Blauncheflur and Floris are reunited, and the two spend a month hidden away in the tower together, enjoying each other's company. This month of sexual liaison certainly demonstrates that Blauncheflur's sexuality is not at issue, but it also leaves Blauncheflur for another extended period of time in the same tower. Her place continues to be in this space, even as she flouts her purpose for being there. Eventually the emir discovers them, growing so angry that he nearly kills them. On second thought, though, he decides to call for council and gives the lovers a chance to speak. When each attempts to take responsibility, to sacrifice their own lives to ensure the life of the other, the emir takes pity on them and knights Floris. The romance ends when Floris's father dies and Floris inherits the kingdom.

The narrative begins with the tension between the value that the noble king and queen of Spain place on Blauncheflur and the value that the narrator gives her. She is the daughter of a slave and therefore not an appropriate candidate for continuing the nobility of the family, a fact made clear by the king and queen. Nevertheless, the poet considers her valuable. We see this first as the poet critiques the values of the king, the highest-status character in the romance, by demonstrating his coldhearted treatment of the lovers and his

wish that Floris marry someone of high status in order to maintain a pure line of descent. The poet describes the love shared by Floris and Blanchefleur in the most tender terms: when told he must go to school, Floris "answered with weeping, / As he stood byfore þe Kyng; / Al weping seide he: / 'Ne shal not Blaunchefloure lerne with me? / Ne kan y noȝt to schole goone / Without Blaunchefloure'" (15-20). Floris is said to weep twice, and his plea, rendered in direct discourse, is especially moving. Blaunchefluris furthermore also given the same education as Floris, and excels as much as he does. In fact, the narrator emphasizes that people of differing status may learn equally well. When Floris's father, the king, decides to send Floris off to school, we are told that Floris will be "sette to lore / On þe book letters to know, / As men don, both hye and lowe" (10-12). The narrator extolls both the high born Floris and the low born Blaunchefluris saying "When þey had v ȝere to scoole goon / So wel þey had lerned þoo, / Inowȝ þey couþ of Latyne, / And wel wryte on parchemyne" (31-34).

The king's devaluing of Blaunchefluris comes when he realizes that the two are in love, and he concocts a plan to kill Blanchefloure, hoping that Floris will soon forget her in order to "wife after lawe" (40). The queen reiterates this desire when she expresses the hope that Floris will "lese not his honour / For þe mayden Blaunchefloure" (57-58). While the poet clearly recognizes the value of Blaunchefloure, the failure of the king and queen to recognize the worth of Blanchefloure, which she possesses in spite of her low status, is clearly at issue from the beginning.

The further devaluing of her body occurs with the plan that sets off the series of trades to which Blaunchefluris's body is subjected, as the queen pleads to the king to spare Blanchefloure's life, suggesting instead that Blaunchefluris be traded away:

þer ben chapmen ryche, ywys,

Merchaundes of Babyloyn ful ryche,

þat wol hur bye blethelyche.

Than may ȝe for that louely foode

Haue muche catell and goode." (146-50)

In her essay, "The Bartering of Blanchefleur," Kathleen Coyne Kelly references this passage in her argument that, more than a love story, this is a story about a mercantile trade in women. She writes that "the very flatness of [Blauncheflur's] character encourages readers to foreground her as a passive object of exchange."[94] While I agree that the story is about the trade in women, and that Blanchefleur is certainly turned into "a passive object of exchange," I question who turns her into that. The narrator, as I have suggested, is sympathetic to the wishes of the young couple. It is royal mother and father who first make Blanchefleur into an object; it is they who set off this domino plot of exchange after exchange. Thus the poem presents a critique of the practice and links it directly to the king and queen. Rather than taking a noble course of action, they subscribe instead to the mercantile mode of money and exchange as an expedient to achieving their goal of rule over household and lineage.

What I do not want to suggest here is that this equation of a female body with money is a mercantile ethic being denigrated by the text. Instead, this monetary way of valuing Blauncheflur's body represents a way to construct the extreme opposite way that a body can be valued from the one that the text favors: social value, that is, value within a social hierarchy. Blauncheflur is worthy of Floris's love as far as the narrative is concerned. Ad Putter and Jill Mann have demonstrated that many romances, including even the high literary

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, were informed by a mercantile ethic. Ad Putter has argued that romance, rather than shore up feudal knightly values against encroaching mercantile ones, instead embraces merchants as crucial members of society. Romance, he says, does not show hostility to merchants at all.[95] Jill Mann argues that the Gawain poet uses the Aristotelian economic theory of exchange value to think about how value is created. In the exchange of winnings, for instance, it is the exchange itself, and not any inherent or even use value of the respective winnings that determine their worth.[96] And Gawain's worth is determined not by his moral superiority, but by the demand that exists for him by other ladies, as the lady of the castle makes clear.[97] Jill Mann says that the poem takes us "into the world of the market" when we are told at the beginning that Guinevere's tapestries are decorated with the best gems that pennies might buy.[98] But pennies are buying goods, not people. Gawain is not being bought. On the other hand, Blauncheflur's worth is not established by a social demand by the merchants or the emir. That implies monetary value, and not one in a hierarchy of people—moral, social, or otherwise.[99] This way of thinking about Blauncheflur's body takes us a little too much into the world of the market. It makes

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[94] Kathleen Coyne Kelly, "The Bartering of Blauncheflur in the Middle English *Floris and Blauncheflur*," *Studies in Philology* XCI:2 (1994): 110.

[95] Ad Putter, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight *and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 188-89, 190-91, 229-43.

[96] Mann, "Price and Value in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in *Medieval English Poetry*, ed. Stephanie Trigg (London: Longman, 1993), p. 303. (294-318)

[97] Mann, "Price and Value," p. 305.

[98] Mann, "Price and Value," pp. 296-97.

[99] She is sold for her weight in gold. The replacement of exchange, where she was exchanged for the cup, to the monetary transaction involving gold may begin to signal her rising status.

her body merchandise. I would suggest, then, that the poem does not critique any mercantile ethic or merchants themselves. Instead, it accuses the highest status people of the poem—king, queen, and emir—of valuing her completely outside of a social hierarchy. They think of Blauncheflur's body as merchandise in opposition to the way that her body will be reevaluated by the end of the poem.

Mercantilism itself is in fact never disparaged. There is considerable potential for slippage between monetary value and social demand value, as Floris demonstrates in his series of exchanges of merchandise to find Blauncheflur. The goods exchanged could metonymically be linked back to Blauncheflur's body, but the text closes down that possibility through the nature of Floris's quest to win her back. Though he uses material goods along the way in his quest to reach her, he gives those goods to the people who give him information about Blauncheflur. He specifically says that he does not "on catel þenke… nouȝt" (E, 461).[100] At one point he does call her merchandise, but he counters this with an understanding that he cannot trade for her, that once he finds her he must "it [the merchandise] forgoo" (E, 536).[101] Furthermore, trading happens in the relatively high status space of the towers of the city wall of Babylon: "And xx toures þer ben ynne, / þat euery day chepyng is ynne, / Euery day and nyȝt þrouȝ-out þe ȝere / þe chepyng is ylyche plenere" (E, 559-62).[102] Trading is an important activity, and thus is accorded an important space in which to occur. The tower is also established as a site where valuable things may be housed while being traded. Moreover, that Blauncheflur never actually passes through the

[100] Version A is nearly identical; versions C and V omit this part.

[101] Versions A, C, and V are nearly identical.

[102] Version A is nearly identical; versions C and V name only two towers.

mercantile towers suggests a separation of the activities of merchants from the actions of the emir. A merchant is responsible for buying and then selling Blauncheflur, but that merchant is in no way connected to the "cheping" that happens with the mural towers of the city.

Even with the clearly important role that "cheping" takes on in the story, those towers are not central to the poem or to the landscape within the poem. They are not physically described at all. Instead, the tower that houses Blauncheflur is, during the second half of the romance, both in the center of the diegetic space of the story, and central to the narrative, as it provides the space where the climax occurs:

> To þe Amyral of Babyloyn
> þey solde þat mayde swythe soon;
> Rath and soone þey were at oon.
> þe Amyral hur bouȝt anoon,
> And gafe for hur, as she stood vpryȝt,
> Seuyn sythes of gold her wyȝt;
> For he þouȝt without weene
> þat faire mayde have to Queene.
> Among his maydons in his bour
> He her dide, with muche honour.
> Now þese merchaundes þat may belete,
> And been glad of hur byȝete." (E, 191-202)[103]

Parts of this narration are repeated verbatim a short time later by the burgess to Floris:

> þe Amyral hur haþ bouȝt.

He gaf for hur, as she stood vpriȝt,

Seuen sithes of gold hur wyȝt;

For he þenkeþ, without weene

þat feire may haue to Queene.

Among his maydons in his toure

He hur dide with muche honoure." (E, 482-88)[104]

The space of the bower/tower according to the emir is thus directly linked to monetary value, that value being drawn from the value of Blancheflour, who draws a high "byȝete" or profit. The towers of the mural wall suggest that valuable objects belong in towers. But the most valuable object, Blauncheflur, does not even pass through the trading towers. She is bought, and in one narrative step she moves into the tower, where the emir keeps all of his maidens. Blauncheflur is the ultimate treasure to be hoarded, and the central tower is the ultimate treasure house.

While the emir's use of all of his towers suggests that they are a valuable space because valuable goods, including women, are traded there, the central tower becomes the focus of the narrative, so much so that the narrative stops completely for several lines to offer a thick description of it, and this tower is extraordinary. The central tower is linked with the mercantile towers of the text. Nevertheless, the narrative makes a huge distinction between the two kinds of towers. The central tower is clearly spectacularly different from the rest. As I have said, the central tower was the most high status space in the thirteenth-

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[103] Version V is incomplete, but the text that remains is nearly identical; versions A and C are missing the text completely.

[104] Version A is nearly identical; version C only has the first line, and it is nearly identical; version V is missing this text completely.

century castle. The sudden shift that the narrator makes toward describing the central tower of Babylon as such a high-status space, in fact the ultimate high status space, relies on this conception of the tower as such as space. The thick description of the tower, as well as that description's inclusion of precisely how this tower is made, points to the fact that this tower is being conceived in terms of the real material architectural construct of the tower:

> An hundryd fathum it is hye.
>
> Who-soo beholdeþ hit, fer or nere,
>
> An hundred fathum it is yfere.
>
> It is made without pere,
>
> Of lyme and of marbulston;
>
> In all þis world is suche noon.
>
> Now is þe morter made so wele,
>
> Ne may it breke iren ne steele.
>
> The pomel þat aboue is leide,
>
> It is made with muche pride,
>
> þat man ne þar in the tour berne
>
> Nouther torchee ne lanterne;
>
> Suche a pomel was þer bygone,
>
> Hit shineþ aniȝt so doth þe soon." (E, 569-82)[105]

The man who might live in the tower, "durst him neuer more… / Couete after more blysse" (E, 587-88).[106] This tower is made out of "lime and marbul stone" (as is the tower in

[105] Version A is nearly identical; version C talks of two towers, but after missing text, speaks of only one tower; version V has missing text, but the text that is present is nearly identical.

Marie's *Guigemar*). It is further made "without pere." "Peer" also may be here a nod to the status of peers of realm, noblemen or aristocrats. The reference to peer especially situates the tower within the historical, material world of architecture, where towers were indeed the spaces occupied by aristocrats. And it is completely defensible: its mortar is made so well that iron nor steel can break its defenses.

For a moment the text also draws upon the romance motif of the enclosed garden, potentially standing in for the female body. At the base of the tower is a garden, and in this garden is a fountain. If any "unclean" maiden steps through fountain, the fountain waters will become muddy (1832-1833). This clearly demonstrates a concern over female sexuality, but like the stories of Chrétien and Marie, I would argue that that concern is not paramount. Nothing is ever made of the fountain after it is mentioned; Blauncheflur is never put to the test with it. If anything, this garden is here because it is a common trope of romance, and not because it is a way through which we should read Blauncheflur. Again, containing Blauncheflur's sexuality is not truly at issue. The audience of this romance is not being asked to consider Blauncheflur as needing to be contained by this garden. Garden is there because garden is always present in romance, by this point metonymically associated with the female body, but not standing in for it as in the *Song of Songs*. As in *Cligés*, the text considers the proper lineage to be maintained through the access made to this garden by Floris, but that access is granted by the narrative.

With this enclosed garden, there is an intertextual connection to the high status spaces of earlier romance. While I would argue that we are not meant in the end to dwell on Blauncheflur's potentially loose sexuality, we are meant to connect this tower with the

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[106] Version A is nearly identical; version C replaces "blysse" with "paradis"; version V is

towers of other romances, rendered valuable through their connection to valuable and high status aristocratic women. This tower is imagined as the most high status space possible. Like Chrétien and Marie's, it is the exemplary tower, impenetrable and the most luxurious.

Added to this description of a tower that is difficult to access because of its material construction and association with the aristocracy, the status of the space is further affirmed by the narrative difficulty of access to it. This tower, unlike those of Marie, is not one that is easily accessible by the male protagonist of the tale. Indeed, rather than being easily accessible, access requires a long series of narrative steps, a parallel construction to the long number of architectural steps necessary to access real castle towers. First Floris must meet the burgess, and then he must go to bridge keeper, who tells him how to trick the porter into homage to Floris. Then there is a series of games of chess, suggesting that complicated maneuvering will ensue. Then Floris must go to a meadow, hide in a basket, and be brought into the tower. Finally, he ends up in the wrong bower. Blauncheflur has to be called from her own bower in order to be reunited with Floris.

Moreover, Floris's means of physically accessing this tower, of actually moving his body from the outside of the tower into its interior, is made out to be especially difficult. Scholarship on the poem has paid much attention to the complicated means by which Floris accesses the tower. In "Cunning and Ingenuity in the Middle English *Floris and Blauncheflur*," Geraldine Barnes argues that the Middle English redaction takes a special interest in the ideas of *gin* and *engin*, over and above love, which forms the central theme of the Old French version.[107] In the Middle English version, time and again Floris refers to his

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missing text, but the text that remains is nearly identical.

[107] *Medium Ævum* 53 (1984): 10-25. Hanning traces the meanings of "engine" from Latin and French dictionaries, noting its wide range of connotations, that it can be either

plan to "wynne" back Blauncheflur or win over the porter with "gynne." This makes clear that this tower is especially hard to physically access by Floris, and not accessible the means we see in Marie and Chrétien: prowess, magic, or, as in the case of *Guigemar*, conveniently absent priests who should be guarding the space.

In fact, Floris must ultimately be feminized in order to access this space. This is especially interesting given that in other texts only another woman is allowed into the chamber of the lady. John A. Geck, because Floris is regularly described as looking like Blauncheflur, concludes that Floris is a "feminized hero."[108] Geck argues that part of this ambiguously-gendered representation is Floris's entry in the tower in a basket of flowers, thus making it a "passive entry."[109] He concludes that "Floris's use of cunning and disguise reveals a lack of interest in prowess in open combat, and works in tandem with Floris's hypo-masculinized behavior and appearance."[110] Geck's argument runs the risk of being circular, Floris's feminization being both effected and proven through his use of cunning as a "passive" means of entry. But his argument does align with the distinction made by the poem between ingenuity and strength, and with the construction of the tower as a feminized space. It is because of the long cultural association of women with towers that Geck's

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positive or negative. In Old French romance, he argues that "*engine* contributes to the sense of the individual in the chivalric romance; personal motive, consciously decided upon and expressing personal values or needs, determines our response to any particular use of this basic human capability" (*The Individual*, p. 111). In *Floris and Blauncheflur*, Floris's use of *engine* is painted as a thoroughly positive trait, one that makes him worthy eventually of gaining access to the privileged space of the emir's tower.

[108] John A. Geck, "'For Goddes loue, sir, mercy!': Recontextualising the Modern Critical Text of Floris and Blancheflor," in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 86.

[109] Geck, "Recontextualising," p. 88.

[110] Geck, "Recontextualising," p. 89.

argument ultimately holds up. The feminization of Floris makes his access of the feminized space of the bower/tower a natural transition. Female-like, Floris makes his way into the tower, and with the help of a woman's ingenuity. When Floris leaps out of the basket at Claris, thinking she is Blauncheflur, Claris cries out. When the other maidens come running, she quickly makes up a story that a butterfly had flown out of the basket and frightened her. They all leave, and she fetches Blauncheflur to reunite her with Floris. The feminized ingenuity displayed by Floris is thus repeated by Claris, aligning Floris even more with a feminized position within the narrative. In the end, this gender switching of Floris's suggests that fully masculine man could not at all enter this tower. For a short time, then, the narrative suggests that this tower is truly impermeable to a man. Only after his successful entry into the tower is he re-masculinized by uniting with Blauncheflur and consummating their relationship.

At this point, the value of Blauncheflur, daughter of a slave, is legitimated through her rescue by and subsequent marriage to Floris. He releases her from the tower that holds her as a treasure with monetary value. Instead, he sees the essential value of Blauncheflur, which is aligned with the high status of the tower space. Value of body and space are mutually constitutive. Before this, Blauncheflur's value has gone unrecognized by the high status characters of the text: she is traded away, circulated as object, bought and put away as a treasure. Now, tower can affirm what the text itself asserted from the beginning.

The status of the tower is affirmed both by the narrative and by its description's reliance on the actual material attributes of the medieval castle tower. And because Blauncheflur resides in this tower, the value of her body then becomes associated with the status of the tower. In contrast to the ladies in Chrétien and Marie's tales, her body's value is legitimated by her association with the extraordinariness of this tower, its aristocratic

nature, and its reference back to the aristocratic towers of earlier romance. After Blauncherflur's move into the tower, at which time she becomes one of the maidens of the tower, the maidens are referred to as of "hyȝe parage" (E, 590).[111] We might take this to mean that through her movement into the tower, Blaunchefl ur's value shifts to functioning as a conduit of noble lineage. Moreover, at this point, this circulation through trade but elevation to noble status and final containment by this miraculous tower suggests that her body's worth must be contained. The inherent value that the narrator ascribes to Blaunchefl ur is also legitimated through her association with this high status space.

The particular interest that the narrative displays in social status comes from this revaluing of Blaunchefl ur's body, from low status to high status. Of course, the narrator recognizes the worth of Blaunchefl ur, but the aristocratic characters in the story reject her from their world and do not view her as a possible conduit of continued nobility within the family. In the beginning, Blaunchefl ur stands outside of the political hierarchy of the royal court, where she is a slave to the members of the household, but the narrator identifies from the beginning a person outside of that hierarchy as having a value. It is not until she is housed by the high status tower that that worth will become equal to those at the royal court. Ultimately Blaunchefl ur's value does not derive from its weight in gold; rather, her value derives from her association with the central tower and the manner in which she is saved from being a victim of trafficking through her marriage to the aristocratic Floris. Blaunchefl ur's body is valued monetarily for the first half of the narrative, but in the second half, the central tower, which stands also at the crucial part of the story, the climax, become the final place that we see her. The linking of mercantile tower to central, aristocratic tower,

[111] Versions A and C omit "hyȝe"; version V is missing this text.

and the circulation of Blauncheflur's between the two, suggests that her body can effect a shift from the status of one to the other. What is thus finally established is a fantasy of a non-aristocratic body, already valued by the narrator, becoming valued as part of an aristocratic system of maintaining status within the social hierarchy gaining status through its association with the high status space of the tower.

Putter has said of romance that a total "fusion of mercantile and chivalric values" occurs.[112] I would argue that in *Floris and Blauncheflur*, a difference is still registered. Chivalric values, i.e. those represented by the highest status characters of the story, do not accord Blauncheflur a place of value in the way that the narrative ultimately does. These values assume that she has no place within a system of aristocratic lineage and the maintenance of that lineage. They do not recognize a demand for her in the way that the ladies of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* do Gawain, or in the way that Floris does Blauncheflur. By no means does the text set up a total opposition; with its movement of Blauncheflur to highest status space of the central tower, and her union with Floris, the text makes clear that joining the chivalric class is something to aspire to. The text hopes that a "fusion" of chivalric and mercantile interests and class status can occur. But the text makes clear that they have not yet. It is through the narrative and the setting up of tower as conduit of social hierarchical value that the text imagines this. And it is through Blauncheflur's occupation of the high status space of the tower, inaccessible and luxurious, that she gains her rightful place in the social hierarchical world of the royal court.

The central tower stands out as higher, both literally, as its description tell us, and figuratively in terms of a representing higher status, in a landscape that includes the lower

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[112] Putter, *Sir Gawain*, p. 192.

status constructs of the mural walls, both less high, and not ascribed aristocratic attributes. Part representation of historical structures, part idealization of contemporary ideologies of gender and space, *Floris and Blauncheflur*'s architectural constructs provide a way for the poet to consider how an architectural space, rather than being one space among many in a socially flat landscape depicting the concerns of the single social stratum of the high aristocracy, can become the locus for determining status

In the following chapters, we will see that Middle English texts use the metonymic relationship between women and towers seen in *Floris and Blauncheflur* that mutually constitutes both as a site of value. Chrétien and Marie crucially establish the woman ensconsed in a tower as a popular trope, one that also relies on real historical practice of women living in towers. Furthermore, they thematize difficulty of access, though every text treats the concept differently. The exemplary towers their texts build imagine the very best kind of tower, luxurious and impermeable, even if the success of theses tower to contain women and their sexuality is variable. Towers, already high status in the material culture of the period, become even more high status as they house the high status and desirable bodies of aristocratic women. In *Floris and Blauncheflur*, the status associated with towers both in material culture and through the association established with high status women in earlier romance allows the tower to become a space that legitimizes a female body that is undervalued by the aristocrats in the text. The trope of female body in tower is a variable one, but the popularity of *Floris and Blauncheflur* demonstrates that its connection of tower with elevating social status continued to resonate with audiences. This may even include mercantile ones, who may have envisioned, with the author, the possibility of social elevation through access to or possession of such towers. The romance appears, after all, in the Auchinleck manuscript, a manuscript produced professionally in London, probably for a

mercantile audience. As all of these romances show, aristocratic women's bodies are valuable, towers are valuable, and the value inhering in both provided a way for other medieval English authors to capitalize on the trope that connects female body to architectural space in determining social place.

III. Contesting Class in Middle English Lyric Poetry

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the tower space is a locus where social status can be negotiated in a dialectical relationship where tower and female body can imbue each other with status. In this chapter, I will turn to how clerical authors of Middle English lyric, normally read as "political" or "religious," use the trope of women in towers to negotiate their own status. Tower space and female body are both valuable, and access to both becomes the objective of the speakers of these poems. The material female body, located time and again in bowers and towers, becomes the locus around which the secular clergy can claim a special status equal if not superior to the aristocratic men with whom they mingled, and by whom their status and right to unrestrained access to aristocratic women was often challenged. These lyrics place women in bowers and towers, and are very much interested in the bodily materiality and particularly the aristocratic status of the women who are located there. This chapter will argue that women are used in class construction, chiefly through architectural metaphor. The primary way that this happens is through the entrance of the lyrics into circulation as art objects. As Bourdieu tells us, art posits itself as circulating in a realm outside of regular economic markets.[113] As art objects, these poems circulated in a way that suggests that they remain aesthetic, rather than engaging contemporary social matters, but the preoccupation with material practices in these lyrics belies their ostensible function as spiritual reminders to a sinful audience or attacks on

[113] Pierre Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 74.

women. Thus these lyrics, as they move amongst aristocratic audiences, enter into a social negotiation with their readers.

Furthermore, the objectification of the material female body seen in "Wen þe turuf" as well as other lyrics further fetishizes that body. Anthropologist William Pietz traces the origin of the fetish object as one that embodies a clash between radically different social systems. The fetishized female body as contained in the textual objects of the lyrics is therefore the site where two conflicting social systems—the secular and the spiritual—encounter one another. Clerics considered themselves to be of a separate world, and to be living under and only subject to separate codes and hierarchies from their lay peers, but they regularly, indeed they had no choice but to, move in a world of secular, political, and economic hierarchies. The female body, contained in towers and in texts representing that containment, operates as the grounds on which struggles over status between clerics and lay men took place. The relationship between how the female body is troped and the textual objects on which that trope was inscribed—the manuscripts— create together a fetish object, always connected, as Pietz argues about the fetish, by their creator. The manuscripts then enter the world, the textual objects themselves the site of social negotiation.

In the varied and diverse corpus of poetry now characterized as "Middle English lyric," the bower is the space where women dwell, and it is a space that, inaccessible to the virtuous speakers of the poems, is a sight where the wrong kind of activities can take place, where worldly concerns like fashion, games, and even sexual activity, take place with men who are sometimes identified specifically as lay and high status. In the last chapter we saw how romance took the metaphoric relationship between female body and tower or enclosed space, where body was that space, and shifted it to a metonymic relationship, where tower could stand in for female body because of their close association in the material practice of

locating women in these spaces. What begins as a metaphor in religious texts—ivory tower for throat—becomes through material practice a metonymic relationship. Later we will see that some lyrics simultaneously exploit both a metonymic and a metaphoric relationship. Some lyrics long for access to the architectural space of tower/bower and thus the women who reside there in a metonymic relationship. Others claim a superior right to that access through a metaphor drawing on development in the religious tradition from the Bible, through body/soul debates, to the anchoritic texts of the thirteenth century. As we move from the lyrics generally into the realm of what are called "grave poems," we will see that hereafter refined to the close association of female bodies, indeed parts of female bodies, such as the ladies' "bright complexion" in "Ubi Sunt Nos Fuerount," further will provide the slippage between metonymy and metaphor that the grave poems use.

I examine a number of lyrics drawn from three manuscripts: Trinity College Cambridge B.14.29, also known as Trinity College Cambridge 323,[114] Digby 86, and the famous Harley 2253. In addition to containing lyrics that address the concerns of this chapter, including several that can be found in two or all three of the manuscripts, a case can be made for considering them together because of their provenance and production: while the actual manuscripts for TCC 323 and Digby 86 can be dated to between 1260 and 1280,[115] the Harley MS, compiled in the early fourteenth, nevertheless contains thirteenth-

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[114] Hereafter referred to as TCC 323.

[115] John Frankis, "The Social Context of Vernacular Writing in Thirteenth Century England: the Evidence of the Manusripts, in *Thirteenth Century England I*, ed. P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1985), p. 181. Digby is generally accepted to have been compiled c.1272-1282 based on a calendar of kings ending with Edward I.

century material, including all of its religious lyrics[116]; moreover, all three can be located on linguistic grounds to Worcester or Worcester and Hereford,[117] and all three contain materials in English, Latin and French. Brown observes, moreover, that the lyrics from these manuscripts appear in large groups, in contrast to earlier thirteenth-century manuscripts, in which lyrics occurred uniquely and largely on their own.[118] This suggests to me that what we are dealing with is something of a programmatic treatment of the lyric material, material that was deemed worth copying by a number of clerics during a period of time in a very localized region.[119] More manuscripts must have existed, as it is clear that these manuscripts did not provide exemplars for each other's shared content.[120] I suggest that the popularity of these lyrics, which must have been widely circulating amongst clerics, were being used by clerics to achieve a social, and not just aesthetic goal. Finally, evidence suggests that all

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[116] *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), p. xl.

[117] Frankis, "Social Context," p. 181. Details will be given in the discussions of each manuscript below.

[118] Brown, *English Lyrics*, p. xix.

[119] Marilyn Corrie gestures toward this point when she writes, "The lack of direct relationship does not mean that the parallels between the contents of the manuscripts are purely coincidental. The fact that the two books, Harley and Digby, were apparently compiled in such very close proximity to each other probably underlies many of their resemblances: they may well represent relics of a localized literary culture that flourished in the South West Midlands of England in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries" ("Harley 2253, Digby 86, and the Circulation of Literature in Pre-Chaucerian England," in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British MS Harley 2253*, ed. Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), p. 441).

[120] This is discussed by Frances McSparren in "The Language of the English Poems, the Harley Scribe and His Exemplars," in *Studies*, p. 401. By studying variants in the language of the poem, she concludes that the poems "copied by the Harley scribe were in circulation in this area, and his exemplars are likely to have been fairly local" (401). She demonstrates,

three manuscripts were written by secular clergy for lay households. These lyrics comprise a systematic function, and I will argue that they functioned for the secular clergy in relation to the lay households that those clergy served. I do not address the entirety of the lyrics that each contains; to do so would make no sense due to the nature of the manuscripts as anthologies and miscellanies. But the variety of other texts each manuscript contains is strong evidence that reading these lyrics in only one light, as penitential, as love lyric, as political poem, ignores the complicated social matrix that produced and consumed them.

TCC 323 is, of the three, the manuscript about which we know the least, though its early editor Carleton Brown notes that it is "The earliest and in some respects the most important of these collections."[121] Indeed while some of its lyrics are highly anthologized, there is no catalog of contents outside of M.R. James' *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: a Descriptive Catalogue*, only one full length study,[122] and no facsimile has been produced. The manuscript contains a number of religious poems, a debate between the body and the soul, the Legend of St. Nicholas. That its lyrics should be studied alongside those of the more popular Digby 86 and Harley 2253 has long been accepted, but no study that focuses on the TCC 323 lyrics in as much detail as Digby or Harley's has been done. Long thought to be a "Friar's Miscellany,"[123] TCC 323's categorization as such has been regularly challenged. Siegfried Wenzel counts TCC 323 as a preacher's notebook, and therefore meant for an audience drawn from across the spectrum of

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as do Frankis and Brown, that the other manuscripts from the South West Midlands, including Digby and TCC 323, cannot have been a direct source (pp. 400-01).

[121] Brown, *English Lyrics*, p. xx.

[122] K. Reichl, *Religiöse Dichtung im englischen Hochmittelalter* (Munich: Fink, 1973).

[123] Carleton Brown claims it for the Dominicans in particular (*English Lyrics*, p. xxi).

the social hierarchy.[124] But John Frankis, in a highly influential rethinking of the entire group of "Friars' Miscellanies," argues that the manuscript's lack of a systematic arrangement of materials makes it an unlikely candidate for a preaching book.[125] He further argues that, while probably compiled in a religious house due to the number of hands—12 in all—that house was more likely one of regular or secular canons than monks: "clergy who had dealings with laity are perhaps more likely compilers than members of an enclosed order, though the latter cannot be ruled out, especially if one thinks in terms of a nunnery, but there seems no obvious reason for preferring a mendicant convent to a house of regular or secular cannons."[126] Support for the hypothesis that it was composed by a cleric for at least some consumption for a lay household lies in its inclusion of an Anglo-Norman poem, *Ragemon le Bon*, which describes a parlor game of fortune-telling. The TCC 323 version is a religious parody of that found in Digby 86, and the poem's presence in these manuscripts demonstrate that they "had a social function, rather than reflecting a purely private literary interest."[127]

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[124] *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 8. Brown also notes that it was clearly meant for the instruction of laymen, including as it does the Life of St. Margaret and a homily for the life of St. Nicholas (*English Lyrics*, p. xx).

[125] Frankis, "Social Context," p. 182.

[126] Frankis relies in part for his discussion on the one comprehensive study of the manuscript to date, that of Reichl, *Religiöse Dichtung*, who identified the number of hands and suggested a religious house for the manuscript's origin, but Frankis disagrees with Reichl "cautiously conclude[ing]" that it is a Franciscan production, p. 182.

[127] Frankis, "Social Context," p. 183.

Though, as Frankis notes, TCC 323 "seems…to be a rather haphazard collection, with various kinds of text being entered as they came to hand,"[128] this manuscript exhibits a special interest in death that sets it apart from the other two. It does have in common with Digby 86 two poems that I'll treat here: "Doomsday," and "The Latemest Day," which both treat death implicitly as they consider the end of time. "Doomsday" warns "þe riche men þat warden fou & gray" (14 [who wear ermine and gray fur]), who "Riden uppe steden & uppe palefray" (15 [ride upon steeds and palfreys]), that "atte dome" they "sculen…singen weilaway" (16 [at doomsday they shall sing "wellaway"]). "The Latemest Day" appears right after "Doomsday" in the manuscript,[129] and dwells much longer on the sins of man and recounts the despondency of the soul after death for what the body has done, in a body/soul debate that was undoubtedly influenced by the twelfth-century Old English "Address to the Soul to the Body," recorded in the thirteenth-century Worcester Fragment.[130] TCC 323, unlike Digby 86, however, contains almost exclusively what is ostensibly religious material, and two poems that appear uniquely in it consider the actual moments leading up to and directly following death. "Wen þe turuf is þi tuur" is one; the other is "Shroud and Grave." "Shroud and Grave" describes the movement of man, "hol & soint" (1 [whole and sound]), to his body, laid in the grave, where it "salt in horþe wonien & wormes…to-cheven" (21 [shall in earth remain for worms to chew]). These two edited lyrics are joined by another rather bizarre piece, lines that appear on the same folio page as "Wen þe turuf is þi tuur"

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[128] Frankis, "Social Context," p. 182.

[129] Brown, *English Lyrics*, p. 188.

[130] Brown, *English Lyrics*, p. 189; Rosemary Woolf also makes note of the clear influence (*The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 79-80).

which are, according to M.R. James' *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: a Descriptive Catalogue, "*Verses in Latin and English on the beasts produced by various parts of the dead body." While TCC 323 records almost exclusively poems categorized as religious, including a number praising Mary, I will demonstrate that the above poems in particular deal in the same secular concerns of the love and political lyrics of Digby and Harley.

Digby 86 contains a much greater variety, including religious verse, but also much secular material, such as medical material, a tract on interpreting dreams, the game *Ragemon le Bon* mentioned earlier, and fabliaux.[131] Like TCC 323, Digby contains English, Latin and French material. The provenance of Digby 86 has been traced to Worcestershire, this time on more than linguistic grounds. A series of marginalia listing owners, including place names, locates it there.[132] While this evidence alone suggests where and how early the book belonged to laypeople, B.D.H. Miller demonstrated forcefully that the book had been produced for a lay household.[133] Thus John Frankis, "accepting Miller's suggestion…would see the compiler (the manuscript is almost entirely in one hand) as a cleric, perhaps the local parish-priest, more probably a chaplain in a manorial household, at any rate a member of the secular clergy."[134] Frankis points out that while the original of *Ragemon le Bon* is addressed entirely to males, the redaction appearing in Digby 86 addresses a mixed audience. From

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[131] See the facsimile for a full list, (*Facsimile of British Museum MS. Harley 2253*, intr. N.R. Kerr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. xv-xxxvi.

[132] The full transcription and analysis of these marginalia can be found in Brown, *English Lyrics*, pp. xxix-xxx, and the facsimile, pp. lvii-lviii.

[133] Frankis, "Social Context," p. 183.

[134] Frankis, "Social Context," p. 183.

this poem he deduces that "the society for whom the Digby manuscript was compiled [was] sexually mixed, though predictably male-dominated (the poem has familiar jokes about women and cuckoldry), requiring entertainment, somewhat naive and even coarse in taste, rustic rather than urban, at any rate lacking in the refinement and sophistication that one might expect to find in an aristocratic court[.]"[135] This conclusion that an aristocratic court is not a possible audience is somewhat tenuous, but the manuscript was most certainly meant for laypeople.

In addition to these observations about provenance which suggest the same milieu for TCC 323 and Digby 86, common lyric materials also suggest a connection. Digby shares with Harley and TCC 323 the "Debate Between the Body and the Soul," and "Doomsday" and "The Latemest Day" appear. Along with these gloomy reminders of death, another poem in this study lists specifically courtly activities before turning to the consequences of those activities: "Ubi Sunt Qui Ante Nos Fuerount," which, as the title suggests, asks what will become of those beautiful women who enjoy eating and drinking, hawking and hounding, wearing gold and delighting in their fair complexions. It warns them not to fall victim to the devil's temptations, but to meditate on Jesus's sacrifice. It ends with a supplication to Mary to allow the speaker and his audience of women to help them reunite with Jesus. The other is "The Thrush and the Nightingale," a debate poem in which the narrator overhears a "strif" (7) over the value of women. The nightingale insists that "Hit is shome to blame leuedy, / For hy beþ hende of corteisy" (25-26). The Thrush, on the other hand, insists that "hy beþ swikele and false of þohut" (37-38). Both then provide examples throughout, but the Thrush has the last word as he reminds the nightingale and the reader

[135] Frankis, p. 184.

that Mary, a woman, gave birth to Jesus. In both of these poems, the language of ideal courtesy and courtly behavior, and that specifically practiced by women, comes into conflict with the ideal of the ultimate holy woman, Mary.

Harley 2253, while being somewhat removed temporally from the other two manuscripts, having been copied in the early fourteenth century, nevertheless provides crucial additions to our understanding of the production and consumption of lyric poetry in the thirteenth century. This is due to two factors: first, it contains by far the largest collection of lyric poetry; second, its provenance has been most thoroughly studied. Carter Revard's meticulous uncovering of legal charters written by the Harley scribe in the area of Ludlow, in southern Shropshire very close to the borders with Herefordshire and Worcestershire between 1314 and 1349, very firmly locates our prolific scribe.[136] Ker conducted the first thorough study of the manuscript and the edited facsimile. He deduced that the scribe was probably a household chaplain, and that his likely patrons were Joan Mortimer, the lady of Richard's Castle, and her son Sir John Talbot, and that he was connected with the Hereford bishop Adam Orleton .[137] Revard, however, provides ample documentary evidence that this was not the case, as well as internal evidence: the political poems, *A Song of Lewes* and *Lament for Simon de Montfort*, take an explicitly Montfordian stance, yet the Mortimers were long political enemies of de Montfort.[138] While he acknowledges a possible connection to these local magnates, he also suggests that the scribe

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[136] Carter Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," in *Studies*, pp. 21-109.

[137] Revard reviews the evidence in "Scribe and Provenance," pp. 22-24.

[138] Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," pp. 28-30.

may also have been connected to a number of other families "of county-magnate status[.]"[139] He suggests in particular the Ludlows of Stokesay castle, a family newly risen to knighthood from an extremely lucrative career in the wool trade.[140] The inclusion in Harley 2253 of two poems, a Middle English poem about the Flemish insurrection and *Against the King's Taxes*, both take the part of wool traders.[141] Moreover, the scribe left another manuscript, BL MS Royal 12.C.xii, which contains the Anglo-Norman romance *Fouke le Fitz Waryn*. Sir William Ludlow, heir to a wealthy wool merchant, married Maud Hodnet, whose ancestor Baldwin de Hodnet fought alongside the historical Fouke. Sir William's son Sir Laurence, then, would be a likely patron for such story.[142]

That Harley 2253 and the scribe's other manuscripts were intended for a lay household, and that this scribe was connected to one as a household cleric or chaplain, is therefore quite clear. The Royal manuscript has courtesy literatures like the romance *Ami et Amile*, and the third manuscript identified as being copied by the Harley 2253 scribe, Harley 273, contains religious and secular materials that a young priest or chaplain would find helpful, including Grosseteste's *Rules for the Countess of Lincoln*.[143] Having identified the small area within which the scribe worked, however, Revard, along with Daniel Birkholz,[144] whose study I will discuss later, confidently asserts that bastard feudalism tied him to

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[139] Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," p. 22.

[140] Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," p. 22.

[141] Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," p. 28.

[142] Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," pp. 77-78.

[143] Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," pp. 67-69, 71.

[144] "Harley Lyrics and Hereford Clerics: The Implications of Mobility, c. 1300-1351," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009): 175-230.

multiple families and places, and that "probably [his] family and connections cover a wide social and geographical range, from Ludlow to the Mortimer earls of March and the Fitz Alan earls of Arundel."[145] Our cleric was thus very tuned into and a part of the secular and very hierarchical world around him.

As has been demonstrated, the Harley scribe cast a wide net in gathering and even possibly authoring some of his materials.[146] As has been noted, all of its religious material dates from the thirteenth century, and it shares several poems with TCC 323 and especially with Digby 86. Though scattered throughout the manuscript, the lyrics comprising the canon of "Harley Lyrics" were established by the important early editors of the manuscript's lyric poetry.[147] A large number are considered religious, but another nine were categorized as political or satirical.[148] In addition to religious texts shared in common with TCC 323 and Digby 86 such as the Debate Between the Body and Soul, and just with Digby, such as the story of the Harrowing of Hell, the *Sayings of St. Bernard*, and two lyrics, "Stond Wel, Moder, under Rode" and "Suete Iesu, King of Blysse," Harley resembles Digby in its inclusion of several fabliaux and other secular verse; as Marilyn Corrie puts it, "[j]ust as Harley 2253 includes fabliaux which ostensibly revel in bawdiness and sexual abandon along with lyrics in which secular eroticism is abjured, so too Digby 86 mingles the

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[145] Revard, "Scribe and Provenance," p. 23.

[146] Revard makes this suggestion, since some of the poems were written in the dialect of the Ludlow area. He gives *Alisoun* as an example ("Scribe and Provenance," p. 73).

[147] Brook's collection established the religious and secular verse canon. The "strictly" political poems were added by Russel Hope Robbins, ed., *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

[148] For a full list of these poems, see Susanna Fein, "Introduction," in *Studies*, pp. 16-17.

unashamedly profane with the solemnly pious[.]"[149] Harley's preponderance of what have been deemed secular verse is especially noteworthy. "Annot and Johon" extols the beauty of the female love object in courtly terms. "The Lovelies Lady in the Land" describes, again in courtly terms, the beauty of the beloved and her unobtainability. "The Way of Women's Love" laments the courtly activities being enjoyed by the speaker's "derne love" (2). "On the Follies of Fashion" blames lower-status women for attempting to imitate the fashions of the aristocracy, claiming that such fashions will lead them into sin. These secular lyrics, written undoubtedly by clerics, if not by our scribe, appropriate courtly motifs and discourse, but I shall argue that these appropriations are not done in an unselfconscious attempt to mimic the tastes of the lay households in which they might have circulated, but, that situated alongside the lyrics of both TCC 323 and Digby 86, we can see in all of the lyrics a critique of lay aristocratic tastes and a bid to participate in competition with the lay aristocracy's hierarchy.

As we shall see, the secular clergy had an especially complex and vexed relationship with the aristocratic laity, in terms of social status and gender identity revolving around their partial inclusion in and regular contact with that laity. This chapter will examine the set of tropes found across Middle English lyrics, in the manuscripts listed above as well as others, that assert the place of the clergy within the shifting context of the intimate relationship between the clergy and the lower aristocracy. The material female body, in its relation to towers and bowers, provides the locus where social status can be negotiated, in a way drawing on, but much more explicitly, than the romances studied in the last chapter.

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[149] Corrie, "Harley 2253," p. 428.

Genre, History, and the Genre in History

How to deal with the genre of lyric, especially their historicizing, has, for the most part, stumped critics. At stake have been problems such as the degree to which they borrow from Old English lyric poetry, the degree to which they borrow from Latin poetry, and the degree to which they incorporate "popular" or "oral" culture.[150] Most attempts at tackling extant lyric poetry have been in this vein: to trace the emergence and influences of this huge, diffuse corpus of lyric verse, and to categorize it.[151] The earliest treatments made rigid distinctions between religious and secular verse, and most work has followed this canonical separation.[152] Some volumes treat the "love lyric," while the most famous restrict themselves to the religious poetry. Even Siegfried Wenzel and David L. Jeffrey, who both made tremendous additions to scholarship on the lyric, and who both insist on the difficulty of distinguishing between religious and secular realms in the high to late Middle Ages, nevertheless return to religious readings of the poetry. Wenzel argues that preachers most certainly borrowed from secular and popular culture, but he concerns himself with the

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[150] Wenzel and David L. Jeffrey (*The Early English Lyrics & Franciscan Spirituality* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975, pp. 21-60) see in Middle English lyric poetry the textual capturing of oral and popular traditions, while Rosemary Woolf attempts to trace their inspiration in Latin lyric.

[151] Mostly religious v. secular. Robbins and Carlton the first to do this and their conclusions still adhered to. Wenzel discusses the problems that inhere in attempting to create subcategories within the religious or secular.

[152] Woolf's monograph, for instance, is just on the religious English lyric; anthologies like *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Brown, 2nd. ed. revised by G.V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); *Historical Poems of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (ed. Robbins); and *The Political Songs of England from the Reign of John to that of Edward III* (ed. and trans. Thomas Wright (London: Camden Society, 1839)) choose based on the editors' assumptions about these categories; *A Companion to Middle English Lyric* (ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2005)) is organized in chapters

sermon context of those borrowings. Jeffrey makes the argument that all verse, even secular or love verse, must be considered religious, if not strictly allegorical, because of the Aquinian insistence that all the realm of nature was God's realm, thus all poetry must be addressing God's realm (14-15).[153] While I agree that easy distinctions are not sustainable, I will argue in this chapter that certainly lyrics that are ostensibly secular, but also those that have only been interpreted within a religious framework, are aiming to participate in a very political and material world. Thus I want to shift the categorization from one based on theme to one based on the cultural work that these lyrics are performing.

While numerous sweeping, comprehensive and introductory volumes on the lyrics have been produced, few historicist arguments about them have been attempted. This is undoubtedly in part due to the nature of the texts themselves. The lyrics' diffuse provenance across multiple manuscripts as well as their wide range of subject matter makes such a task daunting. But Daniel Birkholz points to another reason: "under the pressure of historicist methodological tastes (New and old), one kind of literary anonymity, the anonymity of unestablished authorship, can breed another: the anonymity of provincial inconsequence."[154] The anonymity of their authors, coupled with the difficulty of putting these Herefordshire "backwater" productions into a continuous line of Middle English literary development, makes the lyrics virtually untouchable.[155] Birkholz sets out to counteract this canonical sweeping under the rug, taking as his object the famous love lyrics of Harley 2253. He

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according to different categories; Julia Boffey surveys just the *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1985).

[153] Jeffrey, *Early English Lyrics*, pp. 14-15.

[154] Birkholz, "Harley Lyrics," 176.

[155] Birkholz, "Harley Lyrics," p. 183.

demonstrates that, far from being provincial—the compiler and copyist is known to have worked around Ludlow, a town in the Welsh March—the copyist was in fact very cosmopolitan, and "that the textual phenomenon of the Harley Lyrics—their unique currency 'by west'…—may be regarded as a consequence of the geographical mobility that marks the careers of certain West Midlands secular clerks c. 1300-1351."[156] According to Birkholz, the love-longing of the many love poems in Harley is not a longing for actual women, but for home, for Hereford, for England.

While Birkholz considers the lyrics looking forward to the age of Chaucer and the cosmopolitanism of fourteenth-century London literature, Seth Lerer takes a look backward in time, to the age of the Anglo-Saxons and the coming of the Normans. In his article "The Genre of the Grave and the Origins of Middle English Lyric," he draws a circle around a handful of Middle English lyrics that, he argues, "inhume Anglo-Saxon England."[157] He starts with what is potentially the oldest ME lyric, a lyric that will act as a touchstone for my study as well as his:

> [þe]h þet hi can wittes fule-wis
> of worldles blisse nabbe ic nout
> for a lafdi þet is pris
> of alle þet in bure goð
> seþen furst þe heo was his
> iloken in castel wal of ston
> ne sic hol ne bliþe iwis

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[156] Birkholz, "Harley Lyrics," p. 180.

[157] Seth Lerer, "The Genre of the Grave and the Origins of the Middle English Lyric," *Modern Language Quarterly* 58:2 (1997): 127-61.

ne þriminde mon

lifð mon non bildeð me

abiden 7 bliþe for to boe

ne defter mi deað me longgeð

I mai siggen wel by me

Herde þet wo hongeð.[158]

In the poem the speaker mourns the loss of his lady, who is locked in a "castle wall of stone." John Scattergood uses the detail of the castle to interpret this as the lament by a lower status individual that his "lady is unattainable because she has become the wife of a powerful lord."[159] Lerer declares, however, that he will "survey ... not the privacy of the domestic but the confines of the coffin."[160] The body being mourned in this poem and the other grave poems that he examines becomes not the female body but instead a figure of Anglo-Saxon England: this lady "is England itself,"[161] and "these poems inhume Anglo-Saxon England. They present communities and cultures shored up against alien invasion or encroaching wilderness."[162] A poem like "Ic an witles" "personalizes the communal sense

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[158] Quoted from Carleton Brown's introduction to *English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century*; the lyric appears in the margin of MS Royal 8.D.xiii, also from Worcester (p. xii). Brown was the first to transcribe it, and he dates it to just after 1200 on paleographical and linguistic grounds (xii).

[159] In "The Love Lyric Before Chaucer ," in A *Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, p. 46.

[160] Lerer, "Genre of the Grave, p. 132.

[161] Lerer, "Genre of the Grave," p. 152.

[162] Lerer, "Genre of the Grave," p. 138.

of loss shared by the late Old English poems of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.[163] It invests in the architectural imagery of confinement and control, as its reference to the lady 'iloken in castel wal of stan' recalls both the impregnability and the alien nature of the Norman castle."[164] What Lerer and Birkholz have in common, then, is that they never read the women in these poems as women: female bodies are instead symbols for a geographical location. "Domestic" scenes are turned into national scenes. I will instead take these women for women, and read these architectural motifs as referential to real spaces in which real, historical bodies lived. In his early study, Carleton Brown muses of "Ic and witless, "Is it fanciful to suppose that these verses—written in pencil apparently because their author had no thought of preserving them, and tucked away on a convenient margin in an old book—may possibly record actual human experience?"[165] While such a sentiment would generally be regarded as quaint in literary studies today, Brown's question is not necessarily a bad one. What evidence do we have that it definitely does not?

I am indebted to Lerer's analysis, which centers on the architectural tropes so prominent in the lyrics: he writes that "[b]y focusing on architectural control, the lyric seeks

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[163] Heather Blurton argues against Lerer's nostalgic tendencies with reference to the poem *Durham*, which he reads as a nostalgic reminder of a long-lapsed Old English poetic form. She argues instead that it inserts itself in the politics of the day, which saw the city Durham as a site contested by new Anglo-Norman bishops and the monks of Durham Cathedral, who wished to shore up the cathedral's authority and right to hold St. Cuthbert's relics by associating it with its Anglo-Saxon past ("*Reliqua*: Writing Relics in Anglo-Norman Durham," in *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 39-56. Christopher Cannon also uses *Durham* as an example of how tenuous disciplinary distinctions between Old and Middle English are, arguing that many "Old" English texts may very well need to be rethought as early Middle English ("Between the Old and Middle of English," *New Medieval Literatures* 7 (2005): 203-21).

[164] Lerer, "Genre of the Grave," p. 146

analogies between the artifacts of engineering and the structures of society."[166] He also notes that "[t]he interest in the genre [of the grave] may well be as much a statement of social life…[,] more a commentary on the experience of the living than on the condition of the dead."[167]

I too want to focus on the living and their relationship to architectural control and structures of society, not in relation to an Anglo-Saxon past, but in relation to a contemporary hierarchical and gendered society. Those that seem undoubtedly devotional in import and function, such as "Wen þe turuf is þi tour," precisely because of their interest in the relationship between architectural spaces and material female bodies, participate in the same concerns over politics and secular practices as those classified as love or political lyrics. Indeed, all of the lyrics that I survey place women specifically in bowers, often located in towers, in a way that builds on the metonymic relationship created between the female body and enclosed spaces developed by the romance genre. The lyrics are further very interested in the materiality of the female body, focusing, for instance, on specific parts of the body. Furthermore, where the romance genre assumes the aristocratic status of its female characters, the lyrics focus on that aristocratic status, making it one of their chief themes. Thus it is difficult to read these women as merely symbols for the clerical authors' homeland, whether that is England or the more localized Herefordshire.

I argue that these poems, written by clerics, play upon the material practices of the aristocracy that place women in the inaccessible and high status spaces of the stone tower.

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[165] Brown, *English Lyrics*, p. xii.

[166] Lerer, "Genre of the Grave," p. 132.

[167] Lerer, "Genre of the Grave," p. 143.

Clerics occupied a liminal space with regard to gender and sexuality, as well as with regard to secular political hierarchies, and so were in a kind of competition with lay males over both status and access to aristocratic women. Where the strategy of mimicking aristocratic tropes centered on gendered space and the objectification of women might seem to suggest that clerics wished for status within the hierarchy of lay men, instead I think that the clerical authors of these poems wanted to claim a different kind of status. While many lyrics look like secular love lyrics, and so their clerical authors seem to want access to the spaces and female bodies accessible to aristocratic lay men, the poems that I examine here suggest instead that their clerical authors sought power in a relationship of alterity to aristocratic lay men. Once in this relationship of alterity to laymen, clerics created these textual objects and circulated them, thereby implicitly entering a market that dealt in social status and cultural capital. Their particular representation of women and architectural spaces further suggests that the status they sought was one of a superior claim to accessing women's bodies.

Women and Towers

The complaint of "Ic an witles," that the speaker's lover is inaccessible in a tower suggests a competition between speaker and the builders of the castle walls of stone. It also signals that the bower/tower, the space feminized in contemporary ideology, is precisely what is at stake, that status is also tied to access. The bower is quite literally the locus of competition. As we shall see, the lyrics participate in, and may have helped to constitute, the ideology that linked the female body with the high status space of the bower/tower complex. So while Lerer uses the architectural motifs of the lyrics to argue for a politics of nationalism, a strong literary and material lived tradition supports a reading of the architecture as domestic, the women as real. And as Birkholz notes, the lyrics are more local

even then Herefordshire, that they are localized indeed to individual households, ensuring clerics' familiarity with contemporary high status architecture. These poems, therefore, reference particularly aristocratic material practices and construct a vision of the typical aristocratic women, ensconced within her castle tower.

Whether or not women did in fact occupy towers more often than men, or occupied them more than other more accessible spaces within castles and manor houses, lyrics corroborate the little evidence there is as well as functioned to cement the ideology that placed them there in the cultural imagination. When placed there, a woman also became inaccessible to all but the lord of the castle, the only person who had rights over his entire abode and rights to the body of his lady. The lyrics constitute the bower/tower as a specifically high status and feminized space, thereby creating a metonymic relationship between tower and female, where anxieties over the access to women's bodies becomes registered as anxieties over access to the tower, as well.

The lyrics do not all address just women in towers. They in fact engage a number of disparate topics—fashion, the grave, and stone—which only adds to the potential for reading them as participating in the social world that produced them. The clerics who lived amongst the laity would have been constantly faced with the rich and embellished clothing that women wore, the stone structures that might keep clerics from accessing those women, and of course burial was the purview of the clerical world. Through addressing these topics, clerics brought to the forefront the importance of the material world in establishing status, as well as negotiating it.

Over and over again the lyrics in these three manuscript anthologies place women in bowers, towers, or both. This will be demonstrated as I move through the lyrics, which treat the relationship between clerical author or speaker and the female subjects in their bowers

differently.[168] The rhetoric that places them there is part and parcel of the rhetoric of courtly love and ideas about the practices of courtliness, and one example clearly makes this point. The love lyric "Annot and Johon," which appears in Harley 2253, completely appropriates the motifs of courtly love. The love object is "a burde…ase beryl so bryht" (1), "hire rode is ase rose þat red is on rys / wiþ lilye-white leres" (11-12), and she is compared to a number of characters, some known, some unidentifiable, from sagas and especially from romances:

> He is medierne of miht mercie of mede
> Rekene ase regnas resound to rede,
> Trewe as tegeu in tour, ase wyrwein in wede,
> baldore þen byrne þat oft þe bor bede,
> Ase wylcadoun he is wys, dohty of dede,
> ffeyrore þen floyres folks to fede,
> Cud ase cradoc in court carf þe brede
> Hendore þen hilde þat haveþ me to hede
> he haveþ me to hede þis hendy anon,
> gentil ase ionas heo ioyeþ wiþ Ion. (41-50)

Tegeu and Wyrwein have been identified as ladies at Arthur's court, and Cradoc one of his knights, and Jonas as possibly a character from the *Queste del Saint Graal*.[169] The poem also places the female love object in multiple scenes of domestic architecture: she is "a

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[168] The majority of the lyrics that I examine have not been treated in the scholarly literature beyond labelling them as one kind of lyric or another; moreover, my endeavor in this section is to make this relatively basic point. I have thus refrained from referencing what little has been said of these lyrics. As mentioned above, Birkholz and Lerer are the only two scholars, to my knowledge, who have historicized the lyrics in the way that I am attempting to.

burde in a bour" (1), a "trewe tortle in a tour" (22), a "þrustle…þat singeþ in sale" (23) and "Trewe ase tegeu in tour" (43). A multitude of birds serve as metaphors for the lady, and when she is a falcon she is even out of doors in a wood and a dale, but the poem's beginning with her in a bower and emphasizing her "trueness" within the tower suggests that these are the places where the lady's highest virtues as a lady may be found, and consequently suggest where the lady is most properly located. The bird metaphor represents the lady as caged or uncaged, and in the case of this poem, she is caged. She is the ideal courtly love object, ideally located in the bower/tower.

"The Thrush and the Nightingale," perhaps the most well-known lyric of the Digby manuscript, does as much as "Annot and Johon" to naturalize the relationship between lady and her tower/bower abode. In a debate poem over whether women are virtuous (the Nightingale's position) or false (says the Thrush), both opponents situate the women that they speak of as occupying this space. The Nightingale, like the speaker of "Annot and Johon," uses motifs common to courtly love discourse and insists to the Thrush that women of this sort do indeed exist. He claims that "Wiþinne bourse wowe" (57), "Hy beþ of herte meke and milde, / Hem-self hy cunne from shome shilde" (55-56). Indeed the Nightingale implicitly ties here the very ability of this ideal lady to shield herself from shame with her protection within her bower's "wowe," or walls. And though the speaker is a fantastical talking bird, the reference to walls underscores that he is imagining a real space, surrounded by barriers offering material protection. The Thrush also claims to "habbe wiþ hem in boure I-be" (62); I will return to his less than savory representation of false women and what might happen in the "derne" (65) spaces of their bowers. The significance for now of his claim,

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[169] Brown, *English Lyrics*, pp. 226-28, n. 43-50.

alongside the Nightingale's, is that, virtuous or false, women are singularly connected to bowers. And it is not just a space that they inhabit; much like the tower of *Hali Meiðhad*, it is a space through which their value may be determined. As the clerical authors of these poems en-tower women, they position women and tower as *worth* reaching as spaces that could be used to negotiate the clerics' relationship to women.

Several more of Harley's secular love lyrics employ the language of courtly love, but unlike "Annot and Johon" and the very courteous Nightingale, they underscore the common trope of the lady's inaccessibility. The speaker of "Alysoun," for instance, lives "in louelonginge" (5) and is "for wowying al forwake" (30). In "A Love Message," the speaker tells us:

> Ich haue loued al þis ȝer, þat y may loue namore,
> Ich haue siked moni syk, lemmon, for þin ore;
> Me nis loue neuer þe ner, & þat me reweþ sore.
> suete lemmon, þench on me, ich haue loued þe ȝore. (5-8)

Moreover, in "Lady Have Ruth On Me," the speaker expresses "longyng" for a "maide" that "marreþ" him (1, 3), one who also has a "Lylie-whyt hue" (31), and "rode so rose on rys" (32). Thus several of these lyrics adopt wholesale the discourse of courtly love in what appears to be a mimetic relationship but seen in the intertextual context of the lyrics I dicuss below, these lyrics are more likely participating in a relationship of alterity to lay courtly love rhetoric. They place women in towers not to control their sexuality in a patriarchal system of reproduction, as towers in romances sometimes do, but do so instead to claim a different kind of relationship to women, a spiritual one that could compete with the relationship laymen had to high status women.

While these speak of a general separation of speaker and love object, some lyrics impute the lady's inaccessibility particularly to her occupation of a tower. This introduction of the problem of the tower thereby introduces the problem of status, which was tied up with who had access and who was excluded, not just to status within a hierarchy, but in the physical spaces themselves. All the lyrics recognize that their speakers have been excluded from this space and that status that inheres with access and sometimes explicitly, sometime implicitly, compete with knights. The tower also becomes a site of ambivalence for the speaker of several of these lyrics. While some adopt the rhetoric of courtly love fully but compete with knights for the lady, such as "ic and witless" and "the Loveliest Lady," others adopt that discourse as ideal, wanting to be in position of knights but also suggesting that the tower/bower is a place that enables the wrong value system, thereby suggesting that they would be the more appropriate occupant with the lady; finally those that impute to bower/tower a totally wrong value system including knights, only enabling bad behaviors.

Several of the poems I discuss establish an implicit competition with those of higher status, and specifically those of the knightly class. "Ic an witless" is one potentially explicit example, if indeed John Scattergood is correct in his interpretation that the speaker is a lower class individual separated by a higher class individual by the castle wall of stone. The lover's lady is "iloken in castel wal of ston." The walls of stone, much like walls of the "Thrush and the Nightingale," point to the physical barriers separating the two, and the castle of stone makes clear that this space is a high status one. Indeed, the language of this twelfth-century poem recalls the actual architecture of many of the towers being built in that century: tower keeps, which carved chambers out of the very thick walls, so that the center of the keep was used as a hall, a public space, and private living quarters were placed within the fabric of the massive protective walls. Whether the poet was thinking of this particular

kind of architecture or not, the person physically restraining his love is certainly of higher status.

In "The Loveliest Lady in the Land," the lady is more generally a "burde in boure (5), a construction we will recognize now as being extremely common. Such a construction does not evoke the much more material space of "Ic an witless," but the speaker certainly draws a distinction between himself and his social superiors, knights. He complains that "hire knyhtes me han so soht, / sykyng, sorewyng, & þoht, / þo þre me han in bale broth / aȝeyn þe poer of péés" (57-60). The knights here are not men but "sighing," "sorrowing," and "thought"; nevertheless their representation as knights that stand between the lover and his beloved sets up an implicit opposition between him and these figures, called here knights, of secular aristocratic courtly pursuit. The author chooses to represent the impediments to his love as those people who, in life, would compete for the attention of and possibly deny him access to the aristocratic lady.

Indeed, "The Loveliest Lady in the Land" betrays ambivalence over the rhetoric of courtly love, as the speaker adopts its language while recognizing his exclusion from it. "The Way of Women's Love" does much the same, while retaining the specific detail of the architectural space. The poet of this lyric both sets up a distinction between himself and the knights who would in fact be able to access the tower and participate in this practice, but his exclusion prompts him to introduce an added problem, that of morality. He suggests that the bower/tower itself is a space which might enable morally suspect behavior, involving the knights but ultimately imputed to the architectural space itself. The speaker begins with the rhetoric of slavish love for an unfaithful object, that all-consuming and secret love which borrows a courtly love motif, and ends with an imagined vision of that object enjoying her bower/tower:

LUtel wot hit anymon

Hou derne loue may stonde,

Bote hit were a fre wymmon

þat muche of loue had fonde.

þe loue of hire ne lesteþ no wyht longe,

Heo haveþ me plyht & wyteþ me wyþ wronge.

Euer & oo, for my leof icham in grete þohte,

y þenche on hire þat y ne seo nout ofte.

…

Mury hit ys in hyre tour

wyþ haþeles & wyþ heowes,

so hit is in hyre bour

wiþ gomenes & wiþ gleowes;

Bote heo me louye, sore hit wol me rewe.

Wo is him þat loueþ þe love þat ner nul be trewe. (1-8, 21-26)

While the forlorn speaker rues his love for this woman who is not true, his emotional distance is coupled with his spatial distance and separation from her through the architectural feature of the tower, which denies him access and imagines her literally occupying a space in the tower that rises above him. That space is as much a culprit as the knight that might enter it.

And while the poem at first adopts the usual rhetoric with a lament that the speaker's love must remain secret since his love is not "fre," we discover that it is not because she is chaste, but because she is giving her attentions to other men, the wrong men. The poem quickly transitions into an invective akin to that of the Thrush. Not only has this woman

been untrue; she is so thanks to the kinds of activities that can happen in the tower: "Mury hit ys in hyre tour / wyþ haþeles & wyþ heowes, / so hit is in hyre bour / wiþ gomenes & wiþ gleowes" (21-24). The repetition of the architectural space, as first tour then bour, emphasizes that this speaker is particularly concerned with this space as one that enables the too-free behavior of the lady, as she enjoys games and entertainments with these knights. It is thus pointed up that access to the space of the tower is as important as access to the lady occupying it in achieving the cleric's goal of reaching the woman.

"The Thrush and the Nightingale" reconciles the tensions these poems exhibit between the lyrics that wholesale adopt the language of courtesy that extols the lady and the introduction of these poems that link the bower to susceptibility to moral looseness. It does so by polarizing the two positions into two distinct voices. The courteous Nightingale repeatedly refers to women as "hende" and having "corteisy." He also claims that

> Hy gladieþ hem þat beþ wroþe,
> Boþe þe heye and þe lowe,
> Mid gome hy cunne hem grete.
> Þis world nere nout ȝif wimen nere;
> I-maked hoe wes to mones fere,
> Nis no þing al so swete. (31-36)

This stanza specifically claims that the lady in her bower exercises a moral uprightness with respect to the men who have access to her: she gladdens the angry, whether high or low, and her games are responsible for this. She is an appropriate companion to men. The Nightingale believes, like the speaker of "Annot and Johon," that the lady's "trueness" as a companion is best exercised in her bower. The Thrush, on the other hand, swears that women

…beþ swikele and false of þohut,

…

Hy beþ feire and briȝt on hewe,

Here þout is fals, and ountrewe

Ful ȝare ich haue hem fonde.

…

Ich habbe wiþ him in boure I-be,

I haued al mine wille.

Hy willeþ for a luitel mede

Don a sunfoul derne dede,

Here soule forto spille. (38, 40-42, 61-66)

The Thrush claims, like the Nightingale, to have been in the bower with the lady, but he implies that this is an illicit access, as he has his will there. The Nightingale in some way retains his "birdness," in that he maintains an outside view of the goings-on of the bower. The Thrush, by contrast, takes on an anthropomorphic role as he participates in the morally suspect activities happening in the bower. As he steps into the place of the high-status lay male, he links the access of that man to the bower specifically, and to the "derne" deeds that might happen in that space.

"Ubi Sount Qui Ante Nos Fuerent" takes the position of the Thrush: it makes no use of courtly love but immediately censures the bower as a space for the dangerous access of knights:

Uuere beþ þey biforen vs weren,

Houndes laden and hauekes beren

And hadden feld and wode?

þe riche leuedies in hoere bour,

þat wereden gold in hoere tressour

Wiþ hoere briȝtte rode;

Eten and drounken and maden hem glad;

Hoere lif was al wiþ gamen I-lad,

Men keneleden hem biforen,

Þey beren hem wel swiþe heye—

And in a twinkling of on eye

Hoere soules weren forloren.

At the beginning of the poem, the clerical speaker claims for him and his colleagues, "us," a superior moral position after the former courtly activities of the women in the poem have ceased. The rich ladies are to be found in their bower, and it is there where they eat, drink, play games, and lose their souls by lifting up to high status the men who kneel before them. These men, moreover, are identified as high status through the detail of their kneeling to the women, a sure sign of the courtly love game. Again, bower leads to inappropriate activities and companionship.

This poem, along with "The Thrush and the Nightingale" and "The Follies of Fashion," furthermore directly links the bower with the female body and that body's ornamentation through fashion. The insistence on placing these ladies in their bower, and the rhyming of "bour" and "tressour," emphasize that the bower holds equal responsibility with treasure of gold worn by these ladies in marking them as superior and rendering their bodies more valuable. "Ubi Sunt" thus implies the necessary devaluation of the bower along

with the golden ornaments. "On the Follies of Fashion," makes the link between fashion and feminized architectural space even more pointed:

> Nou haþ prude þe pris in euervche plawe,
> By mony wymmon vnwis y sugge mi sawe,
> for ȝef a ledy lyne is leid after lawe,
> vch strumpet þat þer is such drahtes wl drawe;
>
> In prude
> vch a screwe wol hire shrude
> þah he nabbe nout a smok hire foule ers to hude.
>
> ffurmest in boure were boses ybroht,
> leuedies to honour, ichot he were wroht,
> vch gigelot wol loure bote he hem habbe soht,
> such shrewe fol soure ant duere hit haþ aboht. (10-18)

The "boses" or "protuberances in the dress of women," as Brown glosses it, are here not only popular in bowers but seem almost to originate with them. It is first there that they appear, the poet knows to honor ladies. The poet's meaning can only be ironic given that this fashion, when attempted by those down the social scale, renders those "gigelots" or "lewd women," "slat swyn" or "baited pigs" (22). In fact, contemporary commentators used Boethius's term *luxuria* to refer both to lechery and to wearing extravagant or overly ornamented clothing,[170] thus firmly tying together these two suspect behaviors, both blamed by the lyrics on the tower/bower space. And if poor women are tempted, the tempting is

imputed to ladies residing higher up the social scale in their bowers. This critique of women's interest in fashion as specifically linked to the bower/tower again marks the space as the necessary one for negotiating status.

This survey of a number of lyrics in Digby 86 and Harley 2253 demonstrate a number of things: the space of the bower, or sleeping chamber, is often collapsed with the space of the spatially and socially higher towers, and together these spaces are feminized. While some these poems adopt the courtly lady as the ideal lady, many critique such a lady. Many also criticize the space of the bower/tower as of a place of morally suspect activities. Because bower/tower is the material sign of higher status, access to them signals a high status. Thus, the clerical authors and copyists of these poems pit themselves against knights in a negotiation over social status carried out via the relationship between female body and tower.

The Status of Clerics

Throughout the Middle Ages, clerics of all status, whether higher ecclesiasts or those in minor orders, whether regular or secular, occupied a liminal status but one deeply imbricated with the lay world. Scholarship on the subject of masculinity, especially, has been fascinated with the gender status of clerics, setting it up as a competing masculinity that nevertheless attempted in many ways to mimic the masculinity of their lay male counterparts. Through these studies, the construction of the lay male has also been underlined, as has the status of clerics within a secular social hierarchy. In fact, clerics' competing position within this hierarchy is inseparable from their gendered status. As

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[170] Andrea Denny-Brown, *Fashioning Change: The Trope of Clothing in High- and*

historian S.H. Rigby has noted regarding social status in general in medieval England, "rather than being stratified exclusively in terms of classes, orders or any other single form of social inequality, medieval English society was made up of a number of different axes of social inequality. Any one individual thus had a variety of social identities, including those of class, order, status group and gender."[171] Clerics had to negotiate all four in a continual fight to be recognized within a hierarchy involving lay men.

By the thirteenth century, secular clerics, the authors and copyists of the lyrics I examine, would have been have been highly involved with the laity amongst whom they worked and lived.[172] The lay class[173] with whom they would have primarily mixed, was the lower aristocracy—that is county knights. As we have seen, knights are particularly singled out as the main competitors of the clerical speakers. Several studies within the last two decades have traced the ways that this stratum emerged in the thirteenth century and claimed for itself an elevated status; indeed David Crouch has devoted books to the subject.[174] He marks the development of the knighthood in England from the Conquest, which imported

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Late-Medieval England (Columbus: The Ohio University Press, 2012), p. 56.

[171] Rigby, "Introduction: Social structure and economic change in late medieval England," in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 1.

[172] Both R.N. Swanson ("*Angels Incarnate*: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley (New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 160-77) and P.H. Cullum ("Clergy, Masculinity and Transgression in Late Medieval England," in *Masculinity*, pp. 178-96) make this point specifically as regards gender ideology, but it of course must be true of their social status as well, as I'll discuss.

[173] For a discussion of the appropriateness of the term "class" during the Middle Ages, see S.H. Rigby. He allows for its applicability while arguing against the strictly Marxist sense in which many historians use the term ("Introduction," pp. 1-30).

[174] I will rely on David Crouch for this discussion (*The English Aristocracy 1070-1272: A Social Transformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011)).

the knight as paid and sometimes landed soldier in the service of a lord, skilled cavalrymen but not necessarily carrying noble status.[175] Crouch writes that "[a]ll aristocrats may have been knights, but it did not follow that all knights were perceived as aristocrats."[176] Over the course of the twelfth century, however, knighthood began to carry with it noble status and a prominent and recognized role in the administration of counties, a function inherited from the Anglo-Saxon shire system.[177] While in the twelfth century a large number of men joined the ranks of knighthood, this changed drastically over the course of the first half of the thirteenth century. In John's reign, knights may have numbered 4,500 or more, but by the Baron's Revolt of 1264-65, only four hundred knights are known to have participated.[178] Two reasons are generally accepted: one is the extraordinary financial demands of maintaining a noble way of life, including proper arming, dress, entertaining, and households; the other the increasingly burdensome administrative duties pressed upon county knights.[179] Thus, by the middle of the thirteenth century, "[t]o embrace knighthood was to place oneself in an exclusive social category."[180] According to Crouch, it was the aspiration of knights to nobility that caused the emergence of classes in England, as magnates had to work to separate themselves from an inferior social group claiming equal

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[175] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, pp. 3-4.

[176] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, p. 4.

[177] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, pp. 13-14.

[178] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, p. 16.

[179] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, pp. 16-17.

[180] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, p. 19.

status. By the late thirteenth century, a class noble but recognized as of lower status, the gentleman, appeared.[181]

The knighthood remains the only social group, or class, with which this chapter engages. As I've said, knights are singled out in the lyrics that I study, and county knights would have been the heads of the households in which the manuscripts containing those lyrics would most likely have been written for and circulated amongst. As Crouch has argued, the knight's growing status in the thirteenth century was a watershed for the creation of a class-conscious later medieval English society.[182] The knight's growing status and claim to exclusive rights seem to have posed a challenge to the secular clergy who administered to them. Their claim to an ideal masculinity, caught up in the distinguishing of their status, also challenged the clergy's already hard-to-define gender identity.

The previous chapter engaged romance as a potential site for negotiating social status, and clerics writing lyrics capitalized in an even more direct way on the potential of literature to contest social status. Romance enacted a jockeying amongst laymen and the clerics who lived amongst them, as employees, as family members, and as spiritual guides. As Simon Gaunt put it, "[r]omances are ideological complex because they engage with the interests and fantasies of a group of people who were heterogeneous despite their being bound together by belonging to or being in the orbit of [royal] courts…."[183] Rosalind Fields

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[181] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, p. xvi.

[182] Peter Coss also makes a condensed version of the argument regarding knighthood, and specifically refers to "a much stronger and more clearly expressed class-consciousness than had existed before" (in "An Age of Deference," in *A Social History*, p. 37).

[183] Simon Gaunt, "Romance and other genres," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Kreuger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 48.

suggests that insular romances in particular might have "bridged" the "gap" between layman and cleric, especially with reference to clerics' role as councilors in baronial conflicts with the monarchy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries:[184] the "clerical-baronial network and common interest, in that clerics' manipulation of the self-interest of their patrons occurs on the larger cultural and political stage of the period in the events and processes that produced Magna Carta."[185] Field argues that clerics were conscious of the power of fiction, [186] and that "it seems likely that those clerics operating on the smaller stage of narrative literature were also engaged in a programme of education and opinion forming."[187]

While I agree that in this respect clerics sought to bring their baronial patrons in line with their own interests in a relatively straightforward way, I argue that clerics would also have found themselves in a position of opposition to knights with specific reference to their social position within the aristocracy. As the last chapter discussed, clerics did not have the same interests as the aristocratic laity. And as Ad Putter reminds us, it is untenable to maintain that "courtly romances identify with a feudal nobility under threat" since their authors were clerics.[188] In fact, since clerics were in competition with knights for their prince's favor, the "cleric cannot in this light be regarded as merely the knight's

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[184] Rosalind Field, "'Pur les francs homes amender: Clerical Authors and the Thirteenth-Century Context of Historical Romance," in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2011), p. 184.

[185] Field, "Pur les francs homes," p. 184.

[186] Field, "Pur les francs homes," p. 188.

[187] Field, "Pur les francs homes," p. 186.

[188] Sir Gawain and the Green Knight *and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 197.

mouthpiece."[189] Putter sees in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the romances of Chrétien that the poets' "strategy is not to dislodge the language of chivalry, but rather to appropriate it for their own ends."[190] Part of these ends he acknowledges as making a clerical "programme of instruction and correction palatable and desirable" to fighting men,[191] but he also argues that the clerical author of a debate poem appearing in the manuscript Cambridge University Library Dd XI.78 ultimately paints the cleric as "a better knight than the knight himself."[192]

A claim to masculine sexuality is one particular place where the interests of clerics diverged. It was seen by lay men as exclusively their purview. R.N. Swanson writes:

> …clerics were certainly 'male', but were they 'men'? The medieval clergy challenge many assumptions about gendered identities, especially the blunt equation of body and gender. If masculinity is defined as the threefold activities of 'impregnating women, protecting dependents, and serving as provider to one's family,' then the medieval clergy as unworldly celibates were not meant to be masculine. What 'gender' did they then have?[193]

By the thirteenth century, secular clerics would have been highly involved with the laity amongst whom they worked and lived. This regular and lived association made the contestation of power all the more crucial, and spawned a number of discourses and modes

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[189] Putter, *Sir Gawain*, p. 197.

[190] Putter, *Sir Gawain*, p. 223.

[191] Putter, *Sir Gawain*, p. 210.

[192] Putter, *Sir Gawain*, p. 223.

[193] Swanson, "Angels incarnate," p. 160.

of addressing it, from social tracts, to semi-fictitious chronicle, to highly imaginative romance. One set of discourses limited themselves to the problem of fitting the clergy into a power hierarchy independent of sexuality or gender. Contemporaries determined hierarchies with the separation of orders of those who fought and those who prayed: thus the ecclesiastical hierarchy moved from archbishop at the top to local priests and chaplains at the bottom, and the lay aristocracy from the emerging peerage down through knights, esquires and gentleman.[194] But contemporary evidence also suggests the ways in which these hierarchies overlapped and competed with one another. Though much later than our period, John Russel, in his fifteenth-century *Book of Nurture*, writes of a social structure organized again according to order, but also places the orders in parallel, so that an archbishop is like a duke, a bishop is like an earl, on down through the ranks, with unmitred abbots equaling knights and parish priests equaling squires.[195] This structure implicitly pits parish priests and household chaplains against the knights, their social superiors across the divide of order. Henry de Bracton also makes this suggestion when he discusses *potestas* amongst free men. Every man is either in the king's power, his father's power, or his own.[196] Bracton is clearly limiting himself to a discussion of laymen. Though clerics cared for others, they are implicitly in the power of lay men; this is of course the crux of the clerical problem, where clerics could claim status as care-givers, but were left out of the hierarchy of power.

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[194] Rigby, "Introduction," pp. 5-6.

[195] Discussed in Rigby, "Introduction," p. 6.

[196] *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England,* vol. 2, trans. Samuel E. Thorne (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1968), pp. 33-34.

The Luttrell Psalter makes this point explicitly in its representation of the head of the household, Sir Geoffrey Luttrell. The psalter depicts Sir Geoffrey presiding over the dinner at the center of the table, above him Psalm 115, "I call upon the name of the Lord," to which Coss imputes Sir Geoffrey's claim to a divine authority over his household.[197] The psalter then suggests that while household chaplains ruled the spiritual world of the household, ultimate authority nevertheless was the privilege of the lord, the *paterfamilias*. Such a definitive assertion on Sir Geoffrey's part was no doubt in part due to the fact that clerics could and did claim moral superiority and challenged the male heads of household with whom they lived.[198]

Sir Geoffrey's refusal to be submissive to a member of the clergy was equally tied up with the problem of clerical and lay gender hierarchies. Indeed, the challenge to laymen's masculinity was a challenge to the thing by which those men held onto power within a political hierarchy. Helen Phillips traces the way in which French and English romances, for instance, explore the rights of passage through which young laymen went to achieve fully-fledged masculinity. These included success in knightly endeavors and the dubbing as knight that would follow, as well as the loss and recovery of a beloved and subsequent marriage, and even proper penance, an issue that shows up in romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Sir Gowther*.[199] Although laymen had to demonstrate their proper adherence to the church, they also continually displayed a resistance to putting themselves in

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[197] Coss, "An Age of Deference," p. 47.

[198] Swanson makes this point in "Angels Incarnate," p. 167.

[199] Helen Phillips, "Rites of Passage in French and English Romance," in *Rites of Passage: Cultures and Transition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Nicola F. McDonald and W.M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press), pp. 83-107.

the power of churchmen. This included the very material bodily practice of kneeling before clerics in an act that implied subservience, as it did during the ritual of knighting. The challenge to laymen in general was thus a real one.

The unambiguous ideal masculinity that laymen laid claim to was also constructed against the ambiguous gender identity of the clergy. This has been put in terms of a third gender, which Swanson calls "emasculinity."[200] Part of this "emasculinity" came from within the church, as the Gregorian reform of the eleventh and twelfth centuries insisted on clerical celibacy. Swanson links this to a potential "renunciation of gender as then identified," a genderless status that sought to reach toward the angelic and away from the embodied human.[201] The same period also moved away from the figure of the battling ascetic to one of humiliation and impotence.[202] Clerical men also dressed much like women, and laymen railed against those who did not adhere to this standard but instead wore masculine clothes.[203] Clerics therefore were expected to align themselves either with a genderless identity or with women.

Nevertheless, activities which could only be carried out by laymen were often emulated, and the exclusive right to do them, challenged. A story involving William Marshall, a figure who could be read as the epitome of masculinity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, shows a cleric making a bold claim to both his masculinity and heterosexuality in the face of the uncontested masculinity of Marshall. In the story, Marshall

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[200] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," p. 161.

[201] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," pp. 161-62.

[202] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," p. 163.

[203] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," p. 168.

finds a cleric, armed, with tonsure hidden, eloping with a noblewoman. Upon being asked his identity by Marshal, the cleric answers, "I am a man."[204] Indeed, being a "man" could also paradoxically be seen as a necessity for those who sought to follow in Christ's footsteps: Christ was physically perfect, and so should priests be.[205] Even before entering lay households, men planning to enter the clerical profession were competing with lay men. All clerics attended university, which, Ruth Mazo Karras tells us, "were not primarily training scholars; they were training men."[206] There were members of the aristocracy in attendance, but many students were "from the middling sort."[207] At the university, these students, many of whom would go on to be minor clergy, were "learning from their peers to live like the elites they hoped to become" while in service to aristocracy.[208] Men destined for a life in the church nevertheless displayed interest in fashion and a desire to show largesse to their colleagues. They were also found carrying weapons and fighting.[209]

Another part of the threat to lay male dominance was their problematic sexuality, of course tied inextricably to their gendered status. Along with "emasculinity," Swanson adds the term "closet masculinity" to denote the potential of male clerics to continue to identify as male, and to act on that maleness in ways that laymen found disturbing, in particular the

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[204] Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, p. 218.

[205] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," p. 165-66.

[206] Ruth Mazo Karras, "Sharing Wine, Women, and Song: Masculine Identity Formation in the Medieval European Universities," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), p. 187.

[207] Karras, "Sharing Wine," p. 188.

[208] Karras, "Sharing Wine," p. 189.

[209] Karras, "Sharing Wine," pp. 189-90.

close relationship clerics' celibacy allowed them to have with women.[210] As Swanson writes:

> The collusion between clerics and women to civilize and Christianize medieval lay men could easily be interpreted as a conspiracy against male control over the family and domestic life: the clergy could be attacked as having too close attachments to women, encouraging their spirituality and acts of charity without reference to their husbands, thereby undermining lay male power.[211]

While clerics' ostensible celibacy made such relationships possible, it also put them in a position to have illicit sexual relationships with women, of which they were often accused, thereby undermining lay males' prerogative over their wives and lineage.[212]

Laymen combatted this potentially threatening sexuality by accusing clerics of effeminacy, or by implying it through the construction of their own image in contradistinction to that of religious men. David Crouch finds that twelfth-century epic literature demonstrated a "[c]ontempt for the clerk as a defective male is very much evident in certain forms of twelfth-century epic literature."[213] A story from the chronicle of Matthew Paris demonstrates just such an attempt and failure of a clerical man to enter into the rites of the properly masculine: Paris recounts the failure of William Marshal's younger son Gilbert, after having taken orders, to take on the role of earl upon his brother's untimely death. Gilbert felt he must enter a tournament in order to gain credibility, but due to his lack of

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[210] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," pp. 170-71.

[211] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," p. 170.

[212] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," p. 171.

[213] Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," p. 217.

skill, he was killed. Matthew credits his eagerness to the fact that he had been a clergyman and so all the more anxious to prove his manhood.[214]

After considering the relationship between clerics and those of the knightly class, we can read poems where the clerical author posits himself as the lover of the female love object in a new light. As I argued earlier in the chapter, given the intertextual relationship between these and other poems, the lyrics that posit cleric as lover offer a vision of the cleric as the ideal person to have access to the lady. "I Repent of Blaming Women" explicitly compares the clerical speaker as having equal status to the knight: the speaker claims that Richard "cunde comely ase a knyht, / clerk ycud þat craftes con" (65-66). And in "De Clerico et Puella" the author addresses the lady as "my suete lemmon" (8). The "puella" in question discourages the cleric from pursuing her because "þou art wayted day & nyht wiþ fader & al my kynne. / be þou in mi bour ytake, lete þey for no synne / me to holde, & þe to slon" (18-20). With these poems, clerics adopt the rhetoric of courtly love, but read with poems such as "The Way of Women's Love," they suggest that they, not knights, should properly have access to women's bodies and the space of the bower/tower that these women occupy.

Throughout the poems that I have discussed, the woman is strongly linked to the bower, which develops the potential for a metonymic relationship that "Ubi Sount" and "The Thrush and the Nightingale" take advantage of. These poems particularly critique the material aristocratic overvaluation of fashion, which is itself particularly associated with the body, with the outside. Through their interest in the bower's strong link to the body specifically, these poems construct the bower as interchangeable with the female body, both body and space potentially responsible for immoral deeds. This becomes particularly clear

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[214] Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, p. 217.

when both "Ubi Sount" and "The Thrush and the Nightingale" blame the activities *inside* the bower as resulting in the loss of the soul. In "Ubi Sount," through eating and drinking, merrily enjoying games and the attention of men, "in a twinkling of on eye / Heore soules weren forloren." And according to the Thrush, through "sunfoul derne dede, / Here soule forto spille." So for the clerical authors of these lyrics, what is constructed as their rightful access to the space of the bower/tower and the body of the female becomes all the more imperative in a need to save the soul of the body and redeem the space of the bower.

In setting up a dualistic relationship between body and soul, these poems draw on a long tradition of Middle English lyric known as Body/Soul debates. In the *Worcester Fragments,* a poem written in Old English in the twelfth century and copied in the thirteenth, the body is called a "soulehus" (A, 22), [215] thus explicitly separating the soul from a body that merely houses that soul. In *The Latemest Day,* another thirteenth-century poem found in Trinity College Cambridge 323, the body lies as a "cleyclot cold alse an ston" (21) while the "sorie soule makit hire mon" (23).[216] The body/soul debate commonly called just "Debate between the Body and the Soul" beginning "In an þestrei stude ic stod a lutel strif to iheren / Of an bodi þat was ungoid ser hit lei on one bere" in TCC 323 also appears in Digby 86 and Harley 2253. Thus even so-called political lyrics such as "The Follies of Fashion" and "Thrush and the Nightingale," when placed within the intertextual context of lyric tradition generally and in the manuscripts in which they appear, take on religious valence appropriate to the concerns of their clerical authors.

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[215] This quotation comes from *The Soul's Address to the Body: The Worcester Fragments,* ed. Douglas Moffat (East Lansing: Colleagues Press Inc., 1987), p. 63.

[216] Brown, p. 47.

Where some Harley lyrics adopt in a simple, straightforward manner the language of courtly love, their inclusion with a number of lyrics that point up the problem of using such language by clerics, men in fact excluded from the practices that allow courtly lovers, secular knightly men, to in fact physically access their loves even as the relationship must remain chaste, suggests that none of the adoptions of courtly love language in the lyrics are an act of simply mimicking the tastes of the knightly class who would most likely be reading them. Instead, these lyrics subtly pit their clerical authors against the material practices of courtly love and the lay men who enjoyed a secular status allowing them access to women. These clerics thus compete with lay men for status, with both secular and moral valences, over both material access to the bodies of women and control of their moral status.

Repeatedly, the bower is the space where women dwell, and it is a space that, inaccessible to the virtuous speakers of the poems, is a site where the wrong kind of activities can take place, where worldly concerns like fashion, games, and even sexual activity, take place with men who are sometimes identified specifically as lay and high status. What begins as a metaphor—ivory tower for throat in the *Song of Songs* and the anchoritic cell for the body in *Ancrene Wisse*—becomes through material practice a metonymic relationship. Later we will see that some lyrics simultaneously exploit a metaphoric relationship. Some lyrics long for access to the architectural space of tower/bower and thus the women who reside there in a metonymic line. Others claim a superior right to that access through a metaphor drawing on development in the religious tradition from the Bible, through body/soul debates, to the anchoritic texts of the thirteenth century. The close association of female bodies, indeed parts of female bodies, like the ladies' "bright complexion" in "Ubi Sunt Nos Fuerount," further will provide the slippage between metonymy and metaphor that the grave poems use.

In the next section, I'll argue that the metonymic relationship between female body and tower/bower in high status material practice that allows clerical authors to shift the tower/bower into a metaphor for the female body, thereby placing these lyrics back within the Biblical context that originated the association, will allow us to read the so-called religious poems of Trinity College Cambridge 323 in particular as staking a claim for their clerical authors in the material hierarchical world of secular life.

Trinity College Cambridge 323

The poems that I have surveyed thus far, with the exception of "WEn þe turuf is þi tuur," are all from Harley 2253 and Digby 86. I turn now to the poems of Trinity College Cambridge 323. TCC 323 has been grouped with these other more famous manuscripts on linguistic grounds, and it appears to have traveled in the same milieux, containing, for instance, a parodic version of the parlor game poem *Ragemon le Bon*, also found in Digby 86.[217] Its compiler undoubtedly traveled in the same circles as the clerics responsible for collecting the lyrics of Harley 2253. It differs, however, in that it contains what have thus far only been recognized as religious texts. The lyrics of the Harley and Digby manuscripts appear either to adopt courtly love rhetoric wholesale, or where they critique the bower for its subversive potentials where female sexuality is concerned, they nevertheless construct that space as the one where women dwell. The critique, however, suggests that the space of the bower could be put to a better use were the right individuals allowed access there. The poems of Trinity College Cambridge, as I have argued, also participate in the same concerns with worldly, secular problem of status.

[217] Frankis, "Social Context," p. 183.

The manuscript's lyrics push the critique of the bower much farther, however, unequivocally devaluing the space by representing it as a grave and by criticizing the aristocratic use of stone to construct towers. The ability to build in stone was both a sign of status and a particularly effective way of ordering space. Apart from the recalcitrant, immoveable nature of stone, it created socially symbolic spaces of high status. As Lerer notes in his reading of the lyrics, stone is presented in these lyrics as the purview of an exclusive elite. It rendered buildings impregnable both physically and socially. Thus, the TCC 323 lyrics' devaluation of stone calls into question the status of spaces built in stone. This devaluation allows the poems to construct an alternative kind of space, both valuable and accessible to the poems' speakers. Once the inaccessibility of a space created of stone is written out of existence, lowering it to the mere grave of earth, the body becomes the container, and as the body breaks down, the soul becomes accessible to clerics, who use both the metonymic and metaphoric relation between female body and architectural space to imagine their more appropriate, in their view, access to body and the soul it houses.

"Wen þe turuf," for instance, does not just critique the activities of the female inhabitants of towers and bowers, but instead makes the claim that a woman living in a bower/tower is effectively entombed. The "white throat" already marks the addressee as female, and the first two lines—"Wen þe turuf is þi tour / & þi put is þi bour" (2)—align bower and tower both through rhyme and the simultaneous placing of the female interlocutor in both spaces at once. The poem collapses both time and space to render the bower the most debased of spaces inhabited by bodies: the grave. Rather than read the poem as "the ground will be your tower" and the "turf will be your bower," which is the typical reading of these lines, making it a memento mori, the lines are better read as "the ground is now your tower," and likewise, "The grave is now your bower." The future and present are the same

time here, and the spaces of tower/bower and ground/grave have been completely collapsed. The lady is in her tower which is also the ground, her bower which is also already her grave.

The poem also questions the political economy of aristocratic courtly love that values beauty as a status marker in the secular world. Much as the other poems we've looked at do, it evokes in order to debase the vain interest in beauty already seen in "Ubi Sunt," where the ladies' "briȝtte rode," or "bright complexions," are as much at issue as their possessions: the female body here is reduced to her "wel" and "wite þrote," "skin" and "white throat," and these aspects of her body, suggestive particularly of an aristocratic aesthetic, are targeted by the poem as worms "note," or eat them. The potential of the tower-bower as a metonym for the female body shifts here to metaphor as both spaces become penetrable. But unlike the body/soul debates that make the body an architectural container, the political statement made here relies simultaneously on the metonymic relationship linking female body with socially hierarchical space established by the Digby and Harley lyrics.

This throat, unlike Mary's or the bride of the *Song of Songs*, is accessible not just to worms, but also to the laymen with whom they have secular, sexual, and political relationships. The lines "thi wel and thi wite throte ssulen wormes to note" is always translated as "worms will eat away at your skin and white throat." This interpretation undoubtedly comes from the Latin version directly above the English in the manuscript, which reads, "pellis et gutter album erit cibus vermium," that is, "the skin and white throat are the food of worms." Moreover, other "grave" lyrics, such as "The Lilly with Five Leaves" and "The Latemest Day," speak of worms feasting on flesh; in these poems, the dead body is importantly ungendered, or called simply "mon" ("Lilly with Five Leaves," 37).

But the Middle English, however, carries a much richer meaning.[218] Rosemary Woolf argues for this,[219] and my sense is the same. The Middle English verb "to note" does not mean "to eat," but rather "to enjoy the use of." The worms here are enjoying the use of the dead female body. The language "to enjoy the use of" is the exact language used to describe the Medieval Latin law of ususfructus. This law allowed the use of property that belongs to someone else, including any profit that property might bring. It was a crucial part of aristocratic marriage, wherein a man married a woman of property and then enjoyed the use of that property, and often the woman's title, as well.[220]

The poem's clerical author seems to also critique this use of the female body. This is an image of the objectified female body rendered grotesque as it provides the means by which property, including stone towers, could be enjoyed by male aristocrats. The fragmented female body as it appears in this poem is both shocking and antithetical to the aristocratic and devotional aesthetic of the whole female body that constructs it as impenetrable. This body is penetrated, however, as the worms become phallic, penetrating and enjoying the use of the dead female body. Mary's impenetrable body, also an architectural container, unusable by men, is used to claim that women should not be used in a political economy of patriarchal reproduction.

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[218] Rosemary Woolf argues that the Latin is a translation of the Middle English poem (*The English Religious Lyric*, p. 84). My sense is the same, but regardless, if the sense of the Middle English is an addition, the fact would only contribute to the argument that the lyric is fulfilling a political and social purpose rather than a more universal and religious one.

[219] *The English Religious Lyric*, p. 84.

[220] Twelfth-century examples include William Marshall and Simon de Montfort, the two most powerful men in England other than the king, and the Nevilles, Percies and Staffords all gained their power through marriage in the thirteenth century (Jennifer C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 16-17).

The image of the tower by the thirteenth century all built in stone, collapsing with the dirt beneath it, brings this tower down, lowering what we have seen in the love lyrics risen above the clerical speakers, both spatially and hierarchically to the level playing field of the earth, so to speak. While this poem does not mention stone, its suggestion of the stone tower's collapse devalues this stone, which was so particularly valued by the aristocracy. This echoes the critique of the space of the tower chamber built by stone in the secular lyrics of the last section. It also, then, seems to be joining the other lyrics of TCC 323 that deal in a politics of stone.

"The Latemest Day" is another memento mori which speaks to an already dead subject about the emptiness of this material life and about the fate of the material body after the soul has left it. In this poem, the hall becomes the grave, the roof lying claustrophobically close to the chin. The body lies as a clay clot, cold as a stone. Carleton Brown and Rosemary Woolf note that the author of this poem borrows heavily from the Body/Soul Debate of the *Worcester Fragments*, but in that poem the clay clot (the body) lies on the floor.[221] In "The Latemest Day," however, the clay body is like stone, and stone like the clay body, that is, valueless. In both "Wen þe turuf" and "The Latemest Day," stone is rendered no higher than the ground, and no higher in the hierarchy of materials.

This representation of the body as stone, an amendment made specifically by the author/scribe of "The Latemest Day," then provides a context in which to read "The Shroud and the Grave" as also participating in this critique. "The Shroud and the Grave" echoes the critiques of the love lyrics, where the tower/bower is a space where women might carry on "derne" and sinful deeds. This poem does not contain any architectural spaces, but its

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[221] *The Soul's Address to the* Body, l. 36.

inclusion in a manuscript whose other lyrics take part in a long tradition in Old and Middle English verse of likening the grave to a built domestic space, suggests we may read its grave in that tradition. This is especially the case when the poem's speaker relates that he will "Me grauit him [the dead, presumably universal man] put oþer ston, / þer-in me leit þe fukul bone" (11-12). Stones here create not just a grave, but a space where the bones themselves become deceitful. In this poem, stone, a material used only in high status burials, is directly linked to the devaluation and suspicion of the material bodies that inhabit it. "The Shroud and the Grave" thus also sets up the metaphoric relationship wherein the body is the container, and the inside, represented here as bones, has the potential to be "fukul," to be secret and because interior, possibly inaccessible to the attempts by the cleric of the poem performing the last rites, which of course may only affect the outside, the performance of morality, and not the inside, the soul, which is still in danger of moral corruption.

These poems' politics of stone in reference to death bring us back to the problem of status. Until the thirteenth century, stone effigies inside the church were the privilege of ecclesiastics and occasionally royals. During the thirteenth century, elaborate stone effigies of the knightly class began to appear in greater and greater numbers inside churches as well.[222] Stone effigies of the lay aristocratic class were thus not underground, not buried in dirt, but constituted stone containers, above ground; thus the problem of status, both moral and secular, was reintroduced. Stone itself is therefore historically a way in which laymen negotiated their status alongside clerics, rising even in death into the material architectural

[222] Rachel Dressler, "Steel Corpse: Imaging the Knight in Death," in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), pp. 135-67.

space of the clergy. Stone became a locus, or the ground, of competition between clerics and laymen.

The Ground of Competition

The lyrics that represent the tower/bower as no better than the ground, no better than or less accessible than the dirt from which we all are made, level the playing ground, so to speak. The rendering of a common aristocratic practice of women dwelling in towers, where they are subject to exploitation by a patriarchal social system that uses their bodies for the transfer and use of property in a political and economic system, as a grotesque violation of the very integrity of that body delivers a pointed critique of that system. At the same time, however, the poem is suggestive of a different economy according to which dead female bodies, their fragmentation and accessibility, can be construed as a positive.

While several of the poems we have seen construct the interior space of the tower as inaccessible to the speaker, "Wen þe turuf" claims an interior view of that space. Where in many of the poems the tower functions as a metonym for the female body, the metaphoric relation of tower and body means that not only access to the body in it, but also access to the interior of that body. The poem claims an intimate view of the interior of the female who occupies the tower. This speaker has a special access both to interior space and the soul inside that space. The tower has been broken down, thus breaking down the stone barriers that clerical authors complained kept them from women and prevented a morally superior access to women's bodies and souls. The tradition of body/soul poems in Old and Middle English literature figures the body as the building that houses the soul; thus a view into the building is a view onto the soul. This is true for *Ancrene Wisse*, too, where the anchorite's cell is figured as a barrier not just between herself and outsiders who might seek her body,

but also as the anchorite's body, as a barrier preventing those who might wish to corrupt her soul.

The objectification of the material female body seen in "Wen þe turuf" as well as other lyrics, signifiers written on the material manuscript, render that manuscript a fetish object that can then travel throughout the secular world. The reduction of the female body to parts rather than a whole body contributes to the way that the body is valued for its very material existence, and clerical authors' desire to access the body as much as the soul. The material fetishized object can then be understood in the particular sense that emerges from William Pietz's historical study of the fetish, which traces the roots of the concept that appear in the work of thinkers such as Freud and Marx. In his study, he finds that in the fetish object, "there emerged a new problematic concerning the capacity of the material object to embody—simultaneously and sequentially—religious, commercial, aesthetic, and sexual values."[223] These are the very problematics encountered in the lyrics. "The fetish, then, not only originated from, but remains specific to, the problematic of the social value of material objects as revealed in situations formed by the encounter of radically heterogenous social systems."[224] The female body as contained in the textual objects of the lyrics is therefore the site where two conflicting social systems—the secular and the spiritual—encounter one another. Clerics considered themselves to be of a separate world, and to be living under and only subject to separate codes and hierarchies from their lay peers, but they regularly, indeed they had no choice but to, move in a world of secular, political, and economic hierarchies. The female body, contained in towers and in texts representing that

[223] William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics 9 (1985): 6-7.

containment, operates as the grounds on which struggles over status between clerics and lay men took place. The relationship between how the female body is troped and the textual objects on which that trope was inscribed create together a fetish object.

I argue that the tropes rendered through language on the surface of the manuscripts together constituted the object through which clerics challenged the social values of the secular aristocratic world. Pietz tells us that "[t]he first characteristic to be identified as essential to the notion of the fetish is that of the fetish object's irreducible materiality."[225] These poems repeatedly insist on the materiality of women's bodies. In some, even when the female is not dead and in the process of decomposition, her body as body made up of parts is insisted on. Harley 2253's seemingly straightforward love lyric, "The Loveliest Lady in the Land," strikingly asserts that the female love object, the "burde in boure bryht" (5), is also "a burde of blod & of bon" (10). In those that are complimentary, the fair complexion is focused on; in those that are not, the fair complexion is a point of critique, as is the foul ass of the lewd woman in "On The Follies of Fashion." Over and over again the female body is put on display as particularly material, which maintains a strong link between text and referent. The text carries with it a sign of that materiality.

Fixed in this materiality are all of the problems that we have already seen: sexuality, procreation, potential for or inducement to sin, status and property of the men responsible for or otherwise claiming access and possession over the female body. These problematics over which clerics and laymen can be seen to be struggling are condensed into the figure of the female body. "Wen þe turuf" enacts this in an even more localized site: the female throat.

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[224] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 7.

[225] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 7.

As we have seen, the throat of the bride in the *Song of Songs*, when metaphorized as an ivory tower, becomes a signifier for the impenetrable female body. That impenetrable female body is important to both lay aristocratic men and to the Christian ethic being upheld by clerical authors, but for far different reasons. In this figure the two "incommensurable social values"[226] come head to head: lay aristocratic men require a female body inaccessible to other men in order to preserve the purity of the family line, while Christianity holds as most valuable those women who preserve their bodily integrity through sexual purity.

Once the female body, or more specifically the throat, and by metonymic extension the female body, is represented in the textual object, that representation, inscribed onto the textual object, is "precisely *not* a material signifier referring beyond itself, but acts as a material space gathering an otherwise unconnected multiplicity into the unity of its enduring singularity."[227] The fetish object is also "above all a 'historical' object" which is "'territorialized' in material space" as a "reification" of the social codes that produced it.[228] In the case of the lyrics, their manuscripts, representing, as I argue, specifically historical (and not allegorical or metaphoric even as they employ metaphoric relationships) bodies and spaces, capture the "meaningful" and "singular event" of making claims based on the spiritual codes that produced them to special access and knowledge of the bodies and spaces that they represent. The textual objects of the poems, in their material manuscript context, are a territorialization, a material gathering into a single object in space, of a whole host of ideological concerns and investments.

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[226] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 16.

[227] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 15.

[228] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 12.

A fetish is further defined as "a medium of inscription or configuration defined by some portable or wearable thing." Moreover, "This reified, territorialized historical object is also 'personalized' in the sense that beyond its status as a collective social object it evokes an intensely personal response from individuals."[229] It is their status as textual objects capable of themselves being mobilized in real space that these lyrics can then territorialize spaces not typically accessible to their clerical authors. The material textual object carrying the inscribed lyric enacts the claims of historic, embodied individuals, the clerics who penned them: "The fetish is, then, first of all, something intensely personal, whose truth is experienced as a substantial movement from 'inside' the self…into the self-limited morphology of a material object situated in space 'outside.'"[230] All the claims to status and access, all the power claimed implicitly for clerics, inheres in this object that remains connected to its author-scribe. "'Personalization' provides a name for the dimension of the reified object's power to fix identifications and disavowals that ground the self-identity of particular, concrete individuals."[231] Thus the material manuscript and its rendering of the female body parts, create an object that remains attached to the clerics who penned them in what Pietz describes as a magical object that extends the power of the creator of that object out into the material world.

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[229] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 12.

[230] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 11-12.

[231] Pietz, "Fetish," p. 15.

Clerics enter the market

These textual objects, operating as fetish objects, move into circulation carrying with them the "untranscended materiality" of the objectified female body and the spaces they inhabit. The challenges posed by the lyrics can operate on the one hand purely textually. The claims made are made through tropes, literary figures, and rhetoric. But as I have suggested by arguing that the textual object—manuscript plus inscribed text—works as a fetish object, it is the combination of textual signifiers and textual object that provides power to these lyrics. Once inscribed, the textual objects can be traded, thereby trading symbolically the objects represented in them. While the texts make certain claims within themselves, it is with their entrance into circulation, into the market, that challenges the aristocratic laity.

The very entrance of clerics into the "field of cultural production," as Pierre Bourdieu calls it, is itself a challenge. These lyrics, by virtue of adopting and addressing secular tropes as secular (as opposed to borrowing them in order to completely co-opt them for a religious message, as *Ancrene Wisse* does), and using the form of the lyric, a genre also so closely related to the aristocratic laity, and furthermore transcribing them in manuscripts compiled for lay households, suggests that these clerics were aware that they were leaving the realm of purely religious discourse for religious purposes, and entering the secular world, a world not of pure instruction, but of "art."

Once the lyrics have entered this world, they are subject to its vagaries. If we follow Bourdieu, we can argue that their very entrance into the realm of literature qua literature, of art, enters them into a field where the relations between social agents are objectified by their literary productions.[232] The lyrics, and so their authors, enter into a struggle: "The literary or

[232] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 30.

artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles*, tending to transform or conserve this field of forces. The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement their struggles to defend or improve their positions…, strategies which depend for their forces and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations."[233]

Bourdieu also makes clear how the economic and power relations inherent in artistic production are nevertheless only effectively negotiated by being disavowed by those productions:

> The art business, a trade in things that have no price, belongs to the class of practices in which the logic of the pre-capitalist economy lives on…. These practices, functioning as practical negations, can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing. Defying ordinary logic, they lend themselves to two opposed readings, both equally false, which each undo their essential duality and duplicity by reducing them either to the disavowal or to what is disavowed—to disinterestedness or self-interest. The challenge which economies based on disavowal of the 'economic' present to all forms of economism lies precisely in the fact that they function, and can function, in practice—and not merely in the agents' representations—only by virtue of a constant, collective repression of narrowly 'economic' interest and of the real nature of the practices revealed by 'economic' analysis.[234]

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[233] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 30.

[234] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 74.

While the lyrics are operating within a political rather than a strictly money economy, they nevertheless enact this same disavowal. Only one lyric, "Ic an witles," refers to an entire castle. The rest only gesture to one. Indeed the segmented nature of the tower and bower, where they appear as free-standing structures, or the only structures of interest, decontextualizes them from the political economic units of castle or landed estate. Through adopting the courtly scene of love, they in fact make the same disavowal that we will see in Chaucer's secular and courtly *Book of the Duchess*. The fact of women operating only as biopolitical bodies in realms such as the aristocratic marriage market is covered over by their elevation to courtly love object. The lyrics certainly still critique this practice, but they play on the associated tropes in order to also claim not to be talking about bare power relations.

The languages in which these lyrics are written are a further play to claim status within a secular market. As Lerer writes of the note between the Latin and English versions of "Wen þe turuf," "'Vnde anglice sic dicitur' [and in English it is said]": "such a transition must recall for us the shifts among Latin and vernacular…, conveying the sense that English has some status among the Latin of the churchman and (by implication) the French of the new ecclesiastics."[235] We might extend this to the multilingual upper gentry and aristocratic households in which these manuscripts might have been circulating in. The representation of three languages ensures that these manuscripts are legible to as many as possible and accrues for the manuscripts all the status associated with all three.

The text inscribed may itself be only a sign or series of signifiers entering the market, but the referentiality to real spaces and material bodies means that it does not lose the connection to either the political economy or the spaces and bodies they represent. The

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[235] Lerer, "Genre of the Grave," p. 149.

tropes that disguise the texts' interest in power relations nevertheless connect the lyrics' strategies to those very relations. They challenge the relationships lay men have to those bodies and spaces while claiming a superior knowledge of and right to them. Even those that wholesale adopt the language and values of courtly love, because of their manuscript context, participate in a challenge to power over the female body and spaces that they inhabited so taken for granted by the genre of romance, and presumably by real men. And the lyrics that do this do so on behalf of the real clerical men who wrote, whether authored or copied, them. As the poems of Harley 2253 and Digby 86 suggest, this is no radical call to liberate women from the confines of the dangerous bower. Instead, it is a call to permit the clerical authors of these poems into those spaces and to access the bodies contained therein.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that three manuscripts—TCC 323, Harley 2253, and Digby 86—together participate in a negotiation over social status with the laymen amongst whom they lived and worked, and to categorize them as solely religious or political ignores the complex social matrix that produced them. Several of the lyrics fully adopt the rhetoric of courtly love and locate the bower/tower as the natural place for women to reside, but many also represent the bower/tower as a place that is morally suspect, especially in its accessibility to laymen. Thus I argue that they do not simply appropriate courtly love motifs, but use those motifs to claim an alterior and superior status and claim access to women's bodies. A metonymic relationship between female body and tower/bower is established by the lyrics, but this metonymic relationship shifts to a metaphoric relationship that allows clerics access not just to the bodies of women, but to their souls, as well. The lyrics of TCC 323 move to a more explicit critique of aristocratic building practices, reducing stone towers

to equal status with dirt. This reduction that breaks down the physical barriers that kept clerical authors of these poems from the bodies of aristocratic women. Finally, the alterior status claimed by clerics could then circulate as art objects. As Bourdieu tells us, "The meaning of a work (artistic, literary, philosophical, etc.) changes automatically with each change in the field within which it is situated for the spectator or reader."[236] Thus, the lyrics, not just religious or political, are in fact signifiers on manuscripts moving amongst laymen as art, but subtly enact a negotiation with laymen over social status, claimed through women's bodies, located in towers and bowers, as the site of this negotiation. Baronial households commissioned these collections, and the poems that adopt a courtly love motif would undoubtedly have appealed to their taste, but poems such as "On the Follies of Fashion" demonstrate, as I and others have argued, that clerics were not just acting solely in the interest of the laymen who commissioned them. Clerics could, and did, use literature to instruct, and I would argue, manipulate, their courtly audience.

[236] *Field of Cultural Production,* pp. 30-31.

IV. Chaucer's Poetic Insinuations

This chapter turns to the *Book of the Duchess*, a text for which we know both the author and the historical circumstances of its composition. Chaucer composed the poem in the late 1360s or early 1370s, probably commissioned directly by John of Gaunt, to commemorate the death of Gaunt's wife, Blanche, duchess of Lancaster. The poem follows a first person narrator complaining of insomnia. He takes up a book of Ovidian romance, retelling the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone, which sends him directly to sleep and propels him into a dream, which he then also relates. In this dream, the narrator finds himself in a chamber. Hearing the sounds of a noble hunt, he leaves the chamber, entering a park where he encounters a knight dressed all in black, mourning the loss of his beloved lady. A long conversation between narrator and knight ensues extolling the virtues of the lady and finally convincing the somewhat dim narrator that the lady is not just lost, but dead. When this fact is finally bluntly related by the knight, both pack their bags, the knight riding back to his "long castel with walles white, / Be Seynt Johan, on a ryche hil" (1318-19) and the narrator waking from his dream ready to "put [it] in ryme" (1332).

Recent readers of the poem have belabored the relative absence of Blanche in this narrative, often read as an elegy for her.[237] Equally strange and critically interesting are the

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[237] See below for a discussion of these readings. Richard Rambuss offers a useful summary of what he calls the "consolationist" and "anti-consolationist" critics, but still assumes that the "anti-consolationists" are reading it as an elegy, noting that "it would seem that readers of the *Book of the Duchess* separate themselves into two camps: those who regard the poem as a successful elegy...and those who do not." He then "suggest[s] the both...are right: the poem itself does not make available any consolation, but it does indicate the place where consolation may be found" ("'Process of Tyme': History, Consolation, and Apocalypse in the Book of the Duchess," *Exemplaria* 2:2 (1990): 660-61). More recently, Steve Ellis and Elizabeth Scala have considered the consolation reading inhibitive to fully

long description of the chamber in which the narrator wakes, with its walls painted "with colours fyne" (332) of "hooly al the story of Troye" (326) and "al the Romaunce of the Rose" (334), and the Knight's abrupt ride seemingly out of the story to a far distant castle. I want to suggest that these enigmatic and apparently gratuitous architectural moments correspond with the apparent lack of a material presence for Blanche in the poem. I argue here that a complex dialectic between material architecture and material bodies is articulated in the *Book of the Duchess* in a way that allows us to better read not just the poem but also the cultural practices of historical figures that lie behind it. Chaucer's poem capitalizes on the representation of the aristocratic female body entowered—located materially in intimate and high status architectural spaces—to develop a male narratorial voice that imagines his own—that is Chaucer, the historical man—intimate access to his patron John of Gaunt. Unlike the clerical authors and scribes of Middle English lyric, Chaucer does not critique aristocratic practice but hopes to, and eventually does, increase his own status within the lay male social hierarchy of Late Medieval England.

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understanding how the poem works. Ellis argues that "[w]hat the poem might be asking us to consider is, however, the rather more problematic notion that the act of consolation itself may not be any 'solution' but precisely the problem: that the man in black's being encouraged to memorialize Blanche, while it may 'ese [his] herte' (556), ultimately only intensifies his loss of her, and that this impasse is the poem's proper subject" ("The Death of the 'Book of the Duchess,'" *The Chaucer Review* 29:3 (1995): 253). Scala writes: "it is clear why and for whom Chaucer wrote the Book of the Duchess.... Yet the critical tradition of the *Duchess* testifies to the ambiguity of this most transparent of interpretive situations. The Book of the Duchess evades the historical reference it appears to invoke, just as the poem resists all effort at clear determination. The stability and determinism offered by the reference to Gaunt...positions the poem's structure as an effect of its historical meaning. The uneasy relationship between parts of the *Duchess*...assures the indirect accuracy of its historical, consolatory work. That historical meaning has provided criticism with a definite telos for the poem..." that she claims has prevented critics from considering the textual problems of the manuscript tradition (*Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 16-17, 27. As my discussion of feminist readings below and this chapter will suggest, the poem doesn't do a particularly good job of memorializing Blanche, but our critical work can.

Locating Blanche

As we have seen in romance and Middle English lyric, the literature of the period relies on the cultural association of women with the most interior, inaccessible and high status spaces of the castle, particularly the chamber and the highly symbolic tower. The *Book of the Duchess* does the same, but the poem purposefully obfuscates the lady's place in this system. Indeed, much scholarly ink has been spilt trying to determine how to interpret the poem's representation of her. New Critical readings have tended to concentrate on the sublimity rather than the materiality of Blanche, not surprising given the poem's elegiac purpose and evocation of the rhetoric of courtly love. David Aers, for instance, argues that the poem uses art and rhetoric to turn the Duchess and the Knight's grief over her death into an "icon."[238] James Wimsatt in his invaluable work tracing Chaucer's borrowings from French and Biblical imagery likewise concludes that the poem produces "The Apotheosis of Blanche" through its heavy reliance on Marian imagery.[239] He traces Chaucer's borrowed imagery to the Canticles, in which the bride is said to have a neck that is a tower of ivory. For Wimsatt, this borrowing works to situate Blanche outside of the material world: "for Chaucer's Duchess, 'immortal light,' 'tower of ivory,' and 'resting-place of Truth' are most appropriate titles, for she *is* Queen of Heaven."[240] The poem certainly does work hard to relegate Blanche to a register safely beyond the material and historical, but I am interested

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[238] "Chaucer's Book of the Duchess: An Art to Consume Art," *Durham University Journal* 69:2 (1977): 201-05.

[239] "The Apotheosis of Blanche in *The Book of the Duchess*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 66 (1967): 26-44.

[240] Wimsatt, "Apotheosis," original emphasis.

here in why it does that and the ways in which it fails to completely achieve it. Towers and resting-places, after all, evoke real sites containing real bodies. And though Chaucer is principally borrowing this language, that fact does not negate the effect of its material dimension in Chaucer's poem; if anything, Wimsatt's study helps to situate Chaucer in a very long tradition of concern with the materiality of the female body.

Beryl Rowland gestures toward a material presence for Blanche, but displaces it onto another object in the poem: as medieval chess pieces were made of ivory, she suggests that the image of Blanche's neck as "round tour of yvorye" refers to a real medieval chess piece, the *fers*, or queen, that the Black Knight has lost in a game of chess with Fortune.[241] Rowland importantly establishes a series of signifiers—neck, ivory tower, chess piece—that I will suggest over the course of the chapter revolve not around the allegorical chess game but around Blanche's body and that body's placement within the tower.

With the advent of feminist and post-structuralist, particularly Lacanian, theory into Chaucer criticism, scholars turned from asking how the poem attempts to produce Blanche as being beyond its material concerns and instead considered how the poem's structure in fact relies on her very present absence. In "Originary Fantasies and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*," Gayle Margherita predicates her argument on "the absent body of the lost object [that is, of Blanche]."[242] Her interest does not lie, however, in claiming for it any singularity or historical specificity. Instead she focuses on Blanche as a site of the universal feminine:

The poem attempts to assert its hereditary right to a literary tradition by

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[241] "'A Round Tour of Yvoyre': ('The Book of the Duchess'), 946," *Notes and Queries* 10:1 (1963): 9.

[242] In *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 119.

> dramatizing the "dis-incorporation" or abjection of the lost object that is part of the "work" performed by the elegiac/melancholic subject. Only by asserting his difference from the abject/object can the masculinist poet recover his losses and affirm the exteriority and authority necessary to the continuity of paternalist poetics....[I]n the Chaucerian elegy as in Freudian theory, the exteriority and paternal authority of both poet and analyst are undermined by the return of what both attempt continually to repress: the materiality of language itself, the ma(t)ter which/who inevitably threatens the stability of the paternal system of discursive production. If the elegy is about inheritance, authority, and patriarchy, it is also about desire—desire that circulates throughout texts, exceeding both narrative control and sexual difference.[243]

Crucial to her argument are "Lady White's fixed absence" and "the body of the mother [as] exiled to the lost realm of matter and reference."[244] Glen Burger goes one step farther: he argues that Blanche functions as the Other around and against whom the Knight can define desire and therefore himself, as a kind of continuous dumping ground for signification, her "real" identification somehow making figuration more "real."[245] In claiming that the Knight's acknowledgment of her loss "may also...include the recognition that that which is 'lost' was never present in the literal way imagined[,]" he disavows any real, material referent for Blanche. Margherita and Burger both point up Blanche's central role in the logic of the poem and offer compelling readings for why the poem works so hard to cover that

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[243] Margherita, "Originary Fantasies," pp. 119-20.

[244] Margherita, "Originary Fantasies," p. 134.

role. I, like Margherita, read Blanche as belonging to the realm of matter, but I shall also argue that that realm is not lost, that it is recoverable once we recognize the structures of displacement and appropriation governing the poem. The "realm of matter" is in fact present and crucial to the poem.

In "'Voice Memorial': Loss and Reparation in Chaucer's Poetry," Aranye Fradenburg challenges both Chaucer criticism and theories of the elegy by declaring that "we need a political reading of the elegy."[246] Fradenburg concentrates on the ways in which the suppression of "division, death, and sorrow"[247] objectified in the female body, allows for both the elegy to promise the continuation of life and the masculine Chaucerian to promise "fertility [in] the attempt to 'know' the historical other and restore communality with it."[248] Though Fradenburg ultimately moves away from focusing on the materiality of the female body in her reading, that materiality is the hard kernel at its center.

I attempt here to locate that female body, [249] to locate Blanche, within both the poetic and architectural structures of the poem. While I am compelled by readings of the poem that

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[245] "Reading Otherwise: Recovering the Subject in the *Book of the Duchess*," *Exemplaria* 5:2 (1993): 334.

[246] *Exemplaria* 2:1 (1990): 184.

[247] Fradenburg, "'Voice Memorial,'" p. 185.

[248] Fradenburg, "'Voice Memorial'", p. 192.

[249] Fradenburg, as she calls for a "deconstruction of alterity" with the past, remarks that "what is celebrated as 'other' by some scholars might not seem 'other' to 'others,' specifically that what seems historically other to men might not seem so to women. It is indeed the case that, from the standpoint of feminist theory, the inadequately compensated appropriation of women's resources, and the ideological justifications of such appropriation, have had a long history" ("Voice Memorial," p. 192). I take my cue from her in feeling that this recovery and the appropriations of Blanche's resources should at the very least be attempted.

foreground consolation and subjectivity, I believe that a full "political reading" of this elegy must consider the material body of the woman whom it memorializes. That body, while not often visible in the poem, is crucial to the structure of the poem itself and to the appropriating activities—of husband and author—that drive it.

The primary historical structure that underpins those activities is late medieval aristocratic marriage. It allows Blanche's body and all of the materials associated with that body, including the castle of Lancaster, its associated land and wealth, to be appropriated by her husband John of Gaunt. And while the poem works hard to cover the bare economics of this structure with the language of courtly love, I shall argue that it nevertheless relies on this historical use of material bodies and objects, particularly in the representation of Blanche's body's relationship to both the park and the intimate space of the castle tower chamber. It is primarily the metonymic association of her body with the castle tower chamber that establishes Blanche's rightful and historical place in this particularly intimate and high status space. Once that place is established, Chaucer can represent his narrator taking that place, by occupying the architectural space meant for Blanche. Chaucer's narrator thus appropriates the place of Blanche's material body. And as the Blanche of the poem so heavily relies on the historical Blanche, duchess of Lancaster, I argue that the poem suggests that the narrator's analog, Chaucer himself, be able to do the same. Chaucer has written a poem that does not just seek to operate at a discursive level of rhetorical access but suggests the achievement of material access to his patron John of Gaunt—a kind of access that has powerful political implications.

The placement of that body in the architectural spaces of the poem plays a critical role in the aggrandizing strategies of the Black Knight, of the narrator, and of John of Gaunt

and Chaucer. Blanche's body would have resided both while alive and after death[250] in a castle like the one that appears at the end of poem. While the spaces and structures of the poem work symbolically for the narrator in his exchange with the Black Knight, they also rely on and reflect the real material practices of aristocrats. Understanding how various spaces and structures were inhabited by the men and women of the aristocracy is crucial to understanding how the poem uses them. While Burger's insistence on the privileging of discursivity in the *Book of the Duchess* leads him to regard it as "courtly love disguised as the world[,]"[251] we need, in fact, to rearrange that construction to read the world disguised in courtly love. The very real historical structures of aristocratic marriage, property acquisition and inhabitation of that property drive this poem. These structures require Blanche's body to be in the castle, and while we never see her there, the poem nevertheless relies on her presence there.

Just as Blanche's body sits at the metaphorical center of the poem, the castle sat at the political center of the landed estate, from which the nobility's wealth and power ultimately derived. These estates were characterized by abundance, even excess. The park in which the narrator finds himself on waking demonstrates just such abundance, so much so that even "Argus, the noble countour [mathematician]" (435) "shoulde..fayle to rekene even / The wondres [the narrator] mette in [his] sweven [dream]" (441-42):

> Hyt ys no nede eke [also] for to axe [ask]
> Where there were many grene greves [branches],

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[250] Before burial, during a period of wake, bodies of the deceased would have remained in the home with family and friends (Rosemary Horrox, "Purgatory, Prayer and Plague: 1150-1380," in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), p. 101).

Or thikke of trees, so ful of leves;

...

And many an hert and many an hynde

Was both before me and behynde.

Of founes [fawns], sowres [four-year old bucks], bukkes, does

Was ful the woode, and many roes,

And many sqwirelles that sete

Ful high upon the trees and ete,

And in hir [their] maner made festes [feasts]. (416-33)[252]

This scene pictures the ideal park, the harts and hinds that were hunted supplying the abundance of the ideal noble table with the overflow of rich foods that a powerful man like John of Gaunt would be expected to provide his household and guests. The image of the squirrels feasting in their "maner," punning on "manor," turns grotesquely ironic, given that the squirrels are in fact part of the ecology that is feasted on by the noble households that would have occupied manor houses and castles, including the one at the poem's end. The image also draws an analogy between the park and what is inside the castle at its center. The inability of the mathematician Argus to "rekene" the wonders of the park is matched by the inability of the Black Knight to comprehend the wonders of his lady:

But which a visage had she thertoo!

Allas, myn herte ys wonder woo [very woeful]

That I ne kan discryven hyt [cannot describe it]!

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[251] Burger, "Reading Otherwise," p. 338.

Me lakketh [I lack] both Englyssh and wit

For to undo [explain] hyt at the fulle;

And eke my spirites be so dulle

So gret a thyng for to devyse.

I have no wit that kan suffise

To comprehende hir beaute. (895-903)

Here Blanche's body is present, and like the park, "fulle," but unable to be fully accounted for.

This association of Blanche with the park is not just metaphorical whimsy. Noble women in the later middle ages were instrumental in the transfer and accrual of property. Because women could inherit, heiresses were eagerly sought, even by the already powerful.[253] As one of two daughters of Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster, Blanche inherited part of his estates on his death in 1361, but when her elder sister died, she came into possession of all of them. When John of Gaunt married Blanche in 1359, he was already duke of Richmond, and when Blanche inherited the entirety of her father's estates and titles, he became duke of Lancaster.[254] The transfer of the title as well as the landed wealth that accompanied it was effected through Blanche, and indeed through her body. In fact, English common law relied on a physical and bodily metaphor in describing married

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[252] All quotations are taken from Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

[253] See Jennifer C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1992), pp. 16-23, for the importance of marriage alliances, and especially those with heiresses, in the rise of families to power.

[254] Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 35, 39; Ward, *English Noble Women*, p. 17.

women. The common law term for a married woman was *feme covert*; she was literally covered by her husband.[255] Common and canon law considered husband and wife to be one person, and with marriage, a woman's property became that of her husband, as well.[256] When John married Blanche, she became part of him, and her estates became part of his estates.

The relationship between the Black Knight and his Lady follows this structure. The Knight relates a long account of his quest for her love, and she finally gives him mercy when "she wel understod / That [he] wilned thyng [wanted nothing] but... / ... to kepe hir name / Over alle thynges" (1261-64). He of course means to elevate her above everything, but he will also literally "kepe hir name"; from his marriage and into perpetuity, John of Gaunt was in possession of the title of Lancaster, as were his famous descendants.[257] The perfect accord that apparently characterized the Knight and the Lady's marriage—"Our hertes wern [hearts were] so evene a payre / That never nas that oon contrayre / To that other for no woo [That never was one contrary or different to the other so as to cause woe]" (1289-91)—also reflects common and canon law's matrimonial ideal of personal, even bodily, union between

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[255] See Sue Sheridan Walker, "Feme covert," in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 282.

[256] I do not want to suggest here that women lacked various kinds of power or agency, that this aspect of the law was at all times rigorously enforced, or even that romantic love and real respect did not exist between husbands and wives. Nevertheless, as its presence in the common law suggests, and as I hope to show in this paper, this way of conceptualizing women operated ideologically in a powerful way.

[257] Burger argues "that White is the only subject given a proper name [because] she embodies the stabilizing power of 'proper' naming carried out in terms of the ideology of love so strongly desired by the two narrating 'I's' at work in the *Book of the Duchess* [that is the Knight and the narrator]" ("Reading Otherwise, p. 331). I would add the additional argument that her proper name is the one of real importance in the historical circumstances of Blanche's marriage to Gaunt.

husband and wife. Thus, even as she is spoken of alive, Blanche's body loses visibility as it is "covered" by her husband in the poem as it technically was in law.

The very material role that noble women played generally, and that Blanche of Lancaster played in John of Gaunt's rise to power, emerges in the Black Knight's language of courtly love. He laments to the narrator that, having lost Blanche, he has "lost suffisance" (703), and later describes her as "My suffisaunce," "Myn hap," and "My worldes welfare" (1038-40). "Suffisance," glossed by *The Riverside Chaucer* as "contentment,"[258] has a more commonly attested meaning as "That which suffices, all that is necessary; a sufficiency, enough; an adequate supply, quantity, etc. of something;" and "abundance, plenty, wealth."[259] "Welfare" first means "a source of well-being or happiness," but a less attested meaning is that of "abundance (of meat, drink)."[260] The semantic range of these words indicates the degree to which the material and the psychological cannot be easily distinguished or disentangled. It also indicates the rather hazy structural difference between fullness or plentitude and excess (recall that the narrator cannot describe Blanche's face "at the fulle" or find "wit that can suffise" to take in the fullness of her beauty). The poem's use of these words in the description of the Lady establishes an analogy between her and her landed wealth; this wealth would have been both plentiful and excessive, as would Blanche's body, full in itself and supplemented as it was with land and title. Indeed, the Knight's complaint of loss, and later his declaration that without his lady he has "ryght noght" (705), becomes ironic in light of how much he has in fact gained, even with her

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[258] ed. Benson, p. 339, n. 703.

[259] *MED*, "suffisaunce," 1a,b.

[260] *OED*, "welfare," 2, 3b.

death. The comparison of himself to Tantalus (709), for whom "sustenance [is] just out of reach,"[261] is also ironic, given that one of the frame narratives for the Knight's story is the hunt, which will provide all the sustenance his household could need. The Knight's complaint reflects the psychological effects of the courtly hypereconomy, but it also reflects the material landed economy of the aristocracy. Moreover, the choice of Tantalus seems to me a pointed one: Tantalus does not suffer from a loss of love, but rather suffers from being surrounded by unreachable abundance. With Blanche's death, Gaunt, on the other hand, remains surrounded by very reachable abundance.

In addition to the language of landed wealth, that of feudal ties creeps into the Black Knight's description of Blanche. His figuring of love as a feudal lord is not without plenty of literary precedent, but it is worth noting:

> Dredeles [doubtless], I have ever yit
> Be tributarye [been a vassal] and yive [given] rente
> To Love, hooly with good entente,
> And throgh plesaunce become his thral [servant]
> With good wille, body, hert, and al.
> Al this I putte in his servage,
> As to my lord, and did homage[.] (764-70)

More remarkable is that this feudal rhetoric carries over onto Blanche's body: according to the Knight, she has "So noble port and meyntenaunce" (834). The primary meanings of "meyntenaunce" do not in fact pertain to carriage[262] but to ties of vassalage: "the keeping of

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[261] ed. Benson, p. 339, n. 709.

[262] The *Riverside* glosses it as "bearing, demeanor" (ed. Benson, p. 340, n. 834).

a number of retainers or other supporters" and "a hat of [maintenaunce being] a hat given by a patron as his livery."[263]

In the later Middle Ages, women could inherit and be lords in their own right, so the Lady could have "meyntenaunce" in her own name; once married, however, that maintenance would have transferred to her husband. Many have noted the paradoxical nature of sovereignty, the language of which pervades the language of courtly love, and its effect of obfuscating who really controls whom.[264] The Lady, it would appear, secures the Black Knight as part of her maintenance. He transfers his loyalty from Love to her, claiming to be "hooly hires [wholly hers]" (1041) and to "love hir alwey fresshly newe, / And never other lady have" (1229). He goes through the rituals of swearing fealty, doing "hir worship and the servise / That [he] koude" (1098-99) and "Bowynge to hir, [he] heng the hed" (1216). When the structure of courtly love is resituated in its material context, when we consider it as analogous to real political structures, it becomes obvious that it also covers up the fact of the male prerogative in marital relations. The Knight is still the one who has the lady; he will "never other lady have."[265]

This fact, that is the Lady's status as property, becomes clear in the game of chess that the Knight plays with Fortune, in which he loses the game after losing his queen to her. The game is a metaphorical figuring of the loss of Blanche, but if Blanche's neck refers to

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[263] *MED*, "maintenaunce," 1b.

[264] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992); Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 146-64.

the chess piece, as Rowland has suggested, then the chess piece also refers to Blanche. As Jenny Adams has demonstrated, chess was not only a popular game, but also a popular way to allegorize relationships between people.[266] While many have argued that Chaucer's representation of the game in the *Book of the Duchess* misunderstands its rules, Adams argues instead that Chaucer responds to the popular practice of gambling, suggesting that the Knight resigns the game upon losing his queen because he has wagered her as a stake. Read in this way, the chess game becomes a way to describe the relationship between John of Gaunt and Blanche: "As a game of stakes, the chess game against Fortune at once allegorizes and masks the fiscal-contractual nature of John's marital relationship with Blanche."[267] The chess piece ceases, then, to be just a chess piece, and can also be read as a figure for Blanche, a material object, over the possession of which the Knight and Fortune struggle:

> Had I be God and myghte have do
>
> My wille [If I had had my way] whan she [Fortune] my fers kaughte,
>
> I wolde have drawe the same draughte [done the same thing].
>
> For, also wys God yive me reste,
>
> I dar wel swere she took the beste." (680-84)

And just as the Knight will keep Blanche's name, so too does he imagine keeping his chess piece: "I shulde have pleyd the bet [better] at ches / And kept my fers the bet therby" (668-

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[265] Here is a place where courtly love rhetoric both does and does not conform to historical reality, since Gaunt did in fact have others, marrying another two times after Blanche's death.

[266] See *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), "Introduction: Chess in the Medieval World," pp. 1-14.

69). In his poetry, Chaucer often refuses to draw a hard distinction between "game" and "earnest"; taking the game of chess as simply that—a game—cannot but erase the complexity of the poem and its relationship to the occasion of its writing. When the Knight insists to the narrator, "I have lost more than thou wenest [you know]" (1138), his statement both points to how very much his lady was worth and constitutes a stroke of irony, insofar as he has also gained more than the narrator can possibly guess.

At the symbolic center of the Knight's gains is the castle that appears at the end of the poem: after declaring his lady dead, the Knight rides off to "A long castel with walles white, / Be Seynt Johan, on a ryche hil" (ll. 1318-19). The castle's historical and political function has already been partly explicated by scholars. Richard Rambuss, for instance, reads the Knight's return to the white castle as an "apocalyptic moment," wherein the Knight's consolation is "radically privatized" and can be found both outside history and temporality in the "the heavenly city."[268] Rambuss concludes that this apocalyptic moment being "represented historically" in the form of a castle suggests the "inescapability of history," that "escape from the social world [cannot be]...complete or...transparent."[269] Fradenburg, on the other hand, reads the castle as always fully within the historical and social world from which the poem comes. Arguing that Chaucer's is a poetics that creates interiority as an aristocratic and courtly sensibility, she describes how the castle becomes an outward sign of that interiority:

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[267] "Pawn Takes Knight's Queen: Playing with Chess in the 'Book of the Duchess,'" *The Chaucer Review* 34:2 (1999): 127.

[268] Rambuss, "'Process of tyme,'" pp. 662, 664.

[269] Rambuss, "'Process of tyme'," pp. 678-79.

Love's "making" on the white wall [Blanche] of [Black's] interior is later remade into a

> figure of exteriority, the long castle with white walls toward which Black rides "homewarde" at the end of the poem (1215). Black begins as a white wall that will be crafted by the art of Love, and heads for a *heimlich* castle where the wall of wonder becomes a defensive wall, a material sign of seigneurial power.[270]

According to Fradenburg, the castle shields Black's now constituted interior subjectivity through its material fortifications and symbolic weight. Blanche, though Black's lady, is displaced from the castle's figurative interiority, a point to which I will return, but not before her position within the castle and its material signification of aristocratic power is established.

From the Norman Conquest, stone castles were built to subdue local populations and operated as positions from which the landscape could be surveilled. Lancaster Castle provided this crucial function for the Palatinate of Lancaster, [271] and Blanche of Lancaster would have enjoyed some of that power from within the castle. The elevation of the county of Lancaster to Palatinate under her father meant that she and her husband had almost royal power there. Read in this context, the lady's gaze becomes explicitly powerful:

> Therto hir look nas not asyde [sideways]
> Ne overthwert [nor askance], but beset so wel

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[270] L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 106.

[271] Lancaster Castle is still very much intact, including its twelfth-century keep and a fourteenth-century tower. A palatinate was an area ruled by a hereditary noble who was able to exercise quasi-royal power with a certain degree of autonomy from the rest of the kingdom.

Hyt drew and took up everydel [everything]

Al that on hir gan beholde [that undertook to look at her].” (862-64)

This gaze does not just look out; it also acquires. The Lady’s gaze has powers of surveillance and possession, indeed of the further accrual of possessions.[272] And even before the Knight will keep her name, he tells us that the lady “loved so wel hir owne name” (1018). She recognizes as well as he does the power that inheres in that name and the value of keeping it, as well as the property that comes with it, whole: insofar as the female gaze was understood to be cupidinous, being sure that “Hyr lokynge was not fuly sprad” (874) also prevented the possibility of her body and its property from being disseminated. This placement of Blanche’s well-contained body at the structural center of the Knight’s park reflects the historical place of Blanche at the political center of the landed estate.

That political center was manifested materially in the castle, and the poem further alludes to her occupation of that space. In this material and architectural context the image of the Lady as “A chef myrour of al the feste, / Thogh they [the ten thousand that she is among] had stonden in a rowe” (974-75) becomes more intelligible. Wimsatt traces the image of the mirror to Old Testament verses about Esther that were frequently applied to Mary in the Middle Ages,[273] and Rowland considers those that stand in a row as evidence that we take Blanche as an analogue of the *fers*, which on a chess board would be opposite

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[272] For a discussion of the medieval tradition of the transgressive female gaze, see Sarah Stanbury, “The Virgin’s Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion,” *PMLA* 106:5 (1991): 1083-93. The injunction against a cupidinous, seductive, or aggressive gaze (p. 1084) is certainly reflected in Blanche’s description, as “Hyr lokynge was not foly sprad” (874), but Stanbury notes how in one fifteenth-century Marian lyric, Mary’s “seat of power has shifted from the hearth to the court:...she has become a lady and a queen of heaven” (p. 1089). That such an imagining of female power could transfer back into the material world does not seem wholly out of the realm of possibility to me.

other chess pieces lined up in a row.[274] But the lady as the mirror of the feast opposite those in a row also imagines the medieval hall, in which the lady of the household would sit at the top of the room at the high table, perhaps raised on the dais, facing the long rows of retainers and guests sitting at the lower tables, her high social status signaled by her physical placement in the hall.[275] I have already suggested that the poem has made Blanche central to the castle's symbolic and political function. But with this figure her presence specifically within the material architecture of the castle is established. It is, however, still only established through a chain of signification that denies a view of the duchess herself in that space.

Blanche—Body—Tower

Thus far I have suggested that the representation of Blanche relies on the material historical role that Blanche of Lancaster would have played, her body as guarantor of property exchange and accrual, which John of Gaunt could then appropriate. In establishing that role, the poem places her in the castle hall, and crucially at the top of the hall, as befits her status as lady of the castle. The poem must put her in the castle to guarantee her status, for without that status neither Gaunt nor Chaucer have anything to appropriate. What Chaucer must appropriate in order to guarantee his own status and intimate access, however, is the high status, feminized, most intimate space of the tower. But just as with the castle, he establishes her presence there not by putting her in one, but through a chain of signification

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[273] Wimsatt, "Apotheosis," p. 39.

[274] Rowland, "'A Round Tour of Yvoyre,'" p. 9.

[275] See Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, p. 89.

that capitalizes on the wide cultural association, both in material practice and literary tradition, of women and towers.

As Roberta Gilchrist has shown, the castle spaces that women historically occupied often included a tower.[276] And both Middle English and French literature familiar to Chaucer trope the tower as the place where women reside. The lyrics of the famous Harley manuscript, for instance, do it repeatedly. *Annot and Johan* figures its female love object as a bird, becoming more specific over the course of the poem to compare her to different kinds of birds: at one point she is a "trewe tortle[dove] in a tour" (22).[277] In *The Way of Women's Love*, the narrator laments the inaccessibility of his love object and the space in which she lives, which he imagines to be hyper-accessible to everyone else:

> Mury hit ys in hyre tour
>
> wyþ haþeles [knights] & wyþ heowes [servants],
>
> so hit is in hyre bour
>
> wiþ gomenes [games] & wiþ gleowes [entertainments][.] (22-25)[278]

This poem in particular registers the cultural notion of the tower as a special space accessible only to the privileged. In both lyrics, the tower is imagined as an ideal space for its female inhabitants but nevertheless insists on their placement there. In addition to these lyrics, which appear to have circulated quite a bit, the romance tradition, which Chaucer most certainly knew well, also frequently placed women in towers, but figure towers as ideal ways for their captors to imprison them. One tower of Chrétien de Troyes's Arthurian romance

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[276] See "Introduction," pp. 26-27.

[277] In *English Lyrics*, p. 137.

[278] *English Lyrics*, p. 163.

The Knight of the Cart epitomizes this function. In it, Guinevere is kidnapped by the evil Maleagant and held in a tower. In order to rescue her, Lancelot must climb the tower and come in through the grated window, which wounds him. When his blood is found on the bed the next morning, Maleagant uses it as proof of Guinevere's infidelity. Here the tower specifically encodes anxiety about Guinevere's too accessible sexuality, as it forces her lover to find an alternative and dangerous route to access her chamber.

The *Book of the Duchess* relies on the general association of women with towers and also registers the anxiety over female accessibility through the trope that it uses: the Knight tells the narrator that "Hyr throte, as I have now memoyre, / Semed a round tour of yvoyre" (945-46). This comes as part of a long description of Blanche, most of which Chaucer borrowed and adapted from two poems of Guillaume de Machaut. According to Wimsatt, Chaucer blended the two standard models provided by Machaut's poem—one a physical description, the other a character portrait—"to obtain a less stereotyped effect[,... all] while employing Machaut's own diction."[279] The special irony of Chaucer's "less stereotyped effect" is that his original additions transform these poems' female love objects into perhaps the greatest stereotype of the medieval woman by identifying Blanche with the Virgin.[280] The detail of the "round tour of yvoyre" is one of these original additions. Chaucer has several sources for his Marian imagery, but this particular figure comes from the description of the bride in the *Song of Songs*. Throughout the Middle Ages, the bride was identified with both the Church and with Mary, and so "both *turris Davidica* and *turris eburnea* came

[279] Wimsatt, "Apotheosis," p. 29.

[280] Wimsatt, "Apotheosis," p. 29.

to be included among the Virgin's epithets even in official services."[281] In these epithets, the tower shifts from figuring Mary's neck to figuring her entire person. Mary occupies the tower of her own body. Thus her body, like that of the anchorite of *Ancrene Wisse*, comes to be represented as whole, inviolable, and impregnable. Mary's inviolability is of course a condition of her holy status and fitness to carry Christ, an inviolability which she miraculously maintains even through conception and giving birth.

Though Chaucer draws out his comparison of Blanche and Mary, he cannot rely on the miraculous state that protects Mary to protect Blanche. Blanche also occupies the tower of her own body, but the poem must take pains to drive home that this tower produces an inviolable Blanche. While the poem alludes to Blanche's occupation of the tower through the metonymic association of her body with that space, the figure has the simultaneous effect of preventing the reader of a view of its interior. We are only allowed to see the neck-as-tower from the outside:

> But swich [such] a fairnesse of a nekke
> Had that swete that boon [bone] nor brekke [break]
> Nas ther non sene that myssat [Nor was there anything unbecoming to see].
> Hyt was whit, smothe, streght, and pure flat,
> Wythouten hole or canel-boon [collar-bone.] (939-43)

The word "brekke" is worth dwelling on for a moment. The *Middle English Dictionary* has only one example of the word, this one from the *Book of the Duchess*. It defines the word as "A flaw of some kind" rather than break, although it notes that it is "akin to" the Middle English word "breken," which the *MED* defines as "To break (an object) into parts; dash to

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[281] Wimsatt, "Apotheosis," p. 35-36.

pieces; destroy the wholeness of (an object)."[282] We can arguably read the word "brekke" as break, then, and not just as "a flaw" or a "blemish," as the *Riverside* glosses it.[283] At any rate, with no "brekke" or "hole" to speak of, the tower is a picture of inviolable wholeness with no point of accessibility. And as we see the tower's unbroken facade from the outside, we are prevented from seeing its interior. As with *Ancrene Wisse*, where the body-as-castle provides a second architectural barrier after the anchorhold to accessing the interior life of the anchorite, the tower-as-body provides an architectural boundary denying access to Blanche's interior.

The image of Blanche's neck as an ivory tower points to another way in which the poem maintains an undefiled, exterior view of her body. Phillipa Hardman, following David Lawton's reading of the poem as a "poetic monument to [Gaunt's] grief[,]" offers a reading of the poem as a representation of monumental tomb sculpture.[284] Whether or not the poem's debatable date can be fixed to coincide with Gaunt's commissioning and the building of a joint tomb for himself and Blanche,[285] Hardman makes a strong case for Chaucer's knowledge of and reliance on the tradition of tomb sculpture in the description of Blanche as well as other details of the poem: the whelp that leads the dreamer to the Knight, for instance, seems to symbolize marital fidelity in the same way that dogs carved at the feet

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[282] "breken," 1a.

[283] ed. Benson, p. 341, n. 940.

[284] The quotation is Hardman quoting Lawson, "The *Book of the Duchess* as a Memorial Monument," *The Chaucer Review* 28:3 (1994): 205-15.

[285] Which is Hardman's proposition. She gives a summary of various arguments around dating at p. 206.

of joint effigies did.[286] Hardman makes the compelling point that the colors of Blanche's face—"whit, rody, fressh, and lyvely hewed" (905)—are the same colors that would have been used to paint stone effigies in an attempt to make them lifelike.[287] The Canticle verse from which the whiteness and ruddiness of the face seems to have been taken says only "candidus et rubicandus, electus ex millibus."[288] "Lyvely hewed" is Chaucer's own addition, and while hew could mean "complexion," it could also mean "to hew (rock or stone); [to] shape or quarry (stone); [or to] hew (a sepulcher, etc.) from stone."[289] Blanche's effigy was probably very "lyvely hewed" indeed.

Blanche's materiality surfaces in the most direct and material way here in the deep resonances of her description with the alabaster tombs that memorialized women of her status, if not with the particular alabaster tomb that memorialized her. Just as the poem has avoided the interior of her body and the interior spaces that she would have occupied in conflating the outside of the tower with her whole, unbroken exteriorized body, it further avoids the potential to see inside the dead body, or to see the dead body being mourned, presumably inside that castle. The abrupt nature of the Knight's "She ys ded!" (1309) followed by his quick removal to the castle and the awakening of the narrator from out of the dream all work to prevent any consideration of the dead body. Furthermore, the "hole" to which the passage describing Blanche's neck refers is the cavity that might develop between the collar bones of women unfortunate enough to lack sufficient plumpness, but the hole can

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[286] Hardman, "Memorial Monument," p. 212.

[287] Hardman, "Memorial Monument," p. 215, n. 19.

[288] Wimsatt, "Apotheosis," p. 35.

[289] *MED*, "heuen" (v.(1)), 2b.

also be read as a hole in her body, in her skin even. The image of the perforated skin, of bones and breaks and collar bones which Blanche's description invokes only to refuse is an image, in contrast to the metonymic tower, that points up her embodiedness, and the possibility of that material body's fragmentation, especially in its naming of particular body parts—bones—that should not be seen, parts that should remain internal. Bones take on special significance in Middle English lyrics as "fukul" and "derne" in the critique of lay aristocratic practices. Bones also seem to have significance for Chaucer as he endeavors to convince his reader that Blanche's bones are sufficiently hidden and non-threatening, as they seem to be in the lyrics. Insisting that her neck has no hole nor bones becomes a disavowal of the corruption by death of Blanche's body, of the disintegration of her body when it ceases to live. This disavowal is, again, a refusal of any view of her interior, which disintegration would, in the most bodily way, allow. Furthermore, if her body has indeed been invested with value as property, and its value to a large extent determined by its wholeness, as I have argued, then the potential of that body to be broken up, violated, must be suppressed.

The poem instead insists on either the animate, whole body of the female, which allowed for the transfer of property and titles, or the reanimating monument that continues the work of the function of that body in the transfer and acquisition of landed property and wealth. The painting of stone effigies meant to suggest their referents in life, and the building of effigies was meant to maintain in death the relationships established during life. Joint effigies depicting both husband and wife began to be built in the late thirteenth century, increasing in popularity into the fourteenth, and, as Peter Coss notes, would have the effect of associating the lady with her lord, and if she were an heiress, her line with his, into

perpetuity.[290] Blanche's body remains in circulation, doing what it did in life, that is, guaranteeing the property and title of Lancaster to Gaunt and their descendants.

Of course, death itself does not necessarily preclude efficacy. Jane Gilbert has recently argued that Blanche is written as a feminine exemplar, and that her "elevation depends on her laudable willingness to leave the land of the living for that of the dead."[291] Gilbert relies on the anthropological work of Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, who find that death allows for the living subject to become an exploitable object by the living.[292] It is therefore only through her death, according to Gilbert, that Blanche can become this exemplar to the living. In the medieval imaginary, on the other hand, dead bodies were not simply efficacious objects but retained some of the subjectivity of the people who inhabited them. Relics of saints' bodies were thought to be imbued with remnants of the life force of the saint, thus giving the relic its power to perform miracles.[293] Furthermore, the northern European aristocratic practice of sending different parts of the corpse—heart, head, entrails, bones—to different locations for burial suggests that aristocrats, at least, saw the body "during this liminal period [of about a year after death, as it decomposed,] as active, sensitive, or semianimate, possessed of gradually fading life."[294]

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[290] *The Lady in Medieval England 1000-1500* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. 84.

[291] *Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 191.

[292] Gilbert, *Living Death*, p. 193.

[293] See Patrick Geary, "Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Persepective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 169-94.

[294] Katherine Park, "The Life of the Corpse: Division and Dissection in Late Medieval Europe," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50 (1995): 115.

Chaucer most certainly exploits Blanche's death: more than occasioning the poem, her death allows for the vacating of the space that Chaucer will then appropriate. But his poem simultaneously suppresses any image of her as a semianimate but fragmented dead body. It instead insists on a kind of reanimation—through the lifelike tomb, through the evasion of her dead body, even through the confusion of the narrator, who has trouble realizing that the Black Knight is describing a dead woman, perhaps because the Knight says things like "Now that I see my lady bright" (477)—because the animate, the live body of Blanche, like her property, is whole and uncorrupted. This refusal of the duchess's abject body, of a view of her interior and the interior architectural space that she would have occupied, mirror the inability of the narrator to fully account for her live body. Both are unspeakeable. While the tower attempts to contain her, her association with the abundance of the park remains, as both park and woman threaten in their excess to overspill their bounds. The potential fecundity of Blanche's body, of the outside, is veiled by the language of courtly love but is nevertheless crucial to the Black Knight and to his historical referent, John of Gaunt. The potential fecundity of the inside, on the other hand, must be written over with a carefully hewed funeral effigy.

Chaucer in the Chamber

The effect of all of this is to completely displace Blanche from the space that we should find her in. While she occupies the tower of her own body, she is not occupying that of the castle. As her body becomes tower and then monument, it vacates the actual space of the castle tower so that the poem can place the narrator's own body there. When he wakes after falling asleep, he tells us:

And sooth to seyn [in truth], my chambre was

Ful wel depeynted, and with glas
Were al the wyndowes wel yglased
Ful clere, and nat an hoole ycrased [broken],
That to beholde hyt was gret joye.
For hooly al the story of Troye
Was in the glasynge ywroght thus,
Of Ector and of kyng Priamus,
Of Achilles and of kyng Lamedon,
And eke of Medea and of Jason,
Of Paris, Eleyne, and of Lavyne.
And alle the walles with colours fyne
Were peynted, bothe text and glose,
Of al the Romaunce of the Rose." (321-34)

This chamber is not located in a tower, but as has been shown, chambers often occupied towers and were part of the network of intimate spaces coded feminine by the cultural practices of the time. In much Middle English literature, the word used for chamber (imported into English from French) is *bour*, derived from the Old English *bur*, meaning sleeping chamber. And very often "bours" are located in "tours," and not just for the convenience of the rhyme. The thirteenth-century lyric "When the Turf is Thy Tower" makes this quite clear:

WEn þe turuf is þi tuur,	[When the turf is your tower
& þi put is þi bour,	And your pit is your bower
Þi wel & þi wite þrote	Your skin and your white throat
ssulen wormes to note.	Worms will enjoy the use of.

Wat helpit þe þenne　　What help to you then will be

al þe worilde wnne?[295]　　All the world's joys?]

In this poem, the spaces of tower and bower are completely collapsed as both are figured together as the grave of the poem's female interlocuter. The Harley lyrics, while not quite so morbid, make the same collapsing move. *Annot and Johon*, for instance, describes its female love object as both "a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht" (1) and as a "trewe tortle[dove] in a tour" (22).[296]

And though Chaucer's chamber holds no women, it nevertheless is coded feminine throughout its description. The clear windows without a "hoole ycrased," for instance, recall the lady's neck, which is also "withouten hole" (943). Furthermore, the figures that decorate the walls would undoubtedly have been understood by a contemporary audience as feminizing the space. Michael Norman Salda suggests that Chaucer's model for the "text and gloss" seen on the chamber walls were Westminster Palace's Painted Chamber and St. Stephen's Chapel, both of which, he argues, had paintings that were meant to be read like manuscript illuminations.[297] These spaces were highly public and gendered male if anything, but the resituating of such a model into a private chamber and with romances specifically pointedly feminizes them. Though women did not in fact make up the majority of romance audiences, Melissa Furrow finds evidence of "at least some medieval awareness

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[295] *English Lyrics,* p. 54.

[296] *English Lyrics,* pp. 136-37.

[297] "Pages from History: The Medieval Palace of Westminster as a Source for the Dreamer's Chamber in the 'Book of the Duchess'", *The Chaucer Review* 27:2 (1992): 111-25.

that both reading and writing of the genre were gendered."[298] Chaucer himself relies on this association in *Troilus and Criseyde,* when Pandarus

> ...was come unto his neces place,
> "Where is my lady?" to hire folk quod he;
> And they hym tolde, and he forth in gan pace,
> And fond two othere ladys sete and she,
> Withinne a paved parlour, and they thre
> Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
> Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste. (II.78-84)

Indeed, Chaucer's use of the Troy story falls within the late fourteenth-century production of that mythical city as what Sylvia Federico calls "a particularly feminine fantasy space."[299] And, as she points out, the fall of Troy revolves around the bad behavior of a series of women: Helen, Criseyde, Dido.[300]

The historical Blanche, duchess of Lancaster, and the Lady of the poem both would occupy such a "paved parlour," where the *Romance of the Rose* and the story of Troy would be heard. The appearance of the *Romance of the Rose,* even more than the story of the fall of Troy, would have powerfully suggested to the audience that this intimate space be read as feminine. The thirteenth-century French allegorical dream vision was hugely popular, translated into multiple languages and widely disseminated. Indeed, Chaucer himself

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[298] Melissa Furrow, *Expectations of Romance: The Reception of a Genre in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), p. 3. Furrow discusses the problems for will evidence of women's greater ownership in comparison to men's at pp. 225-28.

[299] *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. xxii.

translated the work early in his career. The poem is particularly famous for its *hortus conclusus*, meaning enclosed garden. This figure comes from the *Song of Songs* and operates much like that poem's ivory tower. In the *Song of Songs*, the bride is called an enclosed garden (4:12). Throughout the Middle Ages, this was taken as a reference to Mary, because she was "closed" when she both conceived and bore Jesus.[301] The *hortus conclusus* thus becomes a metonym figuring the undefiled and inaccessible female body. In the *Romance of the Rose*, the rose is a metaphor for the idealized female love object and sits at the center of the enclosed garden. Like Mary as tower and the castle of *Ancrene Wisse*, the rose itself becomes its own most intimate space, as it occupies the interior of another space that also figures its body. While the poem's narrative is often stalled by philosophical meditations and debates amongst its allegorical figures, the driving force of that narrative is the lover's goal of accessing this innermost space of feminine interiority.

The *Romance of the Rose*, like Mary's many figurative representations and *Ancrene Wisse*, imagines several architectural boundaries that protect the body of the "rose" and construct a spatially imagined feminine interior, but unlike these other traditions, it does so in order to construct a fantasy of access to that interior. It does so using the same strategy as Chaucer, not just metonymically associating the female body with an architectural space but replacing that female body altogether. When Venus, on behalf of the poem's lover, finally takes action to break into the castle that contains the garden, she draws her bow and "like the good archer she was, she took aim at a little loophole that she saw hidden in the tower. It

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[300] Federico, *New Troy*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

[301] For a discussion of the medieval tradition of reading the bride as Mary, see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 151-77.

was at the front rather than the side of the tower, and Nature had set it very skillfully between two little pillars."[302] Here the tower that encloses the garden also becomes the female body, whose impenetrable exterior proves to have a point of access. That this tower is the female love object becomes quite clear as the lover describes achieving access to it: "Next, I wanted to sheathe my staff by putting it into the aperture while the scrip hung outside. I tried to thrust it in at one go, but it came out and I tried again, to no avail because it sprang out every time and nothing I did could make it go in."[303] He eventually "forced [his] way into it, for it was the only entrance, in order to duly pluck the rose-bud."[304]

And though the rose is enclosed within the triply impeding castle-tower-garden structure, which constructs a number of metaphorical impediments to the rose, the poem relies on a fantasy of this castle as immanently breachable. This is in stark opposition to the historical reality of capturing castles, which required crossing moats, mining and bringing down towers, and breaching castle walls. By the thirteenth century this would generally include not one but two sets of curtain walls. In the *Romance of the Rose*, this complex structure is reduced to a castle that has a single tower, the penetration of which is tantamount to the penetration of the female body that the entire structure encloses. The poem ends with the successful infiltration of that interior and the plucking of the rose.

Chaucer employs the same strategy of replacing female body with architectural structure in order to access the interior of that structure, but unlike the *Romance of the Rose*, he wants to access that interior not as a metaphor for sexual intimacy (an unimaginable

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[302] Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 320.

[303] *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 332-33.

move given the subject of his poem) but as a way to access the high status intimate space that that interiority represents. In Chaucer's poem, that space maintains its value precisely because it is inaccessible and is associated with a woman whose aristocratic status is guaranteed by her own bodily inaccessibility. Transmitting the value from Blanche's body to the space she would be associated with means that Chaucer can avoid any crude sexual suggestion, but while the neck "withouten hole" of a duchess cannot be penetrated, the chamber can. In the *Romance of the Rose* the lover must fight to access the interior space of the castle, but in the *Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer utilizes the frame of the dream vision uniquely to imagine instant access to that space. He wakes up already in the castle-tower-garden structure. And where *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* represents the interior feminine space of Bertilak's castle as dark, "derne," and unknowable, the narrator's chamber is illuminated, literally:

> My wyndowes were shette echon,
> And through the glas the sonne shon
> Upon my bed with bryghte bemes,
> With many glade gilde stremes;
> And eke the welken was so fair—
> Blew, bright, clere was the ayr[.] (335-40)

It is also, as Salda suggests, illuminated as would be a manuscript: it has both text and gloss. Chuacer's narrator domesticates and appropriates this space, literally and figuratively shining a light onto it.

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[304] *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 333.

Once the narrator occupies this most intimate and high status space, he is poised to gain physical access to the Black Knight who, as many scholars have noted, should be effectively inapproachable by him. Conveniently situated in the chamber-castle-tower, the narrator:

> …was ryght glad, and up anoon
> Took my hors, and forth I wente
> Out of my chamber; I never stente
> Til I com to the feld withoute." (356-59)

Just as the *Romance of the Rose* reduces the structural complexity of the late medieval castle, Chaucer's poem collapses inside and outside spaces as somehow the narrator takes his horse directly out of the chamber. This path from bed to field elides the very long path from bed, through chamber, into parlor, from there to hall, into courtyard, and finally out into the countryside. While the narrator's course avoids the complicated and masculine spaces of the rest of the castle, he does briefly encounter the very masculine space of the hunt, joining the "emperour Octovyen" and his men as they ride into the forest (368-86). But his route to encountering the Black Knight returns him to a feminine and intimate space akin to the representation of Blanche's body. He meets a whelp who leads him "[d]oun by a floury grene... / Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete. / With floures fele, faire under fete, / And litel used" (398-401). In his description of Blanche, the Knight declares that "certes Nature had swich lest / To make that fair that trewly she / Was hir chef patron of beaute, / And chef ensample of al hir werk" (908-11). The association of natural fairness with Blanche is compounded by the detail of the grass being "litel used." This is a space that, like Blanche's body and like the feminized tower, has not been widely accessed. This signals, furthermore, the narrator's own privilege in being able to access that space. And from here he is

propelled into the very feminized space of the park, shown earlier in this chapter to resonate with the body and political function of Blanche. Once he has achieved access to the most intimate and high status aristocratic space of the tower chamber and then park, he can claim access to the man who would also have had access to those spaces through his own appropriation of Blanche's association with them.

In her discussion of what makes Chaucerian literature Chaucerian, Helen Phillips observes that the "Chaucerian framed narrative habitually exploits tensions...between frame and core."[305] Of the eavesdropping frame specifically she writes: "Late medieval poets developed both its metafictional and psychological potentialities with great inventiveness. In origin and operation the eavesdropping/observing frame is surely primarily narratological rather than psychological... [because it] dramatizes a narratological structure usually hidden in fiction, the distinction between narrator and narrative."[306] In the *Book of the Duchess,* it is a narrative strategy that becomes sociopolitical as narrator inserts himself into the narrative. The narrator begins by overhearing the Black Knight's lament over his lost lady. The lower status narrator is simply an observer of this high status man's grief. But his appropriation of the various spaces associated with the Knight's lady—chamber and then park—allow him to approach the Knight. At this point, the narrator has moved from his sphere outside of the main narrative into the space of that narrative. He still hedges his bets, however. He does not speak first to the Knight, and indeed does not make any overt claims on the Knight's attention: after uttering his complaint, the Knight "Hys sorwful hert gan fast faynte / And his

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[305] "Frames and Narrators in Chaucerian Poetry," in *The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray,* ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 77.

[306] Phillips, "Frames and Narrators," p. 78.

spirites wexen dede" (488-89)... "So, throgh hys sorwe and hevy thoght, / Made hym that he herde [the narrator] noght" (509-10). The narrator has nevertheless entered the Knight's intimate space of mourning, making an implicit claim on the Knight's attention, a claim that the Knight cannot ultimately ignore: "But at the last, so sayn ryght soth, / He was war of me, how y stood / Before hym" (514-16). Once in this space, he does not have to overcome the metaphorical distance of status in speaking to the Knight; instead, the Knight speaks to him: the narrator "[d]ebonayrly" removes his hat in greeting, and the Knight says, "I prey the, be not wroth. / I herde the not, to seyn the soth, / Ne I sawgh the not, syr, trewely" (519-21). With the narrator having accessed the Knight's intimate space, the Knight assumes he is of a status worth noticing. Indeed, the Knight apologizes for not noticing him sooner, calling the narrator "syr"! From here the narrator need do nothing to claim the authority to speak to the Knight; it has been granted to him explicitly by the Knight.

Just as the fantasy of a *translatio imperii* from Troy to London was achieved through female characters in the literature of late fourteenth-century London,[307] Chaucer effects the fantasy of a translation of intimacy and authority from the female body onto his own. He carefully constructs his narrator's home in the chamber, where the refrain that allows the narrator to occupy it consists of highly charged literary allusions and cultural associations. The narrator's middle class masculine body territorializes the aristocratic feminine space, from which he can propel himself into the aristocratic masculine space of the Black Knight. He successfully deploys the relationship between gender and class, manipulating entrenched gender norms and associations in order to write himself out of entrenched social divides. Through imagining access to the aristocratic feminine space, he has spatially and narratively

[307] Federico, *New Troy*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

established a way to gain access to another inaccessible interior, that of the English aristocracy.

Given the poem's grounding in an identifiable historical moment, and the Black Knight and his lady's reference to the historical figures of John of Gaunt and his duchess Blanche, we can read the narrator as a figure for Chaucer himself. Scholars have long commented on the problem of the narrator speaking to someone so above his status. Early scholars read him as simply dimwitted, but this view has now long been supplanted by arguments for the narrator's strategic tact.[308] Chaucer had to contend with the same difficulty in addressing a poem directly to John of Gaunt. Chaucer's desire to appeal to his aristocratic patron is reflected in his poem's profound concern with aristocratic aesthetic and economic structures. His poem does more than just imagine a way of speaking to a man of Gaunt's unapproachable status, however. It makes a claim of spatial access to that man. And as we have seen, access in medieval architecture did not just reflect but also conferred status. By writing himself into the intimate place that Blanche, the duke's wife, would have occupied, Chaucer is making a plea not just to approach but to be inside that space, to have a place there. As powerfully and symbolically charged as medieval architecture was, as much as it was used to structure and control social hierarchies, Chaucer's claim is a radical one.

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[308] See Arthur W. Bahr , "The Rhetorical Construction of Narrator and Narrative in Chaucer's the Book of the Duchess" (*The Chaucer Review* 35:1 (2000): 43-59), for a summary of these positions and his own argument for the narrator's rhetorical cleverness. Susan Schibanoff has also recently noted that Chaucer confronts the "complex" situation wherein he "must give his poetic attention not merely to two persons of higher rank than his own, but to two persons whose different sexes preclude simple praise of them as equally his social superiors" (*Chaucer's Queer Poetics: Rereading the Dream Trio* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 66). She argues that "the eulogistic strategy of the *Book of the Duchess* casts the narrator in the passive role of the queer other in order to praise Whyte and simultaneously to enhance his social superior, the Black Knight, as well as to elevate him to the pre-eminent position of courtly *maker* in the poem" (p. 66, original emphasis).

His strategy of appropriating the place of the female body is also not without danger. In its association with the park, Blanche's body is represented as dangerous, its fecundity threatening to overspill its own bounds. When Chaucer takes her place through his poetry, he claims a powerful fecundity for that poetry. He is threatening, in effect, to overspill his own bounds.

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In the Uprising of 1381, English rebels swarmed London, attacking those that they held responsible for their economic hardships and making their way toward the Tower of London in a naive attempt to access Richard II, hoping that he would come to their aid. Two chroniclers, Jean Froissart and Thomas Walsingham, record the outcome of the rebels' attack on the tower. In both, the rebels are said to have forced their way into the chamber of Joan of Kent, the king's mother. In Walsingham's account, "[t]he rebels, who had formerly belonged to the most lowly condition of serf, went in and out like lords; and swineherds set themselves above soldiers, although not knights but rustics."[309] In his discussion of the narratives of the dubious event (related slightly differently by Froissart and Walsingham, contradicted by another two chroniclers, and left out completely by the rest), Mark Ormrod writes: "The chamber, in short, was much more than merely the royal sleeping quarters; the rebels' invasion of that space in 1381, like their attacks on the royal treasuries and archives both at the Tower and at Westminster, signified their successful infiltration into some of the

[309] Quotations are taken from the discussion of these two accounts by W.M. Ormrod in "In Bed with Joan of Kent: The King's Mother and the Peasants' Revolt," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*. Ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et. al. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), pp. 277-292.

very nerve centres of the fourteenth-century English state."[310] The accounts of this event, whether it happened or not, very clearly register anxiety over the possibility of spaces being physically accessed by people who were not considered to belong in them. The access of the rebels to the physical space of the princess's chamber quite clearly shocked and dismayed the royal chroniclers.

This is the highly charged cultural conception of gendered space with which Chaucer was dealing when he wrote the *Book of the Duchess*. But where the rebels were said to force their way into such an inappropriate space as a princess's chamber, Chaucer instead insinuates himself. But his poetic insinuation had real results. Chaucer was born the son of a wealthy London vintner and was placed at about the age of 14 as a page in the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, wife of Price Lionel.[311] So Chaucer, unlike the patently low status rebels, made steps, both physically into the space, and figuratively into the place, of the English aristocracy. He went on to occupy a number of positions in relation to the royal household, but most importantly for our purposes, he was made an "esquire of the king's chamber" in 1371.[312] In this position, he was "a member of the king's inner household, his *secreta familia*."[313] The late fourteenth century saw a destabilization of traditional hierarchies that based social status on land tenure. Esquires in the period were drawn from lower landed gentry as well as the upper echelons of civil servants, so those in civil service could now gain gentility and the opportunity to move up through the gentle

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[310] Ormrod, "In Bed with Joan of Kent," p. 280.

[311] See Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 34-35.

[312] Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 95.

[313] Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 95.

ranks, through that service.[314] Chaucer's acquisition of this place is contemporaneous with the small range of years during which he could have written the *Book of the Duchess*. While I'm not suggesting some direct causality—I don't imagine that Edward III read the *Book of the Duchess* and was immediately moved to admit Chaucer to his chamber—I am suggesting that Chaucer imagined this kind of access for himself and that he sought a real consequence for the ideas registered by the rhetorical and narrative strategies of his poem. Though Chaucer was no poor rebel, he was a commoner who imagined, and achieved, a very real access to the aristocracy that constructed itself as inaccessible and impenetrable.

[314] See Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 1-23, for a more detailed account of social changes occurring in England during Chaucer's career.

V. Margaret's Chocie: Negotiating Space, Class Identity and Gender Ideologies in the Paston Letter

In 1449, Robert Hungerford, Lord Moleyns dispatched some lackeys to break down a wall in order to forcibly remove Margaret Paston from her chamber at Gresham Manor, which she was attempting to retain under her family's control. When Hungerford subsequently sent a delegation to speak with her, Margaret haughtily refused them admittance and met with them instead outside, at the gates, "and prayid hem that they wold hold [her] exkusyd that [she] browth hem not in to the plase."[315] This incident is a singularly dramatic example of the way in which the Paston women both experienced and negotiated their relationship to power in and through their relationship to the particular ideologies reflected in late medieval gentry architecture. This chapter will consider the literary evidence of the famous *Paston Letters* alongside the material and archaeological evidence of surviving late medieval gentry manor houses in order to argue that Margaret Paston actively recognized and selected among the ways in which different architectural spaces enabled more or less adept articulations of her own practical power and control.[316]

This chapter began as my MA thesis, written at the University of York under the direction of W. Mark Ormrod and Jane Grenville, to whom I am grateful for their guidance.

[315] *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 3 vols, ed. by Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I: p. 229, hereafter *PL*. This incident is discussed further below, p. 17.

[316] The major study of the Pastons is Colin Richmond's series: *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: The First Phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Fastolf's Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: Endings* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); also see Joel T. Rosenthal, *Margaret Paston's Piety* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Margaret Paston's lived historical experience serves as a fascinating counterpoint to the literary representation of women at we have seen so far. Female characters of French romance exercised considerable control over their own movements, and in some cases, over who could access their bodies. The lady whom Lancelot "saves" from rape, for instance, does not just invite, but forcefully suggests that Lancelot share her bed. In Margaret's case, she forcefully refuses access to the domestic space over which she, in her husband's absence, has dominion. At the same time, Margaret's experience powerfully demonstrates for us the vulnerability of women's bodies to men. Middle English lyric assumes, even naturalizes, women's place in chamber and tower, as well as aristocratic men's access to those spaces and the women's bodies that occupied them, while the clerical authors and scribes of the lyrics clearly felt entitled to access those bodies and spaces. Whether aristocratic layman or cleric is being granted access, the picture painted is one of an aristocratic lady physcially and socially remote from most of society. During Margaret's foray into aristocratic life and the aristocratic domestic architecture of the castle, she confronted this practice, but unlike the lyrics, she does not take her place there or the little power it affords her for granted. She challenges the notion that women should naturally be passive occupants of an elevated and isolated space and social status. In Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, the lady's integral place in the structures of patriarchy and its concommitant architectural structures are so obfuscated as to leave critics wondering whether we can find her in the poem at all. Her power is co-opeted by her husband and her material place taken over by Chaucer's narrator. Margaret Paston is wonderful in that we do not have to rely on men to learn her story: she struggles to maintain the power she, as a gentlewoman, feels entitled to, and she actively navigates the various architectural spaces that, coded as they are, allow her varying amounts of control over her own body and who may access it.

Theorizing architectural space has concerned everyone from literary critics and philosophers to archeologists and practicing architects. Most of their conversations, however, have remained isolated from one another: for literary critics, imagined spaces are projections of the psyche or allegories for some other thing; for anthropologists and philosophers, informed by the material world but also abstracting it, spaces are social constructions, imposing structure on our daily lives; for architects and archaeologists, who generally agree with the anthropologists and philosophers, architectural space is also a material reality that must be contended with, analyzed, and considered from the point of view of embodied persons inhabiting it. The Pastons lived in architectural environments that are still extant today—manor houses much like those they lived in, and Caister Castle, the hotly contested property that John I and his sons spent decades attempting to secure. These extant buildings combined with the experiences recorded by the Paston women in their letters provide us with the unique opportunity to engage multiple discourses about space, social status, and their relationship to literary texts. We can place the women's experiences in their architectural context, consider the ways in which those architectural contexts determined women's experiences, and finally reflect on what this might mean for texts circulating amongst the gentry.

The Pastons of Norfolk were a family on the rise in the fifteenth century: William Paston, son of a peasant, married Agnes, the daughter and heiress of a local gentleman. Their son John I married equally well, acquiring the inheritance of Margaret Mautby, the daughter of another substantial local landowner. While John and their sons pursued careers in law and the court in London and abroad, Margaret remained in Norfolk handling the family business, which included hanging on to the contested properties purportedly bequeathed to John by his

friend Sir John Fastolf against both the Duke of Norfolk and the Duke of Suffolk, as well as the elopement of their daughter Margery, among other more mundane concerns.

While the Paston men attempted to live the chivalric life of the court, the Paston women must have encountered, in romance especially, the trope of the high status aristocratic woman tucked away in her tower. It proliferated throughout the medieval period in texts that had wide circulation: Marie de France's *Lais* feature several instances; Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Cart* finds Guinevere imprisoned in one; in the popular Middle English romance *Sir Orfeo*, a fairy king abducts Orfeo's queen and locks her in his castle. The Pastons were not aristocratic, but they wanted to be. And no one wanted this more than Margaret Paston, who fought as hard as any of her male family members for the possession of Caister Castle, that supreme sign that the family had arrived. Her letters give us a fascinating view of a woman negotiating her class through her particular use of and experience in the differing-status architecture of manor house and castle. I argue that we find Margaret carving out a sense of her own individual interests distinct from her family's because she preferred the *habitus*—the architectural programs and the corresponding behavioral possibilities—of her gentry family to the higher status one manifested at Caister, where there was the possibility of needing an enlarged household of retainers whose behavior she could not control, and from whom she might have needed sequestering in its tower.

The ubiquity of the lady in the tower in literature would suggest that she has real, historical counterparts. Historians and archaeologists certainly think so. Pioneering feminist historian Barbara Hanawalt argues that noblewomen were limited to the domestic sphere,

claiming that some may have considered the castle more a cell than a home.[317] Feminist archaeologist Roberta Gilchrist concludes likewise. She finds that the female household was always positioned in the upper ends of halls or the highest part of the castles, with towers occasionally incorporated into the female quarters.[318] Often a private pew in the castle was also provided with direct access from the female quarters: the "cumly closet," or private pew, of the women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* seems to corroborate the architectural evidence.[319] Moreover, in royal palaces, queen's chambers were the most secluded and far more isolated than the king's from the public buildings and ceremonial routes of the palace.[320]

Just as women of medieval romance are often locked away for the explicit exploitation of their own sexuality (for example, the adulterous Guinevere), scholars give as the historical reason the general belief that women were untrustworthy and distracting. Gilchrist writes that the "honour and patrimony of lordship rested on the impermeability of both the castle and female body, [….so] the castle [was] used as a metaphor for the female body, a tabernacle protecting the precious virginity contained within."[321] Evidence for this kind of thinking nevertheless comes mostly from literature. A more pragmatic, and perhaps

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[317] "At the Margins of Women's Space in Medieval Europe," in "*Of Good and Ill Repute": Gender and Social Control in Medieval England*, ed. by eadem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 70-87.

[318] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology: Contesting the Past* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 125, 137.

[319] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology*, p. 123.

[320] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology*, p. 139; Amanda Richardson, "Gender and Space in English Royal Palaces c. 1160-c. 1547: A Study in Access Analysis and Imagery," *Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (2003): 163.

likely, reason is women's need for protection from large numbers of idle and at times drunken men resident within the great household.[322]

These studies of women's place in the household tend to conflate women of noble and gentry status. Nevertheless Gilchrist argues that ideologies surrounding gender differed amongst different classes: she writes that in medieval England "segregation was used to convey a sense of social order, while the actual physical practices of female seclusion varied according to social status and age,"[323] with increasing status leading to increasing segregation of women's quarters.[324] Though studies of the late medieval English gentry tend to ignore women and assume that women simply towed the family line in all matters,[325] they agree that the gentry's values can be contrasted with the nobility's.[326] Localized studies in

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[321] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology*, p. 139.

[322] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 45; Kate Mertes, *The English Noble Household, 1250-1600: Good Governance and Politic Rule* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 57; C. M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 34.

[323] Gilchrist, *Gender and Archaeology*, p. 113.

[324] "Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 53.

[325] There are a very few, brief exceptions: Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Centruy, c. 1422-1485* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 135-37; C. E. Moreton, *The Townshends and their World: Gentry, Law and Land in Norfolk c.1450-1551* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 136, 144; Colin Richmond, *John Hopton: A Fifteenth Century Suffolk Gentleman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 115-136; S. M. Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Chesterfield: Derbyshire Record Society, 1983), pp. 51-58.

[326] The attempt to define the gentry, its values and self- perception, began with K. B. McFarlane. He first maintained that the gentry were simply part of the nobility, but later argued instead for the increasing distinction between the parliamentary peerage and the rest of land-owning society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (*The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 6-7, 7n). Subsequent studies agree

particular have concluded that the greater gentry were happy in their local milieu, associating with their social inferiors.[327] Chris King's study of manor house architecture also suggests that rather than emulating the nobility in their architecture, the gentry were responding to their own needs.[328] All of this suggests that gentry women may have had a different experience of their lived spaces than noble women.[329] The Pastons were only one family, and in some ways, such as their litigiousness, they probably do not represent the majority of their peers. Nevertheless, the abundance of evidence of their lives cannot be ignored since it does not exist elsewhere, and certainly they must still have shared much in common with others of their class. Though it must be done with caution, extrapolation from the lives of Agnes and Margaret Paston in order to draw conclusions about the lives of later medieval gentry women is possible. While they lived in static architecture that set out rules, the way in which the Paston women used and experienced that architecture is not necessarily predetermined. Active human agents have the option of modifying or even resisting the use prescribed by the built environment, and documentary evidence can illuminate how that

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that no single definition is possible, but that the gentry's values can be contrasted with the nobility's. The difficulty of defining the gentry does not concern my study. The Pastons are generally agreed to count amongst the greater gentry, which is easy to recognize in contrast to distinguishing between minor gentlemen and yeomen.

[327] Moreton, *The Townshends and their World*; C. E. Moreton, "A Social Gulf? The Upper and Lesser Gentry of Later Medieval England," *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991): 255-62; Richmond, *John Hopton*.

[328] "The Organization of Social Space in Late Medieval Manor Houses: an East Anglian Study," *Archaeological Journal* 160 (2003): 121.

[329] ffiona Swabey's work on Dame Alice de Bryene is the one study of the household of a specifically gentle woman that is conscious of the distinct position of the gentry. Swabey notes, however, that "We can only guess at the degree of social intercourse between those of the third estate and the clergy and Alice's peers sitting at the top table" (*Medieval Gentlewoman: Life in a Widow's Household in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 113).

might be done. From their letters we find that Margaret and Agnes were both mobile and very accessible in their own private spaces when they could control the access of the people who were admitted to those spaces. Unlike what the architecture prescribes, that admittance was based on behavior rather than social status. I argue that this is the particular ideology reflected in gentry manor architecture, and that it differs from that of the higher status architecture emulated at Caister castle, where female quarters seem to have been more secluded. After fighting so hard for it, Margaret's firsthand experience at Caister of the lifestyle of the noblewoman, with its reduced mobility and authority, led her to reject that lifestyle.

As in great households, Margaret's manor household had few women: she mentions a female servant once in her letters, and one other appears in an inventory.[330] There must have been more, but probably not many. No matter what their numbers, the Paston women could not have been locked away in private chambers and closets, only seeing people when they were admitted by a close personal servant. The best evidence for this comes from a letter to John I from Margaret's chaplain, James Gloys. He wrote to John apologizing for Margaret that she sent him no letter, as what she wanted to say Gloys had already addressed in his, and she did not know of anyone who would do as a messenger at the time, whereas Gloys did.[331] Nor did Margaret's female servants stay sequestered off in their mistress's chamber. The single female servant that appears in the letters Margaret sends as a

[330] *PL*, I: p. 227; Richmond, *Fastolf's Will*, p. 25.

[331] *PL*, II: p. 67.

messenger, "for [she] kowd geten no man to do it."[332] This suggests that when Margaret had letters to send, she must have left her to chamber to find messengers herself.

Furthermore, the many interactions recorded by their letters demonstrate that Margaret and Agnes were in fact highly accessible to a large range of people inside and outside their homes. Margaret can be seen dining out and in with female kin and friends, but she also met with her husband's and sons' many associates on her own. Some were purely social visits: William Worcester, the historian, visited her at Christmas;[333] both he and John I were close professional servants to Fastolf.[334] Some meetings were explicitly on John's business, particularly with regards to the estates that John claimed Fastolf had left him on his deathbed. Ownership of these manors—Caister, Hellesdon, and Drayton—was disputed for years, and Margaret often had to act on John's behalf in the ongoing contest between the Pastons and various claimants.[335] It is clear that these manors were primarily John's interest, so Margaret was only lending him her assistance.[336] Margaret often also entertained these men. She wrote that Hugh Fenn, a gentleman servant of Fastolf and supporter of the Pastons in their fight for the manors of Hellesdon and Drayton, had told Richard Calle that he and his wife would be with her within a week to discuss a place that he had purchased, and Margaret

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[332] *PL*, I: p. 228.

[333] *PL*, I: p. 281.

[334] Richmond, *First Phase*, pp. 15, 249.

[335] These include a William Skypwyth (*PL*, I: p. 297), a "lesser gentleman" (Richmond, *Endings*, pp. 178-79), and Sir John Heveningham twice (*PL*, I: pp. 324, 340).

[336] A role she could choose not to do and therefore should not be taken for granted. She held out at Gresham when it was under attack, but as Richmond points out, it was her jointure and so explicitly her interest (*Endings*, p. 90). Later she did not lend John II the

assured John that she would "make hym gode chyre."[337] In addition to these more formal meetings, associates of the Paston men also came and went from the women's homes in a very informal capacity, running errands, and carrying messages. There can be no doubt that Margaret and Agnes actually interacted with those carrying letters to them, rather than receiving them through a servant: while expecting a letter from John, she sent him one claiming she "see[s] nothere [the messenger] ne the letters."[338]

The Pastons' visitors were not only gentleman associates and family servants. They also included peasants and yeoman. Many of these were Paston tenants. The majority that we see came to launch complaints,[339] but one incident demonstrates that the Paston women offered their tenants hospitality and sympathy, that they were neither distant in terms of physical space nor conduct. When the Duke of Norfolk's men prevented tenants of Caister from farming their land, Margaret wrote to John II that "it is gret pety to here the swemefull and petowse compleynes of the pore tenauntes that come to me for comfort and socour, sumtyme be vi or vii to-gedere."[340]

Whether Agnes and Margaret shared as much intimacy with men as with women when they came is difficult to determine. John III told his mother that he should invite

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money he needed to recover Caister (*Endings*, pp. 109-10), so clearly she could choose when she wanted to support the Paston line and when she was solely maintaining her interests.

[337] *PL*, I: p. 316; Richmond, *First Phase*, pp. 190, 250; Richmond, *Fastolf's Will*, p. 145.

[338] *PL*, I: p. 370.

[339] Against Agnes, for instance, over the building of a wall that obstructed the road to the church and her failure to fully pay the manorial court (*PL*, I: p. 42; Richmond, *First Phase*, pp. 9-10), and against two Paston servants who took the tenants' cattle when the tenants could not pay their rent (*PL*, I: p. 301).

[340] *PL*, I: pp. 336-37.

Elizabeth Brews to dinner where they could have "most secret talkyng."[341] They perhaps would have retired alone together to the parlor or great chamber to eat, talk, or both. Margaret and William Rookwood probably did when they spoke of covert things after dinner. It is clear, however, that Margaret was not alone with Rookwood, as she told John that Playter could relate to him what was said.[342] Though men's presence in the semi-private spaces of women was clearly allowed, whether the presence of a second man made this acceptable can only be speculated.

Though some have argued that use of the hall was in decline in favor of the great chamber or parlor in the later Middle Ages, the letters suggest that Margaret would have met most of these people in the hall.[343] The hall is perhaps the room in which the traditional view of the hierarchical household is most clearly manifested. The lord sat at the "high" end on a raised dais under a canopy, close to his private apartments, while the servants sat in descending order toward the "low" end, approaching the service rooms.[344] This opposition was not the only way of superimposing status upon space: elements in the timber roof did so, as well as codes of conduct. While the common entrance of the hall admitted everyone, only more important guests would have moved through the lower bay of the hall towards the upper ones where the lord sat.[345] Margaret's letters, however, suggest that such rigid rules

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[341] *PL*, I: pp. 605-06.

[342] *PL*, I: p. 258.

[343] See Jane Grenville, *Medieval Housing* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), pp. 107-110.

[344] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, p. 89; Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England*, p. 161.

[345] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, p. 89.

cannot always have been followed. Margaret and her visitors would not have carried on conversations, yelling at each other, from their respective places within the hierarchical layout.[346] Codes of conduct may have determined where people sat but did not stop them from interacting with those sitting in higher (or lower) status positions. This means that either Margaret left the upper end and moved toward the lower, or that low status visitors were allowed to leave their stations and approach Margaret at the upper end.

Margaret also quite clearly enjoyed a large amount of authority within the halls of her manor houses. If the hall of Giffords, a house comparable to those Margaret would have occupied, can be taken as typical, then it seems that the gentry hall's architectural program reflects the inclusion of women in that space.[347] The main decoration remaining in the hall at Giffords is the carvings on the spandrels of the timber roof. These include foliage, musical instruments, chalices, wooden wheels and their spokes, bellows, a flagon, mortar and pestle, a fish on a platter, a mouse entering a pitcher, a crown, a sword belt or arrow shafts, a thistle and a pomegranate.[348] Of these only the pomegranate may have been specifically associated with women, and several are specifically gendered masculine, but most are domestic and so would have been associated with the hospitality of the master and the entertainment and servicing of the entire household. This is a role that Margaret often took on, and the

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[346] The halls that Margaret would have occupied would have been too large for normally carrying on conversations across them, but some were quite small, and so may have allowed for this; see Margaret Wood, *The English Mediaeval House* (London: Harpercollins, 1965), pp. 62-66 for a list of great halls and their dimensions.

[347] The builders of Giffords, the Mannock family, were of comparable status to Margaret's natal family, the Mautby's, so the house can be taken as analogous to her ancestral home at Mautby (King, 'Social Organization', pp. 109-10).

[348] Eric Sandon, *Suffolk Houses: A Study of Domestic Architecture* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1977), p. 206.

decorative program with its nod toward a female presence and its gender-neutral symbols appears to make room for this possibility. The hall nevertheless prioritizes masculine pursuits, so how would Margaret have experienced such a space? Women did not normally, or ideally, occupy the position of authority within the hall, but they were visible there as wives and daughters and therefore would not have been at a total loss when they found themselves in the position of power representing their menfolk. The medieval hall would have been familiar to them even if they were disenfranchised within it. Women who could effectively run a household on their own are documented enough.[349] They would not have been so effective had they cowered and simpered. Instead, they must have, to a degree, demonstrated the authority normally ascribed to the male head of household. Margaret Paston certainly demonstrated her confidence. Gaining a position of authority within surroundings that would have cued her more masculine behavior did not, however, provide her with the authority that ultimately rested with her husband. Margaret headed the household most of the time, but she still had to write to her husband to get her a new servant who would actually obey her.[350] Like other women in her position, she must have felt that she had to negotiate the environment of the manor house hall carefully, but she did manage it quite well.

Giffords' family lodgings also do not conform to an ideology of female seclusion. There is no tower at all, but rather two ranges that, along with the gatehouse complex and hall/parlor complex, form a courtyard. These rooms were assigned status through their

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[349] See especially Rowena E. Archer, "'How ladies...who live on their manors ought to manage their Households and estates': Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages," in *Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c.1200-1500*, ed. by P.J.P. Goldberg (London: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1992), pp. 149-81.

varying size and elaboration, and they were separated from the public, ceremonial parts of the house, but there is almost direct access to the private chambers from the courtyard, arguably the most public part of the complex.[351] Furthermore, though there may have been gradation in the luxury of each room, there is no suite of rooms that is less accessible than others. Placing Margaret in these suites, then, we find her no less accessible than her husband or sons might have been. She may very well have gone to the hall, used the parlor or the great chamber for meeting with her visitors, but in her sleeping quarters there is no distinction made from the men's, no extra protection given. The owners' choice not to incorporate a tower must have been deliberate: they had the resources, and manor houses with towers were not unheard of.[352] This would suggest that King is correct: Giffords' builders wanted to impress, but they did not do so through blind emulation of their social superiors; rather they discriminated in the choice of architectural elements that they felt fit their needs. This includes the establishment of a gender ideology manifested in the architecture. Within Giffords Hall, the architecture does not establish a normative ideal of a secluded woman, suggesting that at Mautby, as well, Margaret would be reached spatially and could herself easily reach and see the courtyard and great hall and the busy activity of the household she was running.

As we have seen, Margaret and even Agnes enjoyed a degree of freedom in their movements and interactions. At their manor houses they cannot have been secluded, and

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[350] *PL*, I: p. 257.

[351] See King's plan and spatial diagram of Giffords, "Social Organization," illustrations 3 and 4.

both appear perfectly comfortable with this. But their letters also show that this comfort was predicated on their ability to control who could appear in their direct presence. In their manor houses, they had the authority to do so; elsewhere they did not. It is in those spaces that they did not have complete control that we find Margaret and Agnes concerned about who could gain admittance to the spaces they occupied.

The parish church offers a key to who ideally had access to them. It was a particularly liminal space where women enjoyed a certain amount of authority even apart from their families, but where anyone was welcome. Lay piety was an important aspect of later medieval life, and members of the higher, more leisured classes attended Mass on a daily basis.[353] We find Margaret and Agnes at the parish church several times.[354] Whereas other public spaces like the judicial court denied them any authority, the sacred space of the church was a place where women could claim authority. Women played a very active role within the church, donating money, goods that they commissioned, and their own precious belongings to their parish churches for its decoration.[355] This included iconic images, saints' statues and even altar cloths. Like the hall at Giffords, the parish church was a space where women's presence was institutionally acknowledged through its architecture.

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[352] For instance, at Faulkbourne Hall, where the tower displayed status but had no military function whatsoever (see H. Avray Tipping, "Faulkborne Hall," *Country Life* (1929), 718-20).

[353] H.S. Bennet, *The Pastons and their England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 204; Helen Jewell, *Women in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 165-66.

[354] *PL*, I: pp. 35, 36, 224; II, p. 30.

[355] See especially Katherine L. French, "Margery Kempe and the Parish," in *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, ed. by Linda

On one occasion when Margaret visits the church, she writes that one of her tenants approached her over a dispute with the parson about an alleged agreement about the purchase of a parcel of land, "[w]her-vppon [Margaret] have don hym examyn a-fore the same parson and all the parysh, and there he sware vppon a boke that he made neuer bargyng."[356] The scene unfolds as though she were a judge presiding over a courtroom. Here, within the protected, sacred, and less male-dominated space of the church, Margaret can assume the role of judge, emphasizing her activity with the complex verb phrase "don hym examyn."

Because of their social status in the community, Margaret and Agnes would have occupied sequestered space within their private pews. Seating was as hierarchal in the church as it was in the hall, so these pews would have been at the front of the church, with visual access by those of lower status behind them blocked by a screen.[357] These pews served entire families, however, so their function would not have been one of gender but of class segregation. Margaret and Agnes sat at the front because they were the patrons of the churches they were attending. Moreover, they were segregated only during the service, as after the service people of lower status could move toward the front of the church. If parallels can be made between the hall and the church with regard to the hierarchical demarcation of space, so too can they be made for how people moved through those spaces. Agnes and Margaret had to rise from their pews and make their way through the low end of the nave to the doors, and others could rise from their pews in the back and move forward to

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E. Mitchell, Katherine L. French, and Douglas L. Biggs (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), p. 162.

[356] *PL*, I: p. 331.

[357] Grenville, *Medieval Housing*, pp. 90-91.

speak to Agnes and Margaret. Unlike their halls, however, the two women could not dictate who came into the church, so they could end up confronted by people with whom they did not invite contact. Here their authority could be very easily challenged, as it was on at least a couple of occasions.

The most telling incident involves Warin Herman, one of Agnes's tenants at Paston. He and two others approached her in her private pew, her "closett," to discuss a wall that she was building. Agnes Ball and Clement Spycere approached Agnes and "bad [her] good euyn."[358] Agnes then "acsyd hym what he wold" before Spycere launched into his complaints about the wall. That she admitted them to the pew but not Herman is clear: "And all that tyme Waryn Herman lenyd ouyr the parklos and lystynd whatt we seyd, and seyd the chaunge was a rewly chaunge."[359] Agnes then provides the reason: she told him that "it was no curtesé to medyll hym jn a mater butt if he were callyd to councell."[360] The problem was not that he was a lowly tenant, but that he had not been "called." The others showed Agnes "curtesé," a concept that is not often associated with the lower classes but which they, as much as their social superiors, were expected to display. They did not accost her but left her with control over the course the encounter would take. Herman, on the other hand, did not respect the social norms that dictated his deference toward her but felt that the church was a space within which he could speak to Agnes on equal ground: Agnes complains that he

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[358] *PL*, I: p. 36.

[359] *PL*, I: p. 36.

[360] *PL*, I: p. 36.

"prowdly goyn forthe wyth me jn the cherche."[361] Here both his demeanor and his claim to occupy her space—he "goes forth with" her—disturbs Agnes's sense of decorum.

Richmond suggests that it is because of incidents like her run-in with Herman that Agnes and all the Pastons after her built chapels in their homes, implying that they wished to avoid anyone they considered socially inferior to themselves, that they were "[m]aking 'space' for themselves, as they developed a new concept of" their social position.[362] Christine Carpenter disagrees, offering evidence that the gentry continued to invest large sums in their parish churches and pointing out that it would be "political suicide" to withdraw from public religious life, "the single significant focus of social life," at a time when asserting one's manorial lordship was most crucial.[363] The Pastons certainly did make use of private chapels,[364] but it is difficult to say that Margaret and Agnes preferred their private chapels, as they did attend the parish church. If the Paston women did prefer their private chapels, it cannot have been simply to avoid their neighbors or enemies as Richmond suggests. The fact that Agnes Ball and Clement Spycere were allowed to enter Agnes's pew, though Herman was not, demonstrates that Agnes had no aversion to the lower classes. Rather it was the lack of control over who had access to them in the public space of the church, as opposed to that which they exercised in their own homes, which appears to concern the Paston women.

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[361] *PL*, I: p. 36.

[362] Richmond, *First Phase*, p. 11.

[363] "The Religion of the Gentry of Fifteenth-Century England," in *Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by D. Williams (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987), pp. 65-66.

These rules of behavior applied as much to those of equal status to Margaret and Agnes, as incidents with poorly behaved and aggressive gentleman demonstrate. The Pastons had to battle three magnates who were trying to claim Paston lands: Robert Hungerford, Lord Moleyns, over Gresham, the Duke of Suffolk over Hellesdon and Drayton, and the Duke of Norfolk over Caister Castle.[365] These magnates never did the dirty work themselves but rather sent bands of their retainers to do it for them, men who did not scruple to bully even women of gentle status. In his attempt to gain Gresham, Hungerford sent men to forcibly remove Margaret. They broke down the wall of her chamber and dragged her from it. Margaret fled to Sustead, where Hungerford sent Walter Barow, a squire, and others to speak with her. Rather than be admitted to the house to see her, however, "they abedyn styl wyth-owt the gates, and [she] kam owth to hem and spak wyth hem wyth-owt, and prayid hem that they wold hold [her] exkusyd that [she] browth hem not in to the plase."[366] She then gave her reason: "in as meche as thei were nott wele-wyllyng to the godeman of the plase I wold not take it up-on me to bring hem in to the jantylwoman."[367] Because he had been an enemy to her husband, and because he was not trustworthy—she said that she did not trust the promises he made her on this occasion—she considered him a particular threat to the women. Though Barow was a squire, a gentleman, Margaret would not even allow

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[364] Agnes had one built at Paston in 1445 (*PL*, I: pp. 27-28); there was already one at Caister when Margaret moved in, and John II paid for a priest for her out of his own pocket (*PL*, I: p. 283).

[365] See Davis, "Introduction," *PL*, pp. xliii-xlvi.

[366] *PL*, I: p. 229.

[367] *PL*, I: p. 229.

him into the space of the hall, the least private part of the house, because he had not earned it through his behavior.

The encounters with Herman and Barow demonstrate that admission to the space of the household and access to the women who occupied it was based on trust and courtesy as much as on social class or function. Servants who were of a lower social status were free to interact with the women of the family they served because, as members of the household, they could be trusted. So too could tenants and farmers who demonstrated courtesy.

Margaret was vulnerable to violent and unruly men, but significantly not those of her regular household or community. The danger came instead in times of trouble from the retainers of local magnates and from the retainers of the Paston men brought into her household as defenders. The lawlessness of the fifteenth-century affected the Pastons perhaps more often than others, but their many experiences testify to the kind of violence that became possible during the period. Margaret Paston has become famous amongst late medieval and early modern feminist scholars for ordering crossbows and poleaxes to defend Gresham when it was under attack. Inevitably this evidence is used to claim that women could fully take on the responsibilities of their absent husbands as heads of the household.[368] Yet Margaret quite explicitly recognizes that her gender rendered her particularly vulnerable and a less than entirely adequate defender. Before being dragged from Gresham, she heard rumor that Hungerford's men meant to "plukk [her] out of here howse."[369] When one of

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[368] Sarah Salih, "At home; out of the house," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 129; Corinne Saunders, "Women and Warfare in Medieval English Writing," in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. by Corinne Saunders, et. al. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 187-212.

[369] *PL*, II: p. 30.

Hungerford's retainers asked her to have her men lay aside their "wyfeles and…jackes," she refused saying that they were a precaution until John came home. She also heard that the men of the Duke of Suffolk had boasted that they would enter her house at Hellesdon to drag her out of it.[370] She states in a letter to John I that she believed the Duke's men were being much bolder in their actions because he was in prison and not himself present to defend his estate.[371]

In these times of trouble, moreover, manor houses like Gresham and Hellesdon could not accommodate an expanded household for their defense, but the higher status Caister Castle was built for the purpose. And during this expansion of the household, when men who were not Margaret's servants were lodged within the house, she did feel threatened. John II seems to have recognized this possibility. When he gathered men to defend Caister against the Duke of Norfolk, he wrote to her that they were "sadde and wel advised men," and of one that "he is no brawlere, but ful of cortesye."[372] It is clear that he felt he needed to justify his choices, and again we see that "cortesye" was expected. No matter how John perceived these men, however, Margaret remained skeptical of them. She wrote to John:

> ye wote wele that I haue ben affrayd there be-fore this tyme…. And I can not wele gide ner rewle sodyour, and also thei set not be a woman as thei shuld set be a man. Therfore I wold ye shuld send home your brothere or Dawbenye…, for if I were there wyth-ought I had the more saddere or wurchepfull persones abought me, and there

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[370] *PL*, II: p. 313.

[371] *PL*, I: p. 304.

[372] *PL*, I: p. 398.

> comyn a meny of knavys and prevaylled in there entent, it shuld be to me but a vylney.[373]

The men whom she feared were not of her household and would have been strangers to her. Several were soldiers from Calais or in the service of nobles not based in East Anglia, among these a French and a German man. Some were servants of John II and John III, but seem not to have been connected with Margaret, though there were also many local men, including ones from Mautby, whom Margaret undoubtedly would have known.[374] Though she would have known some of them, Margaret clearly felt unsafe sharing the space of her home with men who, not being members of her household, she could not trust to be "wurchepfull." At Caister, Margaret clearly did not feel like an adequate replacement, if only for the simple reason that the soldiers, friends and retainers of her sons, would not respect her in the way they would their male masters: "thei set not be a woman as thei shuld…be a man." Kate Mertes states that householders generally appointed single men rather than married ones, perhaps because they were aware of the dangers of unoccupied men to women.[375] This may or may not have been true for larger noble households. In the case of the Paston household, the "single men" who regularly occupied the house did not present the threat; Margaret mixed freely with them and never expressed any apprehension of danger from them. The threat only arrived when men from outside the household, whom Margaret could not trust, arrived.

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[373] *PL*, I: p. 335.

[374] Richmond, *Fastolf's Will*, pp. 194-95.

[375] *The English Noble Household*, p. 58.

While Gresham, Hellesdon, and Drayton were more vulnerable to attack than Caister, it is clear that Caister is the place where Margaret felt unsafe in what was ostensibly her own home. It is difficult to say whether the architectural program at Caister propagated or reacted to this vulnerability, but it is clear that the higher status architecture of the castle involved segregation of female occupants that the lower status architecture of Giffords—and presumably the manor houses that Margaret actually occupied—did not. Like the royal abodes of Gilchrist's studies, Caister was built for two households, having two halls and sets of living quarters. The bigger of the two, the great hall, was quite clearly meant to be a masculine space. It was decorated with armor, weapons, and a tapestry depicting the siege of Falaise, at which Fastolf fought.[376] The so-called winter hall occupied a second story and does not remain, but it is conjectured to have been next to the great tower where Millicent Fastolf probably lived.[377] It was decorated with an arras of the "Morysch daunce" and, if the location has been identified correctly, it also had a small sculpture occupying a recess next to the entrance to the tower that had Fastolf's armorial achievements on one side and his arms impaling his wife's on the other.[378] This decoration is certainly more gender-neutral than that of the great hall and suggests Millicent's occupation in its inclusion of her arms and its

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[376] *PL*, II: pp. 108-09; also see J. Gairdner, *The Paston Letters: 1422-1509 A.D.*, Vol 3: Edward IV-Henry VII, 1471-1509 A.D. (Edinburgh, 1910), p. 487; the main inventories were taken while it was still occupied by Fastolf (Gairdner, pp. 475-90); Magdalene College Oxford Fastolf paper 43 is another inventory of the same date which differs only slightly from the one printed by Gairdner and is included in a summary table of the rooms of Caister in Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England,* Table 5, but another made by John Paston shows that the furnishings were still the same when he had possession (*PL,* II: pp. 107-14).

[377] H.D. Barnes and W. D. Simpson, "Caister Castle," *Antiquaries Journal* 32 (1952): 43.

[378] Barnes and Simpson, "Caister Castle," p. 37.

concern with dynastic identity, in which women could have as great a role as men.[379] The decorative program suggests that it was not just the winter hall but a hall for the use of the female element in the household.[380] Margaret may have used the great hall, but its strong evocation of the exclusively masculine domain of war and nonexistent acknowledgment of a female presence might have made it a more difficult place for Margaret to assert her authority than that at Giffords.

In addition to the great hall's exclusion of a female presence, the architectural program seems instead to locate women in one of its two towers. Caister was not well-fortified; its towers were therefore much more likely to have a social function, like those at the more famous Bodiam Castle in Sussex. [381] Caister's builder, like Bodiam's, was a soldier who had made a fortune and married well. He was upwardly mobile, as were the Pastons when they acquired it. The castle's towers, like many built in the fifteenth century, were primarily statements of their owner's new status and wealth.[382] And it is in one of these towers that Millicent Fastolf's suite of rooms was most likely located. The presence of

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[379] It was certainly so for the Fastolf's. Millicent Fastolf brought to the marriage her Tiptoft inheritance, a family socially superior to Fastolf's, and so increased Fastolf's status from the minor gentry (K. B. McFarlane, "The Investment of Sir John Fastolf's Profits of War," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7 (1957): 103.

[380] There is the possibility that the two halls existed so that one could be occupied by the lord and his family and another by high status visitors, as at Bolton and Goodrich Castles (P.A. Faulkner, "Castle Planning in the Fourteenth Century," *The Archaeological Journal* 120 (1963): 221-30), but it seems that the lodge positioned outside the main castle was meant to be accommodation for high status visitors (A. Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales 1300-1500, Volume 2: East Anglia, Central England, and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 58).

[381] See D. J. Turner, "Bodiam, Sussex: True Castle or Old Soldier's Dream House?," in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), pp. 267-276.

fireplaces and garderobes certainly suggests that it provided high status accommodation, and its only access was through the hall that seems to have been decorated with her in mind. The other tower in the inner court was called the 'treasury' and functioned as offices and storage for Fastolf's valuables.[383] It did not contain his suite of rooms. It is possible to suggest a correlation between a wife and important papers and valuable goods: all precious things which need to be protected. It seems that Gilchrist's supposition of the valuable lady in her tower is proven correct in this instance.

There is no reason to doubt that when Margaret Paston moved into Caister she took over the rooms that had once belonged to the lady of the house. We can conjecture, then, that Margaret lived in the tower, which would, according to the principles of access analysis, make her inaccessible, yet she clearly was not. Simply because her sleeping quarters were in the tower does not mean she never left it. Nor does it mean that people were not admitted to her rooms. Undoubtedly her male and female personal servants were, but visitors, of any status, provided they behaved properly, may have been too. At Caister, however, her position seems to have been particularly tenuous: by day she had to adapt in order to function as head of the household within the very masculine space of the hall, but ultimately she was still a woman who retired to her chambers within the protection of the tower.

Margaret ultimately stayed only a short time at Caister, opting instead to retire to her ancestral home at Mautby. I want to suggest that this is because she recognized the particular gender ideology represented in the architectural program at Caister, which saw greater vulnerability and reduced authority, both perhaps necessitating increased seclusion, for

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[382] See Turner, "Bodiam, Sussex," for a general discussion of this phenomenon.

[383] Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses*, p. 59.

women. I suggest that the lower status gentry's ideology, borne out in its manor houses, was more commiserate with Margaret's preference. In the final years of her life, Margaret's family had moved up the social chain, but she was presented with a choice. She quite clearly chose to remain in an environment—that is both the class ideology and its corresponding architectural program—that acknowledged and fostered female mobility and authority. This choice was also reflected in her decision not to establish a completely separate household from her sons after her husband's death, as widows of the nobility and greater gentry were wont to do,[384] and which she could easily have afforded. She did maintain her own household servants and those servants of her natal family's estates,[385] but she also continued to use those old trusted members of her husband's household who remained in her sons' service, her own household rather informally blending with her sons'.

Margaret certainly stakes out an identity separate from the upwardly mobile one of her male family members, but she reverts to the very established class identity of her natal family. Nevertheless, it is highly significant that she makes this decision. It suggests that she did not view her material world as given or "objective," that she did in fact question to some extent the logic of the practices dictated by an aristocratic *habitus*. And while documentary evidence shows that architecture can only set out rules, not dictate behavior, Margaret's situation proves that through its establishment of a normative ideology, domestic architecture could profoundly affect the experiences of those living in it.

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[384] Ward, *English Noblewomen*, p. 51.

[385] Colin Richmond, "Landlord and Tenant: the Paston Evidence," in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by J. Kermode (Stroud: Sutton, 1991), pp. 20-30.

The Pastons are unique, not least because they have left such a wealth of documentary evidence of their lives. They cannot, without caution, be taken to represent their peers. How exactly to define their peers is in fact still under debate, but they were certainly easily distinguished from the nobility, often, it seems, through their own choice. At Giffords, Mautby or Paston, a gender ideology of greater female accessibility and more possibility of greater female authority operated. Nevertheless, the greater gentry did mingle with the nobility, and some, like Fastolf and the builder of Bodiam, did much to emulate their superiors, including espousing an architectural program that ostensibly secluded women. The upwardly mobile Pastons never amassed the wealth for such a building program, but they were quick to take the opportunity of acquiring its results. We are lucky to see them at the transitional stage, from greater gentry to the greatest of gentry families: they eventually became Earls of Yarmouth in the seventeenth century.[386] The Paston men fought hard to gain Caister, and Margaret was there at every step. Still, it is curious that she only stayed there for a short while after it was finally securely gained, choosing instead to retire to her ancestral home at Mautby. She may have recognized the importance of Caister to the family's status and legacy. But perhaps she also recognized that her own interests were better met at a place like Giffords, where she could enjoy her own natal family's long established good standing while avoiding the more restrictive ideology represented in the architecture of a place like Caister.

Colin Richmond has shown how the Pastons intersected with the most notorious, and perhaps well-known, literary figure of the fifteenth century, Thomas Malory, contending that Malory's and the Pastons' shared world of Arthurian and chivalric ideals and concerns

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[386] Davis, "Introduction", *PL*, p. lii.

explicitly informed Malory's *Morte Darthur*.[387] The Pastons were certianly invested in this world: John II owned a "Grete Boke" that was filled with descriptions of tournaments and ceremonies and tracts on war and governance, and he took place in a tournament alongside Edward IV. Richmond remarks that Malory and the Paston brothers knew that "life was not straightforward" and that "Literature had been a mirror to reflect that since at least the twelfth century."[388] But he also notes that the Pastons, as well as the king of England, sometimes took courses that were patently not chivalric. They had choices. Nevertheless, in Richmond's words, the Paston brothers "had...romance in them."[389] But did the Paston women? Diane Watt argues that Margaret's oft-criticized homely style was a deliberate choice, that while she received letters employing a courtly rhetoric from her sons, and so was well-familiar with it, she felt a plain style to be appropriate for herself.[390] So far as her writing style was concerned, then, Margaret had options, but regardless of how we might consider social constructs constraining, writing (its mode, though perhaps not the resources to do it in the first place) is not constrained by an already present material reality. Negotiating the built environment, on the other hand, is. It seems possible that historical aristocratic women did experience forced seclusion as their romance counterparts did (Eleanor of Aquitaine's imprisonment by Henry II is an example, though a particularly

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[387] "Thomas Malory and the Pastons," in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 195-208.

[388] "Thomas Malory," p. 204.

[389] "Thomas Mallory," p. 206.

[390] "'No Writing for Writing's Sake': The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. by Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 122-38.

extraordinary one). But it is also likely that a large number of female readers in the later Middle Ages would neither have identified with nor wished to occupy the position, spatial or social, of many of the aristocratic women depicted in romance. Indeed, their reading of romance may have done for gentry women what literature still does for contemporary readers: that is, allow them to experience another place and time and actively engage it, as they must have done their architectural surroundings, in reflecting on their own lives.

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