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**CONTAGIOUS TEXTS EMBODIED:
MELANCHOLY HERMENEUTICS IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND
EARLY MODERN LITERATURE**

A Dissertation in

English

by

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to uncover the ways in which late medieval and early modern authors aspired to influence the physiological makeup of readers and audience members in the wake of increasingly sophisticated and encompassing notions of contagion. As I will argue, vernacular medical treatises, advice literature, and how-to books are all central to this aspiration. These texts encourage readers to inhabit literary environments in such a way that accounts for conceptions of the body as porous—i.e. equally capable of absorbing and emitting infectious disease. Into this body and from this body would pour melancholy, an ailment to which these instructional works devote much space. Considered one of the main causes of plague, melancholy evolved during the medieval period from merely a personal affair, to a matter of national concern. Medical treatises and their more popular imitations sought to address this concern by disseminating the information necessary for self-diagnosis and care. The ideas and independently curative project of these works spread widely and reached canonical authors such as Chaucer, Gower, Sidney, and Shakespeare, who also sought to participate in similar methods of self-care through genre and affective design. Like the porous body, the hermeneutics common to the major works of these authors reveal meaning to be co-constitutive, emerging through the reciprocal exchange between the fiction of the text and the imagination of the reader. What these texts transmit, however, is not meaning alone, for to represent or to discuss melancholy also entails the transmission of melancholy. Literature, thus, played a practical role in helping readers cope in a culture of contagion by providing a means of self-preservation and fortification against an ever-threatening environment. Yet despite their healing agendas, performances and texts nevertheless ran the risk of spreading the epidemics they meant to stifle.

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Introduction

And as that great captaine Zisca would have a drumme made of his skinne when he was dead, because he thought the very noise of it would put his enemies to flight, I doubt not, but that these following lines, when they shall be recited, or hereafter read, will drive away Melancholy (though I be gone) as much as Zisca's drumme could terrify his foes.¹

In the preface to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton imagines himself as a contagious embodiment of textual remedy. The image of Zisca's skin stretched across the drum draws attention to the shared boundary between human skin and the skin of the text, both of which possess porous qualities. The text is as much an anatomy of melancholy as it is an anatomy of Burton himself: "I have laid myself open in this treatise, turned mine inside outward."² Indeed, as a self-proclaimed melancholic, Burton lays himself bare on the "stage" of an anatomy theater, dissecting his own melancholic body so that readers may better understand their own. The

¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: New York Review, 2001), 38.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

porous properties of text and skin enable affective transactions to occur across author, text, and reader. In alluding to Zisca's drum, Burton indicates the aggressive, curative potential of his text, which can nevertheless only be activated through reading. Significantly, the cure does not lie in the information contained in the medical compendium, nor in the various representations of the disease contained there. Rather, the cure is enacted by the reading process itself; the words, read silently or aloud, enact physiological effects in the reader. The process of treatment that Burton imagines depends upon the capacity of the text—and therefore, his own body—to extend beyond itself. While Burton may embody the text he has written, it is his delusion to think that it will exert the effects he has intended, posthumously or otherwise.

Much like Zisca's drum, Burton's text accomplishes its aims by spreading negative affect. Burton might seek to cure his readers' melancholy, but this cure, at least partially, depends upon infection or reinfection. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is a carrier of that with which it would do away. It spreads disease before it ameliorates it. Burton emphatically asserts that the entire world is "mad" and therefore every single one of his readers may benefit from the knowledge contained in his book. He then would prove this claim true by making it so. In the Argument of the Frontispiece, which includes ten portraits, Burton invites his readers to see themselves in the portrait of the Madman:

But see the Madman rage downright
With furious looks, a ghastly sight.
Naked in chains bound doth he lie,
And roars amain, he knows not why.
Observe him; for as in a glass,
Thine angry portraiture it was.

His picture keep still in thy presence;

‘Twixt him and thee there’s no difference.³

Here, Burton shapes his readers into patients voluntarily entering into a hospital in order to be treated (by him) for their melancholic disease. He gives them a mirror in which they might see themselves, but that mirror has already been filled with an image devised by its maker.

Burton imagines *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as not only having the same effect as Zisca’s drum but as having a corresponding materiality as well. Burton’s body constitutes the fabric of the text; this body, however, is a diseased one. Burton aligns himself with the role of the physician, but he is also, like his readers, clearly a patient. As the opening frontispiece suggests, the text contains the portraits of his readers, as well as himself. Burton confesses in the Preface that “that which others hear or read of, I felt and practiced myself; they get their knowledge by books, I mine by melancholizing . . . [Melancholy is] something I can speak out of experience, and I would help others out of a fellow-feeling.”⁴ The author’s and the readers’ portraits here fuse, as the melancholy of the author is literally woven into the fabric of the book, and the mad mirror in which readers are meant to see themselves is comprised of the author’s own melancholic disposition. “When I first took this task in hand,” Burton explains, “[I aimed] to ease my mind by writing; for I had a kind of imposthume in my head, which I was very desirous to be unladen of, and could imagine no fitter evacuation than this.”⁵ Burton is aware that he has attempted to cure one form of melancholy (the malady) with another (scholarly genius, the

³ Burton, “Argument of the Frontispiece,” VII.

⁴ Burton, 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

solitariness of which leads to further melancholy)—that is, to “make an antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease.”⁶ Here Burton evokes the logic behind Paracelsian medicine: treating an ailment not through its opposite but through more of the same. With the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, then, Burton attempts to reapply this Paracelsian method, taking the infected and reintroducing them to the infection.

Burton does not abandon Galenism for Paracelsianism completely, but merges the two schools in his text’s design. In his Preface, Burton constructs an analogy that compares his textual endeavor to that of a virtuous woman who “being a leper herself, bestowed all her portion to build an hospital for lepers.”⁷ In comparing his text to a hospital, Burton speaks to the tradition of New Galenism, which put medical knowledge in the hands of educated laypersons. By coming into possession of such self-help books as Thomas Moulton’s *Myroure or Glasse of Helthe*, John Archer’s *Every Man His Own Doctor*, and Thomas Cartwright’s *An Hospitall for the Diseased*, common individuals could, theoretically, become their own physicians. These texts, then, become “hospitals” because they invite readers to view themselves in the humoral portraiture proffered. Because physicians typically prescribed treatment plans based on each individual’s particular humoral makeup, it was important for the individuals to know their unique physiological dispositions, so that they could apply appropriate remedies; otherwise, a cure for one person could be fatal for another. Perhaps this is why Burton expresses anxiety about the capacity of his book to appeal to the idiosyncrasies of all of his potential readers. At one instance he writes, “so many men, so many minds,” and at another, “How shall I hope to express myself

⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷ Ibid., 22.

to each man's humour and conceit, or to give satisfaction to all?"⁸ Melancholy offers Burton a useful means of addressing such idiosyncrasies. Its sprawling applications, its discursive surplus, allow for an encompassing diagnostic. Almost anyone can fall prey to the malady, and, as such, almost anyone can see herself in Burton's distorting mirror. As a hospital, the *Anatomy* admits almost endless patients.

The story of Zisca's drum and Burton's melancholy hospital demonstrate a phenomenon that will form the focus of this dissertation: the physiological impact of literature on humoral bodies. Writers in the late medieval and early modern periods were greatly influenced by increasingly sophisticated and encompassing notions of contagion. The idea that bodies were equally capable of absorbing and emitting infectious disease influenced how texts were both written and engaged with in these periods. Vernacular medical treatises on melancholy, which emerged during the onslaught of the Black Death (1348), provide an apt example of this. Considered one of the main pre-disposing causes of the plague, melancholy evolved from merely a personal affair, to a matter of national concern. Vernacularized medical treatises addressed this concern by disseminating the information necessary for self-diagnosis and care. These treatises gave rise to a proliferation of advice literature and how-to books (reaching their peak in the sixteenth century) that sought to instruct readers on healthy self-governance. The focus of this current study is how these mostly pragmatic and utilitarian texts influenced some of the most canonical literary authors of the medieval and early modern periods.

While literary authors certainly helped disseminate common medical knowledge to lay audiences, my project is primarily concerned with how the texts themselves enacted

⁸ Burton, 28.

physiological transformations in their readers. To this end, I focus on how medieval and early modern authors incorporated various forms of exegetical design into their literary texts. I consider the following four works as case studies: Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, and Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. As I hope to demonstrate, the generic conventions common to each of these works—romance/dream vision, confessional, pastoral, and comedy of manners—are all particularly conducive to self-reflection. Each text's internal hermeneutic establishes certain parameters of embodiment meant to orient an individual's reading practices in a way that promotes imaginative engagement, and hence instruction. Ultimately, the hermeneutical practices common to the four works considered here reveal textual meaning to be co-constitutive, emerging through the reciprocal exchange such internal exegeses foster between the fiction of the text and the imagination of the reader. The awareness of the fully embodied nature of reading suggests that reading was taken to have medical efficacy during these periods. Literature, therefore, played a practical role in helping readers cope in a culture of contagion by providing a means of self-preservation and fortification against an ever-threatening environment.

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to the influence of humoral theory on the representation of emotion in medieval and early modern literary texts.⁹ Walter Clyde Curry's landmark work, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, for instance, describes how the humors

⁹ For useful overviews of humoral theory in medieval and early modern medicine, see Faye M. Gertz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Nancy G. Sirasi, *Medieval and Early Modern Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

structure not only Chaucer's depiction of feeling but his narratives as well.¹⁰ The humors, in this reading, are a matter of both hermeneutics and invention. Corrine Saunders argues that humoral theory allows medieval writers to "repeatedly engage with suffering and conflicted psyches, writing the experience of affect on the lived body."¹¹ It is by doing so, Saunders contends, that these writers ensure their entrance into the English canon. Gail Kern Paster considers "the ideological effect of humoralism on the changing canons of bodily propriety" in medical texts, proverbs, conduct books, iconography, and Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, suggesting that such texts use mimesis as a means of encoding and, at times, challenging such an effect.¹² Michael C.

¹⁰ Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (New York: Barnes and Noble Press, 1926). For more recent accounts of Chaucer and the humoral body, see Alastair Minnis, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 147–551; Linda Ehram Wright, "Bodies," in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 40–57; Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "Chaucer and Science," in *Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Derek Brewer (London: Bell, 1974), 224–61.

¹¹ Corrine Saunders, "Mind, Body, and Affect in Medieval English Arthurian Romance," in *Emotions in Medieval Arthurian Literature: Body, Mind, Voice*, ed. Frank Badzma, Carolyne Larrington, and Corrine Saunders (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2015), 31–47, 31. See also Jeremy J. Citrome, *The Surgeon in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹² Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 22. See also Gail Kern Paster,

Schoenfeldt sees the works of Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton as promoting emancipation through humoral regulation, temperance, and self-control.¹³

In the examination of early emotion, a particularly compelling point of critical inquiry has been found in the porousness of the humoral subject. Miri Rubin, for instance, has shown how the medieval body—“a complex humoral system”—resisted rigid dichotomies through “its sexual openness, its physical liquidity, its vulnerability and pliability.”¹⁴ Similarly, Geoffrey Jerome Cohen understands corporeality in the Middle Ages as “a ‘schizo’ and disharmonic concatenation of parts rather than a tidy collection of individuated systems and organs.”¹⁵ Garrett

Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹³ Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Miri Rubin, “The Body, Whole and Vulnerable, in Fifteenth-Century England,” in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 19–28, 20.

¹⁵ Jeffery Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). On the porousness of medieval bodies, also see *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Susan Signe Morrison, *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer’s Fecopoetics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), especially 1–45; Patricia Dailey, *Promised Bodies:*

A. Sullivan and Mary Floyd-Wilson's edited collection explores the ways in which the passions function as ecology—i.e. how an individual's affective disposition is a continual negotiation between humoral constitution and environmental circumstance. Their collected essays “[alert] us to the ‘ecological’ nature of early modern conceptions of embodiment—the way in which the body is understood as embedded in a larger world with which it transacts.”¹⁶

While modern scholarship has produced increasingly accurate and sophisticated understandings of the workings of the passions within literature and theater, it has had relatively little to say about their influence outside these bounds on readers and spectators. Only recently has work on the humors, passions, and emotions been applied to the theatrical and literary experience, concentrating on reception rather than on conception. Katharine Craik and Tanya Pollard have contributed significant scholarship to this line of discussion, paving the way for further investigation into the ways in which literature and drama enacted and induced affective and physiological states. Craik and Pollard's edited collection, *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, has spurred conversation about literature's effects on mind and body, especially in relation to early modern theories of literary form. As they explain in the Introduction, “early modern audiences approached literary genres with the

Time, Language, and Corporeality in Medieval Women's Mystical Texts (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 22. Also see *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

expectation that they would move, stir, or enrapture them in particular ways.¹⁷ Theories of genre therefore overlap with theories of affect, since both inform our understanding of reader and audience response.” Darryl Chalk contends that the emotions experienced by early modern audiences operated as contagion. The texts encountered by these audiences fictionalize their infectious reception, at once corrupting and inoculating those who bear witness.¹⁸ Allison Hobgood considers the affective interplay between theatergoers and the English Renaissance stage. Her work investigates how “playgoers were altered by encounters with ‘catchable’ dramatic affect and likewise were undeniable influences upon those encounters.”¹⁹

My own study seeks to contribute to, and expand upon, scholarly discussions about the

¹⁷ Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard, eds. *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4.

¹⁸ Darryl Chalk, “‘A Nature but Infected’: Plague and Embodied Transformation in *Timon of Athens*,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 19 (2009): 1–28; “‘Here’s a Strange Alteration’: Contagion and the Mutable Mind in *Coriolanus*,” in *Renaissance Shakespeare*, ed. Martin Procházka, Michael Dobson, Andreas Hofele, and Hanna Scolnicov (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2014), 68–76; “Contagious Emulation: Antitheatricality and Theatre as Plague in *Troilus and Cressida*,” in *“This Earthly Stage”: World and Stage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Brett D. Hirsch and Christopher Wortham (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 75–101.

¹⁹ Allison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 14.

impact literary environments had on humoral subjectivities. Whereas investigations into this topic have focused predominantly on early modern drama, my project explores other configurations of this phenomenon in medieval poetry and early modern prose. In particular, I consider genres as they are informed by the vernacular medical tradition. Attending to a variety of genres common to the late medieval and early modern periods, this project explores the ways in which the vernacular medical treatise (popularized in the fourteenth century) finds form in more sophisticated literary genres across the two periods. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to uncover the ways in which authors aspired to influence the humoral constitutions of readers and audience members, as well as the cultural consequences of such aspirations. As I will go on to show, literary attempts to promote self-care among laypeople naturally engendered anxieties concerning the potential for these texts to produce effects that were less than salubrious.

The four chapters of this dissertation consider melancholia as simultaneously a bodily fluid (black bile) and an emotional disposition (sorrow). In particular, each chapter treats the precarious implications of this duality—that is, the way in which melancholia could act as either an affect or disease depending on whether it was governed properly. These texts were chosen not only for their compositional proximity to major historical epidemics, but also for their unique literary forms, which, I will argue, were all strongly informed by the self-help genre. The multitudinous kinds of self-government manuals that began to appear during the medieval and early modern periods point to the cultural infusion of the concept of contagion into the realms of religion, politics, and social ethics, among others.

This dissertation begins with two chapters covering the late medieval period because the emergence of the self-help genre corresponds with the onslaught of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century, when vernacularized plague treatises began to be distributed to literate

laypersons in the hopes that they might fortify themselves against such a lethal and highly contagious disease. The next two chapters reveal how the self-help genre evolved over the next two centuries and adapted to changing cultural circumstances. What all four texts covered in this dissertation have in common are the ways in which their respective literary forms (informed by contemporary manuals of self-government) sought to alter the humoral constitutions of their (potentially) melancholic readers/viewers.

My first chapter analyzes Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* within the context of the late-medieval discourse of plague—a discourse primarily concerned with self-care and self-preservation. Situating Chaucer's poem within a culture suffused with death and mourning illuminates its therapeutic function for English society at large. While the poem's content does not explicitly engage with representations of the plague, I argue that the dialogic interplay encouraged by the romance genre produced effects outside the fictional dream world in the very real conditions of Chaucer's plague-ridden society. Aligning the rhetoric of consolation with new discursive formations of self-care, *The Book of the Duchess* addresses loss at the same time it addresses the dangers of melancholia as a main predisposing cause of the plague. In the way it elicits particular forms of affective and cognitive participation, Chaucer's poem conditions readers to project themselves imaginatively into the hermeneutical vacancies permeating the poem. Through this imaginative dialogue, readers learn to curb grief and master melancholia. Reading thereby immunizes them against the "sorwful ymagynacioun" perpetuating the plague.

My second chapter attends to how the corrective function of Genius in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is complicated by his seemingly inconsistent roles. Genius is doubly commissioned to instruct the melancholic Amans about love (as a priest of Venus) and about virtue (as an orthodox priest). In both dimensions, Gower's text is arguably about teaching Amans self-

discipline and self-regulation. Previous scholarship has commonly conceived of the dialogue between Genius and Amans in purely cognitive terms—Russell Peck even describes Genius’s instruction of Amans as “mind control.”²⁰ Certainly Amans’s instruction has epistemological dimensions, but to interpret Amans’s training as purely cognitive (or “informational,” to use James Simpson’s term) neglects the profoundly affective dimension of Amans’s confession and the medieval confessional form more broadly.²¹ The text itself functions as an exercise in the shaping and regulating of affect. The affective dimensions of Genius’s teaching illuminate Gower’s “middel weie” as not only a stylistic choice, but also a therapeutic one in that the compositional structure moderates the affect experienced by individual readers. This ultimately enables Amans—in the way he engages with and experiences the moderating accord of the fictions presented by Genius—to take personal responsibility for his own moral transformation. Consequently, Genius diverges from the diegetic ethics commonly characterizing “moral Gower,” and instead, guides Amans’s virtue vicariously through fictional empathy. Amans’s absolution at the end of Book VIII signifies a newfound capacity to coordinate relationships affectively within both social and spiritual communities. In a world where bodies and environments were in constant communication with one another, this form of proper mediation prevented these transactions from degenerating into contamination, infection, and contagion—a state which defines the world we find in the opening Prologue.

My third chapter turns to Sir Phillip Sidney’s *Old Arcadia*, a text saturated with passionate

²⁰ Russell Peck, “Introduction,” *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 1 (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 2006), 24.

²¹ James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lile’s Anticlaudianus and John Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

excess and disorder. Sidney's work has proven to be a productive case study for considering how English authors of the period represented emotional experience in their literary works. In alignment with current trends in the history of emotions, critical interpretations of Sidney's *Old* and *New Arcadia* have emphasized the ways in which the passions cut across body and environment. Building on the themes of environment, embodiment, and emotion pervading Sidney scholarship and studies in the history of emotion more broadly, this chapter considers Sidney's *Old Arcadia* as a noxious rendering of Virgilian pastoral sympathy, in which transactions with the natural world generate disease. Engaging with early modern theories of both the humors and the occult, I explore the sympathetic operations undergirding contagion in *The Old Arcadia*, especially in relation to love-melancholy and the female body. While Sidney seeks to ennoble his female readers by privileging virtuous love over pathological love, his endeavor is persistently undercut by their mutual imbrication: the occult energies responsible for generating sympathy, friendship, and love operated on the same principles as infection and disease. As a result, disease always lurked behind potentially ennobling passions. The tenuous divide between true and false love, therefore, threatened to transform Sidney's *Old Arcadia* from an ethical text about love to a site of erotic contagion.

My fourth chapter explores how early modern culture's burgeoning preoccupation with melancholy and social propriety deeply influenced Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The clearest demonstration of this lies in the fool character, Touchstone, who frequently satirizes precepts found in contemporary manuals of courtly etiquette, and in doing so, reveals the highly codified nature of courtly behavior. As it exists in both the courtesy literature on which Shakespeare draws and the theatrical playscript, behavior—whether it be seemingly “natural” or not—is necessarily scripted and performative; as a result, the distinctions between the natural and the

artificial that legitimize gentility and social rank become indistinguishable. In other words, Shakespeare upsets the political ideology undergirding the notion of the body politic by denaturalizing the constructs upholding a hierarchical society. Given the highly performative nature of courtly conduct, *As You Like It* turns frequently to metatheatre as the site of pathology for the body politic. Potentially, conduct books contributed to the maintenance of national health in their attempt to reaffirm power structures; however, by granting all literate laypersons access to the codes necessary for social mobility, they threatened to expose social and political power as merely a performance. Courtesy books, therefore, rendered notions of “natural” gentility obsolete. Drawing on early modern anti-theatrical tracts that claimed impersonation and counterfeit had infectious capacities, I argue that the notion of contagious theatricality that emerges in the period had implications both within playhouses and without. However, through the medium of comedy of manners, Shakespeare inoculates his audience against antitheatrical rhetoric—specifically, the plague of theatre. Ultimately, *As You Like It* promotes the theatricality of the playhouse as a prophylactic against the corruptive roleplaying that occurs in the real world.

The tradition this study traces positions poetry uneasily between critics and apologists. The quality that condemns poetic mimesis—its ability to “move” readers—is also what redeems it. Authors spanning across the medieval and early modern periods adopt the role of poet-physician in order to transcend attacks on the dangers of poetry originating with Plato. In closing his *Republic*, Plato bans all poetry from the city beyond “hymns to the gods and encomia to good men,” yet poses a challenge: “if poetry for pleasure and imitation have any arguments to advance

in favour of their presence in a well-governed city, we should be glad to welcome them back.”²² Literary critics and authors have since taken up this challenge in an attempt to vindicate poetry. While Plato condemns drama due to its irrational and imitative proclivities, Aristotle makes an argument in the *Poetics* for the ethical utility of these two aspects in the genre of tragedy. For Plato, poetry arouses the emotions in a way that is dangerous for society: “We should now be right not to admit him [the imitative poet] into a potentially well-governed city, because he arouses and feeds this part of the mind [the irrational part] and by strengthening it destroys the rational part.”²³ Aristotle combats this concern with the idea of catharsis. In his definition of the genre, Aristotle writes that tragedy “effect[s] through pity and fear the catharsis of such emotions.”²⁴ The term “catharsis” refers to emotional purgation, stemming from vicariously experiencing the events taking place in the drama. Although Plato’s view holds the irrational and rational part of man as incompatible and the emotions as overpowering our capacity to reason, Aristotle essentially posits through his definition of tragedy that the emotions stirred in the dramatic experience allow audience members to express their emotions in a structured setting. The arousal of these powerful emotions teaches the audience how fear and pity feel as well as when and where they can be appropriately expressed. The arousal of pity and fear—emotions inherent to tragic mimesis according to Aristotle—ultimately benefits and promotes ethical action rather than subverting it, since well-trained emotions are closely tied to ethical behavior.

²² Plato, *The Republic*, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, ed. D. A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, in *Classical Literary Criticism*, 57.

Since Plato, poetry has come to be identified conversely as either a plague or a medicine. Sixteenth-century anti-theatrical pamphleteer Stephen Gosson compares playgoing to “[sitting] in the chaire of pestilence,”²⁵ and John Rainolds notoriously claims that “the maners of all spectators commonlie are hazarded by the contagion of theatricall sights.”²⁶ One of poetry’s staunchest defenders, Sidney describes poetry as “a medicine of cherries,” more effective than other remedies because it is sensually appealing to readers.²⁷ Similarly, George Puttenham writes in *The Arte of English Poesie* that the poet has “to play also the Phisitian, and not onely be applying a medicine to the ordinary sicknes of mankind, but by making the very greef it selfe (in part) cure of the disease.”²⁸ We can see echoes of both Aristotle and Paracelsus in Puttenham’s formulation that views the poison as part of the remedy. Drawing on the tenuous relationship between disease and cure constituting this critical tradition, the following chapters argue that literary works are all in some way understood as remedies, yet all are capable of achieving the exact opposite of their intended effects.

²⁵ Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions* (London: 1582; STC 12095), B7^r.

²⁶ John Rainolds, *Th’Overthrow of Stage-Playes* (Middelburg, 1599; STC 20616), X3^v.

²⁷ Sir Phillip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 114.

²⁸ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie: A Critical Edition*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 98.

Poetics of the Plague:

Melancholia and Prescriptive Reading in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*

Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* has traditionally been characterized as both elegiac and occasional. It was written to commemorate Blanche of Lancaster and to console her husband (Chaucer's patron) John of Gaunt. Because *The Book of the Duchess* stands as the most historically contextualized of Chaucer's early narrative poems, any critical approach to his poem must attend, however cursorily, to the occasion of its birth.²⁹ The precise historical context for Chaucer's first work has commonly set the terms of critical discourse; at the same time, it threatens to obstruct the hermeneutical possibilities of that discourse. While the singular death of Blanche in 1368 may have served as the occasion for Chaucer's poem, the *cause* of her death gestures toward a much larger socio-historical phenomenon. Blanche—along with her sister, father, and millions of others—died from bubonic plague, an epidemic that reached apocalyptic

²⁹ Robert Edwards, *The Dream of Chaucer: Representation and Reflection in the Early Narratives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

proportions in the mid-fourteenth century.³⁰ With the first great epidemic of 1348 killing off nearly half of England's population, any single death such as Blanche's necessarily dissolved into the larger pandemic. Writing in the midst of recurring outbreaks—including those of 1361-62, 1369, and 1375—it seems inconceivable that Chaucer could have treated the particular occasion of Blanche's death without the larger occasion of death on his mind. Nevertheless, the pervasive subject of the Black Death, which appears in the works of several of Chaucer's contemporaries, including Lydgate, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Machaut, remains virtually absent from Chaucer's oeuvre.

Earlier critics have attributed the paucity of plague references across Chaucer's repertoire to either his indifference towards the tragedies occurring during his lifetime, or the little impact the plague had on medieval literature more broadly.³¹ This critical tendency has since shifted

³⁰ For references to Blanche's death in contemporary plague tracts, see Dorothea Waley Singer and Annie Anderson, *Catalogue of Latin and Vernacular Plague Texts in Great Britain and Ireland in Manuscripts Written Before the Sixteenth Century* (London: Heinemann, 1950), app. E.3, 172; app. E.9, 175.

³¹ By "earlier critics" I am more precisely referring to the tradition of scholarship coming before Peter G. Beidler's seminal essay, which was the first to consider the implications of the plague setting on Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*. See "The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner," *The Chaucer Review* 16, (1982): 257-269. On Chaucer's indifference see especially G.G. Coulton, *Chaucer and His England* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963) and Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978). On the sparse impact of the plague on medieval writing more generally see Siegfried Wenzel, "Pestilence and Middle

from indifference to indirection. In his study of late medieval iconography of the plague, John B. Friedman remarks that the “most striking feature of medieval art dealing with the plague is its indirection.”³² Building on this observation, Friedman speculates that because medieval artists commonly drew on images from the past, they had yet to develop an artistic vocabulary by which to express the plague. Scholars such as Ardis Butterfield and Jamie Fumo have found a literary parallel in Chaucer’s works. Butterfield suggests that while Machaut and Boccaccio represent plague in terms of pastoral inversion, the true pastoral depicted in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess* provides the “literal means of escape from plague.” Butterfield argues that the process of withdrawal from courtly and public realities—represented by the pastoral—enables “the horrifying fact of plague death to be faced.”³³ Fumo considers the influence of the Black Death on Chaucer’s re-working of Boccaccio’s pre-plague text, *Teseida*. She argues that Emelye’s “lookyng” in the *Knight’s Tale* “carries a pestilential force that contemporizes the familiar erotic tradition of the lady’s lethal glances through association with current theories of

English Literature: Friar John Grimestone’s Poems on Death,” in *The Black Death: The Impact of the Fourteenth-Century Plague*, ed. Daniel Williman (New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), 131-59.

³² John B. Friedman, “‘He hath a thousand slayn this pestilence’: The Iconography of the Plague in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Social Unrest in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Francis X. Newman (New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986), 75-112.

³³ Ardis Butterfield, “Pastoral and the Politics of Plague in Machaut and Chaucer,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (1994): 3-27 (27, 26).

the plague's transmission."³⁴ Although Emelye appears to function as merely an object of the Theban lovers' gaze in Chaucer's version, Fumo argues alternatively that her passivity in fact generates an "ocular ricochet," whereby the aggressive male gaze is reflected back onto the looker, rather than reciprocated. As the work of Butterfield and Fumo suggests, the quality of indirection undergirding Chaucer's literary engagement with the plague distinguishes him from some of his most prominent contemporaries.

Juxtaposing the opening lines of *The Book of the Duchess* to those of Guillaume de Machaut's *Jugement dou Roy de Navarre* showcases the allusive nature of Chaucer's plague-time poetry. Chaucer's poem opens with an isolated narrator terrorized by "ydel thoght," "hevynesse," and a "sorwful ymagynacioun" that is "always hooly in my mynde." The cause of the narrator's "melancolye" and "drede" remains cryptic, however, as even the narrator admits, "Myselven can not telle why" (1-34).³⁵ In contrast to the obscure circumstances that surround *The Book of the Duchess*'s first lines, Machaut's *Navarre* opens with a graphic depiction of the horrors of the plague. The narrator of the poem describes the heaps of bodies that "gettoit on en grans fosses / Tous ensamble, et tous mors de boces" (were thrown all together / In great trenches, all of them dead from the buboes). Recalling the once magnificent towns recently stricken by plague, the narrator sorrowfully acknowledges that now no one "trouvoit a qui parler, / Pour ce qu'il estoient tuitmort / De celles mervilleuse mort" (could be found there to talk to, /

³⁴ Jamie C. Fumo, "The Pestilential Gaze: From Epidemiology to Erotomania in *The Knight's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 85-136 (88).

³⁵ All quotations from the works of Chaucer are from Benson's *Riverside Chaucer*. They are cited parenthetically in the text by line number.

For they were all dead / From this devastating attack).³⁶ The horrific images relayed in the *Navarre* could easily be the ones keeping Chaucer's narrator up at night. Both narrators exist in isolation—one within his bedroom, the other quarantined inside his home—gesturing towards the dissolution of social bonds that occur during times of pestilence. Several scholars have recognized the significant impact of Machaut's *Navarre* (1349) on Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, written 20 years later. Colin Wilcockson suggests that the extensive account of human tragedy rendered in the opening several hundred lines of the *Navarre* greatly influenced the elegiac form of Chaucer's poem. The reverberation of this tragic landscape in Chaucer's *fin'amor*, he writes, would have hearkened to "the countless thousands who mourned their dead." A. J. Minnis proposes that the non-specificity of the poem's opening lines allows for an "exploration of different kinds of sorrow," especially that kind which "transcends the sufferings of unrequited love." The ambiguous quality of Chaucer's persona, Minnis continues, "may well have been influenced by the more global and non-amatory melancholia attributed to the Machaut persona at the beginning of the *Navarre*."³⁷ The occasion of Machaut's poem influences

³⁶ Guillaume de Machaut, *The Judgment of the King of Navarre*, ed. and trans. R. Barton Palmer (New York: Garland, 1988), 373-74; 382-84.

³⁷ Colin Wilcockson, "The Book of the Duchess," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 330; A. J. Minnis, *The Shorter Poems: Oxford Guides to Chaucer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 115. See further John Lawlor, "The Pattern of Consolation in The Book of the Duchess," *Speculum* 31, no. 4 (1956): 626-648; and Norman D. Hinton, "The Black Death and the *Book of the Duchess*," in *His Firm Estate: Essays*

Chaucer's subsequent undertaking: the commemoration of John of Gaunt's late wife. The melancholy settings evoked by Machaut and other literary contemporaries inflect Chaucer's own work, emphasizing the tragedy of Blanche's death, while also gesturing toward the desolation of all Europe.

Offering further consideration of Chaucer's indirect poetics, I argue that Chaucer treats the mechanism of melancholia undergirding the proliferation of the Black Death. Melancholy was not only a natural affective response to the plague, it was also understood to be a primary factor in succumbing to it.³⁸ The slippage between disease and the affective response to it is a theme thoroughly explored in Chaucer's narrative. And yet it is a theme that manifests in the negative, inventional space of the poem—i.e., in what is *not* said, or *resists* being said, rather than what is said. The abstractions and vacancies characterizing Chaucer's poetic style provide a space for

in Honor of Franklin James Eikenberry, ed. Donald E. Hayden. (Tulsa: University of Tulsa, 1967), 72-78.

³⁸ See Minnis, "there were two main predisposing causes of the plague against which one could take precautions; sad thoughts and bad air (a poisoned atmosphere was then believed to cause the disease) were to be avoided at all costs" (149). See further, the most influential plague treatise of its time, the *Compendium de epidimia* of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Paris, which recommends that one should "flee sadness and melancholy [during times of plague], and live as merrily and happily as possible." Qtd. in Minnis, 169. In general, medical treatises prescribed cheerfulness and happiness—as these emotional dispositions countered their opposites, melancholy and sadness—and advised against imbalancing the humors, which lowers one's resistance to the plague.

readers to work through their sorrow via empathetic engagement with the text. Inserting particularity, or otherwise imaginatively supplying what is missing from the text, prepares readers for a textual dialogue dependent upon affective reciprocity. Participating in contemporary medical discourse, Chaucer offers an alternative to the dominant medical model for responding to disease rooted in textual engagement. In the way it elicits prescriptive forms of psychophysiological participation from its readers, Chaucer's poem aspires to console readers at the same time it prompts them to imaginatively project themselves into the affectively-charged gaps and silences permeating the poem. At a time when the conditions of the plague necessitated a dissociation from other people, literature provided individuals a way of constructing imaginative communities, which ultimately enabled them to move on from self-consuming sorrow to productive mourning. Reading thereby immunizes them against the "sad thoughts" proliferating the plague. Unlike his literary contemporaries, Chaucer's engagement with the theme of plague manifests outside the fictional text in the actual world of vulnerable bodies, contagious disease, intemperate passions, and social upheaval. Interpreting *The Book of the Duchess* within the context of the Black Death illuminates the broader social function of Chaucer's earliest narrative and highlights the practical role of literature in hygienic endeavors.

I

Clear and intimate parallels exist between medical treatises composed following the initial outbreak of the Black Death (1348) and contemporary literary pursuits. Works produced by elite authors such as Chaucer, Lydgate, Boccaccio, and Petrarch demonstrate the ways in which imaginative fiction conscientiously participated in popular medical discourses, especially theories on contagion. While literature helped disseminate and sustain hygienic

recommendations, the texts themselves also became a practical component of these medical regimens, as many treatises prescribed forms of narrative prophylaxis, such as reading and storytelling, during periods of pestilence.³⁹

Many of Chaucer's contemporaries produced poetry that reflected the pestilential conditions of the time. John Lydgate's widely popular, "A Doctrine for Pestilence," for instance, offers readers practical advice on avoiding infection:

Who will been holle & kepe hym from sekenesse
And resiste the strok of pestilence.
Lat hym be glad, & voide al hevynesse,
Flee wikkyd heires, eschew the presence
Off infect placys . . .
Smelle swote thynges, & for his deffence
Walk in cleen heir, eschew mystis blake.⁴⁰

Lydgate's concern with self-preservation in this poem is a theme that traverses much plague-time literature—as we shall see. Reading much like a physician's tract, the poem gestures toward the practical ways in which literary texts engaged in medical discourses. This passage reflects the popular notion that "hevynesse" (melancholy) and "mystis blake" (corrupt air) were the two

³⁹ The term, "narrative prophylaxis," comes from Martin Marafioti, "Post-Decameron Plague Treatises and the Boccaccian Innovation of Narrative Prophylaxis," *Annali d'Italianistica* vol. 23 (2005): 69-87.

⁴⁰ John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part II: Secular Poems, ed. Henry Noble MacCracken (Oxford: EETS, 1934), 702.

main predisposing causes of the plague.⁴¹ It also suggests the typical precautions that individuals could take to avoid infection: travel to the countryside, quarantine oneself indoors, and ward off melancholy with mirth.

In the *Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio espouses similar theories in his extended account of plague-ridden Florence. In the frame narrative, Boccaccio emphasizes traveling to the countryside and storytelling as commonplace methods of self-preservation. In the opening frame of this work, Pampinea offers a survey of a few of these methods: “E erano alcuni, li quali avvisavano che il viver moderatamente e il guardarsi da ogni superfluità avesse molto a così fatto accidente resistere” (Some people were of the opinion that a sober and abstemious mode of living considerably reduced the risk of infection); therefore, “da ogni altro separati viveano” (they lived in isolation from everyone else). “Altri,” Boccaccio continues, “afferstavano il bere assai e il godere e l’andar cantando a torno e sollazzando e il sodisfare d’ogni cosa all’appetito che si potesse e di ciò che avveniva ridersi e beffarsi esser medicina certissima a tanto male” (Others took the opposite view, and maintained that an infallible way of warding off this appalling evil was to drink heavily, enjoy life to the full, go round singing and merrymaking, gratify all of one’s cravings whenever the opportunity offered, and shrug the whole thing off as one enormous joke).⁴² Still others “dicendo niuna altra medicina essere contro alle pestilenze migliore né così buona come il fuggir loro davanti” (maintained that there was no better or more efficacious remedy against a plague than to run away from it). As a result, “assai e uomini e

⁴¹ Minnis, 149.

⁴² Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, v.1 (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 19.

Translation from G. H. McWilliam, *Decameron* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 52.

donne abbandonarono la propria città, le proprie case, i lor luoghi e i lor parenti e le lor cose, e cercarono l'altrui o almeno il lor contado” (large numbers of men and women abandoned their city, their homes, their relatives, their estates and their belongings, and headed for the countryside).⁴³ The *Decameron* seems to present this last option most favorably, while contributing the additional measure of storytelling.⁴⁴ The structure of the *Decameron* is after all based on these two methods of preservation.

Pampinea’s speech in the introduction to the first day details the impetus for the characters’ retreat to the countryside. “Noi dimoriamo qui . . . non altramente che se essere volessimo,” Pampinea asserts to her fellow ladies, “o dovessimo testimonie di quanti corpi morti ci sieno alla sepoltura recati . . . E se di quinci usciamo, o veggiamo corpi morti o infermi trasportarsi da torno” (Here we linger for no other purpose than to count the number of corpses being taken to burial . . . And if we go outside, we shall see the dead and the sick being carried hither and thither).⁴⁵ She continues, “Né altra cosa alcuna ci udiamo, se non ‘I cotali son morti’ e ‘Gli altrettali sono per morire’; e se ci fosse chi fargli, per tutto dolorosi pianti udiremmo” (all we ever hear is “So-and-so’s dead” and “So-and-so’s dying”; and if there were anyone left to mourn, the whole place would be filled with sounds of wailing and weeping).⁴⁶ In order to persuade her

⁴³ Branca, 20-21; McWilliam, 53.

⁴⁴ Marafioti argues that it is only after the completion and wide dissemination of Boccaccio’s text that physicians specifically advocate literary pleasure as part of their prophylactic regimens (70).

⁴⁵ Branca, 33; McWilliam, 59.

⁴⁶ Branca, 34; McWilliam, 60.

audience, Pampinea focuses on vacating the scene of death and mourning. In light of her speech, Lydgate's terms, "hevynesse" and "mystis blake," assume a more pronounced significance. As melancholy corresponded with black bile in humoral theory, "mystis blake" suggests the contagious nature of melancholy; as if sadness could saturate the air and infect those who breathe it in. Significantly, Pampinea demonstrates the slippage between disease and the affective response to it—in this case, "wailing and weeping"—by suggesting that both need to be fled. Responding to the miasma of despair that surrounds them, Pampinea proposes to the six other ladies that they go and stay together on one of their various country estates. Once removed from the plague-ridden city, it is also Pampinea's suggestion that the company engage "novellando (il che può porgere, dicendo uno, a tutta la compagnia che ascolta diletto) questa calda parte del giorno trapasseremo" (in telling stories—an activity that may afford some amusement both to the narrator and to the company at large). As in the *Book of the Duchess*, storytelling is juxtaposed to and preferred over other pastimes: "e tavolieri e scacchieri . . . nel quale l'animo dell'una delle parti convien che si turbi senza troppo piacere dell'altra o di chi sta a vedere" (chessboards and other games . . . which inevitably bring anxiety to one of the players, without offering very much pleasure either to his opponent or to the spectators).⁴⁷ Reading and storytelling emerge as significant components of the preventive recommendations in medical treatises not only because they offer individuals a mental escape from the realities of pestilence, but also because they evoke affective responses that counter the negative emotions accompanying such realities—e.g. fear, sadness, and anguish. In these treatises, physicians propose that recreation and mirth

⁴⁷ Branca, 47; McWilliam, 68.

heighten spirits and strengthen the mind and body so that individuals would not succumb to contagion.

While it was not uncommon for people to convene in the countryside for storytelling and readings (like the fictional characters of the *Decameron*), medieval reading practices were predominantly conducted in isolation, and therefore proved to be useful methods of preservation amidst the ongoing threat of contagion. Unlike the *Decameron*, with its focus on ten companions who find solace in the countryside, Machaut's *Navarre* emphasizes the immense loneliness of plague culture brought about by death and the fear of contagion. Taking an alternative approach to Pampinea's, the narrator in the *Navarre* determinedly quarantines himself inside his home for the duration of the outbreak.

Si qu'en doubtance et en cremeur

Dedens ma maison m'enfermay

Et en ma pensée fermay

Fermement que n'en partiroie

Jusques a tant que je saroié

A quel fin ce porroit venir.

[Therefore in doubt and fear

I closed myself up inside the house

And determined in my mind

Resolutely that I'd not leave it

Until that moment when I would know

What conclusion this [the plague] might come to.]⁴⁸

With a similar focus on isolation, Petrarch's *Rerum Familiarium Libri* (*Letters on Familiar Matters*) conveys the devastating impact the plague had on survivors. In his letters written from 1349-1350, Petrarch draws on the *ubi sunt* tradition to lament all that the plague took from him—including his beloved Laura.

Where are our sweet friends now, where are their beloved faces, where are their soothing words, where is their mild and pleasant conversation? . . . We used to be a crowd, now we are almost alone. We must seek new friendships. But where or for what reason when the human species is almost extinct and the end, as I hope, is near? Why pretend, dear brother, for we are indeed alone.⁴⁹

The cascade of rhetorical questions characterizing Petrarch's prose in this passage formalizes his loneliness: he lacks his brother as epistolary correspondent, and therefore expects no response to the questions he puts forth. Despite the intense emotions driving this passage—predominantly sadness and fear—Petrarch lacks companions with which to form affective bonds, whether it be in the form of consolation, sympathy, etc. Instead, Petrarch's desperate dialogic attempts only echo back to him. The sentiment expressed here adequately registers the dissolution of social bonds that occurred as a result of emerging views on contagion. Several chronicles address the problem of desertion during plague time. Much of the population abandoned their cities and their

⁴⁸ Ibid., 442-47.

⁴⁹ Petrarch, "Letter from Parma," in *Epistolae de Rebus Familiaribus et variae*, VIII.7, ed. Joseph Fracassetti (Florence, 1859), 442-43. Translation from Aldo Bernardo, *Letters on Familiar Matters* (New York: Italica Press, 2005), 419.

homes in order to escape the pestilence. Even more horrifying accounts demonstrate the complete dissolution of personal ties, as people neglected neighbors, close relatives, and even children.⁵⁰ With the exception of the members of the *brigata* in the *Decameron*, Petrarch, the quarantined narrator of the *Navarre*, and the apathetic dreamer in *The Book of the Duchess*, all lack access to a sense of community. They represent the affective implosion that can occur when social bonds dissipate.

II

The scene in which the narrator of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* turns to literature in response to his melancholy-driven insomnia, is indicative of the much larger cultural tendency to regard literature as medicinal. Its capacity both to evoke various affective responses in readers and to offer them psychological reciprocity made reading a ready method for preserving one's health in isolation. In the Middle Ages, as in antiquity, there was a considerable interest in the healing power of poetry. Many beneficial effects could come from reading literature, including physical and mental well-being. The theory of "healthy reading" is based on the principle that illnesses are cured by their contraries. In medieval medical manuals, a remedy for melancholy would entail arousing the emotions of joy and gladness by reading delightful books. Petrarch, who sought to use words (in both their written and oral forms) to cure himself and others of a variety of ills, presents the following theory of self-healing:

⁵⁰ Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 17.

I cannot tell you of what worth are to me in solitude certain familiar and famous words not only grasped in the mind but actually spoken orally . . . how much delight I get from repeating the written words either of others or sometimes even my own! How much I feel myself freed from very serious and bitter burdens by such readings! Meantime I feel my own writing assisted me even more since they are more suited to my ailments, just as the sensitive hand of a doctor who is himself ill is placed more readily where he feels the pain to be.⁵¹

Both appearing in the same collection of letters, it makes sense to read Petrarch's theory of self-healing in response to his lament (quoted above). Petrarch's style in this passage betrays a brimming sense of confidence and elation, while the endless series of questions characterizing the lament has a draining effect on the reader, and concomitantly, the writer. The rhetorical questions projected by the writer seem to hang in the air momentarily before dissipating in the wind. The stagnant style of the lament is replaced here with strong, ecstatic exclamations that affectively move readers and stimulate a sense of individual agency.

With his emphasis on the individual's ability to heal himself either through reading or writing, Petrarch reflects a paradigm shift in the late Middle Ages that modern scholars term New Galenism, or Medieval Galenism. A learned tradition of medicine rooted in classical study, New Galenism posited that the preservation of the body was linked to the daily activities and particular circumstances surrounding the individual. Like modern self-help books and popular medical websites, specialized treatises describing the basics of health and hygiene found their

⁵¹ Fracassetti, "To the same Tommaso da Messina, on the study of eloquence," 442-43.

Translation by Bernardo, 49.

way into several vernaculars and gradually became available to educated laypeople throughout Europe. As a result, individuals began turning to written sources to address their physical and hygienic needs; these readers increasingly believed that information bound in manuscripts or books could provide remedies, relief, and some sense of control over the conditions of their bodies.⁵²

Not surprisingly, this paradigm shift occurred concurrently with the onslaught of the Black Death, during which time a series of plague tractates were disseminated in order to acquaint the general public with information regarding the cause, symptoms, treatment, and prevention of the disease. Representing the first large-scale effort at popular health instruction in history, these documents gained particular value as individuals were forced to rely less on specialized physicians.⁵³ Subject to the epidemic along with everyone else, specialized physicians were scarce, and due to the contagious nature of the disease, they naturally avoided the risk of infection that would come with treating patients. Moreover, medical practitioners were entirely ignorant about how to treat the bubonic plague; therefore, their methods were entirely ineffective for those they were able to provide personal treatment. One of the most eminent physicians at the time, Chalin de Vinario, claimed matter-of-factly that “every pronounced case of plague is incurable.” Guy de Chauliac, the physician to Clement VI and the

⁵² Michael Solomon, *Fictions of Well-Being: Sickly Readers and Vernacular Medical Writing in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1.

⁵³ C.-E. A Winslow and M. L. Duran-Reynals, “Jacme D’Agramont and the First of the Plague Tractates,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1948): 747.

father of French surgery, likewise reveals the helplessness of physicians in face of the plague. In his principal work, *La Grande Chirurgie*, Chauliac writes: “The disease was most humiliating for the physicians, who were unable to render any assistance, all the more as, for fear of infection, they did not venture to visit the patients, and if they did could do no good and consequently earn no fees, for all infected died.”⁵⁴ Because of the failure of professional physicians, self-preservation and self-care became critical to the endeavor to conserve and rebuild public health.

As a result, many medical treatises on the Black Death explicitly targeted a non-professional readership. Written in 1365, John of Burgundy’s was one of the most widely circulated of these kinds of treatises. His preface to readers makes the new approach explicit:

. . . quia in hac epydimia modo quasi de novo reversa et per successiones temporum iterum est reversura, quia nondum finis est, ideo in strage hominum compaciens ac communi vtilitati subsistens salutemque omni mero desiderio cupiens. In hac cedula divino invocato auxilio preservacionem et curam horum morborum planius enucleare intendo, ut vix aliquis phisico indegeat, sed simplius unusquisque phisicus sit praeservator, rector atque curator.

[Because the epidemic is now newly returned, and will return again in the future because it has not yet run its course, and because I pity the carnage among mankind and support the common good and desire the health of all, and have been moved by a wish to help, I intend, with God’s help, to set out more clearly in this

⁵⁴ Quoted in Johannes Nohl, *The Black Death: A Chronicle of the Plague*, trans. C. H. Clarke (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2006), 72.

schedule the prevention and cure of these illnesses, so that hardly anyone should have to resort to a physician but even simple folk can be their own physician, preserver, ruler and guide.]⁵⁵

For the ailing reader, then, a vernacular medical treatise became more than just a collection of technical information; there was a sense in which the reader/patient could do “in text” or “with a text” what the physician normally would do “in person” or at the bedside.⁵⁶ These vernacular medical treatises participated in an emerging culture of pathology, Solomon writes, “one plagued increasingly with the anxiety of disease and perceived threat of latent bodily disorders.”⁵⁷ As a result, highly motivated readers—either experiencing or anticipating disease—approached medical texts with a keen eye toward the immediate condition of their bodies. Solomon calls this phenomenon “sickly reading,” a temporary reading posture in which the patient approaches a text “seeking comfort or a solution for his or her pathological condition.”⁵⁸ He argues that “when the sick approach a text, they do so enveloped in the conditions of the body and with a heightened desire to restore order.” Consequently, these readers are “eager to assimilate information that would help them understand and remedy their unwanted physical status.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ The Latin text is cited from Karl Sudhoff, “Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des ‘schwarzen Todes’ 1348: III,” in *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* V, 1912, 62-69. Translation from Horrox, 186.

⁵⁶ Solomon, 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Sickly reading, then, is highly self-referential. In the wake of treating themselves, readers would be keenly attuned to their somatic experience, leading, conceivably, to a heightened sense of textual efficacy.

As in vernacular medical treatises, Chaucer creates a textual space for a clinical encounter between the melancholic patient and physician. In doing so, Chaucer draws specifically on early medical writers who frequently advised melancholics to engage in dialogic exchanges in order to escape the self-consuming thoughts fueled by introspection. In his treatise *Chronic Diseases*, Aurelianus suggests that the “patient read aloud . . . from texts” and “in this way . . . exercise his mind more thoroughly.” For the same reason, Aurelianus adds, the patient “should also be kept busy answering questions.” Furthermore, the practitioner stresses that “melancholics ought to get out and speak with friends.”⁶⁰ Likewise, Gentile da Foligno recommends that melancholics avoid being alone and converse with friends in order to induce cheerfulness. In one consilium, Gentile writes that the patient “should especially take care not to remain alone nor to plunge himself into sadness or heavy thoughts. To this end conversation with good friends works very well, as do a change of scenery, tackling things that seem challenging to complete, and hawking and hunting.”⁶¹ The Black Knight in *The Book of the Duchess* perfectly fits the mold of—and might even be said to allegorically represent—the melancholic patient described in these medical treatises. Moreover, the conversation that ensues between the knight and the dreamer provides a dramatization of the treatments commonly prescribed in plague

⁶⁰ Quoted from Carol Falvo Heffernan, *The Melancholy Muse: Chaucer, Shakespeare and Early Medicine* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1995), 55.

⁶¹ Gentile da Foligno, *Consilia Gentilis*, qtd. in Olson, 59.

treatises and regimens. Like Gentile, Ugo Benzi frequently recommends conversation as a means of inducing cheerfulness. He adds, however, that such talk should take place “in beautiful and pleasant places, with delightful and sweet musical sounds,” evoking an entire pastoral setting reminiscent of the dream-vision in Chaucer’s poem.⁶²

The setting in which the narrator finds the Black Knight closely resembles that of the biblical Eden. As the narrator describes in great detail, the flowers are plentiful, the trees and their branches are perfectly proportioned to provide shade, and the diversity of beasts live in perfect harmony with one another. The narrator reports that the Eden-like garden, “had forgette the poverttee / That wynter, thorgh hys cold morwes, / Had mad hyt suffre, and his sorwes” (410-12). Within such a setting, the melancholy knight, wallowing in his sorrow, sits in stark contrast. He alienates himself from his companions who are participating in the sport of hunting, and refuses to move on—as the garden has—from the suffering of winter. When the narrator comes upon the Black Knight in the woods and greets him, the knight, entirely subsumed in his own thought, fails to respond at first. As the narrator remarks, the knight “spak noght, / But argued with his owne thoght . . . hys sorwe and hevvy thoght, / Made hym that he herde me noght” (503-04; 509-10). The narrator demonstrates a similar state of mind in the frame of the dream-vision, where we find him in the enclosed chambers of his bedroom trapped in the circularity of his own idle thoughts and sorrowful imagination, and plagued by melancholy and dread. Each character has fallen ill because of obsessive grief, and as a result, each becomes entirely disconnected from the outside world. The remedy to each character’s melancholic state, then, is to escape the circularity of his own mental world and to construct a dialogue that extends beyond the self.

⁶² Ugo Benzi, *Consilia Ugonis Senensis saluberrima ad omnes egritudines*, qtd. in Olson, 60.

As numerous scholars have already noted, the dreamer's probing questions effectively externalize the inner secrets of the Black Knight's mind.⁶³ Similarly, the narrator's empathetic engagement with the story of Seys and Alcyone productively translates his circular melancholia into an understanding, and subsequent correction, of his illness. How the dream functions as a remedy for the melancholy of the two central characters in the fictional world of the poem has already received a surplus of critical attention. What scholars have neglected, however, are the

⁶³ In order to make sense of the narrator's inability to understand that the Black Knight's lady is dead, many scholars have interpreted the narrator's behavior as contrived. T.S. Miller writes that "the narrator's lack of understanding [. . .] serves to draw out the black knight's story and to increase the pathos of the knight's sadness that the narrator cannot [at first] understand" ("Writing Dreams to Good: Reading as Writing and Writing as Reading in Chaucer's Dream Visions." *Style* 45, no. 3 [2012]: 528–548, [531]). Guillemette Bolens and Paul Bekman Taylor suggest that the dreamer's extraction of "a full exposition of the Black Knight's thought" culminates in a productive shift from the knight's "errant chess metaphor" to a "plain statement of a 'fact'" ("Chess, Clocks, and Counsellors in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*." *The Chaucer Review* 35, no.3 [2001]: 281-293, [283]). Robert A. Watson claims that the dreamer's goal is therapeutic: his inquiries are "intended to ease the knight's grief" ("Dialogue and Invention in the 'Book of the Duchess'." *Modern Philology* 98, no. 4 [2001], 543-573, [547]). Rosemarie McGerr proposes that "the dialogue that ensues between the dreamer and the man in black presents the debates of Machaut's two poems in a more unified form and revises them in the process" (*Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998], 51).

material and physiological dimensions of the fictional text itself on historical readers. This critical movement from the enclosed fictional world of the poem to the historical conditions in which it was written is supported by the double structure of the dream vision genre. The link between the vision account and the frame narrative underscores the continuity between the dream experience and the dreamer's waking life, just as it suggests on a deeper level the parallel between fiction and reality. Written within a culture of contagion, where social and environmental ties were insupportable, Chaucer's text served as not only a form of recreational and affective diversion, but also a willing partner with which readers could conversationally engage.

The Black Knight's emotional breakthrough at the conclusion of the poem illustrates the therapeutic benefits of sympathetic conversation. After the knight finds the words to verbalize the object of his melancholy, the hunt abruptly ceases, and the knight returns home to "A long castel with walles whyte" (1318). Christopher Burlinson states that "the allegorical comparison between human body and castle was a common trope in medieval writing, at least as far back as the thirteenth century."⁶⁴ Providing further information on this trope, Jonathan Gil Harris writes that disease in the medieval and early modern period was commonly "imaged as an invasion of man's 'castle of health,' through whose gates or pores the *spiritus mali* of infection . . . enter the body."⁶⁵ This long medieval tradition adds significance to the ending of the narrator's dream.

⁶⁴ Christopher Burlinson, *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 110.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29. Harris acknowledges that this conception of disease originates in well-established Galenic and religious

While the knight's location outside of the castle corresponds to his deeply melancholic and vulnerable state, his return to the castle can only occur after he has learned to manage his melancholy. The Black Knight's restored ability to take care of his body—i.e. regulate his bodily humors—manifests in the image of the castle. The white castle, therefore, represents his renewed health—in direct opposition to the black melancholy that defines him earlier—and his increased fortification against disease.

III

The issue of how readers generate meaning from texts was a matter of ongoing concern for medieval authors because the dissemination of a text meant that its significance was no longer under the complete control of the author, but rather subject to the interpretations of various readers. Responding to this anxiety, many authors attempted to reduce the possibilities of meaning by employing a closed hermeneutics, which restricted the power of readers to rewrite the text in their own image. In *The Book of the Duchess*, however, Chaucer relishes the inherent openness of texts in order to create a reciprocal dialogue with readers. This poem is replete with ambiguity, unresolvedness, abstractness, and other forms of vacancy that highlight its potential for multiple levels of meaning. In granting readers a space within his text, Chaucer adopts a

systems of representations; for example, that “sin penetrated the body through its orifices and pores” was a common medieval axiom (27). While the castle-as-body metaphor originates in archaic religious discourses, Harris demonstrates the ways in which this tradition continues into the early modern period with Sir Thomas Elyot's medical manual, *The Castel of Helthe*, and Edmund Spenser's Castle of Alma in *The Faerie Queene*.

reader-oriented aesthetic, where readers are invited to participate in the construction of meaning. This aesthetic is showcased by Chaucer's narrator who boasts, following the dream-vision, that no one will be capable of calculating the wonders of his dream; not even Joseph or Macrobeus, he claims, will be able to interpret it. Here, Chaucer sets up a provocation or challenge for readers to properly interpret the text, a challenge contingent upon readers' shared emotional suffering. By employing textual cues and models for reading within his poem, Chaucer guides readers through a therapeutic process informed by their unique affective experiences. Ultimately, Chaucer authorizes a textual approach founded on compassion and pity.

Chaucer demonstrates through his poem an awareness of the limitations of language—especially the metered, calculated language of poetry—in expressing matters of the heart. These limitations are realized in the moments of inexpressibility that permeate the poem. Robert Sturges has observed the ways in which medieval literature as a whole abounds in gaps that “require the reader's participation in supplying what is missing from the text.” Moreover, he claims that these works “insist upon their own incompleteness, upon the gaps that make interpretation not only possible but necessary.” As Sturges's claims indicate, the medieval reader assumes a crucial role in “making” the text that readers today are not ascribed. “The distinction between reading and writing,” Sturges continues, “cannot have been as clear as it seems to us.” Readers' additions to a text, whether it be in the form of marginalia, extended commentary, or a continuation of an “unfinished” tale, could become “a next text, to be interpreted and rewritten by new readers/writers.”⁶⁶ Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* fictionalizes this idea in the way the

⁶⁶ Robert S. Sturges, *Medieval Interpretation: Models of Reading in Literary Narrative, 1100-1500* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 2, 3-4.

text continues beyond its conclusion. The narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* begins as a reader, taking up the romance of Seys and Alcyone, but in the end becomes a writer: “Thoghte I, ‘Thys ys so queynt a sweven / That I wol, be processe of tyme, / Fonde to put this sweven in ryme / As I kan best, and that anoon’” (1330-1333). The text borne out of Chaucer’s poem suggests that the cycle will continue indefinitely among readers and writers alike. The formal incompleteness of Chaucer’s texts strongly evokes reader participation in finishing, or at least continuing, that which Chaucer has begun. This slippage between reader and writer suggests that Chaucer saw his readers as collaborators in the construction of an imaginative text.

It is not that readers evolve or develop into writers, but that these identities are mutually constituent. In the opening frame, the narrator—who cannot sleep due to his apathy and “sorwful ymagynacioun”—reads a romance, the tale of Seys and Alcyone, to “drive the night away.” Reading just a small part of the story, the narrator must pause to reflect on his unexpected emotional response: “Such sorowe this lady to her tok / That trewly I, that made this book, / Had such pittee and such rowthe” (95-97). Notably, the referent of the first-person “I” is highly ambiguous. The “I” most conceivably refers to the narrator, since it maintains consistency in the use of the first-person pronoun throughout the poem. Nevertheless, while the narrator—who at the conclusion of the poem claims that he will put his dream into rhyme—is allegedly the author of the poem contemporary readers are reading, the immediate referent in this passage appears to be the romance of Seys and Alcyone, and not the larger text in which it appears: *The Book of the Duchess*. Furthermore, the narrator explains beforehand that he is reading a book that had been written a long time ago by “clerkes” and “other poetes”; therefore, it would be absolutely impossible for him to be the author of the book—or, would it? Reading this line within the context of both medieval readers’ participatory approach to texts, as well as Chaucer’s dialogic

and open poetic style, this latter position becomes much more convincing. By implication then, the reader of the text consciously asserts his responsibility in making, or authoring, the text he is reading by means of his imaginative and affective contribution.

Several moments throughout the poem indicate a dissolution of the boundaries between the text and the reader, or the fictional and the actual. Perhaps the most obvious example of this occurs in the structure of the poem itself. The double structure characteristic of dream-vision poetry creates a parallel between fiction (represented by the dream) and waking life. The narrator's act of falling asleep on the book, in fact, serves as a dramatization of the continuity between the two. Rosemarie McGerr writes that "one might almost say that he fell into the book or into the world of the story, for that, in effect, is where he 'wakes up.'"⁶⁷ Furthermore, the presence of fictional audiences and readers within the poem necessarily implicates historical audiences. The boundary between the fictional and the actual breaks down as historical readers recognize a version of themselves being represented on the page.

Perhaps the most obvious dissolution of these boundaries, however, occurs when the narrator, or Chaucer-persona, breaks the "fourth wall" and addresses his audience directly. One example of this occurs within the tale of Seys and Alcyone as related by the narrator. When Juno's messenger arrives at Morpheus's cave, rather than repeat what the reader has overheard in the messenger's previous dialogue with Juno, the narrator cuts the messenger short and inserts a parenthetical aside to his readers: "'Juno bad thow shuldest goon'— / And tolde hym what he shulde doon / (As I have told you here-to-fore; / Hyt ys no nede rehearse hyt more)" (188-90).

⁶⁷ Rosemarie P. McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 48.

Here, Chaucer relies on his readers to remember the conversation between Juno and her messenger—that is, to supply the information that Chaucer intentionally leaves blank in the fiction. Another instance comes soon after when Alcyone dies from sorrow upon learning of her husband’s death. Again, the narrator interrupts the story to address his readers: “But what she sayede more in that swow / I may not telle yow as now; / Hyt were to longe for to dwelle” (215-17). By not elaborating on the lady’s sorrow here, Chaucer opens up a space for readers to empathize with the fictional character by way of their own personal affective experiences. At the same time, Chaucer makes clear that readers should not dwell too long in this state of mind. Rhetorically, these moments may indicate the limits of literature or the author’s inefficient telling of the story. I would propose, however, that these moments when the fiction breaks down or dissolves function as cues for readers to engage cognitively and imaginatively with the text, or otherwise to mold the poetry’s incomplete utterances to fit their own particular emotional experiences.

While some of these cues involve the author’s personal “I” communicating directly to the reader’s “you,” other instances are subtler. The use of the inexpressibility topos, for instance, functions as another such cue embedded in the text that engages readers in affective transactions. In the extensive process of describing his late beloved to the narrator, the Black Knight hits the limits of his lingual and cognitive capacities:

But which a visage had she thertoo!
Allas, myn herte ys wonder woo
That I ne kan discryven hyt!
Me lakketh both Englyssh and wit
For to undo hyt at the fulle;

And eke my spirites be so dule
So gret a thyng for to devyse.
I have no wit that kan suffise
To comprehende hir beaute. (895-903)

The Black Knight's inability to express the magnitude of his lady's beauty calls on his listener—and indirectly Chaucer's readers—to imaginatively complete that which the Black Knight had begun but failed to finish. By constructing an ideal, abstract, and unattainable persona, lacking in specificity and idiosyncrasy, Chaucer provides a confined space for readers to project onto the object of melancholy traits of the loved ones they have lost.

What connects all these moments is the quality of incompleteness. Inscribed throughout the poem are a series of beginnings that require endings. What constitutes a deferral for the text—namely, its failure to create a coherent whole—translates into a prophylactic for its readers. Through their engagement with the text, which serves as a transaction with the world beyond the self, readers undergo a process whereby their imaginative state no longer dwells on a single object, but is constantly subjected to various tasks put forth by the text.

IV

As we have seen, several of the imaginative cues left for the reader in the *Book of the Duchess* do not merely distract readers from their sorrow, but directly encourage sorrowful thinking in order for it to be mastered. One of the most recognizable moments where this happens includes the narrator's reluctance to dwell on Alcyone's sorrow. By no means does this emotionally potent moment provide mirth to readers, who were also fraught with sorrow and in constant remembrance of their lost loved ones. Reading of Alcyone's reaction to the news of her

husband's death moves the narrator so deeply—" [I] had swich pite and swich rowthe / To rede hir sorwe" (97-98)—that he must momentarily take pause. This passage demonstrates that the affective dimension of texts is not bounded to the page, but rather occurs as a transaction between reader and text.⁶⁸ Most likely the reader would have been reading the story aloud—as was common practice, even in private settings. During this process, the reader comes to inhabit the characters in the fiction, reading their lines, and expressing their sorrow, similar to the way that Morpheus (shortly hereafter) inhabits the body of King Seys.

The narrator's opening condition, marked by self-absorption, inattentiveness to the world around him, and lack of sympathy with others, is unexpectedly relieved through his reading of the tale of Seys and Alcyone. The narrator's reading experience prompts him to feel compassion and pity for the sorrow of another. This affective experience not only distracts him from his own sorrow, but also sets him up to learn from Alcyone's tragedy. The poem sets up a specific

⁶⁸ Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson discuss the passions as phenomena located both inside and outside the individual (as opposed to the modern view of emotion as merely an internal bodily state). Their capacity to cut across body and environment encourages a conceptual understanding of the passions as infectious ("Introduction: Reading the Early Modern Passions," in *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004], 1-20). Elsewhere, Floyd-Wilson and Garrett Sullivan have emphasized the "'ecological' nature of early modern conceptions of embodiment--the way in which the body is understood as embedded in a larger world with which it transacts" ("Introduction: Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World," in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007], 1-13).

comparison between the fate of Alcyone and that of the narrator. While the narrator is able to distance himself from his own sorrow by sympathizing with Alcyone and the Black Knight, Alcyone is not allowed that distance when confronted by the body of her dead husband. As a result, Alcyone is unable to develop any perspective on her grief. Tragically, Alcyone's experience remains one of death, whereas the reading experience of the narrator leads to a view of life that seeks to put an individual's sorrow into a larger context.

In response to the strong empathy ("rowthe") that the narrator experiences, he writes, "I ferde the worse al the morwe / After, to thenken on her sorwe" (99-100). "I ferde the worse" could be translated either as "I fared the worse" or "I feared the worse." In both cases, the thought of a fictional sorrow engenders psychosomatic degeneration for the reader.⁶⁹ Many plague treatises during the latter half of the fourteenth century warned against the emotion of fear because it made one more susceptible to illness and death. Jacme d'Agramont, a Catalan physician writing in 1348, discusses the nature and causes of pestilence and presents a preventive regimen organized according to the nonnaturals. In regards to the passions, Jacme emphasizes the dangerous effects of fear and the imagination.

It is evidently very dangerous and perilous in times of pestilence to imagine death and to have fear. No one, therefore, should give up hope or despair, because such fear only does great damage and no good whatsoever. For this reason also it is to be recommended that in such times no chimes and bells should toll in case of

⁶⁹ Although the MED confirms that "feared" would be the more likely translation of "ferde," it is not altogether clear what the narrator fears exactly.

death because the sick are subject to evil imaginings when they hear the death bells.⁷⁰

Due in part to treatises such as Jacme's, sanitary ordinances across Europe were issued to minimize the omnipresent feeling of death, whether it be the ringing of the death bell, or the wearing of mourning attire.

Nicholas de Burgo, a Florentine physician writing later in the century, also cautions against "the depressing effects of seeing and hearing nothing except what betokens death." He recommends that people avoid thinking and speaking of the sick and dead, and argues that fear and imagination are reasons why people do not recover once they have contracted the plague. Yet another treatise emphasizing the corporal effects of imagination claims that "simply thinking about the plague makes a person infected."⁷¹ Given these well-established views, it becomes clear why the narrator of Chaucer's poem should fear the emotions of sorrow and grief, or even fear imagining death in general. The apparition of dead relatives, such as the drowned body that appears before Alcyone, is precisely the kind of morbid imagination that the plague tracts are concerned about.⁷² It is quite telling that Alcyone dies from sorrow soon after the visitation of her dead husband's body. Contagion, therefore, manifests not just outside in the form of contaminated air, but in the imagination itself.

⁷⁰ Jacme d'Agramont, "Regimen of Protection against Epidemics of Pestilence and Mortality," trans. M. L. Duran-Reynals and C. -E. A. Winslow, *BHM*, 23 (1949): 57-89 (84-85).

⁷¹ Qtd. in Olson, 171.

⁷² Olson, 178.

Chaucer's approach in *The Book of the Duchess* is unexpected because it directly contradicts the common medieval remedy of curing illnesses by their contraries. For instance, a predominant remedy for warding off the poisonous vapors exuded by dead bodies during the pestilence involved inhaling sweet odors. For melancholia in particular, physicians consistently advised mirth, merriment, and recreation. The overwhelming and potentially fatal emotions generated by Chaucer's fiction, therefore, do not appear to align with the prophylactic prescribed by the text. However, this very fact—that readers' affective states potentially mirrored those of the characters in the text—provides an outlet for empathy that a majority of individuals surviving the pestilence would not have had the luxury to engage in. By filling in the imaginative gaps of certain characters' sorrow, readers enter into an affective dialogue that leads to consolation and productive mourning. At a time when the conditions of the plague necessitated a dissociation from other people, literature gave individuals a way of constructing imaginative communities, which enabled them to move on from self-consuming sorrow to productive mourning.

Amatory Contagion:

Humoral Entrainment in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*

In the *Confessio Amantis*, John Gower approaches the topic of love as a set of relations that extend from the microcosm to the macrocosm. A well-functioning polity is a city full of—and even driven by—affect. It follows from this that melancholy, too extends from the personal to the political. Gower's text assumes the ethical responsibility of representing an affectively charged moral reconstitution within its narrative frame. Towards this end, the figure of Genius plays a key role. Within the fiction, Gower employs Genius as a mechanism for teaching the melancholic Amans self-discipline and self-regulation. Genius is a textually embedded mechanism that nevertheless possesses the practical capacity to influence his pupil and thus to demonstrate Gower's ethical erotics to outside readers.

The corrective function of Genius in the *Confessio* has received persistent critical attention because the figure plays seemingly inconsistent roles: he is doubly commissioned to instruct Amans about love (as a priest of Venus) and about virtue (as an orthodox priest). Genius's seemingly paradoxical role is considered the source of the poem's most serious fault. An early formulation of this view comes from Gower's great editor, G. C. Macaulay. Macaulay observes that the "conception of a Confessor who as priest has to expound a system of morality,

while as a devotee of Venus he is concerned only with the affairs of love, can hardly be called altogether consistent." Scholars following Macaulay tend to agree that Genius's loyalties to Venus impede the moral program that he attempts to espouse as an orthodox priest. Thomas J. Hatton, for instance, argues that as a servant to Venus, Genius can provide Amans with only a limited perspective on the allegorical tales he tells. Similarly, Kurt Olsson argues that Genius's obligation and commitment to each side "makes him appear unsure in both." For Winthrop Wetherbee, the morals of the tales often serve merely as foils to Genius's intuitively more sympathetic response to the story he is telling. More recently, Matthew Irvin has argued that Genius usurps institutional roles in order to bypass prudence and instead promote errant, sensual reading.⁷³

⁷³ *The English Works of John Gower*, I, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), xix; Thomas J. Hatton, "The Role of Venus and Genius in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: A Reconsideration," *Greyfriar* 16 (1975): 29-40; Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 58; Winthrop Wetherbee, "Genius and Interpretation in the 'Confessio Amantis,'" in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske*, ed. Arthur Groos (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 241-60; and Matthew Irvin, "Genius and Sensual Reading in the *Vox Clamantis*," in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet: Language, Translation, and Tradition*, ed. Elisabeth Dutton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 196-205.

The various iterations of Macaulay's paradox assume that the fleshly values associated with Venus's natural love necessarily displace the spiritual values championed by Christianity.⁷⁴ I would like to suggest, as an alternative to this long authoritative tradition, that Genius's two roles within the text are not incompatible after all. The affective dimensions of Genius's moral instruction illuminate Gower's "middel weie" as not only a stylistic choice—"Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore"—but also a therapeutic one. The title of Gower's work, translated from the Latin as *The Lover's Confession*, indicates a potentially dangerous subject matter for medieval readers. Love was discussed by medieval Galenic authors under the category of *accidentia animae*, or "accidents of the soul." Considered the sixth of the non-natural factors of health and disease—alongside environment, food, sleep, exercise, and evacuation—the accidents of the soul could easily lead to disease (e.g. Amans's love-sickness) and death if not properly moderated. Alternating between fiction (pleasure) and moral instruction (utility), Gower's text prevents readers from becoming too enveloped in their own affective responses to the tales. The

⁷⁴ For further interpretations following this strain of criticism see in particular E.C. Knowlton, "Genius as an Allegorical Figure," *Modern Language Notes* 39 (1924): 89-95; John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964); Paul M. Clogan, "From Complaint to Satire: The Art of the *Confessio Amantis*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 4 (1973): 217-22; Anne Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II," *Speculum* 53 (1978): 94-114; David W. Hiscoe, "The Ovidian Comic Strategy of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Philological Quarterly* 64 (1985): 367-85; and R. F. Yeager, "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other': The Page as Sign in the Work of John Gower," *Text* 3 (1987): 251-67.

consistent organizational structure of the confessional form conditions readers to moderate their passions and maintain physiological balance—a necessary state for attaining virtue.

Beyond the overall structure of Gower's text, the fictional scenarios provided by Genius trigger emotions that align with his moral prerogative. Gower's adaptations of classic tales guide readers' affective responses in accordance with the moral Genius is attempting to prescribe. This ultimately enables Amans—in the way he engages with and experiences Genius's affective hermeneutic—to take personal responsibility for his own moral transformation. Consequently, Genius diverges from the diegetic ethics commonly characterizing "moral Gower," and instead, guides Amans's virtue vicariously. In other words, it is not simply Genius's moralizing after each tale that leads to Amans's spiritual and physical well-being. Rather, Amans's virtue is shaped imaginatively in the way he experiences the feelings and actions of the characters in Genius's tales. Amans's absolution at the end of Book VIII signifies a newfound capacity to coordinate relationships affectively within both social and spiritual communities. In a world where bodies and environments were in constant communication with one another, proprioception played a key role in preventing these transactions from degenerating into moral and physical contagion—a state which defines the world of the opening Prologue.

In what follows I propose that the moral and ethical program put forward in Gower's *Confessio* is not only consistent with Genius's affective pedagogy, but is in fact predicated upon it. I will develop this claim over the course of four sections. In the first, I consider the contentious and melancholic world that Gower introduces in the Prologue. As Gower makes clear, disorder pervades all levels of the community, from individual physiology, to social, environmental, and political relations. Gower's conceptualization of the world as a set of affective relations gone awry establishes the prescriptive mechanism driving the *Confessio*

Amantis proper. In other words, the disorder identified in the Prologue defines the prescription set forth in the textual hermeneutic that follows. The text's therapeutic prerogative nourishes the idea that it is the ethical responsibility of each individual to regulate his own humoral constitution in accordance with universal natural law. Conceivably, the embodied reading practices supported by Gower's literary text engender health and re-establish the social bonds that have been broken. In the second section, I locate the precise point of connection between medicine and moral philosophy in Galenic humoral theory, particularly the accidents of the soul (commonly referred to simply as "the passions"). Explicating the interrelatedness between disease and sin, which emerges from the Christianization of Greco-Roman medical philosophy, connects Genius's two roles as servant to both the soul and the flesh. In the third section, I place Gower's *Confessio* within the penitential tradition. Penitential manuals emerged as a popular genre in late medieval England, and the embodied reading practices that they encouraged were thought to induce spiritual and physical well-being. Heavily influenced by this genre, Gower creates a virtual confessional that equips readers to independently stave off both sin and disease. The fourth section focuses on Gower's compositional strategy for mediating affective experiences through his fictional tales. Specifically, I will discuss how Gower adapts these fictions in order to direct readers' empathy in accordance with the moral of the tale. I will treat two tales from Book I—"The Trump of Death" and "The Tale of Narcissus"—as case studies demonstrating how the *Confessio* enables readers to take personal responsibility for their own affective, and concomitantly, moral transformation.

I

The Prologue to Gower's *Confessio Amantis* highlights the various manifestations of disorder plaguing England. Covering the realms of the State, the Church, and the Commons, Gower locates an affective disjuncture that spans across microcosm and macrocosm. His conceptualization of the present state of England rejects unidirectional causative links between microcosm and macrocosm, and instead draws on wider patterns of subjectivity. The model of affective experience established in the Prologue demonstrates the endurance of Aristotelian and Galenic understandings of the passions as psycho-physiological events. The Latin phrase *accidentia animae*, translated literally as "the things that happen to the soul," refers to the functions of the soul as related to embodied human life, rather than to Platonic or theological notions of the immortal soul. The accidents of the soul, therefore, were conceived as part of an interlinked set of exchanges between the body and the environment.

Aligning with medieval regimens of health and plague treatises, Gower rejects the notion that the passions were forces of nature to which individuals were subject; rather, he posits that individuals had some agency in moderating their passions, and hence, their "wel" and "wo."⁷⁵

For after that we falle and rise,
The world arist and falth withal,
So that the man is overal
His oghne cause of wel and wo.
That we fortune clep so

⁷⁵ Gower's rejection of fortune and emphasis on human responsibility are stressed by George R. Coffman, "John Gower in his Most Significant Role," in *Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays in Honor of George R. Reynolds* (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1945), 52-61.

Out of the man himself it groweth. (Pro. 544-49)

This passage responds to the common medieval viewpoint that mankind's fortunes are the product of a metaphysical, arbitrary force outside of his control. In medieval and early modern literature, this force was typically personified by the figure of Fortune and her wheel. Here, Fortune's wheel is transcribed onto the human body, suggesting that the two entities are actually one-in-the-same; therefore, the power mortals attribute to fortune emerges, in fact, out of man himself. The motion of falling and rising commonly associated with Fortune's revolving wheel corresponds with the motions of the human soul, fluctuating between passive and active states. Furthermore, the word "wel"—which according to the Middle English Dictionary would have been pronounced the same as "wheel"—simultaneously gestures toward both mankind's well-being and Fortune's wheel. This passage creates an image in which the entities representing the microcosm and macrocosm are fused in order to suggest the reciprocal nature of their impact on one another. The cause of health and disease, then, lies neither solely in the individual nor his surrounding environment, but in how each individual chooses to inhabit his environment.

Drawing on medieval natural philosophy, Gower emphasizes the fluidity between the physiology of the human body and its metaphysical correlative. He stresses the interdependence of the macrocosm and microcosm through the idea that human nature itself is the fundamental embodiment of discord.

Thus of his propre qualité
The man, as telleth the clergie,
Is as a world in his partie,
And whan this litel world mistorneth,
The grete world al overtorneth.

. . .

Therwhile himself stant out of herre,

The remenant wol noght acorde.

And in this wise, as I recorde,

The man is cause of alle wo,

Why this world is divided so. (Pro. 954-966)

Within medieval metaphysics, a disordered body manifests as a disordered world. The conflicting elements comprising man's humoral disposition necessitate a certain proclivity towards diversity, disunity, and continual strife. This concept is expanded upon at great length in Book VII, where Gower demonstrates a masterful handling of the medieval Aristotelian system. The section editorially deemed, "Four-Fold Creation," reflects upon the orderliness of the universe in which everything falls into patterns and correspondences, extending from the highest levels of creation to the lowest. In the Latin verses that head this discussion, for instance, man's constitution is intimately linked to the constitution of the universe:

Quatuor omnipotens elementa creauit origo,

Quatuor et venti partibus ora dabat.

Nostraque quadruplici complexio sorte creatur,

Corpore sicque suo stat variatus homo.

[The omnipotent Beginning created the four elements and gave mouths to the regions of the four winds. Our constitution too is fashioned in a four-fold manner, and thus in his body man exists in a varied state.]

In a deeper sense, the subsection on the “Four Complexions” demonstrates how each element corresponds to a particular humor and disposition, as well as a bodily organ: the Melancholic corresponds to earth and is seated in the spleen; the Phlegmatic corresponds to water and is seated in the lungs; the Sanguine corresponds to air and is seated in the liver; and the Choleric corresponds to fire and dwells in the gall. As these discussions indicate, the microcosm is tightly imbricated in the macrocosm: the circulation of the blood (microcosm) is likened to the flowing of water (macrocosm); and the hierarchy of the organs—with the heart at the apex—imitates the organization of the state (VII. 246–47; VII. 463–89). The inherent fluidity connecting man to the rest of the world suggests that mankind has a collective responsibility for the state of the world and that individuals contribute their own peace or discord to the human community at large. Just as humans have the capacity to generate disorder in the macrocosm, they also have the potential for generating collective harmony and peace.

Humans have a place in this system of physical and natural laws, both in the way their physical beings are constituted and in the way they influence (or are influenced by) the celestial spheres. Human beings differ from other elements of creation in their complexity, both as a species and as individuals. While there are many different kinds of humans—the melancholic, the phlegmatic, the sanguine, the choleric—every other element of the universe is described as having a single and undiversified “kind.” Because humans are divided in themselves, subject to the influence of their different complexions and different organs, they “mai stonde upon no sekerness” (VII. 400). Returning to this theme in the Prologue, Gower writes:

For the contraire of his astat
Stant evermor in such debat,
Til that o part be overcome,

Ther may no final pes be nome.

...

Bot for ther is diversité

Withinne himself, he may nocht laste,

That he ne deieth ate laste. (Pro. 979–990)

In drawing attention to human beings as embodiments of discord, Gower stresses the frailty of the human condition, especially its mortality. While this frailty is a somewhat painful acknowledgement on the microcosmic level, its extended influence on the macrocosmic level nevertheless offers a compromise. Commenting on this passage, Richard Hillman writes that “this is commonplace medieval science and theology, but Gower makes more than conventional use of it in developing the healing of Amans as a paradigm that may lead to collective peace.”⁷⁶ Therefore, it is through the acknowledgement of the universal human condition that order can be achieved. More than merely reflections of one another, the microcosm and macrocosm, as conceived in the Prologue, interpenetrate one another. On one hand, man’s embodied condition subjects him to the malign forces of the natural environment, which have the capacity to modify the complexion of an individual. On the other hand, the environment is more than an influential

⁷⁶ Richard Hillman, “Shakespeare’s Gower and Gower’s Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of *Pericles*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (1985): 433. On the connection between the macrocosm of the prologue and the microcosm of the *Confessio* proper see also Jane Chance Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975) and Michael Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1987).

site of discord; it is also very much informed by man's own pre-existing incontinence. Under this conception, the boundaries that seem to separate microcosm and macrocosm are in fact porous and permeable. The solution to discord then, does not lie solely in the individual, but in individual efforts to ameliorate or modify the transactional relationship between body and environment. In other words, the solution lies in recognizing the self as embedded in a larger world with which it transacts, and subsequently coordinating the body properly to the various affective landscapes one finds oneself in.⁷⁷

According to Gower, the key to resolving dissidence and confusion is for humans to keep their humors in proper harmony by negotiating proper affective relations with their surroundings. A primary argument put forth in the Prologue is that human beings share common ground with all forms of life. This idea has its roots in Aristotle's account of man's tripartite soul in *De Anima*. Working from the observation that all matter is ensouled, Aristotle constructs three degrees of soul: the vegetative (plants), sensitive (all animals), and intellective (human beings). In his formulation, the higher soul (intellective) builds upon and enfolds the souls lower than it on the scale of being (sensitive and vegetative), creating a complex embeddedness for humankind who possesses all three. Gower explains that man's nature is angelical: "And lich to beste he hath felinge"; "And liche to trees he hath growinge"; "the stones ben and so is he" (Pro. 951-53). Evoking the Great Chain of Being, the poet locates humankind's resonances with beings on all levels of the hierarchically-structured chain—from its apex with the angels, all the

⁷⁷ See *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, eds. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). While this critical work focuses on the early modern period, it discusses a conceptual paradigm that dates back to Galen.

way down to the most meager of beings, such as stones, which barely escape nonexistence. Paul Strohm has claimed that the Prologue addresses the need for hierarchical order in man and the state, while Dorothea Siegmund-Schultze finds inconsistencies in Gower's social ideology, which oscillates back and forth between aristocratic and bourgeoisie partisanship.⁷⁸ These critical perspectives assume that Gower's interest lies in the distinctiveness of beings comprising the hierarchically-structured universal order. As Gower presents it, however, this worldview emphasizes the commonality among all beings on the chain as fundamental to its coherency as a systematic scheme of the universe. The passage above, then, in demonstrating the ways in which humans share with the diversity and plenitude of the universe, is meant to encourage humans to form sympathetic bonds with other beings as a potential remedy to the division and strife currently plaguing them.

Gower's three major poems—*The Mirour de l'Omme*, the *Vox Clamantis*, and the *Confessio Amantis*—have often been considered as one continuous work by modern scholars because, in them, Gower recurrently explores the individual's responsibility within the larger social context. In his various critiques of the commonweal, Gower steadfastly emphasizes the responsibility of each member of society to the other. Russell Peck has observed that Gower's social commentary is insistent upon the correlation between social criticism and personal ethics. He writes that Gower “seems always mindful of man as a double entity, both social and individual. When exploring man's individual psyche he turns to metaphors of state; when

⁷⁸ Paul Strohm, “Form and Social Statement in *Confessio Amantis* and *The Canterbury Tales*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 1 (1979): 17-40; Dorothea Siegmund-Schultze, “John Gower und seine Zeit,” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 3 (1955): 5-71.

criticizing the state he conceives of a common body . . . the key to Gower's encyclopedic moral philosophy is 'comun profit,' by which he means the mutual enhancement, each by each, of all parts of a community for the general welfare of that community taken as a whole."⁷⁹ Gower dramatizes this philosophy in his critique of the Church.

The invocation of the pastoral setting and the parable of the sheep is particularly conducive to his project of affective negotiation because it is a trope conventionally characterized by man and nature living in perfect harmony with one another. It is also reminiscent of biblical teachings, which linked the true lover to a shepherd protecting his flock from wolves (false lovers). The story we get, however, draws on a horrifying perversion of this trope. The shepherds, symbolic of clergymen, approach their sheep with anything but pastoral care: rather than corralling, the shepherds "forcacche"; rather than peacefully grazing on the open pastures, the sheep are forced "Into the breres" (Pro. 409). The shepherds exploit their sheep for economic gain, plucking their wool without restraint and using their staffs to beat the sheep, rather than to ward off the hungry wolves. Gower paints a picture that encourages readers to sympathize with the sheep who are left naked and abused. Preoccupied with worldly goods, representatives of the Church have abandoned their spiritual duties, perpetuating sin and disease through self-love, rather than generating charitable love (*caritas*) among their congregation. As a result, the shepherds are not only inept at protecting their flock; they have themselves become the wolves.

⁷⁹ Russell Peck, *Kingship and the Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale: Southern University Press, 1978), xxi.

The conclusion to the Prologue creates a sense of urgency in the quest to find someone with the power to reinstate peace in the world. Gower nostalgically muses on Arion who “hadde an harpe of such temprure, / And therto of so good mesure / He song” (Pro. 1055-57). The tune of Arion’s music tamed wild beasts and set predators at peace with their prey.

And every man upon this ground
Which Arion that time herde,
Als wel the lord as the schepherde,
He broghte hem alle in good acord;
So that the comun with the lord,
And lord with the comun also,
He sette in love both tuo
And putte away melencholie.
That was a lusti melodie,
Whan every man with other low. (Pro. 1062-71)

Within the Neoplatonic tradition, music was thought to produce the harmony of the soul, as an echo of the harmony of the heavenly spheres. Behind this vision of the world—governed by harmony and divine sound—lay the simple notion that music was a remedy or curative for the sickness of the soul, particularly melancholia. Listening to harmonious music placed individuals under the government of the greater harmony of the heavenly spheres, making them not only attuned to each other, but to the entire cosmos. Boethius takes up this theme in *De institutione musica*, where he maintains that Pythagoras could inspire *enkrateia*, or continence, with music. Boethius illustrates this through a story about Pythagoras who encounters an intoxicated youth one night while contemplating the heavens. The frenzied youth was about to set fire to the house

of a rival who had locked himself in the house with a harlot. When Pythagoras learned that this youth—under the influence of the Phrygian mode—would not be stopped from his crime, even by the admonitions of his friends, he ordered that the mode be changed; and thus Pythagoras restored the frenzied mind of the boy to a state of absolute calm through spondaic melody.⁸⁰ From this story, Boethius confirms that song has the capacity to drastically curb and/or redirect the affections of both the body and the spirit. The passions can never be completely stifled; instead, the key to “curing” the passions is to curb one affect with another in order to maintain proper balance. The “lusti melodie” that puts the listeners in “good acord,” for Gower, simultaneously drives “away melencholie” as it conduces every man to laugh with his brother. The regret, however, lies in the fact that a musician is needed with the capacity to unite a divided people. Ostensibly, the ideal ruler would take the form of God or a king (namely, King Richard). As a humble poet, Gower admits: “I may noight strecche up to the hevene / Min hand, ne setten al in evene / This world, which evere is in balance (I. 1-3). And yet, by writing on a theme appropriate to a poet—love—Gower creates a literary work with the potential to restore order in the world.⁸¹ The universal sympathy provoked by Gower’s fictional compilation not only aligns

⁸⁰ Boethius, *De institutione musica [Fundamentals of Music]*, trans. Calvin M. Bower (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 5.

⁸¹ The idea that God, priests, kings, and poets were like physicians in their capacity to heal was a common medieval trope.

with the overarching order established by the Creator, but also enables readers to realize their own personal sense of government within the larger context of the commonweal.⁸²

II

As we have seen in the Prologue to the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower views the disorderly state of England in pathological terms; that is, he identifies the diseased conditions of the social organism. The metaphorical application of the organic body that pervaded medieval political discourse was imbued with cosmic significance. For medieval writers, this organic political analogy was grounded within a system of correspondences between the body of man (the microcosm) and the larger universe (macrocosm). Within this organic metaphor, it makes sense that social disfunction would manifest as illness. Writers of the period, therefore, concerned themselves with the maintenance of the social organism, posing theories about the cause and possible cures for the body politic's illness. Gower's perception that the very fabric of human

⁸² For critical perspectives on the figure of Arion see Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion* and James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 289, who both argue that Gower himself takes on the role of the new Arion. Conversely, Peter Nicholson claims that Gower renounces the role of healer and reconciler and intends the new Arion to take the form of young King Richard (*Love & Ethics in Gower's Confessio Amantis* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005], 123). Most similar to my own view, Russel Peck advocates that "the kingly model becomes the standard for every man, as Amans, sobered by age, realizes his own personal sense of kingship and domain within the larger context of common profit" (*Kingship and the Common Profit*, 12).

society was swiftly unravelling seems to have been one shared by his contemporaries. In his “Lak of Stedfastnesse,” Chaucer similarly laments that in these chaotic times “the world hath mad a permutacioun / Fro right to wrong, fro trouthe to fikelness.”⁸³ By the time Gower began writing the *Confessio*, England had already survived three crippling plagues (1349, 1361, 1369) and continued to live under the constant threat of recurrent outbreaks. “But worse than the plagues,” Russell Peck writes, “was the plethora of human pestilences . . . where men greedily turn themselves into beasts to despoil their own land.”⁸⁴ According to Peck, singular profit at the expense of the commonweal characterized secular—and to an even larger extent ecclesiastical—leadership and contributed greatly to the social and ideological instability of the late fourteenth century. Beyond the figurative sense in which Peck means it here, “human pestilence” illuminates the tightly imbricated nature of sin and disease within medieval thought. Tracing back to the Christianization of Greco-Roman medicine, this fusion of spiritual and bodily health provides the ideological foundation upon which Gower’s moral and affective program rests.

The connection between illness and morality has its origins in Greco-Roman medicine.⁸⁵ Greco-Roman doctors, Galen among them, believed in a humoral system wherein an individual

⁸³ *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 19-20.

⁸⁴ Peck, *Kingship and the Common Profit*, xi. The image Peck creates here is strangely reminiscent of the pastoral scene in Gower’s Prologue to the *Confessio* (see p. 13 of this chapter).

⁸⁵ I am indebted to the works of Oswei Temkin for providing the background on Greco-Roman medicine and the Christianization of that system. See in particular, *Galenism: Rise and Decline*

could maintain his or her health through the practice of *sophrosyne*, or moderation. Both a mental and physical regimen, *sophrosyne* was thought to be a promising method for keeping the humors in balance. As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the humoral system depended on a series of physical correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The microcosm consisted of the four bodily humors: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Each of these four humors then, reflected the elements of the macrocosm: air, water, earth, and fire, respectively. The humors also had certain qualities that defined them: blood was hot and wet, phlegm was cold and wet, black bile was cold and dry, and yellow bile was hot and dry. The fact that the nature of the microcosm relates intimately to the nature of the macrocosm has significant implications for the physical well-being of man, the “*homo* world,” who contains within himself the four elements that also make up the macrocosm. In order to maintain within himself the perfect harmony that characterizes the macrocosm, man needed to attune his medicinal, hygienic, and dietary regimens to the movements of the heavenly bodies. A lack of balance among the four humors engendered sickness.⁸⁶ In order to restore balance and health to

of a Medical Philosophy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973) and *Hippocrates in a World of Pagans and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). Temkin argues conclusively that Galen and Hippocrates were the leading medical authorities throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period.

⁸⁶ Drawing on Hildegard of Bingen’s *Of Causes and Cures*, Jennifer Radden claims that “mental disorders such as melancholy reflect instability in the person’s system of humors, but ultimately that instability is attributable to original sin. Hildegard’s writing on melancholy includes the supposition that melancholy afflicted Adam after his sin, and that such melancholy was a type

the body, Galen suggests the application of qualitative contraries (otherwise known as “cure by contraries”). Galen provides a clear explanation of this principle in the *Tegni*:

One fundamental mode of healing is to introduce the opposite (*contrarium*) of that which is to be corrected; all causes promoting health are of this mode . . . For if everything that is ill-proportioned (*immoderatum*) is contrary to nature, and everything that is moderate is in accord with nature, then nature requires that everything immoderate be restored to moderation (*ad moderatum reduci*) by something which is equally ill-proportioned in the contrary direction.⁸⁷

As an example, if a patient’s illness were caused by an imbalance of phlegm, which is cold and wet, he or she would need to counteract that humor with its opposite, yellow bile. Therefore, the patient would need to take a prescription composed of hot and dry ingredients. Within this humoral-based medical system, humans are inherently connected to the natural elements because these elements—not germs—influence health.

Lacking any concept of viruses or bacteria as causes of illness, medieval doctors reasoned that because health, according to Galen, results from controlling the passions through moderation, it follows that immoderate behaviors caused certain illnesses. At the most basic

likely to cause illness and disease; indeed, it is possible to read her passage about Adam’s state so as to *identify* melancholy with original sin, thus rendering melancholy part of the human condition” (80). See *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. Jennifer Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸⁷ Qtd. in Joel Kaye, *A History of Balance, 1250-1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and its Impact on Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 162-63.

level, the Christianization of Greco-Roman medical philosophy involved layering sin on top of the notion of *sophrosyne*. One's capacity to control the passions—in their psychophysiological form—is bound up with the concepts of sin and redemption. Under the influence of the Church, the humors functioned as a site for understanding an individual's emotional and moral state, as well as his or her physical constitution. Each of the dominant humors corresponded to an emotional state which, if indulged to excess, could lend itself to sin. As Bryon Lee Grigsby elaborates, "being phlegmatic may lead to the sin of idleness, being sanguine may lead to the sins of lust and overindulgence, being choleric may lead to the sin of covetousness, and being melancholic may lead to the sins of deceit and envy."⁸⁸ Following the Fall, the humors amalgamated, resulting in four defective and corrupted temperaments—i.e. four distinct manifestations of original sin.⁸⁹ The ability to regulate and balance adulterate humors brought human beings closer to the spiritual and physical constitution characterizing the divine.

Just as immoderate behaviors could lead to illness, certain sins—from a Christian perspective—could cause illnesses. For example, sins such as lechery and envy engendered leprosy, and the universal sins of melancholy and pride allegedly brought about the bubonic plague.⁹⁰ "Because of Galen's association of immoderation with illness and because of

⁸⁸ Bryon Lee Grigsby, *Pestilence in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 36.

⁸⁹ See F. László Földényi. *Melancholy*. Trans. Tim Wilkinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

⁹⁰ Because plague was a disease that struck countless people, contemporaries interpreted the disease as a punishment for pride, which was considered an all-encompassing sin. See also

medicine's growing part in Christian theology," Grigsby writes, "medieval medical doctors developed theories that argued that some illnesses reflected immoral states." In this way, the relationship between spiritual and corporal illness served as not merely a metaphor, but a literal truth.⁹¹ For example, when medieval people stated that envy caused leprosy, they meant that this

Földényi, who argues that "melancholia was not an attribute of the individual, but of the genus humankind, and was born when the Tree of Knowledge was robbed. The consequences of melancholia are sorrow and despair, since humankind is incapable of forgetting paradise" and "it automatically extends to everybody." "In the case of melancholics," Földényi continues, "the sin is double, since in addition to the collective original sin, they are weighed down by individual sin."

⁹¹ Countless scholars have cited the connection between spiritual and bodily health in the Middle Ages. See Peregrine Horden, *Hospitals and Healing from Antiquity to the Later Middle Ages* (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate Variorum, 2008); Bryon Lee Grigsby, "Medical Misconceptions," in *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages* ed. Stephen Harris (New York: Routledge, 2008), 142-150; Jennifer C. Vaught, *Rhetorics of Bodily Disease and Health in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard, *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins* (Woodbridge, England: York Medieval Press, 2012); Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler, *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2001); and Martha Bayless, *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

sin literally caused leprosy. Consequently, if a certain form of moral transgression was thought to cause illness, then the only way to alleviate illness would be to correct the moral failings of an individual or of a community. Here it is worth noting that the concept of illness extends beyond the individual to characterize the moral state of a community. In other words, the same terms that would apply to the state of an individual soul could also apply to a community at large. Sin, then, functions as a practical mechanism for explaining the spread of disease. Elaborating on the example of envy above: “A person who is envious can threaten the stability and health of the community; therefore, God identifies him or her as a threat through the sign of the disease, and it is the people’s responsibility to recognize the sign . . . and remove the person from the community.”⁹² In other words, the symptoms of disease signaled divine punishment. God’s instantaneous visible punishment for the invisible sin of lechery takes the form of disfiguring sores. Similarly, the epidemics of bubonic plague that swept through Europe in the Middle Ages afflicted their victims with buboes, or, as they came to be called, “God’s tokens.”⁹³ In this sense,

⁹² Grigsby, 22-23.

⁹³ See Jonathan Gil Harris, “(Po)X Marks the Spot: How to ‘Read’ ‘Early Modern’ ‘Syphilis’ in *The Three Ladies of London*,” in *Sins of the Flesh: Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Kevin Siena (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005): 109-132. Harris writes: “Pathological spots figure prominently in the Judeo-Christian iconography of God’s scourging of innocent as well as sinful souls. The catch-all term ‘plague,’ deriving from the Latin ‘plaga,’ strike or blow, was employed as a conventional figure for God’s punishment of individual and communal sins” (121).

immoral behavior itself was a contagion, and only when individuals renounced sin could they help eliminate the epidemic diseases that threatened to destroy society.

While God possessed the power to inflict disease as a punishment to individuals who transgressed his law, he also produced the salve that would redeem them. The image of *Christus Medicus* identifies Christ as not only the savior of souls, but also the healer of bodies.⁹⁴ In *On Christian Doctrine* (c. 396), Saint Augustine writes about how Christ attends to the sinner's wounds as would a doctor, by sometimes applying contrary elements. Because man fell from grace through the sin of pride, Augustine points out, God acted like a doctor when he applied the contrary, humility, as the cure.⁹⁵ Both spiritual and medical doctors cured by using the opposites or contraries in order to establish a balance. The balance that the spiritual doctor attempted to achieve, therefore, aligned closely with the one Galen attempted in his medical work. Just as Christ, the apostles, and saints before them, priests also assumed the esteemed role of healers. Because the health of the body reflected the health of the soul, priests tended to both.⁹⁶ No

⁹⁴ Medical historian Vivian Nutton writes that Christianity has always been “a healing religion *par excellence*” (5). See “From Galen to Alexander: Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity,” in *Symposium on Byzantine Medicine*, ed. John Scarborough, Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 38 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1983).

⁹⁵ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 15.

⁹⁶ Citing an anonymous medical miscellany from the fifteenth century, Joseph Ziegler paraphrases, “the body follows the soul when it is disturbed,” and “the soul follows the body in its accidents” (Joseph Ziegler, “Introduction,” in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, 6).

secular institution yet existed for training and making available medical practitioners; consequently, most medical learning occurred in monasteries, and the Church held the responsibility for administering medical care to the community.⁹⁷ In a world where sin and disease were analogous, the institution of the Church functioned as a hospital responsible for treating diseases both of the body and the soul.⁹⁸ As mediators between human beings and the Godhead, the clergymen offered parishioners cures in the form of confession and penance. As Gower keenly recognized, however, the Church's ubiquitous authority over all matters of health made it prone to corruption. Many of these so-called representatives of God possessed the power not only to proffer antidotes, but to disseminate the seeds of pestilence as well.

III

The curative qualities associated with penance and penitential manuals emerge out of Galenic ideology. Within his medical philosophy, Galen posited that health was the responsibility of each individual. Placing health in the hands of the masses, Galen's writings initiated a paradigm shift

⁹⁷ Before 1423, when the first medical university in England was established, medical training was only offered as minor course of study. See Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 18.

⁹⁸ Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa writes: "During the medieval period . . . the inseparability of bodily and spiritual concerns was paramount, as displayed in the Church's dominance over all issues concerning sickness, health, life, death, and the salvation of all individual souls" (1). See the introduction to *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015).

in the late Middle Ages, in which the preservation of the body was linked to the intrinsic nature and daily activities of, as well as the particular circumstances surrounding, the individual. As a counterpart to this trend, specialized treatises describing the basics of health and hygiene found their way into several vernaculars and gradually became available to educated laypeople throughout Europe. As a result, individuals began turning to written sources to address their physical and hygienic needs. These readers increasingly believed that information bound in manuscripts or books could provide remedies, relief, and some sense of control over the conditions of their bodies.⁹⁹ Penitential handbooks, or manuals, represent just one literary form that participated in this paradigm shift.

In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council made confession obligatory for all Catholics. In order to enforce the practice of confession the medieval Church had to educate the populace so that they could take full advantage of their confessions. To assist with this task, England generated a large number of texts for lay instruction to teach medieval penitents how to present themselves in confession. As Leonard Boyle notes, “Within fifty years of the council there was a profusion of episcopal or synodal constitutions all over Europe and a remarkable array of manuals of confession, *summae* of moral teaching, expositions of the Ten Commandments, compendia of vices and virtues, collections of sermons and sermon exempla, and general manuals of the

⁹⁹ Michael Solomon, *Fictions of Well-Being: Sickly Readers and Vernacular Medical Writing in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

pastoral care, in Latin and in various vernaculars.”¹⁰⁰ This call for lay (and vernacular) education produces a situation in which the literate laity were taking the clergy’s words right out of their mouths.¹⁰¹ According to Jerry Root, vernacular confessional manuals of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries aimed to “delineate a model of self-scrutiny and a corresponding formula for self-presentation into which the individual penitent inserted him or herself in confession.”¹⁰² By the late fourteenth century, however, the “laicization” of English religious writing, including the Bible, became an act of anticlericalism supported by the Lollards (or Wycliffites). The Wycliffites endeavored to shape Christian identity through instruction (via scriptural texts, exegesis, etc.). One main aspect of Lollard reform involved replacing the authority of the established Church with the authority of Scripture. Another component concerned the rejection of auricular confession. Although confession to a priest had been required of all church members annually since the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, the Lollards claimed that a spoken confession was not necessary to the health of the soul.

The production of penitential manuals, in particular, emphasized a relationship with the text unmediated by clerical authority. Allen J. Frantzen claims that penitential handbooks,

¹⁰⁰ Leonard Boyle, “Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology,” in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas Heffernan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 30-43 (31).

¹⁰¹ Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 12.

¹⁰² Jerry Root, “*Space to speke*”: *The Confessional Subject in Medieval Literature*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 1.

“Collectively amplified the penitential’s emphasis on the individual and his need to assume responsibility for his spiritual welfare.”¹⁰³ Ostensibly, the penitential sought to provide a better life for the penitent, both spiritually and physically. In John T. McNeill’s influential essay on medicine in the penitentials, he writes that

the penitent was regarded as one morally diseased and ill, and his treatment is, in the penitentials, repeatedly, even habitually, referred to as the task of the moral physician. His sins are the symptoms of disease. The penalties enforced are “*medicamenta*,” “*remedia*,” “*fomenta*”—measures designed to restore his moral and spiritual health.¹⁰⁴

In other words, penance served less as a punishment, and more as a restorative. Indeed, penance is what one pays for an immoderate life; however, penitentials had the simultaneous effect of providing balance to one’s life, much like the Galenic doctors of the Greco-Roman period. As McNeill states, “in large degree the Penitentials seek to recover to the offender a balanced state of mind. There is nothing that impresses itself more upon the student of the Penitentials than their moderation.”¹⁰⁵ Penitential manuals served not merely didactic or catechetical purposes, therefore, but also therapeutic ones in their capacity to evoke psychophysiological effects in their readers. Many were committed to the idea that texts could animate readers by kindling faith. In

¹⁰³ Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 13.

¹⁰⁴ John T. McNeill, “Medicine for Sin as Prescribed in the Penitentials,” *Church History* 1.1 (1932): 14-26 (14).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

particular, the habitual absorption of scripture was thought to enhance bodily as well as spiritual health so that even when God's word wounded sinners by chastising them, it did so in order to ultimately encourage healing. The experience of passionate feeling through reading, therefore, confirmed the worshippers' sincerity, especially their willingness to repent, and permitted reintegration into a Christian community. This notion of therapeutic reading expanded beyond penitential literature to encompass literature of all kinds. Examining medieval views on the emotional effects of literature, Glending Olson discovers a hygienic and therapeutic value in the experience of reading literature, particularly in its capacity to moderate the "accidents of the soul," or the passions. The pleasure of the literary text, Olson argues, generates for the reader an inner harmony that promotes psycho-somatic health.¹⁰⁶ Penitential literature's capacity to restore the spiritual and physical well-being of its readers allowed individuals to bypass church-ordained, spiritual mediators in their quest for redemption. As a consequence, this form of literature was understood to have the power to stifle epidemics.

As numerous critics have already thoroughly explored, the form and content of Gower's *Confessio* are deeply indebted to medieval penitential manuals. The template constituting these texts assigned roles to confessors and penitents alike. Priests utilized these manuals, for example, in order to estimate the gravity of the sins confessed to them. Mary Braswell writes, "By asking a series of very specific questions, [the priest] could discover the penitent's knowledge of his actions and the extent to which his will was involved. Thereby he could determine the degree of

¹⁰⁶ Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). While Olson's study similarly looks at medieval literature's hygienic capacity, his approach does not foreground transactions between body and environment.

consent for each of the major sins.”¹⁰⁷ According to Braswell, this line of questioning clarified for priests the mental disposition of the sinners with whom they dealt. Gower changes the terms of the confessional by casting a contrite penitent who has sinned against Love as a learner in Love’s school. Within this context, the penitent’s learning takes on a uniquely affective dimension, and Genius’s line of questioning leads him to better understand Amans’s humoral disposition. From here, Genius directs Amans morally by evoking the proper affective responses through the tales he tells.

More than merely a fictional penitent dramatizing the process of confession, Amans serves the deeper purpose of opening a space for contemporary readers to insert themselves into the text. In the *Confessio*, Gower conveys the typical procedure for undergoing confession as follows: Genius introduces a branch of one of the seven deadly sins; at this point, Amans may or may not express ignorance; in response, Genius will explain in general denotative terms what this branch of sin entails; after Amans confesses—or refuses to confess—to the specific sin, Genius explains the sin further in connotative terms, which take the form of stories or parables; immediately following the fictive account, Genius provides a brief moral to the story. One of the larger arguments of Braswell’s book, *The Medieval Sinner*, is that the model penitent typically featured in medieval penitential manuals was actually endowed with imaginary traits to make him more realistic. In this regard, Braswell considers the way in which these figures could be interesting literary characters. Within a sophisticated literary text like the *Confessio*, however, where one would expect to find complex literary figures, Amans disappoints. Gower makes only

¹⁰⁷ Mary F. Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 38.

slight revisions to the stereotypical penitent of the manuals, including, for instance, Amans's capacity to evade—or at least not fully admit to—committing particular sins. Placing Amans alongside a penitential figure from a standard medieval manual illuminates just how much of a stock character he really is.¹⁰⁸ His ignorance remains for the most part consistent throughout the books of the *Confessio*, and he demonstrates only minimal development as the confession proceeds through the “vices dedly.”¹⁰⁹ I intend to demonstrate, however, that Amans's lack of depth becomes operative within Gower's larger project of affective reform. The artificiality of Amans's character opens up a space for Gower's audience to read themselves into the figure of the penitent. The specific demographic of Gower's audience—either royal or aristocratic and secular—would have aligned closely with the courtly lover portrayed in the *Confessio*. Banal in and of himself, Amans becomes a crucial vehicle for shaping contemporary, Christian readers. Through the lens of Gower's larger project, developing Amans as a character becomes much less important than developing individual readers into contrite penitents. Amans's absent character enables readers to embody the empty placeholder, and thereby undergo confession virtually.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁹ Several scholars have noted the static quality of Amans's character. See, for instance, Donald G. Schueler, “The Age of the Lover in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” *Medium AEvum* 36 (1967): 152-58; Frances McNeely Leonard, *Laughter in the Courts of Love: Comedy in Allegory, from Chaucer to Spenser* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1981); Kurt O. Olsson, “Natural Law and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 11 (1982): 229-61; and Peck, “The Problematics of Irony in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,” *Mediaevalia* 15 (1993): 207-29.

Influenced heavily by the compositional structure of penitential manuals, Gower's *Confessio* necessitates an embodied reading experience. Such a reading practice precludes passive observation, and instead requires readers to participate fully—that is, psychosomatically—in the imaginative space offered by the text. As Katharine Craik has observed, "the literary environment of English poetry appears neither static nor separate from the minds and bodies of those who encountered it, emerging instead as a series of transactions between material language and the material bodies of readers and writers." The humoral porosity undergirding medieval epistemology suggests not only that literary environments could shape readerly subjectivity, but that medieval readers would have in fact expected such texts to move, stir, or enrapture them in particular ways.¹¹⁰ In a discussion on Gower's use of narrative in addition to the language of sin and contrition in the *Confessio*, Katherine Little suggests that "Gower seems to be a good student of the mode of encouraged identification, familiar in vernacular sermons and penitential manuals, in which the priest directs listeners or readers to inhabit . . . 'empty forms' and see themselves in relation to both the language of sin and contrition and the virtuous or sinful figures of exemplary narratives."¹¹¹ The *Confessio*

¹¹⁰ Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3. While these scholarly works explore early modern texts as case studies, the humoral body is a conceptual paradigm spanning from Galen to Descartes. Medieval, and other pre-Cartesian texts, would have participated in a similar ideological milieu.

¹¹¹ Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 105. Several other scholars have noted the way in which penitential manuals commonly constructed a space or role for penitents to "insert"

dramatizes the process of confession, or at least an adapted form of it. As Amans undergoes the process of reform, then, readers become witnesses to the procedure. Moreover, Amans's vacuous identity creates multiple virtual forms for readers to inhabit. As readers fill in the gaps of Amans's character with aspects of their own subjectivities, they gain the more productive capacity to understand themselves in relation to the exemplary narratives that Genius uses to illustrate each sin.

Because Amans persistently remains a "bad" reader of the stories Genius relates, the confessional assumes an expansive and overly thorough form, which enables the text to reach a diverse readership. If Genius "is going to give as full a treatment of Gluttony as he does of Pride," writes Nicholson, "then for our instruction at least . . . Amans must remain Amans, with all of his faults and failings." In accordance with this pedagogical scheme, Gower arranges each book in the *Confessio* as an independent discussion of one of the deadly sins. When a new book on a new topic begins, it does so without any reference to what precedes it. In this way, "Genius and Amans are constantly starting over."¹¹² The fact that each book in the *Confessio* constitutes a self-contained literary environment, emphasizes the variability and multiplicity of empty forms available to readers. The reader must therefore negotiate various subject positions as the writer encourages the "thou" of the fictions to become the right kind of "I." Unlike in novels where characters develop linearly, Amans constantly shifts personae to fit the landscape of each sin.

themselves into the text, thereby coercing readers to actively embody the text, rather than passively observe. See in particular Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner* (51, 60) and Root, "*Space to speke.*"

¹¹² Nicholson, *Love & Ethics*, 99, 98.

Amans' value as an object of instruction depends upon his being a generic figure, one whose behavior and emotional experiences align, for the most part, with the average reader's. At the same time, however, his adaptability allows Gower to shape his behavior, his faults, and his virtues from book to book, according to the needs of the moment and the lesson at hand. In this light, Amans proves to be a truly dynamic figure, capable of accommodating a variety of environments and situations. The multitudinous roles he assumes transfer over to multiple frames of perception for readers to experientially inhabit. Rather than developing morally throughout the course of the *Confessio*, Amans assumes various roles for the purposes of covering exhaustively the seven deadly sins. His chameleon-like persona leads constructively to humoral balance, and concomitantly, moral development for readers. Learning how to comport themselves properly to the fictive landscapes provided by the *Confessio* improves readers' spiritual and physical health.

While much about Amans's character remains consistent throughout the poem, the personal accounts he offers are ultimately shaped by the lesson at hand, and like the tales, they have more consistency within each book than from one book to another. At times, Amans even seems to take on slightly different identities according to the nature of the sin he is confessing. Only in Book II (on Envy), for instance, does Amans express jealousy towards his rivals; in fact, he makes no mention of these rivals anywhere else in the poem. Moreover, anger and sullenness mark him expressly in Book III (on Wrath, or Melancholy), in contrast to the hopefulness he exerts nearly everywhere else. His suicidality (III.1503-13) and thoughts of homicide (against Danger, III.1516-30) also stand in stark contrast to his usual passivity. Both his impatience in Book III and his despair in Book IV (IV.3458) contradict the dedicated service he expresses elsewhere (V.4759-75 and V.6066-68). In Book IV (on Sloth), his fear and inability to speak in his lady's presence (IV.572-91) conflicts with earlier passages in which Amans—contrary to his

lady's wishes—expresses unreservedly his love and devotion (I.1274-1305, III.520-50). These, along with many other similar inconsistencies throughout the poem, demonstrate the impact textual environments can have on individuals. In each book, Amans enters an environment saturated with disease (in the form of sin) and his behaviors and affective responses showcase at least a temporary infection. Clearly, Gower's intention is not to convey Amans as a consistent character with consistent traits throughout the tales of the *Confessio*, but rather, to show the ways in which particular sins generate specific situations, which subsequently determine various affective responses. In this way, Amans serves purely an exemplary function: the series of identities taken up by Amans throughout the *Confessio* display a range of behaviors and emotions that is just as important as the tales for conveying Genius's lessons.

IV

Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* famously convey the acts of storytelling and reading as remedies against pestilence and melancholy. Beyond bringing pleasure and recreation to their readers through delightful fictions, certain literary creations—perhaps prompted by the devastation of the Black Death—self-consciously embodied in their very structures what medieval medicine had claimed for centuries about the role of the imagination and the passions in preserving health. Gower's *Confessio* is one such literary creation in that each of its tales is meant to curb or redirect the affective states of the individuals inhabiting the position of the sinner. Like a typical medieval regimen of health, the tales in the *Confessio* provide a collection of correctives for its diverse readership. In this way, Gower's *compilatio* functions as a medicine cabinet of sorts, offering a variety of treatments for patients with a variety of ailments. A common recurrence in Amans's dialogue is to request of Genius

. . . if ye wolde in eny forme
Of this matiere a tale enforme,
Which were agein this vice set,
I scholde fare wel the bet. (I. 1973-76)

Genius's storytelling serves the explicit purpose of inducing a certain affective state in the listener or reader in relation to the specific sin being covered. Some of these tales are meant to evoke sympathy; others, antipathy or even abhorrence. It is the affective dimensions of these tales that harness the power of conversion, and subsequently lead penitents to "fare wel the bet." In the Book of Pride, for example, Genius seeks to provoke fear and humility in Amans as affective correctives to his proclivities towards narcissism and self-love.

Gower's promise to his readers in the opening of the Prologue to "go the middel weie" is easily written off as a conventional rhetorical device. Aligning with Horace's dictum that the best poetry combines teaching and pleasure, Gower claims that he will "wryte a bok betwen the tweie, / Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore" (Pro. 18-19). Clearly, the *Confessio* demonstrates these stylistic aims: good storytelling sugarcoats Genius's moral expositions. Gower's peculiar employment of the "middel weie" in the *Confessio*, however, extends beyond this conventional usage. The affective dimensions of Genius's pedagogy illuminate Gower's "middel weie" as not only a stylistic choice, but also a therapeutic one in that the compositional structure of his text mediates the affective experience of both Amans and the reader. The tales within the Book of Pride illustrate how Gower's text functions as a virtual confessional. Like medieval penitential manuals, the *Confessio* begins with the sin of pride—considered the worst of all sins. Within the particular framework of Gower's affective project, the sin of self-love becomes of utmost priority for the penitent to overcome because it is only by turning away from the self that a

community can be both unified and stabilized by affective bonds. Two tales from Book I in particular—"The Trump of Death" and the "Tale of Narcissus"—echo the themes of the Prologue and anticipate the text's conclusion.

In "The Trump of Death," an exemplary tale featuring the sin of pride, the King of Hungary encounters two aged pilgrims, and with "gret humilité" embraces them and kisses their feet (I. 2050). The king's nobles, his brother in particular, "of here oghne Pride" criticize the king for abasing his royalty (I. 2060). As a lesson, the king causes the trump of death to be blown before his brother's house. To his penitent and fearful brother, the king explains that the law of man may be altered and is therefore less to be feared than the law of nature, established by God, which he revered in the old men. In Gower's tale, mortality represents the earthly functioning of divine law, and those who fail to reverence old age are guilty of pride. The tale ends on a rather optimistic note: we are led, I think, to believe that the King has not only reinforced the affective bond he shares with his brother, but also inculcated among the other nobles the proper affective relations that should be established within one's personal community, the community of mankind, the community of nature, and the community of God.

Scholars have emphasized the value of "The Trump of Death" as a statement of both the relationship between individual morality and the health of the kingdom, as well as the leveling power of death. Jessica Rosenfeld, for instance, claims that "like others of Gower's kings, the King of Hungary is exemplary inasmuch as he recognizes the 'likeness' of all human beings rooted in shared mortality, suggesting that compassion can cut through the apparent difference created by the distribution of temporal goods, and can make what is obscure (likeness) clear

again.”¹¹³ Those afflicted by the sin of pride forget their common humanity and set themselves above common nature or apart from the laws of community as they attempt to make God’s order conform to their private desires. This tale is told so that the king is clearly defined by his right relationship with nature and his people. In identifying with the king’s brother, however, readers undergo a series of uncomfortable feelings—from embarrassment (upon witnessing the king’s debasement), to alienation (during the May Day festivities), fear (at the sound of the trumpet), and humility (in an attempt to win pardon from the king). The provocation of negative affectations associated with the brother encourages readers to learn from his mistakes so that they may dis-identify with him. Just as Genius attempts to move Amans away from pride by evoking fear and humiliation, the king initiates a similar plan to remedy his brother’s faulty perspective. Upon hearing his brother’s complaint

The king bethoghte himself tho
How he his brother mai chastie,
That he thurgh his Surquiderie
Tok upon honde to despreise
Humilité, which is to preise,
And therupon yaf such conseil
Toward his king that was noght heil;
Whereof to be the betre leared,
He thenkth to maken him afered. (I. 2116-2124).

¹¹³ Jessica Rosenfeld, “Compassionate Conversions: Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* and the Problem of Envy,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42 (2012): 94.

The king characterizes his brother's prideful counsel as unhealthy—"Noght heil"—and seeks to teach him humility through fear. This tale about the positive affective bonds that the king fosters with perhaps the lowliest and most meagre of his subjects does not ultimately resonate with Amans, however. After Genius's telling of the tale, Amans replies,

Mi fader, I am amorous,
Wherof I wolde you beseche
That ye me som ensample teche,
Which mihte in loves cause stonde. (I. 2258-61)

The sympathetic bonds that the narrative advocates are rooted in brotherly rather than erotic love. It is probable that this tale does not resonate with Amans because he cannot relate fully to the form of love evoked by it.

"The Tale of Narcissus," however, proves more effective at getting Genius's point across. In this tale, a lord's son—who believes himself to be high above all other creatures—falls in love with his own reflection. The severe pain produced by setting his heart upon a thing forever beyond compassing eventually drives him mad and leads him to commit suicide by bashing his head against a rock. Readers of this tale would have been familiar with its origins in Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. While the tale does not diverge drastically from its source, Gower's adaptation of the ending is quite striking. In Ovid's tale, Narcissus's death is more of a graceful decline; it is the result of foregoing food and drink due to his amorous fixation. This tale is more effective in teaching Amans about proper affective relations because the affect driving the tale is much more violent. Unlike "The Trump of Death," the character representative of pride in this tale does not ultimately evade punishment for his sin. Moreover, Amans would have related closely with the figure of Narcissus. As Andrea Schutz notes, "both are self-absorbed, boringly

fixated on their unhappy love affairs, and oblivious to the world around them.”¹¹⁴ Amans is affectively corrected by the tale because he identifies with the fictional character presented in Genius’s fiction. After this tale, Amans’s response is quite different: “Mi fader, as touchende of me, / This vice I thenke for to fle” (I. 2367-68). In other words, to the extent that the tale *touches*, or *affects* Amans, he will avoid committing this sin. In this particular case it is not a positive affect that drives Amans’s moral reconstitution, but a negative one that acts as a deterrent. In a similar way, the noble audience reading these tales are affectively corrected to the extent that they perceive themselves in the characters of the fictions presented by Genius. The series of fictional encounters and moments of empathy provided in the *Confessio* drive the reader towards adjustments in his perception of self and society beyond his private scheme of reality. As a text that perpetually produces exemplary tales, the *Confessio* provides the opportunity for its audience to experiment with different forms of life through self-insertion, while directing individuals to embody the forms ultimately endorsed by Genius.

While the image of the mirror would have been immediately associated with the personification of Pride, it also functions to provide a fuller understanding of Gower’s larger project in the *Confessio*, since readers are encouraged to engage with the text as if looking into a mirror. As they are exposed to the characters contained in the stories of the past, readers learn how to see themselves in others. That is, they gain the capacity to empathize with the fictional characters of the stories. One way of looking at Genius’s function, then, is to see him as conditioning his readers to see others in themselves. Although typically indicative of self-love,

¹¹⁴ Andrea Schutz, “Absent and Present Images: Mirrors and Mirroring in John Gower’s ‘Confessio Amantis,’” *The Chaucer Review* 34 (1999): 118.

looking into the mirror within this context becomes an unselfish act because it engenders a process of unification with other bodies and selves.

Once Amans is absolved of his sins and is no longer fit for Venus's court, he transforms into John Gower. As we have seen, Gower demonstrates a range of subjectivities: first, he assumes the role of Amans the lover in Book I; as the fictional Amans, he fluidly adapts to the various textual landscapes defining each of the eight books; and then finally he transitions back to his nonfictional self in Book VIII. For Gower, this process generates individuals with a newfound capacity to coordinate relationships affectively within both social and spiritual communities, thereby contributing to the health of England. By undergoing himself what he is asking his readers to undergo, Gower sets himself up in contradistinction to the hypocritical clergy of the Prologue. Unlike the worldly clergymen, Gower practices what he preaches. At the *Confessio's* conclusion, Gower discovers within Venus's mirror that he is an old man withered and wasted away. When Gower sees that his hair has turned to gray, "Mi will was tho to se no more / Outwith, for ther was no plesance" (VIII.2832-33). No longer the self-absorbed lover represented by Amans, Gower substantiates his credibility to his readers by properly ordering his own misdirected passions.

And thus thenkende thoghte fele,
I was out of mi swoune affraied,
Wherof I sih my wittes straied,
And gan to clepe hem home agein.
And whan Resoun it herde sein
That loves rage was aweie,
He cam to me the rihte weie,

And hath remued the sotie

O thilke unwise fantasie,

Wherof that I was wont to pleigne . . . (VIII. 2858-67)

As a gesture toward the generic tradition of dream vision, Gower awakes from his swoon enlightened by the divine messages he has received during his slumber. Just as fear incites Amans to denounce the sin of pride, fright stirs Gower to action. In his enlightened state, Gower recognizes how his “wittes” had “strayed” due to “love’s rage”; he also understands how to “clepe hem [his wits] home agein.” Harkening back to the “middel weie” that opens the *Confessio*, Gower finds “the rihte weie,” by the poem’s end.

Graduating from Love’s school does not mean that Gower has defeated the passions once and for all, however. The rosary that Venus bestows upon Gower serves as a constant reminder that mediating the passions is a continuous process and a constant struggle. The beads that Venus hangs about Gower’s neck are “blak as sable”—a color that (within the context of humoral theory) identified melancholy. Engraved upon the beads in gold is the message “*Por reposer*,” which could direct Gower to compose himself (i.e. maintain homeostasis) or to reposition himself—i.e. accommodate himself to the constantly-shifting environment (VIII. 2904, 2907). The black beads function as a form of external aid for maintaining affective composure. The rosary beads operate as a practical mechanism for internalizing through meditation and prayer the emotional and ethical intentions described by the multitude of voices compiled in the

Confessio.¹¹⁵ Venus's beads aim to instill in the penitent a daily habituation of this exercise, which eventually induces a fundamental alteration, a new constitution of the self.

As I have attempted to show, Gower's *Confessio* functions as a virtual confessional whereby readers—in the way they engage with and experience the moderating accord of the fictions presented by Genius—take personal responsibility for their own moral transformation. In this way, Genius diverges from the diegetic ethics commonly characterizing “moral Gower,” and instead, guides the virtues of Amans and the readers who embody him vicariously through fictional empathy. Through confession—initially prompted by Amans's insufficient and confused self-definition in the opening—Amans acquires particularity and becomes John Gower.¹¹⁶ Through a similar process, the narratives of exemplarity contained within the *Confessio* aim to corral readers into a certain parameter of affective identity—parameters laid out in the fictional exempla that readers come to embody. At the conclusion of the text, the perpetual iteration of fictional forms produced by the *Confessio* finds a point of rest in the reader, where repetition—now physically, rather than fictionally, constituent—continues through daily habituation.

¹¹⁵ See Sara Ritchey, “Wessel Gansfort, John Mombaer, and Medieval Technologies of the Self: Affective Meditation in a Fifteenth-Century Emotional Community,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 38 (2013): 153-174. In her article, Ritchey discusses how the hand-psalter guided “associated nodes on the hand with specific emotions that should be activated when the meditant chanted the text of the psalms” (163).

¹¹⁶ Samuel T. Cowling, “Gower's Ironic Self-Portrait in the *Confessio Amantis*,” *Annuaire Mediaevale* 16 (1975): 63-70.

Contagious Women:

Melancholic Sympathies in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*

Recent studies on early modern conceptions of the passions have emphasized the porousness of the humoral subject within its environment. Gail Kern Paster describes the passions as an ecology, where an individual's affective state is shaped by a continual negotiation between his or her humoral constitution and environmental circumstance.¹¹⁷ Elaborating on this phenomenon, Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson define the passions as a “set of correspondences between inner and outer worlds, between the human body and the world in which it feels and acts in continuous, dynamic reciprocity.”¹¹⁸ This conceptualization has inspired new ways of interpreting emotional experience in literary works from the period. As a text saturated with passionate excess and disorder, Sidney's *Old Arcadia* has proven to be a

¹¹⁷ Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹¹⁸ Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, “Introduction,” in *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, ed. Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 18.

productive case study for considering how English authors of the period represented emotional experience in their literary works.

In alignment with current trends in the history of emotions, critical interpretations of Sidney's *Old* and *New Arcadia* have emphasized the ways in which the passions cut across body and environment. Jacqueline T. Miller, for instance, reads the passions in Sidney's *New Arcadia* as infectious in that they can pass from one individual to another. She interprets the external representation of emotion — namely, “verbal and bodily signifiers” — as preceding and in fact creating the passions they signify (i.e. the passions within).¹¹⁹ Working on the same text, Sallie Anglin observes the exchange between embedded subjects that are “de-centered, re-centered, and transformed” in relation to their environments, and an environment that is itself “altered by human thought and action.”¹²⁰ She proposes that this ecology between human and environment emphasizes the communal, rather than isolated, nature of identity in Sidney's text. Shifting to Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, David Houston Wood analyzes the impact “humoral volatility” had on early modern narrative structures. He argues that Sidney supplements classical narrative theory with mimetic forms that reflect “contemporary psychosomatic realities.”¹²¹ Providing further insight into the theme of embodiment, Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. articulates the passions as affective

¹¹⁹ Jacqueline T. Miller, “The Passion Signified: Imitation and the Construction of Emotions in Sidney and Wroth,” *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 43.4 (2001): 407–21.

¹²⁰ Sallie Anglin, “Material Romance: Embodiment, Environment and Ecology in Sidney's *New Arcadia*,” *Sidney Journal* 30.2 (2012): 87.

¹²¹ David Houston Wood, “[A] Deathful Suck’: Passions, Potions, and Poisons in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*,” *Prose Studies* 28.2 (2006): 150.

landscapes. Rather than suggesting a strictly "subject-centered model of affectivity," "the passions can be seen as generating fields of affective energy that both envelop and re- or de-constitute the individual subject."¹²² As these studies showcase, early modern conceptions of the passions as constitutive of both body and environment clearly influenced the way authors such as Sidney conveyed affective phenomena.

Building on the themes of environment, embodiment, and emotion pervading Sidney scholarship and studies in the history of emotion more broadly, this chapter considers Sidney's *Arcadia* as a noxious rendering of Virgilian pastoral sympathy, in which transactions with the natural world generate disease. Engaging with early modern theories of both the humors and the occult, I explore the sympathetic operations undergirding contagion in *The Old Arcadia*, especially in relation to love-melancholy and the female body. While Sidney seeks to ennoble his female readers by privileging virtuous love over pathological love, his endeavor is persistently undercut by their mutual imbrication: the occult energies responsible for generating sympathy, friendship, and love, operated on the same principles as infection and disease. As a result, disease always lurked behind potentially ennobling passions. The tenuous divide between true and false love, therefore, threatened to transform Sidney's *Old Arcadia* from an ethical text about love to a site of erotic contagion.

My analysis of Sidney's *Old Arcadia* consists of the following three sections: "Contagious Women," "Pastoral Sympathies," and "Dangerous Remedies." In the first section, I

¹²² Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., "Romance, Sleep, and the Passions in Sir Philip Sidney's *The Old Arcadia*," *ELH: Journal of English Literary History* 74.3 (2007), 735.

propose that the female body functions as the site of melancholic transmission within Sidney's text. As a literary work confounded by effeminate desires, as well as one with a decidedly female readership, Sidney's *Old Arcadia* depends on early modern conceptions of sympathies in order to effectively represent and enact melancholic contagion. I focus on the figure of Pyrocles in particular, a man who assumes the form of an Amazonian princess named Cleophila. Pyrocles's "sex change" not only grants him access to the isolated inhabitants of Arcadia, but also increases his potency as a foreign contaminant that incites erotic desire and melancholy. In the second section, I turn to the landscapes of the text in order to chart out moments of emotive flux for Sidney's melancholy characters. The reciprocal fluctuations that occur between the humorous bodies afflicted by irrational passion and the hostile shifts in their environment exhibit a perversion of the harmonious symbiosis central to the pastoral mode. The last section turns to the emotional implications of representing passionate superfluity for Sidney's female readers. Despite his ethical agenda to distinguish true love from erotic love, Sidney nevertheless risks seducing his readers with the erotic content present in the text.

I. Contagious Women

The conventional image of crossdressing in the early modern period—both within literature and without—is that of a woman taking on a man's identity. Given the superior position granted to men in a patriarchal society, it makes sense that women would want to adopt a male identity. Gender transformations appear as common topoi in Shakespeare's comedies in particular, including *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*. In both cases, the central female character adopts a male disguise in order to obtain authority, independence, and security within the public sphere. The assumption underlying these plays is not only that gender is fluid, but also that the male

gender is always more socially advantageous. It is striking, therefore, that in *The Old Arcadia*, Pyrocles assumes the disguise of an Amazonian princess. Why would Sidney have his main protagonist surrender his elite position as a man, a prince for that matter, and all the social privileges that come along with it? The obvious response is that in assuming the habit of a woman, Pyrocles appears as less of a threat to Duke Basilius, which allows him to keep more intimate company with Philoclea. Beyond this, however, Sidney demonstrates his esteem for the unique capacities of the female body, especially in relation to popular occult beliefs—i.e. the cosmological notion that secret sympathies and antipathies coursed through the natural world. By adopting the identity of the Amazonian princess Cleophila, Pyrocles gains access to the infectious potency inherent to the female body, and thereby spreads melancholy and erotic desire among the inhabitants of Arcadia.

When Pyrocles first informs Musidorus of his plan to disguise himself as a woman, Musidorus derides him for transforming himself into the weaker sex. In the argument that ensues, Musidorus suggests that donning feminine apparel will lead to more than a superficial transformation.

See how extremely every way you endanger your mind; for to take this woman's habit, without you frame your behaviour accordingly, is wholly vain; your behavior can never come kindly from you but as the mind is proportioned unto it. So that you must resolve, if you will play your part to any purpose, whatsoever peevish imperfections are in that sex, to soften your heart to receive them—the very first down step to all wickedness.¹²³

¹²³ Sir Philip Sidney, *The Old Arcadia*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford Univ.

Musidorus grants clothing influential power over the wearer's psychosomatic processes and behavioral tendencies. In wearing women's clothing, Pyrocles assumes a particular identity that elicits corresponding behaviors; more than that, the clothing influences how Pyrocles perceives and inhabits the world. Musidorus's fear that playing the woman's part will lead to an actual gender transformation is based on the connection (connoted by the word "habit") between one's clothing and bodily constitution and one's mental and moral constitution.¹²⁴ By transforming himself without (his external attire) Pyrocles necessarily endangers what is within (his mind). Cleophila confesses as much in a song: "transformed in show, but more transformed in mind" (26). This phenomenon provides a clear example of embodied cognition—or more precisely, "enclothed" cognition¹²⁵—in which the Amazon's clothing infects Pyrocles's mind with femininity, as if the female gender were contagious.

At stake in Pyrocles's crossdressing is the loss of the "worthy enterprises" and martial virtue that constitute Pyrocles's identity before his arrival in Arcadia; instead, Pyrocles lets his "mind fall asleep" (13). Pyrocles's condition of effeminate idleness induced by passionate love parallels that of Aeneas in Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1587). Like Musidorus, Achates warns Aeneas that Dido is infecting his mind with femininity:

Banish that ticing dame from forth your mouth

And follow your foreseeing stars in all.

Press, 1985), 18. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

¹²⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. "Habit."

¹²⁵ See Adam Fiajo and Adam D. Galinsky, "Enclothed Cognition," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48 (2012): 918–25.

This is no life for men-at-arms to live,
Where dalliance doth consume a soldier's strength
And wanton motions of alluring eyes
Effeminate our minds inured to war.¹²⁶

Dido's effeminate environment produces physiological effects in Aeneas and his men; their strength wanes and their minds soften. Unlike Aeneas, who despite his love for Dido decides to recover his masculinity and continue his heroic pursuits, Pyrocles chooses to abandon his "man career" in order to pursue more lusty enterprises (12). The association of femininity with idleness, irrationality, and lack of bodily self-control informs Musidorus's claim that assuming the female form is the "first down step to all wickedness." This demotion on the scale of being evokes Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's discussion of the nature of man, which granted human beings the freedom to choose their positions among the infinite order of beings in the universe. According to Pico, human beings had no clearly determined essence or nature; instead, they possessed indeterminate and dynamic qualities. Because man possessed all possible forms of nature within himself, it was his duty to overcome the lower forms of life and to elevate himself toward God. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico evokes a metaphor similar to the Great Chain of Being: a "ladder extending from the lowest earth to the highest heaven, divided in a series of many steps, with the Lord seated at the top." Pico calls for man to purify his soul so that he may be worthy to ascend the ladder to God, "lest we be hurled down from the ladder as

¹²⁶ Christopher Marlowe, "Dido: Queen of Carthage," in *The Complete Plays*, ed. Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (New York: Penguin, 2004), 1-67 (IV. iii. 31-6).

impious and unclean.”¹²⁷ Within the hierarchical order of the universe, women stood below men as inferior beings, their natures bent towards the sensual and the bodily, rather than the spiritual and the intellectual. Like Musidorus, then, Pico equates a “down step” on the ladder with “wickedness,” since this moves man further away from God.

The cultural implications of Pyrocles’s crossdressing can be productively informed by antitheatrical polemics that focused on the phenomenon. In protesting Pyrocles’s plan to wear female attire, Musidorus gestures towards the sexual anxieties animating pamphlet attacks against the early modern stage, which grew into the full-fledged fear that costume could biologically transform men into women. Because the theatre was the most common site of male crossdressing, with the practice of using boy actors to play female roles, these anxieties were predominantly voiced in anti-theatrical tracts. According to Laura Levine, “the fear that costume could actually alter the gender of the male body beneath the costume” lay at the root of these attacks.¹²⁸ In his pamphlet *The School of Abuse* (1579), Stephen Gosson claims that theatre “effeminates the mind,” and threatens to transform men into women through the performance of “effeminate gesture” and “wanton speache.”¹²⁹ In the years following this publication a pamphlet

¹²⁷ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “Oration on the Dignity of Man,” in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, eds. Ernst Cassirer, Paul O. Kristeller, and John H. Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 229, 230.

¹²⁸ Laura Levine, *Men in Women’s Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3.

¹²⁹ Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse* (1579; rpt. London: The Shakespeare Society, 1841), qtd. in Levine, 9.

war developed in which authors continued to articulate the fear that clothing could transform an individual's gender. Phillip Stubbes, for example, argued that boy actors who wore women's clothing could literally "adulterate" the male gender.¹³⁰ In another prominent antitheatrical tract, William Prynne described a case in which women's clothing had caused a man to "degenerate" into a woman.¹³¹ Renaissance understandings of performance and acting maintained that actors could truly become the characters they played; a boy actor, therefore, could transform into a woman simply by wearing women's clothing and behaving in a feminine manner.¹³² Early modern fears concerning the stage and boy actors emerged from the ultimate elusiveness of gender identity. In spite of the dominant ideology underlying a hierarchical society—that gender is predetermined and fixed—anti-theatrical discourses revealed an alternative possibility: that gender could be fluid and alterable.

The relationship between gender and performance established by early modern antitheatrical tracts—and sustained by feminist critics of today—sheds light on Musidorus's fear not only that femininity will adulterate Pyrocles's purer masculine identity, but more substantially, that Pyrocles's masculinity may dissolve entirely. In considering the performative

¹³⁰ Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583; rpt. Netherlands: Da Capo Press, 1972), qtd. in Levine, 4.

¹³¹ William Prynne, *Histrion-mastix: The Player's Scourge or Actor's Tragedy* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), qtd. in Levine, 10.

¹³² Juliet Dusinberre, "Boys Becoming Women in Shakespeare's Plays," *Shakespeare Studies* 36 (1998): 1–28. When boy actors dressed as women, Dusinberre writes, "the sexual identity of the actor was erased in the act of performance" (11).

nature of gender, Levine identifies masculinity in particular as the only gender that needs to be performed in order to exist.¹³³ She claims that femininity holds the “default position,” the alternative to masculinity that “one is always in danger of slipping into.” As such, femininity does not *need* to be maintained or performed, whereas “men are only men in the performance, and relentless re-enactment, of their masculinity.”¹³⁴ Based on this premise, Pyrocles’s masculinity is doubly threatened: not only has he decided to “play” a woman, but, even more seriously, he has fallen in love with one.

The distinction between passionate love and true love is central to the ethical agenda of Sidney’s work. The dominant theme espoused by Sidney’s *Old Arcadia* is that a man’s passions must be ruled by reason. In subjugating reason to passion, therefore, Pyrocles directly violates this moral conviction. Upon hearing of his friend’s lovesickness, Musidorus expresses his furtive disapproval: ““this effeminate love of a woman doth so womanize a man that, if you yield to it, it will not only make you a famous Amazon, but a launder, a distaff-spinner, or whatsoever other vile occupation their idle heads can imagine and their weak hands perform”” (18-9). Here again, Musidorus showcases his blatant misogyny, marking the much degraded position Pyrocles must occupy within society as a woman. On another level, Musidorus is pointing out that becoming a woman for love of a woman reveals that particular love—“effeminate love”—to be emasculating. Neither a virtuous nor ennobling emotion, this “bastarde Love,” as Musidorus

¹³³ See also Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 136. Butler argues that the “gendered body” lacks an “ontological status” apart from the series of actions and performances that create it (136).

¹³⁴ Levine, 8, 7.

calls it, is unworthy of the name of love. This attitude towards passionate love would have been common during the period in which Sidney was writing. In his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, Marsilio Ficino writes that “it behooves a man of sound mind to be careful not to apply indiscriminately the divine name *Love* to irrational emotions.”¹³⁵ Likewise, in *The Book of the Courtier*, Castiglione claims that those who are “wrapped in this sensuall love, which is a very rebel against reason . . . make themselves unworthy to enjoy the favors and benefits which love bestoweth upon his true subjects.”¹³⁶ Making the association between effeminacy and passionate love explicit, Robert Burton states succinctly that passionate love “turns a man into a woman.”¹³⁷ Pyrocles embodies this transformation: his womanish attire signifies his subjection to passionate love.

The anxieties expressed by Musidorus in regards to femininity and effeminate love introduce a theory that undergirds the narrative of *The Old Arcadia* as a whole—that the female body possesses contagious capacities. This theory is firmly situated within early modern discourses of the occult, which focused, among other things, on the secret nature and condition of women. In alignment with the pervasive idea in early modern scientific thought that “Nature hides her secrets,” occult operations tended to be associated with the secret, the hidden, and the latent. In opposition to the material humoralism of Galen, occultism drew on an “invisible technology” comprised of “unseen active effluvia.” According to Mary Floyd-Wilson, it was a

¹³⁵ Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, tr. Sears Jayne (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1999), 131.

¹³⁶ Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, tr. Thomas Hoby (London, 1959), 306.

¹³⁷ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. A. R. Shilleto (London, 1896), iii. 163.

commonly held belief among the early modern English that “secret sympathies and antipathies . . . coursed through the natural world,” compelling “both bonds and animosities.”¹³⁸ In fact, up until the latter part of the seventeenth century, “a belief in hidden causes and occult forces was held by most people, no matter their status, educational background, or understanding of the cosmos.”¹³⁹ The language of the occult seeps into Musidorus’s definition of “true love” (which he differentiates from passionate love): “true love hath that excellent nature in it, that it doth transform the very essence of the lover into the thing loved, uniting and, as it were, incorporating it with a secret and inward working” (18). Secret sympathies, or hidden attractions, would have been thought responsible for “uniting” the “very essence of the lover [with] the thing loved.” In his widely popular *The Book of Secrets*, Albertus Magnus uses this same language to explain how “every particular or general nature, hath natural amity and enmity to some other . . . And in [Man] be the virtues of all things, and *all secret arts worketh in man’s body itself*” (emphasis mine).¹⁴⁰

Many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century philosophers implemented similar occult logic to explain the enigmatically close connection one individual may feel towards another. Ficino, for example, describes love as “the attraction of one thing by another,” caused by “a certain affinity of nature.”¹⁴¹ In *A Treatise of the Passions*, Edward Reynolds similarly attributes human

¹³⁸ Mary Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–2.

¹³⁹ Floyd-Wilson, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Qtd. in Floyd-Wilson, 11.

¹⁴¹ Qtd. in Floyd-Wilson, 8.

attraction to “that naturall or impressed sympathie of things, whereby one doth inwardly incline an union with the other, by reason of some secret vertues and occult qualities disposing either subject to that mutuall friendship, as betweene Iron and the Loadstone.”¹⁴² Levinus Lemnius argues the same point in *The Secret Miracles of Nature*, when he explains that “sympathy and mutual agreement, whereby the one is by similitude wonderfully affected with the other, & thence comes the attraction” is the result of “secret and hidden properties,” where “we see the effects of things, but we know not the causes.”¹⁴³ While sympathetic operations explained the mechanism behind true love, it is precisely the qualities of likeness, similitude, and kindness, that facilitated love’s poisonous potential. The occult energies responsible for generating sympathy, friendship, compassion, and love, operated on the same principles as contagion. If sympathies transform “the lover into the thing loved, uniting and . . . incorporating it with a secret and inward working,” then they also prime the lover for infection. Eric Langley goes so far as to claim that “the most pernicious form of contagious sympathy is that found in friendship.” Early modern discourses on friendship repeatedly record that “the love of a friend . . . is enabled by similitude and kindness.” Drawing on the metaphor of “corporeal inclusion,” a friend was understood to be an extension, or continuation of one’s physical body, eventually becoming, in Plutarch’s words, “incorporate.” However, as Langley observes, “the reciprocal and incorporative dynamic of friendship can be easily appropriated, recasting reciprocation as transmission, incorporation as infection.” Consequently, “kindness becomes unkind,” and

¹⁴² Qtd. in Floyd-Wilson, 9.

¹⁴³ Qtd. in Floyd-Wilson, 8.

“likeness facilitates corruption.”¹⁴⁴ This emphasis on friendship in discourses on occult sympathies should remind us that in *The Old Arcadia* the passionate relationships among the lovers is shadowed by the friendship between Pyrocles and Musidorus. I propose that this friendship is the only example of true or divine love offered by the text.

An understanding of sympathetic operations reveals the close resemblance between true love and lovesickness. As Marion Wells writes, “it is not always easy to distinguish clearly between ‘ordinary’ love and pathological love.”¹⁴⁵ In fact, many medical writers from the period suggest that all love is a disease and that falling into melancholia is inevitable if one contracts that disease. To be sure, the line between love that remains within the realm of health and pathological love is thin. Early moderns placed “mad and beastly passion” at odds with the “Platonic view of love as an ennobling force by means of which the soul can transcend the constraints of bodily existence”; and yet, despite this distinction, the medical tradition of love-melancholy engages in complex ways with this Platonic view of love.¹⁴⁶ As Henry Staten observes, “Plato binds the question of the sublimating of sexual love very tightly to that of the ascent to the ideal.”¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Plato’s transcendent, divine love begins in the love of a mortal

¹⁴⁴ Eric Langley, “‘Plagued by kindness’: Contagious Sympathy in Shakespearean Drama,” *Medical Humanities* 37 (2011): 105.

¹⁴⁵ Marion Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and the Early Modern Romance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning: From Homer to Lucan* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 3.

body. As both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* make clear, however, one should “quickly move beyond love of a beautiful body toward love of an abstract and universal beauty.”¹⁴⁸ The abandonment of physical love for a particular individual is crucial to the soul’s ennoblement. Wells takes note of the “double-sided nature of love-melancholy, which both participates in a Platonic eros that strives toward the beautiful and also remains focused on the *individual* as the source of beauty.” “This tension within love-melancholy,” Wells explains, “highlights a contradiction within Platonic love itself, which, though it advocates a move beyond the mortal body, always begins there and may pull the lover back down toward the body.”¹⁴⁹ The description of true love provided by Musidorus—“that it doth transform the very essence of the lover into the thing loved, uniting and . . . incorporating it”—requires that the “thing loved” be of a more excellent nature than the lover: “the love of heaven makes one heavenly, the love of virtue, virtuous” (18). The sympathetic magnetism that drives Pyrocles to unite with Philoclea, however, does not involve the “transcendence of the body but rather a growing sexual obsession that embrutes the rational soul.”¹⁵⁰ Pyrocles’s sympathetic inclination to unite with the beautiful object, therefore, provides an instance of “melancholic incorporation,” in which passion threatens to overwhelm the sovereignty of his reason.

Early modern conceptions of disease transmission were predicated upon the notion of sympathetic transference. Contemporary plague treatises indicate that the spread of infection depends upon an inherent compatibility between the victim and corrupting agent. As Pierre

¹⁴⁸ Wells, 6.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

Drouet affirms in *A New Counsell Against the Pestilence* (1578), the infection of pestilence requires “some naturall likenesse betweene the thing Agent, and the Pacient.”¹⁵¹ Girolamo Fracastoro’s *De Contagione*, one of the most important works for sixteenth century theories on contagion, relies on the idea of sympathies to explain how insensible, yet material particles communicated across persons and things. In fact, prefacing Fracastoro’s work is a separate tract, *De Sympathia*, which Vivian Nutton claims “provided a general theoretical framework for the discussion of the specific example of contagion and contagious disease” found in *De Contagione*.¹⁵² Fracastoro identifies three types of contagion: transmission by direct contact or touch, through intermediaries (such as clothing), and action-at-a-distance. To explain this third type of contagion, early modern natural philosophers, including Fracastoro, appealed to the emission of effluvia— “an outflow of material particles too subtle to be perceived by touch or sight.”¹⁵³ These corrupted particles, also governed by the laws of sympathy, spread through the air by means of breath, bodily fluids, and most notoriously, the eyes.

Due to the porous and “leaky” qualities attributed to the female body during this period, women were thought to possess the acute capacity to act on others at-a-distance. One of the most prominent examples of female contagion comes from Platonic-Galenic theories of eyebeam emission, which “linked the polluting, venomous female gaze with menstruation.”¹⁵⁴ Period

¹⁵¹ Pierre Drouet, *A new counsel against the pestilence* (London, 1578), qtd. in Floyd-Wilson, 55.

¹⁵² Vivian Nutton, “The Reception of Fracastoro's Theory of Contagion: The Seed that Fell Among the Thorns?,” *Osiris* 6 (1990): 200.

¹⁵³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Effluvium.”

¹⁵⁴ Suzannah Biernoff, “The Eye of the Flesh,” in *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*

conceptions of feminine physiology “regarded the accumulation of menstrual blood as a toxicity that is intermittently purged through the eyes.”¹⁵⁵ As Suzannah Biernoff explains it, “menstrual blood was thought to contain evil humours which could be emitted, with the visual rays, as a kind of poisonous vapour, infecting or ‘impregnating’ adjacent objects through the medium of the air.”¹⁵⁶ Johann Jacob Wecker asserts that women were able to infect others with their corrupted eye-beams “by reason of their Complexion . . . every Moneth they are filled with more superfluities . . . and they send forth venomous fumes to those that stand by them, and fill the body therewith.”¹⁵⁷ The “menstrual” eye was understood to be a source of infection—“a symptom of the inherently unstable, leaky, and therefore dangerous female body.”¹⁵⁸ It was by virtue of their very physiology, therefore, that women were perceived as potential repositories of infection.

The beams and vapors emitted from a woman’s eyes could transmit love or disease—forging a material thread of connection or contagion between the viewer and the viewed—

(New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 52.

¹⁵⁵ Jamie C. Fumo, “The Pestilential Gaze: From Epidemiology to Erotomania in *The Knight’s Tale*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 118.

¹⁵⁶ Biernoff, 52.

¹⁵⁷ Johann Jacob Wecker, *Eighteen books of the secrets of art & nature being the summe and substance of natural philosophy* (London, 1660), qtd. in Floyd-Wilson, 15–16.

¹⁵⁸ Biernoff, 52. On the early modern conception of women as leaky vessels, see Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

because both operated on the same principles. The infectious influence of the female is analogized in the portrait of Philoclea that contaminates Pyrocles's eye-beams in the gallery of Mantinea. The notion that pestilence could be transmitted rapidly by sight corresponds to the "rhetoric of suddenness" characterizing the initiation of lovesickness. In the *Tractatus de Epidemia*, an anonymous doctor of Montpellier assimilates erotic conventions to epidemiological ones, emphasizing the eyes as portals of malady. Robert Burton treats beauty as a cause of love-melancholy in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*: "the rays, as some think sent from the eyes, carry certain spiritual vapours with them, and so infect the other party, and that in a moment."¹⁵⁹ This explanation resonates with Pyrocles's lines on the same phenomenon in *The Old Arcadia*: "For since it was the fatal overthrow of all my liberty to see in the gallery of Mantinea the only Philoclea's picture, that beauty did pierce so through mine eyes to my heart that the impression of it doth not lie but live there" (16). The fact that Philoclea's portrait is just as effective at conveying disease as her actual person suggests that Pyrocles's imitation of a female will grant him the same contagious capacities that an actual female would possess.

After dressing Pyrocles in his "transforming apparel," Musidorus doubts that Philoclea could have "a greater portion of beauty." To this, Pyrocles responds, "Speak not that blasphemy, dear friend . . . for if I have any beauty, it is the beauty which the imagination of her strikes into my fancies, which in part shines through my face into your eyes" (25). Here, Pyrocles describes his transformed beauty as a fusion of Philoclea and Pyrocles, embodied in the form of Cleophila. Significantly, Pyrocles christens his new identity Cleophila, a name which inverts that of his beloved Philoclea. While Pyrocles has incorporated Philoclea into his body and mind, he has also

¹⁵⁹ Burton, 86.

exposed himself to infection, in the form of melancholy and femininity. To his friend Musidorus, Pyrocles denies that wearing “woman’s apparel” will make him “more womanish”; and yet, as Cleophila, Pyrocles has already gained the unique feminine capacity to wound with his gaze. “Contagion,” Alison Bashford and Clare Hooker explain, “implies absorption, invasion, vulnerability, the breaking of a boundary imagined as secure, in which the other becomes part of the self.”¹⁶⁰ Pyrocles’s contraction of melancholy upon beholding the portrait of Philoclea offers a literal demonstration of the bodily incorporation that results simultaneously from love and disease. Early modern models of disease transmission that granted a sense of shared identity—by means of sympathies and incorporation—necessarily gave way to a sense of identity both liable to invasion and open to the operations of a contagious and threatening environment.

Sidney identifies Pyrocles as a foreign contaminant that threatens the health of the quarantined community of Arcadia. Basilius’s fear of the foreign begins with the oracle’s forecast that “in thy throne a foreign state shall sit” (5). The duke responds to this threat by moving his family to a “solitary place” and narrowly securing the borders of his province: “As for the government of the country, and in especial manning of his frontiers (for that only way he thought a foreign prince might endanger his crown), he would leave the charge to . . . Philanax” (6). Regardless of these precautionary measures, both foreign princes manage to infiltrate Arcadia and the duke’s secluded residence. Drawing on the organic metaphor of the body politic, Basilius’s xenophobia accommodates a pathological significance, in which the ruler of the

¹⁶⁰ Alison Bashford and Clare Hooker, “Contagion, Modernity, and Postmodernity,” in *Contagion: Historical and Cultural Studies*, eds. Bashford and Hooker (London: Routledge, 2001), 4.

“healthy” unified nation of Arcadia “guard[s] against the malign invading pathogen.”¹⁶¹

Introduced as a prelapsarian Eden, Arcadia is renowned for the “sweetness of the air” and the “moderate and well tempered minds” of the inhabitants. Within this scene, Pyrocles takes his cue as the corrupting agent that exposes Arcadia to pestilence and the passionate excess of erotic desire.

Pyrocles’s decision to inhabit, not just any female body, but that of an Amazonian princess, emphasizes his foreign identity, while also strengthening his capacity to act on others at-a-distance. As a female warrior society, Amazons signified a disruption to patriarchal ideology, due, in part, to their martial prowess and sexual self-sufficiency. Kathryn Schwartz writes that “in a culture inclined to read female masculinity as an excess of heterosexual desire”—masculine women were typically regarded as harlots and strumpets—“the Amazon’s implication in sexual aggression is an inevitable consequence of the disruption of gender roles.”¹⁶² Because of the connection between inversions of gender and ocular power, the Amazons carried legendary associations with the murderous gaze. The basilisk and Venomous Virgin—both notorious for emitting infectious poison from their eyes—served as commonplace examples of feminine ocular aggression. For many writers, including Henry Cornelius Agrippa, Giambattista della Porta, and Johann Jacob Wecker, the behavior of these mythological figures

¹⁶¹ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 49.

¹⁶² Kathryn Schwartz, “Missing the Breast,” in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, ed. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 147–70.

offered an analogy for how the “passions of the mind can work out of themselves upon another’s body.”¹⁶³

Amazons, along with intractable women of all kinds who refused to conform to society’s gender codes, allegedly possessed the power to infect others with physical disease or immoral behavior. According to Agrippa, Giambattista della Porta, and Albertus Magnus, “bold and assertive women, in particular, could transmit their unruly passions to others either at-a-distance or through the shared handling of objects.”¹⁶⁴ Women’s capacity to infect others both at-a-distance and through intermediaries sheds further light on Pyrocles’s “transforming apparel.” Della Porta elaborates on this notion: “a Harlot is not only impudent in her self, but she also naturally infects therewith, all that she touches and carries about her; so that if a man . . . put on her garments, it will make him impudent and lecherous as she is.” Thomas Johnson makes a similar claim: “the smock or other apparel of a strumpet being worne of others, giveth a certaine impudencie and shameless boldness to those parties.”¹⁶⁵ Following this logic, the apparel of an Amazonian princess would transfer over to Pyrocles the hyper-contagious qualities inherent to the sexualized female body. Pyrocles, however, is not the only one affected by the Amazonian attire. As part of his plan to spend the night alone with Philoclea, Pyrocles suggests that Gynecia wear his garments to protect her honor in case she is seen walking to the cave. Once disguised, “she that before would not have gone alone so far (especially by night, and to so dark a place) now took a pride in the same courage, and framed in her mind a pleasure out of the pain itself”

¹⁶³ Floyd-Wilson, 52.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶⁵ Qtd. in Floyd-Wilson, 52.

(197). Beyond granting her courage to fare the solitary trek to Pyrocles's cave in the middle of the night, the Amazonian garments also empower her to enact sexual dominance. Immediately after changing her clothes, Gynecia spots the bottle of gold engraved with the verses: "Let him drink this whom long in arms to fold / Thou dost desire, and with free pow'r to hold" (197).

Gynecia has in her possession what is essentially a "roofie." Bringing the magical liquor with her to the cave ensures that she maintains control over Pyrocles's body, and provides insurance that Pyrocles will honor his promise to sexually satisfy her.

Within the quarantined space of Arcadia, Pyrocles represents patient zero. The first to contract melancholy, Pyrocles next spreads the disease to Musidorus (via Pamela), and then to the members of the noble family. Significantly, the narrator uses the metaphor of a "cup of poison" to describe the infection Pyrocles has spread to Basilius and his family: "the cup of poison, which was deeply tasted of all this noble company, had left no sinew of theirs without mortally searching into it" (81). The metaphor of plague or infectious poison resonates throughout the prose romance and refers to the love-melancholy experienced by the central characters. In an isolated lamentation, Gynecia cries, "what poisonous heats be these that thus possess me? How hath the sight of this strange guest invaded my soul? Alas, what entrance found this desire? . . . if by any idle lusts I framed my heart fit for such an impression, then let this plague daily increase in me till my name be made odious to womankind" (97-8). Here again, Pyrocles takes on the form of a foreign invader. Entering through her eyes—the same means by which he was infected—Pyrocles has infiltrated the body and soul of the chaste Gynecia and infected her with a formidable case of melancholy and lust. In this way, the healthy host is reimpressed by the impressions of the hostile plague carrier. Undergoing a similar fate, her husband Basilius begs Cleophila to "cool his fiery plague" (101). The "poisonous heats" and

“fiery plague” that have infected Gynecia and Basilius reflect the contagious agent, Pyrocles, whose name carries associations with fire.

As an outsider unaffected by the melancholy miasma surrounding the duke and his household, Philanax provides an alternative perspective on Pyrocles’s role as a contagious agent. In his speech at the trial that concludes Sidney’s work, Philanax refers to Pyrocles as a “venomous serpent, admitted thus into [Basilius’s] bosom, as contagion will easily find a fit body for it” (335). Philanax’s meaning here is somewhat ambiguous: is the serpent a “fit body” for a corrupting agent, or is Basilius a “fit” body vulnerable to infection? Both meanings seem to play out satisfactorily within the broader context of the romance. Pyrocles does, albeit involuntarily, infect a number of “fit,” or healthy, bodies; however, he also employs a series of bodies, or identities, to suit his purposes. Thomas Dekker’s caution to his readers that “in such changeable shapes did this Cameleon-like sicknes appeare” is as applicable to Pyrocles as it is to the plague.¹⁶⁶ Philoclea says as much in her invective against Pyrocles, who had been hiding his feelings for her in order to dupe Gynecia and Basilius:

What aileth this new conversion? Have you yet another sleight to play; or do you think to deceive me in Pyrocles’ form, as you have done in Cleophila’s? Or rather, now you have betrayed me in both those, is there some third sex left you into which you can transform yourself, to inveigle my simplicity? (206)

Philoclea captures the chameleon-like nature of Pyrocles, who not only performs roles and adopts fake identities, but also literally employs bodies, as in the case of Cleophila’s female body, which grants him access to the duke’s home. Drawing on early modern ideas about drugs,

¹⁶⁶ Dekker, *Newes from Graves-end Sent to Nobody* (London: T C, 1604).

medicines, and poisons, Tanya Pollard describes how being “fluid, formless, and essentially invisible, poison was notorious for appearing as something other than what it was.”¹⁶⁷ Philanax emphasizes this quality in order to support his prosecution against Pyrocles:

This man, whom to begin with I know not how to name, since being come into this country unaccompanied like a lost pilgrim, from a man grew a woman, from a woman a ravisher of women, thence a prisoner, and now a prince; but this Timopyrus, this Cleophila, this what you will (for any shape or title he can take upon him that hath no restraint of shame), having understood the solitary life my late master lived, and considering how open he had laid himself to any traitorous attempt, for the first mask of his falsehood disguised himself like a woman. (334-35)

Because both depended on the mechanism of “incorporation,” love and disease had the potential to unfix the self in ways that aligned with a humoral cosmology that subscribed to the idea of permeable selves and fluid subjectivities.

II. Pastoral Sympathies

As touched on in the previous section, contemporary notions of disease transmission attributed the spread of infection to operations of sympathy. In *Sylva Sylvarum*, Bacon describes the aggressive sympathies involved in plague infection: “such aires . . . have some similitude with mans body; and so insinuate themselves [through] operations of sympathy.” Furthermore,

¹⁶⁷ Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 107.

“thinges like and consenting in qualitie, [when] quartered together, spredde, multiplie and infect in similitude.”¹⁶⁸ The idea that infection depends upon the sympathetic connection between victim and disease corresponds to humoral theory’s emphasis on the ecological relationship between the humoral body and its environment, with which it shared the same elemental features. Abraham Holland, a victim of the plague, voices this very idea: “Our Bodies Constitutions . . . agree / With the malicious ayre and so contract / The quicke Infection.” In his plague pamphlets, Thomas Lodge demonstrates the ways in which disease emerges as a dynamic exchange between an individual’s constitution and the surrounding atmosphere: “plague proceedeth from the venomous corruption of the humors and spirits of the body, infected by the attraction of corrupted aire . . . which have the propertie to alter mans bodie and spirits.”¹⁶⁹ As this diverse array of authors establishes, the pervasive belief that sympathetic contact facilitates disease contraction existed well into the seventeenth century.

In his *Old Arcadia*, Sidney constructs a noxious rendering of Virgilian pastoral sympathy, in which transactions with the natural world generate disease. Set in Edenic Arcadia, Sidney’s work unabashedly establishes itself within the classical pastoral tradition, which romanticized the tranquil and leisurely lives of shepherds and goatherds who lived in perfect harmony with nature. The Eclogues that appear after each book or act of *The Old Arcadia* offer a distillation of the pastoral mode in their representation of an idyllic rural community of shepherds who vocalize their woe through song. In setting the scene for the shepherds’ “pastorals (for so their sports were

¹⁶⁸ Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum: Or, A Naturall Historie* (London: J H, 1627), 245, 246.

¹⁶⁹ Lodge, *A Treatise of the Plague: Containing the Nature, Signes, and Accidents of the Same* (London: E White, 1603). Qtd. in Langley, 104.

termed),” Sidney draws attention to the symbiotic relationship between the shepherds’ singing and their natural environment. Around the meadow appointed for these activities grew a number of stately trees “as if it had been to enclose a theatre”; and the “pleasant arbours” grew so close together that they “yielded a perfect shadow, in those hot countries counted a great pleasure” (41–2). The natural world appears to respond or react to the shepherds’ physical needs, providing fruit, sweet smells, aesthetic pleasures, shade, and of course, a naturally-occurring amphitheatre in which to perform their eclogues. The natural sympathy that exists between the shepherds and their corresponding environment is a reflection of their humorally-balanced constitutions.

Although prone to melancholia, the shepherds channel their passionate excess by delivering well-crafted poetic and musical expressions of love. The highly regulated and formally contained verse structure of the Eclogues provides a useful exercise in the regulation of the passions. While melancholy connects everyone in the community, it also leaves them vulnerable to disease. The physiological imbalance and disorder caused by the introduction of erotic excess into Arcadia (in the form of Cleophila) exposes the pastoral community to malign environmental forces, such as the feral beasts of the forest and Basilius’s mutinous subjects.

Juxtaposing a typical pastoral scene with a scene of environmental assault emphasizes the dual nature of sympathetic operations. The episode involving the encounter with the lion and she-bear demonstrates the way in which erotic excess can animate the surrounding environment. Significantly, the beasts (common emblems of the passions during the period) enter the scene at the exact moment Pyrocles and Musidorus allow themselves to be overcome by their passions. As they rest under the shade of a tree waiting for the pastoral games to begin, a form of affective transference occurs when Cleophila—a witness to Musidorus’s enamourment—sees in him “the glass of her own misery.” Thus inspired, Cleophila takes Philoclea’s hand and addresses her

passionately: “O love, since thou art so changeable in men’s estates, how art thou so constant in their torments?” — when suddenly there came out of the wood a monstrous lion, with a she-bear of little less fierceness” (42). The arrival of these wild beasts out of the woods quite literally disrupts Cleophila’s verbal lovemaking (indicated by the hyphen), and precipitates a change in the environment that matches the disordered constitutions of its inhabitants.

The similarities that exist between the beasts and the princes—Cleophila and the lion, Dorus and the she-bear—not only reveal the scene to be an instance of psychomachia, but also signify the deadly sympathies constituting infection. Like Pyrocles, the beasts— “which, having been hunted in forests far off, had by chance come to this place where such beasts had never before been seen” (42)—assume the form of foreign invaders. The beasts signify the failure of temperance and the hegemony of the passions; as such, they are simultaneously internal and external to the humoral subject. The parallels that exist between Pyrocles and the lion, who are both motivated by their physical appetites, come to the fore during their battle.

But Cleophila, seeing how greedily the lion went after the prey she herself so much desired, it seemed all her spirits were kindled with an unwonted fire; so that, equaling the lion in swiftness, she overtook him as he was ready to have seized himself of his beautiful chase, and disdainfully saying ‘are you become my competitor?’—strake him so great a blow upon the shoulder that she almost cleaved him asunder. (43)

In accordance with the logic of psychomachia, Pyrocles’s internal struggle against his baser appetites manifests in the physical battle against the lion. Providing useful insight into how the relationship between subject and environment was perceived in the period, Sullivan explains the ways in which “motions in the environment . . . intersect with and animate motions within the

body itself.” In this way, “one can read the passionate body as a single field of motion within a larger, environmental one.”¹⁷⁰ The passionate perturbations occurring within the central characters, therefore, operate within the greater sphere of the Arcadian forest, itself suffused by perturbations and motions. The feral beasts demonstrate the fluidity of the passions and their capacity to extend beyond and across the borders of the humoral subject and the environment.

Indicating both the materiality and externality of the passions, the wild animals function as external counterparts to — as opposed to outward effects of — the passions operating within the characters. According to Peter Harrison, for the medieval and early modern period, “the natural world was a book, a repository of rich and varied symbols which bore important meanings.”¹⁷¹ Within this book, animals served as representations of different “characters” of the passions; for instance, “the Malice of a Serpent, the Fury of the Tyger, the Cholera of the Lyon, and the Lubricity of the Goat.”¹⁷² This taxonomy of the passions finds resonance in the characters’ emotional reactions to the assault:

There might one have seen at one instant all sorts of passions lively painted out in the young lovers’ faces—an extremity of love shining in their eyes; fear for their mistresses; assured hope in their own virtue; anger against the beasts; joy that occasion employed their service; sorrow to see their ladies in agony. (42)

¹⁷⁰ Sullivan, 737.

¹⁷¹ Harrison, Peter. “The Virtues of Animals in Seventeenth-Century Thought.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59.3 (1998): 465.

¹⁷² Ayloffe, William. *The Government of the Passions, according to the Rules of Reason and Religion* (London, 1700), 31, qtd. in Harrison (467).

The early modern notion that the human being "contained all creatures within himself" necessarily entailed that the external signification of the passions in animals found a counterpart within the individual.¹⁷³ Elaborating on this principle, Jacob Boehme writes, "'whatsoever is Internally, and howsoever its operation is, so likewise it hath its Character externally.'"¹⁷⁴ This principle plays out in the case of Gynecia, whose desires only grow after witnessing Pyrocles's heroic defeat of the lion: "O deserts, deserts, how fit a guest am I for you, since my heart is fuller of wild ravenous beasts than ever you were!" (80). In her melancholy lamentation, Gynecia acknowledges her fluid subjectivity, in which her humoral constitution fluctuates in accordance with her environmental circumstance. In this context, the lion and bear function as external expressions of the internal passions operating within the lovers of Arcadia.

The second case of environmental fluctuation, which draws on the metaphor of the body politic, features the rebellion of some of Basilius's subjects, an act that evokes the disordered constitution of their ruler. The metaphor of the organic body pervaded much political discourse, some writers going so far as to attach certain classes of society to particular bodily organs. For early modern writers, the organic political analogy was grounded within a system of correspondences between the body of man (the microcosm) and the larger universe (macrocosm). If every member of society partially constituted the body of the king, then they also contributed to the health or illness of the state. In *The Touchstone of Complexions*, Levinus Leminius illuminates this intimate correspondence: "All the members of the body be so linked

¹⁷³ Harrison, 466.

¹⁷⁴ Boehme, Jacob. *Signatura Rerum: Or the Signature of all Things* (London, 1651), 77, qtd. in Harrison (468).

and knit together, and such participation and consent is betweene them, that if one of the smallest joyntes, or the little toe bee hurt or pained, the whole body is distempered and out of quiet.”¹⁷⁵

The correlation between bodily and national health undergirding the theory of the body politic aligns with the sympathetic operations that connect Basilius’s love-melancholy with social dysfunction.

Leminius’s image of the bodily parts “linked and knit together” resonates with the discourse on friendship previously discussed, especially the concept of “incorporation.” Plutarch describes a friend as an extension of one’s physicality: “as you are a body together, so hang not together by skins and gymocks, but labour to be jointed together by flesh and sinewes.”¹⁷⁶ On the same topic, Richard Brathwait claims that a friend is an “individuante companion” who can “knit unto you, as if he were individually united to your selfe.”¹⁷⁷ As we have seen before, though, the sense of community and connection engendered by sympathies also created a breeding ground for infection, as evidenced in the case of the unruly mob, whose “minds [were] all knit together only in madness” (109). The “participation” and “consent” required among the members of the body for proper functioning, therefore, also possessed echoes of disease. As Lodge defines it,

¹⁷⁵ Qtd. in Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester University Press, 1994), 81.

¹⁷⁶ Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called the Morals*, trans. P Holland (London: A Hatfield, 1603), 90.

¹⁷⁷ Brathwait, *The English Gentleman; Containing Sundry Excellent Rules or Exquisite Observations, Tending to Direction of Every Gentleman, of Selecte Ranke and Qualitie* (London: J Haviland, 1630), 279, 297.

contagion “is no other thing but a like disposition by a certaine hidden consent communicated by touch unto another.”¹⁷⁸ The “hidden consent” required for infection suggests that disease contraction depends upon a reciprocal exchange between sound and unsound bodies. Even within the infected body, as Margaret Cavendish writes, “the motions of some parts which are sound, do imitate the motions of those that are infected,” and “by this means, the Plague becomes contagious and spreading.”¹⁷⁹

While the narrator initially conveys Arcadia as a prelapsarian Eden filled with “well tempered minds,” the Bacchanalian-like celebration in honor of the duke’s birthday creates an atmosphere of unbridled passions and raging, chaotic energy that fully envelops the Phagonian townspeople. Similar to the disruption caused by the wild beasts in Book 1, a powerful animalistic force—the “mad multitude”—rudely puts an end to the shepherds’ singing. The description of Basilius’s rebellious subjects emphasizes their animalistic nature, as well as their status as a body of intense motion. Like the untamed beasts of the forest, the insurgent masses become mere producers of “tumult,” and “rascals” emitting “savage howlings.” Furthermore, rather than an image of individual humans, this scene presents the dissolution of human qualities to create one “raging motion.” As previously discussed, animals functioned as symbols of human passions, but the passions were also understood as a kind of motion. The narrator identifies Bacchus—“begotten with thunder” and therefore “full of stir and debate”—as the cause of the “furious storm” that rains down on Basilius’s lodge. The god of wine, madness, and frenzy,

¹⁷⁸ Qtd. in Langley, 104.

¹⁷⁹ Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy to which is added The Description of a New Blazing World* (London: A Maxwell, 1666), 54.

Bacchus represents all that escapes human reason. In alignment with Cavendish's explanation for how a disease becomes contagious, the motions of each member of the party imitate the motions of those that are infected—in this case, the motions of sedition. This idea manifests as a form of peer pressure: "neither was any man thought of wit that did not pretend some cause of dislike. Railing was counted the fruit of freedom, and saying nothing had his uttermost praise in ignorance" (111). In this way, the townspeople are "knit[ted] together," but "only in madness." As the narrator reports, "some cried 'take!', some 'kill!', some 'save!'; but even they that cried 'save!' ran for company with them that meant to kill" (109). Thus, "the disagreeing sound of so many voices was the only token of their unmeet agreement" (113). Disorder and the absence of reason join the Phagonians together and fuel their seditious enterprise. The turbulent motion signifying the ungoverned passions comes to a halt, therefore, with the introduction of reason.

Associated all along with her infectious qualities as an Amazonian princess, Cleophila provides a sympathetic locus for the "many-headed multitude," that redirects their violent intentions: "The blows [Cleophila] had dealt . . . made each of them take breath" and the "outward graces" and "goodliness of her shape . . . did even fix the eyes of the barbarous people with admiration upon her" and cause their "rageful violence" to "take pause" (113). This shift to a state of inactivity enables the "raging motion" to revert back to individuated bodies. The introduction of reason gradually unravels the bonds holding the assailants together:

Instead of roaring cries, there was now heard nothing but a confused muttering whether [Cleophila's] saying was to be followed, betwixt doubt to pursue and fear to leave. Glad everyone would have been it had never been begun; but how to end it (each afraid of his companion) they knew not—so much easier it is to inflame than to quench, to tie than to loose knots. (115)

In exchanging an environment of frenzy and turbulence with one of reason and right government, Cleophila disrupts the sympathetic operations holding the townspeople together, thereby prohibiting the further spread of infection. Referring to the mob's dispersal, the narrator writes that the "ungracious motion converted into their own bowels," and the rest "fled to certain woods not far off . . . where drinking only water, they were well disciplined from their drunken riots" (116). The recession of the surging masses signals a return of government, but also suggests the possibility of resurgence in the future. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that Basilius remains in the forest and therefore continues to abdicate his responsibility to govern both his subjects and his passions.

III. Dangerous Remedies

The trial that concludes *The Old Arcadia* invites readers to pass judgment on the actions of its two central protagonists, Pyrocles and Musidorus. Pyrocles is accused of attempted rape and collaborating in the murder of Duke Basilius, while Musidorus faces the charge of theft, in stealing away Pamela, the princess of the province. The text offers two possible judgments: one from Euarchus, King of Macedon, and the other from Duke Basilius, who wakes from his deathlike slumber just in time to pass it. Euarchus enacts justice in its rawest form: he sustains an objective position over the course of the judicial proceedings, unswayed by sympathy or compassion even after discovering the true identities of the men he has sentenced to death (his only son and nephew). In his speech to the assembly, Euarchus justifies his decision to steadfastly uphold justice, despite the love he has for his children: "If rightly I have judged, then rightly have I judged mine own children, unless the name of a child should have force to change the never-changing justice. No, no, Pyrocles and Musidorus, I prefer you much before my life,

but I prefer justice as far before you” (356). Euarchus’s decision to condemn Pyrocles and Musidorus to death seems harsh even to their most adamant persecutor, Philanax:

With that, though he would have refrained them, a man might perceive the tears drop down [Euarchus’s] long white beard, which moved not only Kalodoulus and Kerxenus to roaring lamentations, but all the assembly dolefully to record that pitiful spectacle. Philanax himself could not abstain from great shows of pitying sorrow, and manifest withdrawing from performing the king’s commandment.
(356)

The “pitiful spectacle” of the trial becomes a locus of contagious sympathy that spreads among the Arcadian assembly. While sympathy emanates from the spectacle itself, it also finds bodily form in the figure of Sympathus, who only appears in this final scene of the text as the princes’ prison guard. As a constant accompaniment to the princes, Sympathus personifies the protective force of sympathy in their moment of judgment. Sympathy and compassion knit the members of the assembly together, and assuredly affect the readers of the text as well, who have formed a sympathetic bond with the protagonists over the course of the narrative.

While Euarchus exacts uncompromising justice, his ruling is completely overturned by Basilius when he wakes. Basilius, “considering all had fallen out by the highest providence, and withal weighing in all these matters his own fault had been the greatest,” acquits the princes (and Gynecia) of their crimes, and sanctions their union with his daughters. While Sidney presents Euarchus’s execution of the law as perhaps overly precise, he also finds fault with Basilius’s complete disregard of the law. After Basilius publicly pardons his wife, she is exalted thenceforth as the “perfect mirror of all wifely love.” It is at this point, however, that the narrator inserts a subtle point of criticism: “which though in that point undeserved, she did in the remnant

of her life duly purchase with observing all duty and faith, to the example and glory of Greece—so uncertain are mortal judgements, the same person most infamous and most famous, and neither justly” (360). Sidney suggests that the “mortal judgements” pronounced by Euarchus and Basilius—each falling on opposite ends of the spectrum—are both flawed. The dissatisfaction expressed by the narrator, invites readers to weigh the errors of the princes against their virtues, and judge accordingly. As the remainder of this section will demonstrate, however, the text’s blurring of true and false love threatens to skew readers’ judgments.

Whatever their intentions may have been with the Arcadian princesses, the love Pyrocles and Musidorus have for each other is unquestionably pure, and arguably the only example of Platonic love offered by the text. The conversation the princes have while imprisoned provides thorough evidence of the ennobling love they share. The prison cell that holds them seems to inspire a conversation about the idea—native to Platonism—that the body is merely a prison for the soul. While ignoble love, or love-melancholy, considers the embodied, mortal beloved to be the “untranscendable condition of joy,” the princes envision the continuation of their friendship in the afterlife.¹⁸⁰ Even after the loss of “sensible or passionate knowledge”—and with it the memory of earthly existence—Pyrocles tells Musidorus that he hopes he will “know our friendship, though exempt from the earthly cares of friendship, having both united it and ourselves in that high and heavenly love of the unquenchable light” (322). For Musidorus, as well, the nature of their friendship transcends the body. “Do not me, therefore, that wrong . . . as to say you have brought me to any evil,” he tells Pyrocles, “since the love of you doth overbalance all bodily mischiefs; and those mischiefs be but mischiefs to the baser minds too

¹⁸⁰ Wells, 8.

much delighted with the kennel of this life” (321). The bodily mischiefs Musidorus refers to, are of course the passionate desires that have led to their imprisonment. Now, however, in light of their impending death, “Musidorus, looking with a heavenly joy upon [Pyrocles], sang this song unto him he had made before love turned his muse to another subject” (322–23). This passage suggests that Musidorus’s muse had once been “divine love,” until passionate love took its place. Evidence of this transition abounds in the numerous melancholic verses Dorus sings amongst the Arcadian shepherds for the majority of the text. The melancholy Pamela inspires contrasts sharply with the heavenly joy inspired by Pyrocles, indicating that the latter form of love is both healthy and ennobling, while the former is pathological and debasing.

The clear distinction made here between divine love and love-melancholy is complicated by the idealization of the beloved so central to the courtly love tradition. Thus far, Platonism has functioned as the measure of true and false love in Sidney’s text; however, as a prose romance, conceptions of courtly love also play an influential role in readers’ judgment of the kinds of love to be esteemed in the text. While Platonism conceives of the mortal beloved as merely a means towards closer contact with the divine, courtly love establishes an “erotic discipline” that figures the individual beloved as the “highest goal of aspiration.” According to Henry Staten, the discourse of courtly love, or *fin’amor*, reconciles “(hetero)sexual love with the protocols of idealism” so that the pursuit of the mortal beloved serves as a “sufficient condition for the ennoblement of the self.” Although “the beloved may be in herself the highest goal of aspiration,” Wells observes, “she is nevertheless by and large an object of continuing, unsatisfied desire.”¹⁸¹ Corroborating this point, Carol Heffernan describes courtly love as an “ever

¹⁸¹ Wells, 8.

unsatiated, increasing desire which ostensibly moved the lover to acts of virtue and nobility as he sought the favor of the beloved.” In its purest form, courtly love “aims at the union of hearts and minds and foregoes the solace of physical possession.”¹⁸² Within the courtly love tradition, therefore, the beloved functions not only as an inspiration for noble and heroic acts, but also as a source of love-melancholy, since the process of ennobling the soul can only occur at the expense of the body’s physical desires.

To an extent, the princes’ love for their ladies inspires virtuous and ennobling actions, such as slaying the beasts of the forest and subduing the violent townspeople; however, this love also leads them to commit deeds that are less than honorable. Or, in the case of Queen Erona, it leads them to postpone heroic deeds altogether. In the First Eclogues, Histor reports on a tale of Pyrocles and Musidorus’s first heroic enterprise in which they save Erona from the rageful lust of King Otanes who intended to force her to marry him by threatening the life of her true beloved, Antiphilus. While the princes successfully kill Otanes and rescue Antiphilus, Otanes’s sister, Artaxia, has since sought vengeance by capturing Erona and imprisoning her. As an ultimatum, Artaxia demands that either Pyrocles and Musidorus return to the country of Lydia within two years’ time to be held accountable for their traitorous actions, or Erona will be publicly burned at the stake. The princes’ reaction to hearing this news indicates the effects of effeminate love.

Great was the compassion Cleophila and Dorus conceived of the queen Erona’s danger—which was the first enterprise they had ever entered into; and therefore

¹⁸² Heffernan, “Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*: The Disease of Love and Courtly Love,” *Neophilologus* 74 (1990): 298.

(besides their noble humanity) they were loath their own worthy work should be spoiled. Therefore, considering they had almost a year of time to succour her, they resolved as soon as this their present action (which had taken full possession of all their desires) were brought to any good point they would forthwith take in hand that journey; neither should they need in the meantime anything reveal themselves to Plangus (who, though unwittingly, had now done his errand). (63-4)

The narrator's parenthetical asides in this passage reveal an underlying criticism of the princes' laissez faire approach to the heroic enterprises they once prioritized (before their arrival to Arcadia). Their previous drive to test their masculine virtue and develop their martial prowess has been replaced by idleness and leisure. In shirking their duties, the princes subject Erona to a longer imprisonment at the hands of the cruel Artaxia, and in not revealing themselves to Plangus, they allow him to continue on his desperate search to bring the princes back with him. Fully possessed by their desire for the Arcadian princesses, Pyrocles and Musidorus fail to progress to the next stage of Platonic love. In the *Symposium*, Plato explains that the lover must come to view his beloved as one beautiful body among many; realizing that he is "a lover of all beautiful bodies . . . relaxes this excessive preoccupation with one."¹⁸³ This moment is just one of many in the text when the princes' love-melancholy motivates less than admirable behavior.

The text highlights the faults of the disease-stricken princes elsewhere via acts of sexual promiscuity. The princes, of course, are not alone in this as Basilius and Gynecia share the same aspirations of "enjoying" their beloved Cleophila—and both would have guiltlessly done so if

¹⁸³ Qtd. in C. D. C. Reeve, "Plato on Friendship and Eros," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

not for the bed-trick. Pyrocles states his goal explicitly from the outset: “Neither doubt you, because I wear a woman’s apparel, I will be the more womanish; since, I assure you, for all my apparel, there is nothing I desire more than fully to prove myself a man in this enterprise” (21). After weeks of scheming—at the expense of all the other characters in the text—both princes manage to isolate their mistresses. Pyrocles seduces Philoclea into having carnal relations outside of wedlock, and even more appalling, Musidorus attempts to rape Pamela while she sleeps, despite his previous vow to protect her honor. Fortunately, Musidorus’s attempts are thwarted by the clownish vagabonds who pose a “most infortunate bar of his long-pursued and almost-achieved desires” (177). Like Pyrocles, Musidorus views sexual intercourse as the ultimate objective, which suggests that the princes are perhaps mistaking erotic desire for love. Euarchus says as much in his speech during their trial: “that sweet and heavenly uniting of the minds, which properly is called love, hath no other knot but virtue; and therefore if it be a right love, it can never slide into any action that is not virtuous” (352). Readers are left to decide whether the princes should be mortally punished for mismanaging erotic excess (as per Euarchus), or exonerated because their actions are merely the result of a secret predestined sympathy between their bodies and the disease (as per Basilius).

Ultimately, while Sidney can provide examples of virtuous and vicious love in his text, he cannot control how readers will respond. Written at relatively the same time as *The Old Arcadia*, Sidney’s *Defence of Poetry* (1595) focuses on the power of poetry to move readers to virtuous action and political virtue. Central to Sidney’s *Defence*, of course, is the Horatian dictum that poetry teaches and delights. He describes poetry as “a medicine of cherries,” more effective at edifying readers (than history or philosophy) because it is sensually appealing to consumers. Sidney’s comparison between poetry and medicine is not arbitrary; it reveals that

Sidney recognizes poetry's capacity to physically "move" readers: "That mooving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appeare, that it is well nigh both the cause and the effect of teaching."¹⁸⁴ A key claim of the *Defense*, then, is that poetry presents models of virtue and vice that move readers either to emulation or abhorrence. While Sidney insists that worthy examples will move readers towards virtue—"What so much good doth that teaching bring foorth as that it mooveth one to do that which it doth teach"—poetry nevertheless runs the risk of provoking the very disease it seeks to remedy. Poetry's power to "move" readers—as Plato recognized—could prove dangerous in that it roused vicious passions in readers even if only in the service of edification. The tale of Franscesca and Paolo from Dante's *Divine Comedy* provides a succinct dramatization of the dangers inherent to literature.

One day we reading were for our delight
Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthral . . .
Full many a time our eyes together drew
That reading, and drove the colour from our faces . . .
When as we read of the much-longed-for smile
Being by such a noble lover kissed,
This one, who ne'er from me shall be divided,
Kissed me upon the mouth all palpitating. (*Inferno* V. 127–136)

In a similar way, the erotic desire constitutive of the process of edification in Sidney's *Old Arcadia* has and always will threaten to titillate readers.

¹⁸⁴ Sir Philip Sidney. "The Defence of Poesy." *Sir Philip Sidney Selected Prose and Poetry*. Ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969).

Contagious Courtesy:

The Melancholy Body Politic in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

Out of a renewed interest in the classical theory of the body politic emerged a conception of health that linked social misconduct and political dysfunction with the medical condition of melancholy.¹⁸⁵ As such, melancholy evolved during the early modern period from merely a personal affair to a matter of national concern. Vernacular medical treatises on melancholy originally proliferated in the medieval period for the purposes of self-diagnosis and care in the face of nationwide pestilence; however, the “Elizabethan Malady” (as it has come to be known) also gained prominence within discourses of courtesy as an affliction predicated on behavioral and affective scripts. The correlation between individual and national health undergirding the theory of the body politic gave rise to a proliferation of advice literature or how-to books that sought to instruct readers on healthy self-governance. In fact, advice literature of various kinds—including conduct manuals and courtesy books—had become one of the most popular genres of

¹⁸⁵ See Adam Kitzes, *The Politics of Melancholy from Spenser to Milton* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

writing by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁸⁶ Handbooks such as Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* and Lemnius's *Touchstone of Complexions* were united by a common political agenda: the construction of a nation-based conceptualization of health. This conception grounded the health of the nation in the health of its subjects. Consequently, the physiological condition of English subjects became a product of political prerogatives established for the purpose of maintaining social order.

Despite the numerous allusions to courtesy literature throughout *As You Like It*, the topic has received scant critical attention.¹⁸⁷ In fact, early modern English advice literature in general remains a grossly understudied topic.¹⁸⁸ And yet, as I intend to show, early modern culture's burgeoning preoccupation with melancholy and social propriety deeply influenced Shakespeare's play. The clearest demonstration of this lies in the fool character, Touchstone, who frequently

¹⁸⁶ Jaques Carré, ed., *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600–1900* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 2.

¹⁸⁷ While critics have noted the more blatant allusions to courtesy literature in the play (e.g. Touchstone's speech on the etiquette of dueling in 5.4), none have embarked on a full-length study on their significance for the play as a whole.

¹⁸⁸ For the few book-length studies on this topic, see Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Carré, *The Crisis of Courtesy*.

satirizes precepts found in contemporary manuals of courtly etiquette, and in doing so, reveals the highly codified nature of courtly behavior. As it exists in both the courtesy literature on which Shakespeare draws and the theatrical playscript, behavior—whether it be seemingly “natural” or not—is necessarily scripted and performative; as a result, the distinctions between the natural and the artificial that legitimize gentility and social rank become indistinguishable. In other words, Shakespeare upsets the political ideology undergirding the notion of the body politic by de-naturalizing the constructs upholding a hierarchical society.

Given the highly performative nature of courtly conduct, *As You Like It* turns frequently to metatheatre as the site of pathology for the body politic. Potentially, conduct books contributed to the maintenance of national health in their attempt to reaffirm power structures; however, by granting all literate laypersons access to the codes necessary for social mobility, they threatened to expose social and political power as merely a performance. Courtesy books, therefore, rendered notions of “natural” gentility obsolete. The conclusion of this chapter draws on early modern anti-theatrical tracts that claimed impersonation and counterfeit had infectious capacities. I argue that the notion of contagious theatricality that emerges in the period had implications both within playhouses and without. However, through the medium of comedy of manners, Shakespeare inoculates his audience against antitheatrical rhetoric—specifically, the plague of theatre. Ultimately, *As You Like It* promotes the theatricality of the playhouse as a prophylactic against the corruptive roleplaying that occurs in the real world.

The pathological and the political have a long-standing relationship that dates back to the ancient comparison between the body natural and the body politic found in Plato.¹⁸⁹ The metaphor of the organic body pervaded early modern political discourse as writers of the period concerned themselves with the maintenance of the social organism, posing theories about the cause and possible cures for the polity's illness. During the historical period that has been dubbed by literary critics as "the age of melancholy," the diagnosis for social dysfunction became more particularized. The condition of melancholy could be used to account for various forms of politically subversive conduct. In *The Politics of Melancholy from Spenser to Milton*, Adam Kitzes writes that early modern authors "made explicit links between melancholy and a set of publicly disruptive conditions all of which (taken together) suggested that the disease was not only a personal affair, but a matter of concern for the commonwealth as a whole."¹⁹⁰ Kitzes contends that "the analogy between a healthy body and healthy state," assured that all members of the polity "understood their respective positions within a predetermined hierarchy while simultaneously remaining united under the collective purpose of health and sustenance."¹⁹¹ The notion of the "melancholy body politic," therefore, denotes a commonwealth plagued by political turmoil.

The opening scenes of *As You Like It* survey the aftermath of Duke Frederick's usurpation—a much disordered and melancholy body politic. The Duke's political tyranny is

¹⁸⁹ Ernest Baker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906).

¹⁹⁰ Kitzes, 2.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

reflected in his humorous—i.e. mercurial—personality; in fact, his capricious and moody temperament serves as his defining characteristic. For example, Le Beau warns Orlando that the “Duke is humorous,” and given his “condition,” he “misconsters” Orlando’s victory over Charles in the wrestling match (I. ii. 231–33).¹⁹² Soon after this, Adam likewise asks why Orlando would “be so fond to overcome / The bonny priser of the humorous Duke,” which provokes the wrath of both the Duke and his envious brother Oliver (II. iii. 7–8). Furthermore, the usurping Duke showcases his humorous nature when he rashly orders Rosalind’s exile at the beginning of the play, and then, even more impetuously, he converts to a religious life in the midst of commanding a great army against Duke Senior and his followers at the conclusion of the play. While Duke Frederick constitutes the source of disease within the body politic, nearly all members of the court soon feel its ill effects. The play, therefore, pathologizes politically subversive conduct in the character of Duke Frederick, and dramatizes the analogy inherent in the notion of the body politic. *As You Like It* thus foregrounds the link between the individual human body and the collective “body” of political institutions.

In accordance with the typical green world structure, the discord and disorder that envelop the court at the beginning of the play provoke the central characters to flee from the world of the court to the natural setting of Ardenne. Northrop Frye’s notion of a green world comedy insists upon the contrast between the “normal world” of the court and the “green world.” “The action of the comedy,” he explains, “begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is

¹⁹² All quotations from Shakespeare are drawn from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et. al. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), 631–687.

achieved, and returns to the normal world.”¹⁹³ This formulation has strongly influenced interpretations of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*—one of the truest examples of a green world comedy. C. L. Barber, for example, argues that the Forest of Ardenne “is a region defined by an attitude of liberty from ordinary limitations, a festive place where the folly of romance can have its day.” “The traditional contrast of court and country,” he continues, “is developed in a way that is shaped by the contrast between everyday and holiday, as that antithesis has become part of Shakespeare’s art and sensibility.”¹⁹⁴ Drawing on this same distinction between “normal society” and the “green world,” Gene Fendt argues that the “green world is the world of desire” within which the “humorous excesses” of the characters—and audience members—are “purged so that the personal, interpersonal and social reintegrations can occur in the last scene.”¹⁹⁵ The following analysis does not seek to deny that the dramatic movement of *As You Like It* depends upon the presence of these two worlds—that of the court and the forest. What it does take issue with, however, is the presumed dichotomy between these worlds. In the case of *As You Like It*, the green world is not severed from the courtly world. The affinity between these two domains dissolves the distinction between what is “normal” and “other.” Although the central characters escape the physical bounds of the humorous court, melancholy and courtly artifice nevertheless

¹⁹³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 107.

¹⁹⁴ C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study in Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959), 253.

¹⁹⁵ Gene Fendt, “Resolution, Catharsis, Culture: *As You Like it*,” *Philosophy and Literature* 19 (1995): 248–60, 250.

extend beyond into Ardenne. In many ways, the characters never truly leave court. The “natural” world into which they venture is a highly manufactured realm fraught with political intrigue.

As a ruler (or at least former ruler), and therefore head of the body politic, Duke Senior subscribes to a political ideology based upon the distinction between the natural and the artificial—the very distinction that the play attempts to deconstruct. In accordance with Frye’s conception of the green world, Duke Senior emphasizes the division between the world of the court and the natural world of Ardenne: “Hath not old custom made this life more sweet / Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods / More free from peril than the envious court?” (II. i. 2–4) The Duke expresses the idealistic view that a world free from artifice exists—namely, the Forest of Ardenne. The fact remains, however, that such idealism finds expression through the voice of an actor standing upon a stage. The highly artificial theatrical context comes into tension with the drama’s assertion of a total absence of such artificiality. Beyond this contextual irony, the Forest of Arden is, if anything, a site of heightened theatricality, and a number of critics have gone so far to argue that it serves as a metaphor for theater itself.¹⁹⁶ One only has to look as far as the figure of Rosalind—a boy actor who plays the part of Rosalind, who disguises herself as Ganymede, and who then role-plays as “Rosalind”—for evidence of this. On the artificiality of Shakespeare’s green worlds, Jean E. Howard writes that they are “not so much a spontaneous expression of ‘natural’ simplicity as the artful imitation of such simplicity by characters exiled from more sophisticated realms who for a time assume the guise of shepherds [or forest outlaws]

¹⁹⁶ See Kent Talbot Van den Berg, “Theatrical Fiction and the Reality of Love in *As You Like It*,” *PMLA*, 90 (1975): 885–93 and Albert Cirillo, “*As You Like It*: Pastoralism Gone Awry,” *ELH* 38 (1971): 19–39.

and play an elaborate game of ‘Let’s pretend.’” This world of make-believe, as Howard describes it, offers characters “an opportunity to see more clearly—and perhaps then to change—the world in which [they] ordinarily live by entering for a time the playful, meditative, and artificial realm of imaginary shepherds.”¹⁹⁷

The artificially natural realm of Ardenne provokes debate concerning the conflicting concepts that constitute its space. English monarchical theory in the early modern period emphasized the indispensability of transparent counsel to the unity and health of the body politic.¹⁹⁸ And yet, most English conduct books of the sixteenth century emphasize dissimulation as a key characteristic of the ideal courtier, who must maintain a prudential relationship with his sovereign. In the remainder of his speech, Duke Senior claims that he prefers the harsh, yet transparent, counsel of the raw environment to the flattering “counsellors” at court (II. i. 10). Amiens, however, answers the Duke’s denouncement of obsequious counselors with flattery: “I would not change it. Happy is your grace / That can translate the stubbornness of fortune / Into so quiet and so sweet a style” (II. i. 18–20). Amiens’s response discredits the Duke’s idea that either the “custom” and “painted pomp” of court is something that they can leave, or that a political Golden Age exists to which they might return. Furthermore, Amiens draws attention to the artificial rhetoric of the Duke’s speech, which “translates” their fortune into “so sweet a style.” In describing the virtue of the arboreal landscape, the Duke employs the very inflationary discourse he had thought the forest to exclude. The irony, then, that permeates Duke Senior’s

¹⁹⁷ Jean Howard, “Introduction,” *As You Like It, The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et. al. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), 621.

¹⁹⁸ Kitzes, 5.

perspective of the Forest of Ardenne invites audiences to laugh at rather than sympathize with such limiting ideals.

While Duke Senior's optimistic and idealistic view of the forest finds "good in everything," Jaques finds evidence of political discord everywhere. As a melancholic satirist, Jaques's observations of the Forest of Ardenne expose social injustices.¹⁹⁹ Placed in juxtaposition to Duke Senior's speech, Jaques's melancholy commentary on Ardenne is relayed to the audience secondhand by the First Lord: Jaques "swears you [Duke Senior] do more usurp \ Than doth your brother that hath banished you" (II. i. 27–8). Here, Jaques suggests not only that the political turmoil of the court extends into the forest, but also that it is augmented there. For Jaques, the natural world is not restorative; rather, it provides further indication of the spread of political disease. In typical Machiavellian fashion, the deer of the forest—which Jaques refers to as "fat and greasy citizens,"—remain oblivious to the "poor sequestered stag / That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt" (II. i. 55, 33–4). The scene that Jaques witnesses reflects on self-interested courtiers who are subsumed by political advancement and void of compassion. The languishing deer provides a testament to hierarchic disparity, in which the lower class citizens—"poor and broken bankrupt"—give to those who already have "too much" (II. i. 57, 49).

¹⁹⁹ On Monsieur Melancholy and satire, see James P. Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Oscar James Campbell, *Shakespeare's Satire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), 44–64. David Bevington, "Shakespeare vs. Jonson on Satire," *Shakespeare 1971: Proceedings of the World Shakespeare Congress*, ed. Clifford Leech and J. M. R. Margeson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 108–22.

By analogy, Jaques comments on the political implications of the Duke taking up residence in the forest. Jaques insists on the destructive, hostile, and oppressive force of Duke Senior and his entourage, who not only usurp the forest from the “native burghers of this desert city,” but also “have their round haunches gored” (II. i. 25). The courtiers disrupt the natural order of things by claiming sovereignty beyond their lawful jurisdiction. In expelling the deer from “their assigned and native dwelling place,” Duke Senior and his “brothers in exile” are no better than Duke Frederick. It would be a mistake, therefore, to see the green world as an escape from the political tyranny of the court. As the sobbing deer makes clear, the melancholy body politic has an even stronger presence within the Forest of Ardenne than it does without.

Much like Duke Frederick, Jaques is a character defined by deleterious humor. As such, he personifies the ill health of the commonwealth. Conspicuously, Jaques is the only central character not introduced in the scenes preceding Duke Senior’s exile. It is as if Jaques’s human form gives life to the disordered commonwealth of which he is a part: he both manifests *in* the forest and is a manifestation *of* the forest. Jaques’s political commentary involving the deer, therefore, is not merely an expression of personal discontent, but alludes to a larger dissatisfaction over the current state of political affairs. However, Duke Senior—who “loves to cope him in these sullen fits”—finds Jaques’s moralizing merely entertaining (II. i. 68). The lesson from the deer is clearly lost on the Duke as evidenced in his later interaction with Orlando and his wounded “fawn,” Adam. When Orlando—desperately seeking food for his elderly companion, Adam—first encounters the Duke in the forest, he is immediately reproached for his poor manners and lack of civility. Duke Senior outright scolds him for his ungentlemanly conduct: “Art thou thus boldened, man, by thy distress? / Or else a rude depiser of good manners, / That in civility thou seem’st so empty?” (II. vii. 91–3) As Orlando explains to the Duke and his

company, he only put “on the countenance / Of stern commandment” because he assumed that “all things had been savage here” (II. vii. 106–8). Ironically, the Duke, who has been playing Robin Hood in the forest, reprimands Orlando for assuming a role that accords with his newfound environment—the seemingly wild and savage Forest of Ardenne.²⁰⁰ Their joint role-playing suggests that theatricality is just as intrinsic to the natural world as it is to the court. Such performativity correlates with the civilities associated with nobility. For Duke Senior, Orlando’s noble birth means nothing if he does not provide a corresponding outward demonstration of it. After all, it is only when Orlando casts off the habit of a savage in exchange for the habit of “gentleness,” that he (and Adam) are welcomed to the Duke’s table. However, neither of Duke Senior’s roles—located at opposite sides of the political spectrum as ruler and outlaw—represent what might be considered the Duke’s “true identity.” Neither the persona of beneficent rogue nor that of the exiled ruler can lay claim to the natural. These roles are equal artifice.

The similarities between this scene and the spectacle of the deer are striking. The misplaced courtiers stand in for the “fat and greasy citizens,” who make a point to abide by the

²⁰⁰ In Act 1, scene 1, Charles directly compares Duke Senior and his band to “the old Robin Hood of England” (112). Amiens later quotes the Robin Hood ballads in the opening line of his song in Act 2, scene 5 (See *A New Variorum Edition of Shakspeare*, ed. Horace Howard Furness [London: J. B Lippincott & Company, 1890], 487). On *As You Like It* and Robin Hood, see Stephen J. Lynch, *As You Like It: A Guide to the Play* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 9; Robert Leach, “A ‘Robin Hood’ Play,” *English Studies* 82 (2001): 393–400; Richard Wilson, “‘Like the Old Robin Hood’: *As You Like It* and the Enclosure Riots,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43 (1992): 1–19.

practices of civility and courtesy outside of court culture, if only because it reinforces their distinction from lower class citizens and the so-called primitive environment that surrounds them. Moreover, the condition of the courtiers, who have just sat down to a banquet, reflects the “careless herd / Full of the pasture” (II. i. 52–3), while Orlando’s starving servant, Adam—actually referred to as a “fawn”—represents the wounded deer abandoned in the forest. Both scenes emphasize the theatricality of the Duke’s compassion and civility. His role as a Robin Hood, who notoriously steals from the rich and gives to the poor, as well as his role as Duke, permit him to sustain a fantasy of legitimization. In the case of the deer, and the potentially savage Orlando, Duke Senior enforces good manners insofar as he sees them as a boundary between civilized and savage domains.

The prevalence of metatheater throughout *As You Like It* draws attention to the classical ideology of the body politic as articulated by Plato—that each citizen has his or her own role to play within the commonwealth, and moreover, that “each member can only act, and be understood, and indeed exist, through the end and aim of the whole.”²⁰¹ Jaques gives utterance to this relation of the individual to the State in his most famous lines: “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players” (II. vii. 139–66). Drawing on the notion of the *theatrum mundi*, Jaques reduces human beings (of all social classes) to scripted actors performing roles assigned to them as part of a greater, macrocosmic design.²⁰² As per his humorous nature, Jaques

²⁰¹ Baker, 127.

²⁰² On Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, and the *Theatrum Mundi*, see Tibor Fabiny, “*Theatrum Mundi* and the Ages of Man,” in *Shakespeare and the Emblem: Studies in Renaissance Iconography and Iconology* (Szeged: Attila József University Press, 1984), 273–36; Laurie

feeds off of Orlando and Adam's "woeful pageant," which imbues his speech with a particularly melancholy tenor. The infant is "mewling and puking"; the "whining schoolboy" goes "unwillingly to school"; the "sighing" lover sings a "woeful ballad"; and the last scene of all portrays the most tragic view of death imaginable: "second childishness and mere oblivion, / Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." Perhaps in response to Duke Senior's theatrical show of civility towards Orlando, Jaques's speech reveals that he is all too aware of the theatrical qualities of his companions, who are "merely" players on the world's stage.

In emphasizing the presence of performance in everyday life, Jaques blurs the line between professional players and those who perform off-stage, between costume/disguise and self-fashioning or display. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Stephen Greenblatt collapses the theatrical world and the world of the courtier by introducing the idea of the self as "player." In this context, courtly conduct literature becomes nothing more than acting handbooks: "the manuals of court behavior which became popular in the sixteenth century are essentially handbooks for actors, practical guidelines for a society whose members were nearly always on stage."²⁰³ Greenblatt draws attention to an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. He links the phenomenon of self-fashioning to

Johnson, "The Distributed Consciousness of Shakespeare's Theatre," in *Shakespeare and Consciousness*, ed. Paul Budra and Clifford Werier (New York: Paulgrave MacMillan, 2016), 119–38; *If Then the World a Theatre Present . . .': Revisions of the Theatrum Mundi Metaphor in Early Modern England*, ed. Bjorn Quiring (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

²⁰³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 162.

one's manners or demeanor—particularly that of the elite—thereby indicating a strong adherence to mere outward ceremony. Relatedly, Norbert Elias's pioneering work on the role of manners in the “civilizing process” has shown the degree to which class structure and identity were defined by codes of conduct.²⁰⁴

To a large extent, courtesy literature concerned itself with the acquisition of the manners indicative of nobility. Peacham's *Compleat Gentleman*—a text that devotes much space to ideas of nobility and bloodlines—appears to be responding to the decline of English nobility, which the acquisition of codes of conduct is meant to reverse.²⁰⁵ Principally, authors such as Peacham conveyed strategies for how to manage self-display for the purposes of reaffirming socio-political power. Thomas Elyot's *The Book Named the Governor* (1531), for example, targeted individuals with positions of power who needed to appear competent and respectable in the eyes of those working beneath them.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, while courtesy books sought to reaffirm the distinctions among social classes, they also threatened to potentially dissolve these distinctions altogether. “Ideally,” Jacques Carré writes, “the perfect gentleman's outward behavior only

²⁰⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: A History of Manners* (New York: Urizen, 1939).

²⁰⁵ Peacham writes in response to what he sees as a crisis among British gentility: “There is nothing more deplorable, than the breeding in generall of our Gentlemen.” He derides their “backwardnesse and rawnesse,” their “ignorance and idlenesse,” and lack of education” (*Peacham's Compleat Gentleman* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966], 47).

²⁰⁶ Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrican Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 123–278, argues that Elyot's *Governor* is not only addressed to the aristocracy in general, but also, more specifically, seeks to instruct Henry VIII.

mirrored the qualities of his soul. But there was a danger that he might ape the required behavior without possessing the spiritual qualities.” It was this possibility, Carré claims, that “eventually ruined the whole concept of Renaissance courtesy.”²⁰⁷ Similarly, Frank Whigham proposes that the presumed connection between the rhetoric of self-display and the “God-given order of things,” dissolves when the “tools of rule” are converted into “a commodity packaged for the open market of the literate.”²⁰⁸

Rosalind’s excessive theatricality derives from a reliance on the teachings of these commoditized, codified tools of rule. This reliance further throws the distinctions between nature and artifice into confusion and has serious implications for her courtship with Orlando. A self-identified “busy actor,” Rosalind assumes such a range of roles that she loses sight of interior authenticity (III. iv. 53). Douglas Lanier notes that within the context of performance, character becomes “a matter of the mechanics of exteriority.” “For the actor,” Lanier elaborates, “the problem of character is first and foremost a material one: how to craft and display a set of physical marks—gestures, postures, sounds, costumes—that are legible to an audience.”²⁰⁹ From the moment Duke Frederick banishes Rosalind from court, she assumes an actor’s perspective. Taking on the role of Ganymede, Rosalind emphasizes the mere superficialities that distinguish men

²⁰⁷ Jaques Carré, “Introduction,” in *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600–1900*, ed. Jaques Carré (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 1–10, here 3.

²⁰⁸ Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 2.

²⁰⁹ Douglas Lanier, “‘Stigmatical in Making’: The Material Character of *The Comedy of Errors*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 23 (1993): 81–112, 83.

from women: “We’ll have a swashing and a martial outside, / As many other mannish cowards have, / That do outface it with their semblances” (I. iii. 113–16). Rosalind insists that it is the “swashing” and “martial outside” that will make her a man, since both men and women secretly have a “women’s fear” inside their hearts (I. iii. 113). As such, Rosalind assumes that the masculine gender requires merely a shift in the “mechanics of exteriority”—a set of codes assigned to men that can be easily learned and reproduced.

Much to her detriment, Rosalind approaches courtship with the same principles she had used earlier during her invention of Ganymede. Upon learning the identity of her admirer, Rosalind (as Ganymede) takes it upon herself to teach Orlando how to be a proper lovesick courtier. Playing yet another role—this time the physician—Rosalind attempts to diagnose and cure “love-shaked” Orlando; however, she does not find the textbook “marks” of love-melancholy upon him (III. ii. 331, 333). The physical manifestations of love that Rosalind looks for in Orlando—“a lean cheek,” “a blue eye and sunken,” “an unquestionable spirit”(III. ii. 337–38)—closely follow the somatic symptoms listed amongst contemporary treatises on lovesickness. An archetype of this tradition, Andre Du Laurens’s chapter, “Of another kinde of melancholie which commeth by the extremitie of loue” (trans. 1599), provides a succinct summary of the sufferer’s maladies.²¹⁰ He writes that “the sillie louing worme,” will not only “becometh pale, leane, souning, without any stomacke to his meate, hollow and sunke eyed,” but also, that “you shall finde him weeping, sobbing, sighing, and redoubling his sighes, and in continuall restlesnes, auoyding company, louing solitarines, the better to feed & follow his

²¹⁰ André Du Laurens, *A discourse of the preseruation of the sight: of melancholike diseases*, trans. Richard Surphlet (London: Felix Kingston, 1599).

foolish imaginations.”²¹¹ By reciting the behavioral and emotional scripts found characterizing love-melancholy in treatises such as Du Laurens’s, Rosalind transforms Orlando’s passionate love from a pathology to a fashionable accoutrement occasionally donned by members of the nobility.

Rosalind’s process of diagnosis—which relies only on the physical expression of symptoms—does not account for what Hamlet describes as “that within which passes show.” This superficial focus guides Rosalind’s attempts to diagnose not only physiological ailment, but literary ailment as well. Orlando, when demonstrating his love for Rosalind by composing verse, meets harsh criticism for failing to properly imitate Petrarchan conventions. And Rosalind is not the only figure concerned with poetic surfaces. In response to his discovery of Orlando’s works, Touchstone claims, “This is the very false gallop of verses. Why do you infect yourself with them?” (III. ii. 101–02). Rosalind admits that the poems are a “tedious homily of love” that do not follow the rules of correct verse form (III. ii. 142). For Rosalind, the successful love poem is shot through with artifice and conventionality; it follows the rules of correct verse. Although she has no reason to doubt Orlando’s sincerity, Rosalind nevertheless requires that Orlando perform the role of lover up to the point that she scripts his wedding vows:

Rosalind: Then you must say, ‘I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.’

Orlando: I take thee, Rosalind, for wife. (IV. i. 115–16)

In scripting Orlando’s role as lovesick courtier, Rosalind prevents him from reverting back to his “false gallop of verses.”

²¹¹ Ibid., X.118.

Rosalind proposes to cure Orlando using a method that matches rather precisely that prescribed by medical treatises as a curative for love-melancholy: she hopes to turn love to denigration, passion to misogyny. Du Laurens, for instance, suggests “striv[ing] to make him hate that, which so tormenteth him, as in affirming the thing to bee evill, in calling his mistresse, light, inconstant, foolish, devoted to varietie, mocking and laughing to scorne this his grieffe.”²¹² Within her role-playing scheme, Rosalind (as Ganymede) now assumes a new role as a hypothetical “Rosalind.” In doing so, she hopes to promote (or at least appear to promote) the aversion demanded by the treatment. Standing in as Orlando’s beloved, “Rosalind” will “grieve, be effeminate, changeable, longing and liking, proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant, full of tears, full of smiles . . . now like him, now loathe him, then entertain him, then forswear him, now weep for him, then spit at him” (III. ii. 366–72). Rosalind produces an imagined “Rosalind” by relying on social codes prescribed in vernacular medical treatises such as Du Laurens’s, while ostensibly retaining an authentic self—a Rosalind lived rather than a Rosalind performed. The coded misogyny of this imagined “Rosalind,” however, continues beyond the realm of the imagination. *As You Like It* invites us to distinguish between “Rosalind” as she role-plays with Orlando (as part of his cure) and Rosalind as she is without artifice, when with her friend Celia. Yet in these moments where Rosalind, alone with Celia, has no cause to perform, signs of

²¹² Ibid., XI.122.

“Rosalind” nevertheless emerge: “Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak” (II. 26–27).²¹³

Despite Rosalind’s earlier conviction that men and women are separated merely by external gesturing, her female physiology fails her when she faints at the sight of Orlando’s blood. This incident initiates a provocative discussion concerning the distinction between truth and counterfeit.

Oliver: You a man? You lack a man’s heart.

Rosalind: I do so, I confess it. Ah, sirrah, a body would think this was well counterfeited. I pray you, tell your brother how well I counterfeited. Heigh-ho!

Oliver: This was not counterfeit. There is too great testimony in your complexion that it was a passion of earnest.

Rosalind: Counterfeit, I assure you.

Oliver: Well then, take good heart, and counterfeit to be a man.

Rosalind: So I do; but I’ faith, I should have been a woman by right. (IV. iii. 163–174)

The dialogue between Oliver and Rosalind emphasizes the thin line between sex (biological) and gender (the social codes associated with each sex), reality and performance, counterfeit and truth. It leaves Oliver wondering whether Rosalind is a man with a woman’s heart or a woman with a woman’s heart. In stating that “many will swoon when they do look on blood” (IV. iii. 157),

²¹³ On “Rosalind’s” “ventriloquizing of misogyny,” see Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 99–135.

Oliver allows for the possibility that Ganymede simply lacks a “man’s heart”—i.e. the kind of heart that would match the appearance of a man. Despite Rosalind’s persistence—“counterfeit, I assure you”—Oliver resists her perspective that personhood is entirely a social fiction, pointing out that even the best performance cannot replicate a “passion of earnest.”

The plague of melancholy infecting Ardenne is exacerbated not only by Rosalind’s counterproductive treatments—her attempts to treat the lovesick Orlando and Silvius fail miserably—but also by the intervention of Jaques. The somber courtiers—further indication of the disordered body politic—provide sustenance for Jaques, who seems able to extract melancholy from the environment: “I can suck melancholy out of a song like a weasel sucks eggs” (II. v. 11–12). Jaques reaps the black bile residing both inside characters and without. He thrives on melancholy, constantly seeking out sources of pain and sorrow. This depressing quest plays out through his empathy for the dying deer; his persistent request for more singing from Amiens; and his attempt to engage Orlando in a conversation concerning “all our misery” (III. ii. 254). Jaques’s character, however, is not of a purely humoral quality. In this regard, he is more similar to Rosalind than he is to Duke Frederick. He frequently confuses performance and authenticity, and, in doing so, he comes, much like Rosalind, to further spread his disease. Ironically, then, Jaques’s *theatrum mundi* speech, which satirically points out the excessive theatricality of other characters, applies to himself as well. In his conversation with Rosalind (as Ganymede), Jaques must defend his melancholy nature against her attack on his lack of moderation. In describing his melancholy, Jaques relies on a series of negations before arriving at what he believes is a unique or distinctive kind of melancholy: “It is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous

sadness” (IV. i. 14–18). The abundance of Jaques’s source material speaks to the “discursive surplus” attributed to melancholy during the early modern period. Jaques’s well-stocked disposition takes the form of what Drew Daniel calls, a “melancholy assemblage.”²¹⁴ His sources of melancholy derive from many different “simples”—both from persons and objects in the environment. The series of negations leading up to Jaques’s own particular form of melancholy demonstrates a desperate attempt at individualism. He would differentiate his affliction by admitting its collective derivation.

While Jaques believes his melancholy to be of an individual nature, it nevertheless remains inauthentic. The medical language he uses to describe his distinct melancholy gestures toward the artificiality of his formulation. Jaques draws upon convention to perform melancholy. This enables him to be diagnosed both by the characters in the play as well as the members of the audience familiar with such tropes. Jaques cites and combines melancholy, rather than introducing a new form. Jaques assembles the varieties of melancholy into one, an act enabled by the discursive surplus characteristic of melancholy in the early modern period. His compilation builds from the term’s sematic possibility, its ambiguity, its slipperiness. Rosalind plays off of Jaques’s performance by advising him to better perform his role as a melancholy traveler: “Look you lisp, and wear strange suits; disable all the benefits of your own country; be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are for I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola” (IV. ii. 29–33). Rosalind here draws attention to the esteem in which Jaques holds his status as a melancholic. To a certain extent, his affliction functions as a

²¹⁴ Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

commodity. Because melancholy holds great value with regard to his self-definition, Jaques insists on accumulating as many different varieties as possible. He is a collector, hoarder, and perhaps connoisseur of melancholy. The more he acquires, the more his standing grows within the ranks of humoral exemplars.

The artificiality of Jaques extends beyond his performance of melancholic tropes. His relationship with the figure of the fool further collapses the division between theatricality and authenticity. Although ostensibly a lord attending upon Duke Senior, Jaques shares many affinities with those characters who traditionally trod the stage in motley. Shakespeare's fools are typically solitaires, men who can comment on society partly because they themselves are set apart and free of domestic entanglement. Jaques persistently abandons any duty he holds as the Duke's attendant to instead seek solitude. He actively alienates himself from the other characters. Jaques, for instance, dismisses Orlando in favor of his own company: "I thank you for your company, but, good faith, I had as lief have been myself alone" (III. ii. 232). Similarly, when Amiens tells Jaques that the Duke has been looking for him all day, Jaques responds, "And I have been all this day to avoid him" (2.5.28). When he does return to his company, the Duke comments, "What a life is this, / That your poor friends must woo your company?" (II. vii. 9–10). The most obvious example of Jaques's desire to be solitary is his abandonment of the wedding festivities that conclude the play: "To see no pastime I. What you would have / I'll stay to know at your abandoned cave" (V. iv. 184–85). Jaques's repeated departures into isolation emphasize his status as outsider, and this interconnects with his recurring social commentary, which in turn emphasizes his affiliation to the figure of the fool. Such similarities reveal a crisis of identity in Jaques. He performs simultaneously the melancholic and the fool, consistently obscuring a clear

distinction between the two roles. In this regard, the play refuses to allow a simple recognition between performed and “natural” identities.

As You Like It encourages a connection between its principal fool, Touchstone, and Jaques through opposition just as much as it does through similarity. The two unite in antithesis. Where Touchstone brings mirth and laughter with him wherever he goes, Jaques brings a dark cloud of despair. Where the clown’s wisdom emerges from folly, Jaques’s emerges from melancholy. The Duke even seems to value Jaques in the way he would a fool. When a Lord informs the Duke about Jaques’s encounter with a sobbing deer, the Duke interrupts with, “But what said Jaques? Did he not moralize this spectacle?” and “Show me the place. I love to cope him in these sullen fits, for then he’s full of matter” (II. i. 43–4, 67–9). Furthermore, as Stephen Lynch observes, Touchstone’s moral of time in act two, scene seven materializes in parodic imitation of Jaques’s famous speech on the seven ages of man, which occurs within the same scene.²¹⁵

Given the play’s genre, it is hardly surprising that Touchstone has better luck in influencing the characters he comes into contact with than Jaques. Not even Jaques is immune to the fool’s comic contagion. The melancholic undergoes a merry transformation upon first meeting him. Jaques’s melancholic perspective, however, makes no headway with any of the other characters: Orlando flatly declines the satirist’s invitation to join him in a verbal assault upon the world “and all our misery” (III. ii. 254); Rosalind, after pointing out how the average fencepost achieves Jaques’s ideal of silent unresponsiveness, blatantly states that “I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad” (IV.i. 24–5). Jaques’s presence

²¹⁵ Lynch, *As You Like It*, 53.

consistently promotes hope of his absence. Such absence can only be fully achieved once Arden's surplus melancholy finally dissipates. Like the clown, Jaques is a kind of touchstone: he tests the health of the commonwealth by measuring the essential sanity and balance of the central characters who can only return to court once their suffering has been sufficiently purged. With the absence of the melancholy body politic, Jaques no longer has a place in the play's comedic ending.

Jaques himself remains unaware of his foolish nature. He makes no connection between the performance of melancholy and the performance of the clown. Upon meeting Touchstone in the forest, Jaques comes back to the Duke's company not only singing his praises, "O noble fool! / A worthy fool!" but also voicing his desire to become a fool himself (II.vii. 33–4). Meeting Touchstone in the woods is the point where Jaques meets his folly "ill'inhabited" by the court fool Touchstone (III. iii. 7). Of course, while Jaques has a keen skill for recognizing the folly in others he does not recognize it in himself no matter how blatant. Jaques does not sense the irony when he goes on to state enthusiastically, "O that I were a fool / I am ambitious for a motley coat" (II. vii. 42–43). Here, Jaques refers to the profession of a court fool which is a role that Touchstone plays. However, you can only succeed as a fool, if you are perceived as naive, simple minded, with wit and wisdom expressed but laterally, unexpectedly. Jaques insists that this role of fool runs counter to that of the melancholic: "It is my only suit, / provided that you weed your better judgements / of all opinion that grows rank in them / that I am wise" (II. vii. 44–47). Jaques's demonstrates his lack of self-knowledge when he confesses to Orlando, "By my troth, I was seeking for a fool when I found you." Orlando's response, however, reimagines the Narcissus myth to highlight Jaques's truly foolish nature: "He is drown'd in the brook; look but in, and you shall see him" (III. ii. 260–2). Jaques reaction is entirely oblivious: "There I shall see

mine own figure” (III. ii. 263). Jaques cannot identify the connections between melancholy and folly that the play makes explicit. And, indeed, it is partly in this inability that such connections come into focus.

As You Like It shows that the parallels between fools and melancholics diverge when put into conjunction with disease. Where the former would cure, the latter serves only to infect. The play makes the divergence readily apparent when Jaques voices his wish to become a fool to Duke Senior. It is Jaques’s status as a political malcontent that justifies the Duke’s rather harsh response. Jaques’s request—“I must have liberty / Withal, as large a charter as the wind, / To blow on whom I please” (II. vii. 47–9)—alludes to the commonplace idea that corrupted air was the primary means of spreading disease. While Jaques believes that he will “cleanse the foul body of th’infected world, / If they will patiently receive [his] medicine,” Duke Senior recognizes the impossibility of such a plan (II.vii. 60–1). Jacques, as the Duke makes clear, is the source of disease, a miasma of melancholy: “And all th’embosséd sores and headed evils / That thou with licence of free foot hast caught / Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world” (II. vii. 67–69). Because Jaques is himself infected, he is much more likely to “disgorge into the general world” sin and disease, spreading social disorder rather than correcting it. Jaques’s description of the fool, which relies on metaphors of physic, touches on the potential medicinal function of folly, especially during times of political upheaval. As part of their position, fools speak truth to power and critique social ills under the cover of bumbings and perceived innocence. *As You Like It* stages the ability of fools to correct the emotional dispositions of those around them. For Rosalind, who shows signs of melancholia at the beginning of the play—signaled by Celia who repeatedly encourages her to “be merry”—Touchstone serves a medicinal function. He rights her

from potential emotional waywardness by providing cheer, mirth, and normalcy during a time of uncertainty and loss.

Jaques infects with his melancholy, but his satire holds equally communicable implications. Jaques's description of satire is a moment of metatheater in which Shakespeare reflects upon his craft.²¹⁶ Like conduct books, early modern readers and writers tended to understand the comedy of manners tradition as potentially remedial—it provided a means of correcting social disorder.²¹⁷ Drawing upon this tradition, Jaques's anatomy of satire provides a commentary on social mobility:

What woman in the city do I name
When that I say the city-woman bears
The cost of princes on unworthy shoulders?
. . . Or what is he of basest function,
That says his bravery is not on my cost. (II.vii. 74–6, 79–80)

Here, Jaques focuses on an issue central to much conduct literature. He faults those of the lower classes who disguise themselves unworthily in the attire of nobility. Despite their base birth, these individuals might “pass” for those of noble birth based simply on costly vestments. The commoners don the trappings of nobility fashionably and subsequently socially. Jaques puns on the word “cost” to indicate the dire stakes for courtiers such as himself if such accoutremental imitation continues. If anyone can perform the role of an aristocrat, then the distinction between

²¹⁶ Bednarz, *Shakespeare and the Poets' War*, 108.

²¹⁷ Mary Claire Randolph, “The Medical Concept in English Renaissance Satiric Theory: Its Possible Readings and Implications,” *Studies in Philology* 38 (1941): 125–57.

classes evaporates at great cost to the upper echelons. As per the process of satire, Jaques explains that spectators are meant to see themselves in the general characters he mocks and revise their behavior accordingly. He would heal the social order through mockery; he derides to restore the proper hierarchy. While Jaques believes that no wrong could possibly come from his social commentary, Duke Senior stresses that all remedies are potentially dangerous. The cure, often, can be just as deadly as the disease.²¹⁸

Jaques is hardly the play's only satirist. Touchstone not only fills this role, but displaces Jaques in his efficacy. Modern scholars understand Touchstone's principal function as that of a mirror: he reflects—often with increased clarity—the nature of those characters who come before him.²¹⁹ Ever the artful satirist, Touchstone holds a glass to the whole world, allowing others to more fully understand themselves whilst in the Forest of Ardenne.²²⁰ Touchstone's extensive knowledge of courtly mannerism and conduct makes him particularly adept in this role. He draws out the follies the court because of his ability to recognize which actions conform to prescribed conduct. The codification of behavior ensures the longevity of that behavior. Touchstone is an embodiment of the conduct book. He emerges from the outpouring of courtesy literature in Elizabethan England, as well as other similar manuals of self-government, such as Levinus Lemnius's *The Touchstone of Complexions*. In performing the role of court fool and

²¹⁸ See Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²¹⁹ Patricia Wareh, "Literary Mirrors of Aristocratic Performance: Readers and Audiences of *The Faerie Queene* and *The Winter's Tale*," *Renaissance Drama* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 85-114.

²²⁰ See Robert Hills Goldsmith, "Touchstone: Critic in Motley," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 884-95.

courtier, Touchstone both satirizes the theatricality of courtly behavior, while also showcasing the nobility's greatest fear: if a fool can play the part of courtier by simply learning the codes of courtesy, then so can anyone.

Touchstone satirizes the codes of conduct enforced as a means of delineating strict parameters of identity for English subjects by performing them himself. When Jaques introduces Touchstone to Duke Senior, he emphasizes the absurdity that “[this motley] hath been a courtier, he swears” (V. iv. 41). Touchstone seeks to validate this claim by demonstrating his excessive knowledge of civility and courtesy. First, Touchstone claims to have practiced a series of behaviors that constitute the quintessential courtier: “I have trod a measure,” “flatt’red a lady,” “been politic with my friend,” “smooth with mine enemy,” and “undone three tailors” (V. ii. 44–6). The qualities of the courtier mentioned here align precisely with those laid out by Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*. For Castiglione, the chief characteristics of the courtier are “to daunce well without over nimble footinges”; “to be handesome and clenly in his appaile”; “to make his garmentes after the facion of the most”; and “to be wise and well seene in discourses upon states.”²²¹ Second, Touchstone demonstrates in tedious detail the rules governing courtly quarrels—the retort courteous, the quip modest, and so on—thereby exposing the elaborate codes of behavior set forth in books on the etiquette of dueling (V. iv. 64–96). As Touchstone enlightens Jaques, “O sir, we quarrel in print, by the book— / as you have books for good manners” (V. iv. 90–1). In fact, several such manuals existed in the sixteenth century that

²²¹ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Courtier*, trans. Thomas Hobby (London: John Wolfe, 1588).

covered topics hardly less fantastic than Touchstone's "lie seven times remov'd."²²² Vincent Saviolo's *Practice of the Rapier and Dagger* (1594–5), for instance, devotes its second part to detailing exhaustively "the manner and diversity of Lies." As this scene demonstrates, then, Touchstone not only has a better mastery over the codes of courtly conduct than the courtiers do, but can skillfully perform such codes even while recognizing their artifice and absurdity.

Courtesy literature's intense preoccupation with the outward signifiers of manners had dangerous implications for readers who were encouraged to carefully manage a façade in everyday life. These dangers are aggressively laid out in antitheatrical tracts, such as *Th' Overthrow of Stage-Playes* (1599), in which John Rainolds contends that the "iniquitie" of personation endangers the actors' minds to infection because "diseases of the mind are gotten far sooner by counterfeiting, then are diseases of the body."²²³ The impression that such personation leaves on the actor's body is explicitly figured in Rainolds's treatise as an infection. As Darryl Chalk explains, the "lively representation" of other persons "corrupts the actor's body and mind and, crucially, this state is transferable to the spectators, who are contaminated merely by watching."²²⁴ On this topic, Chalk argues that "the notion of a contagious theatricality emerges in the period as the theatre's opponents repeatedly imagine that actors will become the vectors of a

²²² See Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility, Politeness, and Honor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²²³ Qtd. in Darryl Chalk, "'Here's a Strange Alteration': Contagion and the Mutable Mind in *Coriolanus*," in *Renaissance Shakespeare*, ed. Martin Procházka, Michael Dobson, Andreas Hefe, and Hanna Scolnicov (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2014), 72.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

contagion of corruptive roleplaying capable of destroying the natural order of things.”²²⁵ The imagining of a pathological theatricality by anti-stage critics applies to the mundane performances of English citizens in the real world. The potential consequences involved in maintaining a constant façade undercut the purported intentions of most courtesy literature—to restore the natural order of things. While the conduct books themselves threaten to disseminate social disease, Shakespeare’s satire about this failing provides the cure. Just as the central characters of *As You Like It* role-play in the realm of the theatrical or the imagination as a means of purging melancholy before returning to a restored body politic, the physiological effects produced by the theater on audiences is meant to restore order in the real world. Essentially, role-playing within the realm of the theater functions as a vaccine that prevents susceptibility to the corruptive role-playing in the real world.

²²⁵ Chalk, “Contagious Emulation: Antitheatricality and Theatre as Plague in *Troilus and Cressida*,” in “*This Earthly Stage*”: *World and Stage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Brett D. Hirsch and Christopher Wortham (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 75–101. For a discussion of theatre-as-plague, see Chalk, “‘A Nature but Infected’: Plague and Embodied Transformation in *Timon of Athens*,” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 19 (2009): 1–28, and René Girard, “The Plague in Literature and Myth,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15 (1974): 833–50.

“Frame Your Mind to Mirth and Merriment”:

Imagining Disease through Self-Help Books

In the Induction to Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*, a wealthy Lord plays a trick on an unconscious drunkard named Christopher Sly: he leads the beggar to believe that he has been out of his wits for the past fifteen years and that he is in fact a noble lord. For the deception to work, the Lord and his men must set the scene and play their assigned roles well. Acting as playwright, the Lord casts each part, providing scripts and all:

And if he chance to speak be ready straight,

And with a low submissive reverence

Say “What is it your honour will command?”

Let one attend him with a silver basin

Full of rose-water and bestrewed with flowers;

Another bear the ewer, the third a diaper,

And say “Will’t please your lordship cool your hands?” (Induction 1. 48–54)²²⁶

By creating this fictional space, the Lord gives Sly no choice but to “forget himself” (Induction 1. 37) and “let the world slip” (Induction 2. 137); that is, to let reality slip away and theatrical illusion take over. As the First Huntsman assures the Lord, “I warrant you we will play our part / As he shall think by our true diligence / He is no less than what we say he is” (Induction 1. 65–7). It is the actors’ office to orient Sly’s mind to the fantasy that surrounds him and to instruct him on how to actively participate in it. From the activities that they suggest—sleeping, eating, hunting, etc.—to the services they proffer—“Will’t please your mightiness to wash your hands?” (Induction 2. 74)—the Lord’s men project certain parameters of behavior onto Sly that align with the fiction of which he is a part. The Lord’s play, therefore, opens up a space for Sly to recreate himself in accordance with the illusion that envelops him: “Upon my life, I am a lord indeed, / And not a tinker, nor Christopher Sly” (Induction 2. 70–1).

These behavioral directives are associated not only with social class, but with the preservation of health, as well. Once Sly accepts his new identity, his health is confirmed: “O, how we joy to see your wit restored! / O that once more you knew but what you are!” (Induction 2. 75–76). In order to maintain his health, Sly is given further medical directives. Bartholomew avoids Sly’s sexual advances by stating, “For your physicians have expressly charged, / In peril to incur your former malady, / That I should yet absent me from your bed” (Induction 2. 117–19). Immediately thereafter, a messenger recommends Sly watch a play, appealing to the authority of his “doctors” who “hold it very meet” for him to hear a pleasant comedy “seeing too

²²⁶ All quotations from Shakespeare are drawn from *The Norton Shakespeare: Comedies*, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et. al. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997), 185-244.

much sadness hath congeal'd [his] blood, / And melancholy is the nurse of frenzy” (Induction 2. 131–3). Sly's prescription goes beyond merely passively watching the comedy, however; the messenger further instructs him before the viewing: “frame your mind to mirth and merriment / Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life” (Induction 2. 135). On one level, this passage places Shakespeare's play among the popular collections of witty stories, jokes, and songs marketed as psychological remedies for melancholy. The idea behind these inexpensive publications—such as *Robin Good-Fellow, his Mad Prankes, and Merry Jests, Full of Honest Mirth, and Is a Fit Medicine for Melancholy* and *An Antidote against Melancholy: Made Up in PILLS. Compounded of Witty Ballads, Jovial Songs, and Merry Catches*—was Galen's method of cure-by-contraries, which suggested curbing the excess of one humor with its opposite.²²⁷ The

²²⁷ For a survey of the these popular collections published in the seventeenth century, see the following: Nicholas Breton, *Wonders Worth the Hearing: Which Being Read or Heard . . . May Serve Both to Purge Melancholy from the Minde, & Grosse Humoours from the Body* (London, 1602, STC 3714); Samuel Rowlands, *Democritus, or Doctor Merry-Man his Medicines, against Melancholy Humors* (London, 1607, STC 21366); W. C., *The First Part of the Renowned Historie of Fragosa King of Aragon . . . Right Pleasant for the Aged to Drive Away Melancholy Thoughts* (London, 1618, STC 4319); Anon., *Robin Good-Fellow, his Mad Prankes, and Merry Iests, Full of Honest Mirth, and Is a Fit Medicine for Melancholy* (London, 1628, STC 12016); Anon., *The Pennilesse Parliament of Threed-Bare Poets . . . Composed by Doctor Merry-Man: Not Onely to Purge Melancholy, but Also to Procure Tittering and Laughing* (London, 1649); Anon., *A PILL to Purge Melancholy: or, Merry Newes from Newgate* (London, 1652); Anon., *Mirth in Abundance . . . Contriv'd to Relieve the Melancholy, and Rejoyce the Merry; to Expell*

comedic quality of *The Taming of the Shrew*, however, is only one aspect contributing to the play's curative potential. As the passage concluding Induction 2 emphasizes, it is not the play alone that enacts the cure, but the audience's frame of mind while watching it.

While the brief, two-scene Induction may at first appear extraneous—film adaptations and scholarly discussions of *The Taming of the Shrew* occasionally exclude it—I would like to suggest, to the contrary, that these two prefatory scenes are critical for training Shakespeare's audiences how to imaginatively engage in the theatrical experience. Uniquely, the play begins with an Induction, rather than the typical Preface. According to the OED, an induction is not simply a formal introduction; it can also mean something akin to “initiation”—i.e. “admission to the knowledge, or instruction in the elements, of any subject or practice.” In the context of *The Taming of the Shrew*, this means that just as Sly is initiated into the world of upper-class society and its customs, audiences are initiated into the world of theatrical illusion. As they learn about the codes intrinsic to theater, audience members also receive instructions regarding their new role as playgoers. In addition to initiation, “induction” can also refer to the process of inducing,

Sorrow, and Advance Jollity (London, 1659); Anon., *An Antidote against Melancholy: Made Up in PILLS. Compounded of Witty Ballads, Jovial Songs, and Merry Catches* (London, 1661); Laurence Price, *A New Dialogue between Dick of Kent, and Wat the Welch-man . . . Written and Printed on Purpose to Make Folks Merry in Time of Sadnesse . . . and Pass the Tedious Melancholy Nights* (London, 1654); Humphrey Crouch, *England's Jestes Refin'd and Improv'd, [which] May Serve as the Witty-Man's COMPANION, the Busie-Man's DIVERSION, and the Melancholy Man's PHYSICK and RECREATION*, 3rd edn (London, 1693); Anon., *Wit and Mirth: or, PILLS to Purge Melancholy* (London, 1699).

or moving a person to some condition or belief. Through this perspective, the opening moments preceding the play-within-a-play serve to frame audiences' minds to the comedic genre, as well as to theatrical illusion more broadly. They function as a mechanism for orienting the audiences' mindsets to a space defined by the imaginary and the mimetic.

As a guide for audiences on how to interact and engage with the performance, the Induction aptly employs Christopher Sly, a man whose poor social status excuses him from being acquainted with the customs of the theater. Sly's complete lack of knowledge as to what a comedy is, while a source of comedy in itself, also provides an opportunity for the playwright to initiate novice theater-goers. Presumably, Sly and Bartholomew remain onstage for the entire production. As theater-goers themselves, they dramatize the act of watching a comedy and serve as a constant reminder to audiences that they are watching a play-within-a-play. This device functions, in part, as a means of defining normative transactions meant to occur between audience and stage; that is, as another vehicle of instruction. Watching a fictional audience onstage provides useful information about how to properly watch a play, including when to laugh, how to react at certain moments, etc. In *The Taming of a Shrew*—an alternate version of Shakespeare's *The Shrew* that includes a number of additional passages involving Sly—Sly interrupts the action of the play several times to ask the Lord questions mostly involving the plot.

The presence of the audience onstage also emphasizes the self-reflexive nature of Shakespeare's play as both a comedy and a self-help book. Although perhaps not commonly considered as such, *The Taming of the Shrew* is a fairly conventional how-to book, providing step-by-step instructions on how to tame a shrew. In *A Shrew*, which contains episodes rounding off the Christopher Sly framework, Sly awakens from his "dream" announcing to the Tapster that he "know[s] now how to tame a shrew" (16) and that he plans on employing the techniques used

by Petruccio to tame his own wife: “I’ll to my / Wife presently and tame her too, / An if she anger me” (19–21).²²⁸ This moment is comical because the audience knows what Sly doesn’t—that he is in fact the shrew. In just the first lines of the play, Sly’s character is revealed through a violent quarrel with the Hostess of a tavern. He calls the Hostess a strumpet, threatens to beat or flog her, refuses to pay for the glasses he broke, and then falls asleep in the street due to his excessive drinking. While the Hostess’s “remedy” is to “fetch the headborough” (Induction 1. 9), the Lord who comes upon Sly’s unconscious body has another remedy in mind—fiction. Induction 1 and 2, therefore, dramatize how to tame a shrew in miniature, with Sly cast in the starring role. In the end, however, he misses the “message” of the play because he fails to engage in the self-reflexive form of the comedy. Put simply, he fails to recognize himself in the character of the shrew.

Even though Sly does not benefit from the medicinal qualities of Shakespeare’s play, the audience is much more likely to. Sly’s role in *The Taming of the Shrew* (unlike *A Shrew*, he is only present for the first two scenes) is minor, yet key to enacting a prophylactic hermeneutic within the play. First, Sly acts as a catalyst for exposing the mechanisms of theatre to the audience, thereby orienting audiences’ mindsets to the theatrical space. Second, his failure to imaginatively inhabit the space of the play-within-a-play gives audiences an opportunity to learn from his mistakes. In casting Sly as a foolish tinker, Shakespeare encourages the audience to laugh at him and resist accepting his reductive interpretation of the play. Like the other literary works examined in this dissertation, Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew* offers spectators a mirror through which to examine themselves. Audiences must be able to see themselves in the

²²⁸ Qtd. from the “Additional Passages” following *The Taming of the Shrew* in Norton, 243–44.

diseased/disordered body onstage if they are to undergo the cure intrinsic to the play itself, to the act of spectating.

The connection between imagination and cure that Shakespeare, Sidney, Gower, and Chaucer emphasize is one that pervades contemporary medical discourses. A common consensus among authors writing on this topic was that a patient's frame of mind played a crucial role in his or her health. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton makes a brief digression ("Of the Force of Imagination") to consider the extent of a physician's power over a disease in a patient whose imagination controls the patient's perception of his own health. Drawing from a catalog of examples, Burton affirms that some individuals are plagued by imagined illnesses ("molested by Phantasie"), while others "by Fancy alone, and a good conceit, are as easily recovered."²²⁹ Given the potency of the imagination, Burton must conclude that it is the patient—or more precisely his imagination—that ultimately has control over his or her health.

Similarly, Montaigne's essay "On the Power of the Imagination" explores the ways in which the imagination can engender significant physiological effects. Like Burton, Montaigne devotes much space to how the powers of the imagination can lead to contracting sickness or producing cures. Regarding the latter, Montaigne essentially describes what is known today as the placebo effect. He writes, "Why do doctors begin by practising on the credulity of their patients with so many false promises of a cure, if not to call the powers of the imagination to the aid of their fraudulent concoctions?"²³⁰ Montaigne illustrates this phenomenon through examples

²²⁹ Burton, 253–8.

²³⁰ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1993), 44.

of patients who simply by believing that they were being treated, were actually cured and relieved of their pain. The idea that before treatment physicians would create a narrative wherein their patients played a healthy role illustrates the fusion of fiction, imagination, and medical practice so characteristic of early English self-help books.

It would be difficult to ascertain the extent to which self-help books, and their literary counterparts, contributed to medical care in England from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. At the very least, we can assume that these works helped assuage cultural fears and anxieties raised by illness in a period of time marked by devastating epidemics, infections, and widespread pestilence. The author of *The Secrets of Alexis of Piemont* (1558) seems to write in response to the onslaught of “strange and unknown diseases that swarm among us, and more in number than can be found remedy for.”²³¹ Such a threatening environment placed great demands on the medical community, which had to begin addressing illness as both a social and biological phenomenon. As Paul Slack explains, “[illness] produces strains and anxieties which need treatment as much, if not more than, the disease itself.” Consequently, the doctor’s role becomes more than “simply that of an administrator of an effective physical cure.”²³² Because “physiological disturbances could have psychological causes,” Slack continues, “the proper

²³¹ Qtd. in Paul Slack, “Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England,” in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Charles Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 262.

²³² Slack, 262.

frame of mind was as important as the proper diet in preserving health.”²³³ It was the function of vernacular medical treatises and literary self-help books to meet this demand.

One response to this demand was the increased popularity of satires at the turn of the seventeenth century, which described fictional events during epidemics. Besides providing entertainment, the familiar language and settings implemented by these works made illness less disturbing. Thomas Dekker’s *Plague Pamphlets*, written during the year of a plague epidemic, serves as a potent example. His pamphlet, *The Wonderfull Yeare* (1603), draws on cultural anxieties about plague as a vehicle for humor and political satire. In the prefatory epistle, Dekker personifies his book as a plague victim threatening to thrust itself into the water-bailiff’s company. Wittily drawing on medical commonplaces, he recommends mirth in the face of plague, as well as fortifying the soul against fearful imaginings (in this case, that his book seeks to infect or harm). In another example, Dekker includes a scene in which a fat man, fleeing from a plague victim, is compassed by a smoky cloud (produced by “his own fattie hotte steeme”)—a play on the idea that miasmatic clouds were the means by which the disease spread. Dekker’s approach to illness in this pamphlet makes the fearful harmless and provides an antidote to grief and suffering. Like the other genres considered in this study, satire is a mirror or glass of health that shapes readers’ perceptions of illness by activating their imagination.

The case studies considered in this dissertation all explore various permutations of an exegetical model common to early English self-help books. This study began with a consideration of literary works written in the latter part of the fourteenth century—a period that witnessed an explosion of vernacular medical texts—and ended with Shakespeare’s *As You Like*

²³³ Ibid., 268.

It, first performed in 1603 when the number of vernacular medical texts being published had reached a record level. The model of self-care with which medieval and early modern authors engaged, however, continued to exert influence well into the seventeenth century, reaching its pinnacle, some might say, with the publication of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. As I have demonstrated, the generic conventions common to each of these works—romance/dream vision, confessional, pastoral, and comedy of manners—are all particularly conducive to self-reflection. Each text's internal hermeneutic establishes certain parameters of embodiment meant to orient an individual's reading practices in a way that promotes imaginative engagement. The result is a curative experience enacted through the process of reading. Ultimately, the hermeneutical practices common to the four works considered here reveal textual meaning to be co-constitutive, emerging through the reciprocal exchange such internal exegeses foster between the fiction of the text and the imagination of the reader.

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ENGL 129 Shakespeare (1 section)

ENGL 221 British Literature to 1798 (Instructor for 4 sections, T.A. for 2 others)

ENGL 202B Writing in the Humanities (3 sections)

ENGL 202C Technical Writing (4 sections, including 1 online)

ENGL 30 Honors Rhetoric & Composition (1 section)