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THE ETHICS OF MOURNING: THE ROLE OF MATERIAL CULTURE AND PUBLIC POLITICS IN THE 'BOOK OF THE DUCHESS' AND THE 'PEARL' POEM

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DUCHESS AND THE *PEARL* POEM

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ABSTRACT

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The Ethics of Mourning:
The Role of Material Culture and Public Politics in the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Pearl* Poem

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This project is a socio-historic analysis of two late 14th century dream visions: Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and the *Pearl* poem. Utilizing Robert Pogue Harrison's concept of objectifying grief through ritualized communal mourning, this thesis examines the ways in which mourning literature functioned as consolatory device, and a form of public performance for the powerful patrons who commissioned the pieces. By engaging with pre-existing communities of grief, material culture, and courtly discourse these poems perform the work of mourning while simultaneously enacting modes of public performativity that stress the ethics of grieving, and suggest that, for royal patrons, it is imperative for the stability of the commonwealth that they respond appropriately to loss. In performing the work of mourning the texts advocate for a unity between public and private selves, enacting the principle that for a great leader the private is always public.

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Introduction
The Role of Mourning Literature and Material Culture in the Objectification of Grief

> Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependence and ethical responsibility.

-Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

Our post-(post-)modern relationship with death, particularly our tendency to relegate it to hospitals—removing the dead and dying person from the home, the space of the living— has divorced us from our ancestors' ritualized practices of grief and mourning, and recast loss as an individual burden with specific temporal restraints in lieu of an ongoing communal responsibility. In ancient times, common funerary and mourning practices created a community of bereavement, that prevented loss from becoming an isolating circumstance and strengthened social bonds between members both during and after loss. Robert Pogue Harrison suggests that, as an antidote to our failing cultural response to death, ritualized communal mourning behaviors serve to "contain the crisis of grief in the very act of *objectifying* its content through scripted gestures and precise codes of enactment," thus insulating the bereaved from the psychological threats of grief: "conniption, catalepsy, or psychic dissolution."[1] Within the pages of ancient tragedies we find vestiges of these ritualized behaviors—the orchestrated and "barbarous howls and shrieks of primal lamentation" which signified a death within the community.[2] While they seem to be wild and unconstrained, these scripted processes served to "*depersonalize* the condition of grief by submitting it to a set of public, traditionally transmitted codes."[3] In other words, Harrison defines "objectification" as the process of mitigating the "desire to die with the

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[1] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 56-57. Emphasis my own.
[2] Ibid, 55.
[3] Ibid, 55-60. Emphasis original.

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dead" which "runs as deep in human nature as both love and the death drive, whose impulses it commingles and combines," thus containing grief through ritualized and formalized public spectacle.[4] Sigmund Freud, the 'father of psychoanalysis,' pioneered investigations into the death drive and argued that cultural mores develop to redirect this drive through other psychological mechanisms and desires. He remains the preeminent theorist for studies in grief and mourning on the individual level since his methods and theories provide a specific lens to examine a person's psychological reaction to loss, but Harrison's emphasis on Heideggerian theories of human social interaction abstracts Freud's notions of individual mourning and melancholia by applying similar theories to communal responses to loss. In *The Dominion of the Dead*, Harrison traces the transformations of these social interactions from antiquity to modernity, examining the ways in which communal responses to death have changed over time. Harrison's anthropological-socio-historic study of the history of relationships between the living and the dead opens up new avenues for examining the public performance of grief and communal funerary rituals in the Middle Ages.[5]

Over the centuries the highly vocal and intensely physical rituals of antiquity were tamed and muted by Christianity. As Purgatorial discourse rooted itself in Christian doctrine during the latter half of the twelfth-century, the emphasis of funerary ritual shifted from comforting the bereaved to praying for the soul's expedient journey through Purgatory and on to Heaven.[6] The doctrine of eternal souls made ostentatious spectacles of grief increasingly taboo and, in the monastic halls of the Middle Ages, death and subsequent mourning rituals were re-imagined. In

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[4] Ibid, 55.
[5] For a psychoanalytic investigation of mourning in Chaucer's works see L.O. Aranya Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). See David Aers "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*," *Speculum* 68.1 (1993): 54-73 for a psychoanalytic discussion of the *Pearl* poem.
[6] John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution: 1200-1700," *Past & Present* 100 (1983), 29-32.

an effort to conform to changing Christian culture and customs, people began to create tangible, artistic, and textual representations of death—artifacts that I will call the material culture of death and mourning—that served to engage the living in the project of meditating on death and praying for the souls of the departed. This transition of mourning practices from vocalized public displays of grief to textual meditation on the process of dying ultimately rooted itself in the material culture—tombs, texts, paintings, etc.— of the later Middle Ages. Ashby Kinch claims, "[b]y providing concrete forms in which to contemplate death, verbal and visual artists served as privileged mediators of this decisive event, offering aesthetic forms in which readers and viewers could manage their anxiety."[7] Monastic fraternities' "Signs of Death," collected poems which "describe the signs that the body produces as it approaches death," attempted to work through the process of dying and functioned as guides for the living on how to both attend a death and how to die themselves.[8] The moment of death became a fixation for the people of the Middle Ages. The work of objectifying grief migrated from vocal performance to artistic renditions of death, often depicting the soul of a dying individual being removed by Death. By the later 14th century and early 15th century the proliferation of death iconography resulted in artistic renditions of exposed corpses being incorporated into the Office of the Dead, as well as the construction of the first *transi* (cadaver) tombs.[9] Crucially, these new aesthetic media maintained the sense of community propagated by the ancients thereby contributing to the "objectification" practices Harrison sees as central to the work of communal mourning. Additionally, these textual

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[7] Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 4.
[8] Ibid, 6. For further discussion of death iconography, its proliferation, and its political and social implications see Ashby Kinch. *Imago Mortis* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), especially pgs 3-24.
[9] For a discussion of *transi* tombs and the role of the cadaver in the later Middle Ages see Kenneth Rooney, *Mortality and Imagination: The Life of the Dead in Medieval English Literature* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), especially Chapter 1: 33-101

representations of death also performed the work of privatizing mourning practices by bringing them into the home.

In conjunction with this material culture of death, cultural tropes like courtly discourse, Eucharistic performativity, and traditions like annual commemoration and other intangible socio-cultural constructs make up the immaterial culture which defines and structures material artifacts. Narrative poems, like the *Book of the Duchess* and *Pearl*, are unique in their engagement with material and immaterial culture. Not only are the narratives *responding* to both the material and immaterial culture, they *become* both material and immaterial. The text in the form of a book is concretely a material artifact, but the narrative, which has its own oral component in the form of public readings, is essentially immaterial. These dualistic narratives recognize not only the importance of submitting grief to a set of public rituals, but also the significance and necessity of continued meditation outside of the public sphere. While Harrison's model of objectification allows for a broader investigation into communal, rather than individual, mourning, when we apply it to a given cultural context we must also attend to the political implications of public grief and subsequent methods of mourning. These political implications are of paramount importance because they are a manifestation of societal tensions and changing responses to death and dying. The intangible cultural tropes which influence the creation of the material culture of death I will refer to throughout this thesis as immaterial culture.

Death in the later 14th century was an experience that transcended class boundaries. The emotional effect of death was a common human experience regardless of physical or social locale and in this way acted as a unifying force. Additionally, the Church's relationship to death and the institution's widely understood rituals made it an ideal social platform for political advantage. Members of the English monarchy and other high ranking individuals utilized death

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and funerary customs as political currency. The cultural expectations and ceremonies surrounding death were often appropriated by aristocratic members of society in order to reinforce their own status, or leverage their social power for ideal placement in the afterlife.[10] The material culture of death and mourning became a central concern for people of the Middle Ages; monuments and effigies were used daily for ongoing obits and dedicated prayer for decades after someone's death. As a result, funerary monuments and effigies became increasingly ornate and the location of one's body after death was no longer simply a human concern, but rather a political decision that had lasting effects. Architects often worked for years on a single tomb, sourcing materials and craftsmen from all over England and, in some cases, the rest of Western Europe.

Delicately woven into the aristocratic society of later 14th century England, poets created diverse narratives in order to capitalize on moments of public grief. Whether they were directly commissioned to craft a piece of memorial literature, or simply able to present a memorial work in hopes of future favor, the surviving grief and mourning literature composed by these poets gives modern readers a glimpse into the political life of patrons and the social milieu from which it was born. *The Book of the Duchess,* widely assumed to be Chaucer's first major poem, is connected to one such specific cultural context when he refers to it as *The Deeth of Blanche the Duchess* in the *Prologue* to *The Legend of Good Women*. This rare instance of Chaucer referring specifically to the context of his poetry identifies the work we now call *The Book of the Duchess* as a commissioned piece of memorial literature, crafted to honor Blanche of Lancaster., although questions of its specific date still persist, the poem has been the subject of examinations of

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[10] For further discussions of aristocratic appropriation of public mourning rituals see Ashby Kinch. *Imago Mortis* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), especially pgs 3-24; and Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject." *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010): 294-322.

medieval conceptions of identity, consolation, and patronage.[11] The narrator of the poem tells the audience about a dream he had in which he took part in a "hart hunt" with the Emperor Octavian and met a melancholic knight. In an effort to help the Knight through his grief, the Dreamer listened to his lamentations and asked him about the reason for his melancholy. When the Knight eventually admits the loss of his lady the dream abruptly ends with the Knight riding toward home and the Dreamer committing to put his story verse. Recently, L.O. Aranya Fradenburg has combined these historicist threads of analysis with psychoanalysis and discourses of courtly love to examine the ways in which modes of desire and courtly discourse reinforce notions of self-sacrifice, and re-imagine individual subjectivity. She argues that "[c]ourtly love dignifies the oscillation between sentience and insentience that fascinates and constructs the subject. Courtly culture exalts the ergogenic and divisive power of the image, making spectacular arts out of sacrifice."[12] Her argument suggests that Chaucer appropriated an existing discourse of courtly love as a way to re-imagine the functionality of mourning discourses and the potential of these discourses to bolster, reify, and repair communities through grief and, more particularly, through grieving leaders. By exploring the inherent tensions of courtly and non-courtly discourse in *The Book of the Duchess* Chaucer focuses on the communal aspects of mourning literature and its connection with the pre-established modes of commemoration. Ultimately, Chaucer's memorial text serves both to do the 'work' of mourning at a community level, as well as suggest broader political implications of aristocratic grief and its socio-political ramifications.

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[11] See Bertrand Bronson, "The *Book of the Duchess* Re-Opened." *PMLA* 67.5 (1952): 863-881 and Edward Condren, "The Historical Context of the *Book of the Duchess*: A New Hypothesis." *The Chaucer Review* 5.3 (1971): 195-212 for competing view points on the relationship between Chaucer, the Dreamer, the Knight, and Gaunt with Bronson taking a more traditional view of linking Chaucer with the Dreamer and Gaunt with the Knight, while Condren suggests that both the Dreamer and the Knight represent alternate temporalities of Chaucer's single conscious. Both authors, along with Robert Jordan, "The Compositional Structure of the *Book of the Duchess*." *The Chaucer Review* 9.2 (1974): 99-117, argue that the relationship between the Dreamer and the Knight is meant to provide a kind of cathartic consolation.
[12] L.O. Aranya Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 24.

Also composed in the social milieu of the later 14th century, the *Pearl* poem is often linked to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* in studies of late medieval dream visions. Both poems were composed in the last quarter of the 14th century and focus on a melancholic man who recently suffered a profound loss and is consoled by a companion. In *Pearl* a bereaved Jeweler laments the loss of his pearl and, after falling asleep on a grave-like mound of earth, experiences a dream vision. In his dream he meets an anthropomorphized version of his lost pearl and attempts to cross the river separating them in order to resolve his grief. The anonymity of the author, the poem's appearance in only one extant manuscript—the Cotton Nero A.x.— and little reference to the work in other contemporary documents not only make it terribly difficult to date but also a *tabula rasa* in terms of historical context. For this reason, early criticism tended to focus on the allegorical potential of the poem, painting it with broad generalizing strokes of Medieval Christianity, a trend which was not broken until the latter quarter of the twentieth century. John Bowers' 2001 socio-historical study of the *Pearl* poem argues that it too may be a memorial poem, honoring Queen Anne of Bohemia, meaning that it is engaged with the same genre of mourning literature as Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*.[13] Examining these poems together, and noting their participation in a broad genre of mourning literature and individual engagement with the relevant material culture, in this case the prevalent tradition of funerary monuments and the Wilton Diptych, reveals that each poet had similar concerns about the socio-political effects of grief. Bowers' study, in many ways, gave new legs to scholarship on *Pearl*, which had previously been rooted in, and permeated by, theological and allegorical traditions.[14]

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[13] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Courtly Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001).
[14] See for example Jean Beal, "The *Pearl*-Maiden's Two Lovers." *Studies in Philology* 100.1 (2003): 1-21; Josephine Bloomfield, "Stumbling Toward God's Light: The *Pearl* Dreamer and the Impediments of Hierarchy." *The Chaucer Review* 45.4 (2011): 390-410; David K. Coley, "*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 209-62; Susanna Fein, "Of Judges and Jewelers: *Pearl* and the Life of Saint John."

Most important for this study, however, is the relationship Bowers' study reveals between the common historical foundations for both Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and *Pearl*: both works were commissioned by unpopular ruling figures in the wake of their wives' deaths. These works represent a part of their patrons' public lives in the face of a crisis. Their subject matter not only reflects widespread medieval sensibilities about death and mourning literature, but also reveals political complexities and tensions percolating beneath the surface concerning masculine political authority in the face of the death of women who bolstered that authority. While we may not be able to interpret these artifacts as 'facts,' produced from singular events or moments, their existence is tied to a distinct set of social and historical circumstances. As I will argue, placing these works of art in specific historical circumstances puts them in conversation with history, with contemporaneous material and immaterial artifacts, and with networks of socio-political tensions that span temporal boundaries.

Though they were composed roughly twenty years apart, the complex socio-cultural circumstances of which the *Book of the Duchess* and *Pearl* are part started with the death of Edward III in 1377. Edward's death marked a significant decline in John of Gaunt's already tenuous popularity,[15] while it simultaneously indicated the beginning of Richard II's minority on the throne of England.[16] Generally popular following the disastrous reign of Edward II (1307-1327), Edward III, who reigned from 1327 to 1377, saw impressive military success in the early years of the Hundred Years' War, earning decisive military victories at the Battle of Crécy, the Battle of Neville's Cross, and in Calais.[17] Toward the end of his reign. however, Edward's health and popularity declined, and as a result, he left most of the military campaigning to his sons:

Studies in the Age of Chaucer 36 (2014): 41-76; Elizabeth Harper, "*Pearl* in the Context of Fourteenth-Century Gift Economies." *The Chaucer Review* 44.4 (2010): 421-439.

[15] John of Gaunt was Edward III's youngest, and at this time, only surviving son.

[16] Richard II was the only son of Edward IV, the Black Prince (d. 1376), and John of Gaunt's nephew.

[17] May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 105-138.

Prince Edward IV, also known as the Black Prince, Lionel of Antwerp who died in 1368, and John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. Unfortunately for the princes, years of high taxation and a string of military failures began to cause significant strife in England. The military success that had previously insulated the monarchy and fueled a sense of nationalism in the English people yielded to a new social reality. Citizens who found themselves in a changing labor market due to the Black Death were beginning to learn "to fight for religions or their markets" rather than "the hereditary rights of their sovereigns," and no longer had victories in exchange for their high rates of taxation.[18] This time of weakness in England's social and hierarchical structure was punctuated most significantly by the deaths of both Queen Philippa (15 August, 1369) and John of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche of Lancaster (12 September, 1368); their passing, while not specifically the cause of any political unrest, signified a profound change for the people of England and the spend-thrift monarchy.[19] John of Gaunt would come to bear the brunt of this political fallout.

After Queen Philippa fell ill, King Edward III began an expensive affair with Alice Perrers. The Good Parliament, which sat from 28 April, 1376 to 10 July 1376, would later call for her exile, claiming that she "completely dominated the court, and abused the influence which she exercised over the King in the most shameful manner, interfering with the course of justice, and enriching herself at the expense of others, after the manner of her kind."[20] Already an unpopular figure due to his close association with the profligate monarchy, John of Gaunt's absenteeism after his wife's passing further amplified his negative public image. From the time of Blanche's death in 1368 to the Good Parliament in April of 1376, Gaunt had not spent a significant stretch of time in England, preoccupied as he was with claiming land and titles in

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[18] Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1964), 13.
[19] Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1964), 75.
[20] Ibid, 129.

France and Spain.[21] His military exploits, spurred on by his new marriage to a foreigner, Isabelle of Castile, were viewed as a drain on the country's resources, and a main cause of the high taxation rates. He returned to the country briefly in 1374, a year marked by significant expenditures for Blanche's annual commemoration, a cultural expectation which Gaunt had observed regularly since her death but never officially attended. [22] This was also the year that the duke commissioned Henry Yevele to build an elaborate double tomb which would serve as the final resting place for Gaunt and his first wife.[23] The commission of such an elaborate effigy during a time of Gaunt's own declining popularity is a direct result of this political turmoil. By creating such a monument he grounded himself on English soil. His effigy and the focus it brought to his dead English wife served as a political tool in terms of reminding the people of London that Gaunt was wealthy, powerful, and, most importantly given his foreign failures, English.

The nadir of Gaunt's popularity was reached in the aftermath of the Good Parliament. When Gaunt returned to England in 1376 from a diplomatic mission in Flanders both his father and his elder brother, the Black Prince, were too ill to perform their duties, leaving him to take their place in front of parliament, which was calling for significant reform. While Edward III was known to support the cause of reform, John of Gaunt was staunchly on the side of the monarchy, an unpopular side to take in front of the energetic and irritated parliament.[24] Sydney Armitage-Smith claims that initially Gaunt appeared to be open to Parliamentary suggestion: "[a]cknowledging the sacrifices which had been made by the country, the Duke [of Lancaster], in

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[21] Ibid, 123.

[22] See N.B. Lewis, "The Anniversary Service for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, 12th September, 1374." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. 21 (1937): 176-192 for a detailed account of expenditures for and attendees of this event.

[23] See Fig 1 below. The tomb was entirely destroyed in the Great Fire of London, but there is a surviving image of it from an engraving by Wenceslaus Hollar.

[24] Sydney Armitage-Smith, *John of Gaunt* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1964), 127.

a sympathetic address, invited the commons to declare their grievances, and promised to use all his influence to secure redress."[25] However, the political situation deteriorated rapidly after the Black Prince's death on 8 June, 1376 and Gaunt's earlier pliancy transformed into a single-minded stubbornness that was directed entirely at rebuking parliamentary reform.

The members of Parliament sought to capitalize on the Black Prince's Death. In an attempt to circumnavigate John of Gaunt's power, the Good Parliament requested that the Black Prince's son, Richard II, be presented to them, thereby confirming the young boy as heir-apparent for the ailing Edward III. Furthermore, a permanent council of twelve parliamentary elected officials was to be installed in the King's office.[26] As a response to these unprecedented Parliamentary requests, John of Gaunt, "assuming an authority which no King of England had dared to exercise, and for which no precedent could be found since the first beginnings of constitutional government," essentially annulled the Good Parliament.[27] Gaunt was already an unpopular figure due to his military failures and "regarded in many quarters as short-sighted and irresponsible," he further demonized himself in the eyes of the public by removing the King's Council established by the Good Parliament; returning Alice Perrers to court, among others who had been impeached; punishing prominent members of parliament, including its speaker, Sir Peter de la Mare and Lord Latimer, William of Wykenham; and introducing an additional poll tax.[28] May McKisack discusses the unsavory rumors about Gaunt circulating throughout London following the Good Parliament:

> Gaunt lived in open sin with his daughters' governess, Katherine
>
> Swynford; he has poisoned his first wife's sister for the sake of her

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[25] Ibid, 131.
[26] Ibid, 131.
[27] Ibid, 131.
[28] Ibid, 131; See also May McKisack *The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 385-395.

inheritance and was seeking to destroy his nephew Richard by the same

means; he was plotting with Charles V to secure a papal bull declaring

Richard illegitimate. Even the duke's royal birth was denied in a story,

said to be sponsored by William of Wykeham, that he was a Flemish

changeling smuggled in to the abbey at Ghent in place of a daughter born

to Queen Philippa.[29]

Regardless of whether or not the majority of these claims were ever substantiated, their breadth

indicates just how unpopular Gaunt was in London.

In the aftermath of the Good Parliament and before launching a year-long campaign to

restore "the royal power and dignity" of the monarchy, Gaunt held his annual memorial service

for his first wife, Blanche of Lancaster. The event did little for Gaunt's reputation, though,

ironically, "[h]is very unpopularity [sic] served to stimulate loyalty to the young and innocent

heir to the throne." [30] The tension between Gaunt and his newly crowned nephew would

continue for next two decades. While Gaunt's vast wealth and influence would eventually

provide some stability for Richard's shaky monarchy, both men would maintain geographically

separate courts, with Gaunt largely remaining in London and Richard preferring to hold his court

in the Northwest Midlands around Cheshire. These geographic preferences likely explain

Gaunt's patronage of Chaucer, a London poet, and Richard's patronage of a poet who composed

in the Midlands dialect.

The people of London gladly welcomed the young Richard II to the throne in hopes of

reining in John of Gaunt's political power. Regardless of the initially warm welcome, Richard

II's reign was by no means an easy one. Born in 1367, Richard II inherited the throne only 10

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[29] May McKisack *The Fourteenth Century 1307-1399* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959), 393.
[30] Ibid, 397.

years later in 1377. Richard's coronation procession on 16 July, 1377 was led by John of Gaunt, his uncle, who was, at that time, being much more cognizant of nurturing his relationship with the Londoners and making every effort to appear supportive of his nephew's ascension.[31] As Nigel Saul notes, "[i]t was a spectacle the likes of which was not to be seen again until the procession marking Richard's reconciliation with the Londoners fifteen years later."[32] Richard's early years as king, even though he was deemed competent to govern by parliament and given full use of the great seal, were managed by a serious of parliamentary appointed advisors.[33] Throughout his minority, the political unrest grew, and by 1381 the peasantry had finally had enough. Spurred on by yet another massive poll tax—the third in as many years— and with little to show for their hardship in the way of successful military endeavors, the revolt of the working classes was inevitable. While the majority of the revolt's manpower came from Kent, it was the opportunistic unrest in London that resulted in the destruction of Gaunt's Savoy Palace and subsequently forced him to flee to Scotland after being turned down for asylum in Northumberland.[34] Although Richard's role in quelling the revolt is often glorified both in contemporary accounts of the event and by modern scholars, it would not prove to be an indication of his relationship with London in the future.[35] Richard was not a warrior king like his grandfather; his expenditures were vast but focused largely on architectural projects, such as Westminster Abbey, and maintaining a large, lavish court. His petulance would eventually result in parliamentary action limiting his royal prerogative in 1387 and 1388, and a schism of sorts with London. During these years Richard sought refuge in the Northwest Midlands, setting up an

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[31] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 224.
[32] Ibid, 24.
[33] Ibid, 28.
[34] Ibid, 54-63.
[35] For an in depth discussion of Richard's role in the Revolt and its aftermath see Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 72-82.

alternative center of government in Cheshire. This dedication to the northwest midlands would continue in varying degrees throughout Richard's life; he would later, in the tyrannical last years of his reign, call himself the Prince of Cheshire.[36] Richard recovered his political power in 1389 (John of Gaunt's return was an influencing factor in this political stabilization) and immediately "sought to create a true national power base by recruiting knights from a broad geographical spread…eventually retaining a company of over 700 [native Cheshire] knights, esquires and archers, from whose number he selected 312 for his personal bodyguard."[37] This royal base in Cheshire undoubtedly explains why we have *Pearl* and the other three poems of the Cotton Nero A.x., and is likely responsible for other extant examples of alliterative verse. Richard's court is often noted for its obsession with art and culture,[38] and his tenure in Cheshire gave local artisans and poets an opportunity to plug into the rich culture of court life and create works of art that both reflected the royal court and honored their local languages and traditions. Richard's later deposition also likely explains why poems as magnificent as *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain* survive in only one fairly unimpressive manuscript.

Richard's return to power also came with a re-branding of sorts. By the end of his reign Richard had established himself as an extremely orthodox and pious man, proclaiming himself a champion of the Church against heresy. In an attempt to solidify his divinely ordained rule, Richard made his piety a central focus of his new identity. Although Richard was likely brought up to be sympathetic to Lollardy, which was originally supported by the gentry, in the early 1380's the Lollard movement became associated with political unrest and Richard made significant efforts to broadcast his orthodox beliefs and financially support orthodox

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[36] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Courtly Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 69.
[37] Ibid, 71.
[38] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 295-300.

institutions.[39] Along with his wife, Queen Anne of Bohemia, Richard retrenched himself in Christian customs, the cult of Saints, and the material culture produced by and for these ideologies. From 1390 to 1397 England maintained relative stability, aside from a brief skirmish between Richard and London in 1392, and "relations between the king and the nobility were more harmonious than they had been for a decade."[40] Though this was a time of peace for Richard and his court, allowing art and culture to flourish, this decade was also punctuated by great personal tragedy for the king. It was during these years that most scholars believe Richard commissioned the most significant material artefacts of his rule: the double tomb for himself and Anne, and the Wilton Diptych.[41]

The King was deeply distraught over Anne's death in 1394. They had been very close throughout their marriage; he often sought her counsel, and, unusual for royal marriages, "they had even travelled together on all major itineraries."[42] He destroyed Sheen Palace, where she died, and "for a year he would not enter any chamber that she has been in."[43] Court poets responded to Richard's grief in specific ways. It is assumed that Chaucer's revision to the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women*, which initially mentioned Sheen Palace, but in a later version does not, is a response to the King's actions and emotional distress after Anne's death.[44] Additionally, as Bowers has argued, the *Pearl* poem may have been commissioned by Richard in response to Anne's death, or shortly thereafter. Richard also commissioned Henry Yevele to build a double tomb which was likely completed between 1396 and 1399 and still stands in Westminster Abbey today.[45] Like John of Gaunt, Richard sought to create a tangible

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[39] Ibid, 300.
[40] Ibid, 235-239.
[41] See Figures 2-6 below for images of the Tomb and Diptych.
[42] Ibid, 93-93, 455-457.
[43] Nigel Saul *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 456.
[44] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Courtly Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2001), 156.
[45] This is according to westminster-abbey.org.

representation of his grief. Both monuments serve as a material bridge, constructed around the

idea of a dead woman, joining private loss and pain, and political power and wealth. Much like

the annual performance of commemoration, the material culture—tombs, paintings, poems,

illuminated manuscripts, etc.— produced by powerful patrons reflects an artistic imagination that

correlates directly to concrete cultural memory. To the end, he also commissioned pieces that

glorified his kingship, presenting his rule in terms of his increasingly orthodox piety. The Wilton

Diptych is undoubtedly the most impressive artifact produced in Richard's court and it certainly

illuminates his obsession with his own public image.[46] The Wilton Diptych has become

synonymous with Richard's reign and almost every study of his life includes some attention to it.

While its artist remains anonymous, there is general consensus about the date of the Wilton

Diptych circa 1395.[47] The interior of the Diptych (see Fig 2 below) depicts Richard as a young

boy, with by Saints Edmund, Edward and John the Baptist, being presented to the Virgin and the

Infant Jesus. The exterior of the piece (see Fig 3 below) depicts a series of heraldic emblems

which surround a White Hart in a bed of rosemary and other plants.[48] Most scholars agree that

the Wilton Diptych was central to Richard's public persona and much ink has been spilled in an

effort to analyze and interpret the culture of Richard's court through the images and symbols

depicted on the Diptych. For the purposes of this study, the Diptych's aesthetic merits

comparison to *Pearl's* rich poetic style. The Diptych's lavish use of gold directly reflects the

kind of opulence Richard prided himself on, while the figures of saints and pious kings speak to

Richard's own piety and his identity as a saint-king rather than a military king. The *Pearl* poem's

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[46] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 356-58, 360, 365, 384-385, 446, 450-460.
[47] Dillian Gordon, "The Wilton Diptych: An Introduction" in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*, Eds Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, and Caroline Elam (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 20.
[48] See Ibid, pg 19-26 for an in depth discussion of the Diptych and its interpretative tradition.

highly wrought structure, with its intricate form and lavish sonic effects, in some ways mimics this opulence in literary form.

In the following two chapters I will ground Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and the anonymous *Pearl* poem in specific socio-historical circumstances, examining the material culture that developed alongside them as reflections of public aristocratic performances that greatly influenced the textual production of the poems. This process of writing and crafting re-imagines discourses of mourning that blend the muted traditions of Christianity, with the ritualized laments of antiquity in an effort to instill an ethic of mourning rather than simply a method of working through mourning. The monuments and artifacts to which these texts respond function as centerpieces for on-going communal mourning. They allow communities to gather and perform the work of mourning, thereby objectifying grief and reifying political power structures. The texts themselves, however, contribute a narrative component to the work of mourning, introducing a notion of ethical mourning practices for their patrons. This ethic links the public and private spheres of loss by encouraging powerful patrons to recognize the dangers of individual melancholy and its negative impact on complicated socio-political systems.

While socio-historic studies of each individual poem have been published in the past, there are remarkably few which examine both poems together. Both works have been given significant attention in works like A.C. Spearing's *Medieval Dream Poetry*, and rarely does a sustained study of *Pearl* forget to mention the *Book of the Duchess* in some way, shape, or form. However, these studies are generally non-committal in regards to a dating argument for one or both poems and tend to analyze them in terms of broader sensibilities about the performance of mourning or consolation in medieval literature.[49] By comparing these texts, and the

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[49] For additional sustained studies of the dream vision genre, Chaucer, and the *Pearl*-poet see: J.A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry* (London: Penguin Press, 1992); Kathryn Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge:

contemporaneous works of material culture, through a specific set of socio-historic circumstances, I hope to illuminate the ways in which the text played a crucial role, not only in the objectification of grief, but also in the constitution of the imaginative public persona of its patron who is ethically bound to respond appropriately to the socio-political ramifications of grief.

My first chapter will discuss Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* as both a memorial to Blanche of Lancaster and a literary edification of its patron at a time when his public image was particularly vulnerable. I hope to expand on Phillipa Hardman's claim that Chaucer utilized existing funerary sculpture to craft an aesthetic that animated the funerary monument.[50] Basing my argument on Edward Condren's proposed composition date of eight years after Blanche's death,[51] I argue that Chaucer's poem responds to, not simply on a widespread cultural aesthetic, but specifically on the uniquely exquisite tomb Gaunt commissioned for himself and Blanche. The poem utilized the momentous effect of the tomb and the public occasion of its unveiling to re-cast John of Gaunt, not as a bad diplomat, failed warrior, and political enemy of the people of London, but as a grief-stricken knight who, in following the literary custom of courtly love, mourned intensely and continuously for the loss of his first wife.

By creating spaces that mimic the psychological effects of loss, Chaucer aestheticizes the condition of grief, probing the painful "in-between" spaces—specifically the spaces in between remembering and forgetting that contain the lack we call grief. In acknowledging the role of

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D.S. Brewer, 2000); Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision* (Standford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971); A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain-poet*: *A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Michael St. John, *Chaucer's Dream Visions* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2000).
[50]Phillipa Hardman, "The 'Book of the Duchess' as a Memorial Monument." *The Chaucer Review* 28.3 (1994): 205-215.
[51] See Edward Condren, "The Historical Context of the 'Book of the Duchess': A New Hypothesis." *The Chaucer Review* 5.3 (1971): 195-212

material culture and communal ritual via the figure of Lady White, the Knight's lost love, Chaucer reminds his audience that they are gathered— as an audience, both inside and outside the poem— because of Blanche's death, not in spite of it. Her idealized figure is constructed, not through standard rhetorical narration, but through the lamentations of the Black Knight who epitomizes the ideological invention of the courtly knight. Chaucer's skillful use of courtly language through the mediating voice of the befuddled Narrator- Dreamer further manufactures a picture of the Knight as a pitiable but honorable figure, who cannot escape the confines of his grief. Ultimately Chaucer suggests that in order for Gaunt to become an effective public figure he must unite both his private grieving-self and his public-self. Nodding both to the importance of cultural mourning practices, including funerary monuments and annual commemorations, and the necessity of political stabilization, Chaucer imagines a new, secular discourse of mourning which roots the need for consolation in the public sphere rather than the private. In doing so he implies that the political application of public mourning might indeed point to the principle that for an aristocratic subject the private must be public. It is these two disparate identities which must coalesce in order to maintain a stable commonwealth.

My second chapter will examine the ways in which a similar process, with a remarkably different aesthetic, is enacted in the *Pearl* poem. *Pearl*'s later composition date of 1395, its temporal proximity to the death of Queen Anne, and its royal patron all contribute to the religious content and obscure symbolism of the poem. Relying on the orthodox sensibilities of Richard's court in the 1390's the *Pearl*-poet makes Eucharist symbolism central to the narrative and function of the poem. The Eucharist is a central symbol throughout the narrative, from the Maiden who, in her white, round perfection, evokes images of the thin white wafer regularly

used by priests performing the Eucharist,[52] to the Dreamer's final resolution in turning to Christ

for comfort. While complimenting Richard's piety, the Eucharistic symbolism in the poem also

recognizes the roles of identity and performativity which, for wealthy and aristocratic Church

attendees, were part and parcel of the public ritual of Eucharist. The poet appropriates the

performative persona inherent in Eucharistic discourse and uses it as a guide for the king in the

wake of his loss, ultimately arguing that a balanced sense of personal interiority is central to

being an effective public leader.

The poem's obsession with the transformed infant corpse simultaneously addresses

medieval tensions surrounding the corpse, and glorifies the "child" image which permeates

Richard's court in the last years of his reign. From Richard's depiction as a child in the Wilton

Diptych to his chaste marriage with Anne of Bohemia, the King was preoccupied with his own

childhood. Whether this was an effort to romanticize his early years as King during his minority,

or a way to actualize a vision of himself as a child of God, these representations of Richard and

his court shed new light on the role of the Heavenly Maiden in *Pearl*. This obsession with re-

imagined youth suggests that the poem does indeed offer consolation to Richard in the year or so

after Anne's death by re-creating happier times and focusing, not on the inevitability of aging,

but on the potential of eternal youth in Heaven. Furthermore, I will argue that the poem's much

debated ending appeals to Richard's pious public image, offering the Eucharist as a way to fill

the void of grief with Christ, by linking Richard's emotional stability to a divinely-ordered

stability outside the vicissitudes of human life.

The use of courtly language by both poets alludes to the ordering power of courtly

discourse and the social customs that accompany it. Both poets' use of courtly and non-courtly

discourse reflects an engagement with the civilizing potential of the ideological systems that

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[52] I am indebted to Dr. Paul Dietrich for his contributions to this line of thinking.

permeated English socio-political structures. The linguistic tension between the Dreamers and their counterparts, the Black Knight and the Pearl Maiden exhibits the poets' dedication to the patron-poet relationship. By constructing their poems, not only in relation to their patron's public personas, but also through common cultural mechanisms, like the idiom of courtly poetry, both poets succeed in creating a mourning text that effaces temporal boundaries, linking the mourning subject to larger temporal structures that transcend the self. Both of these texts create a "de-historicized" subject that functions both when concretely grounded in the social milieu of their respective courts, but also when freed from the temporal bounds of history.

Images
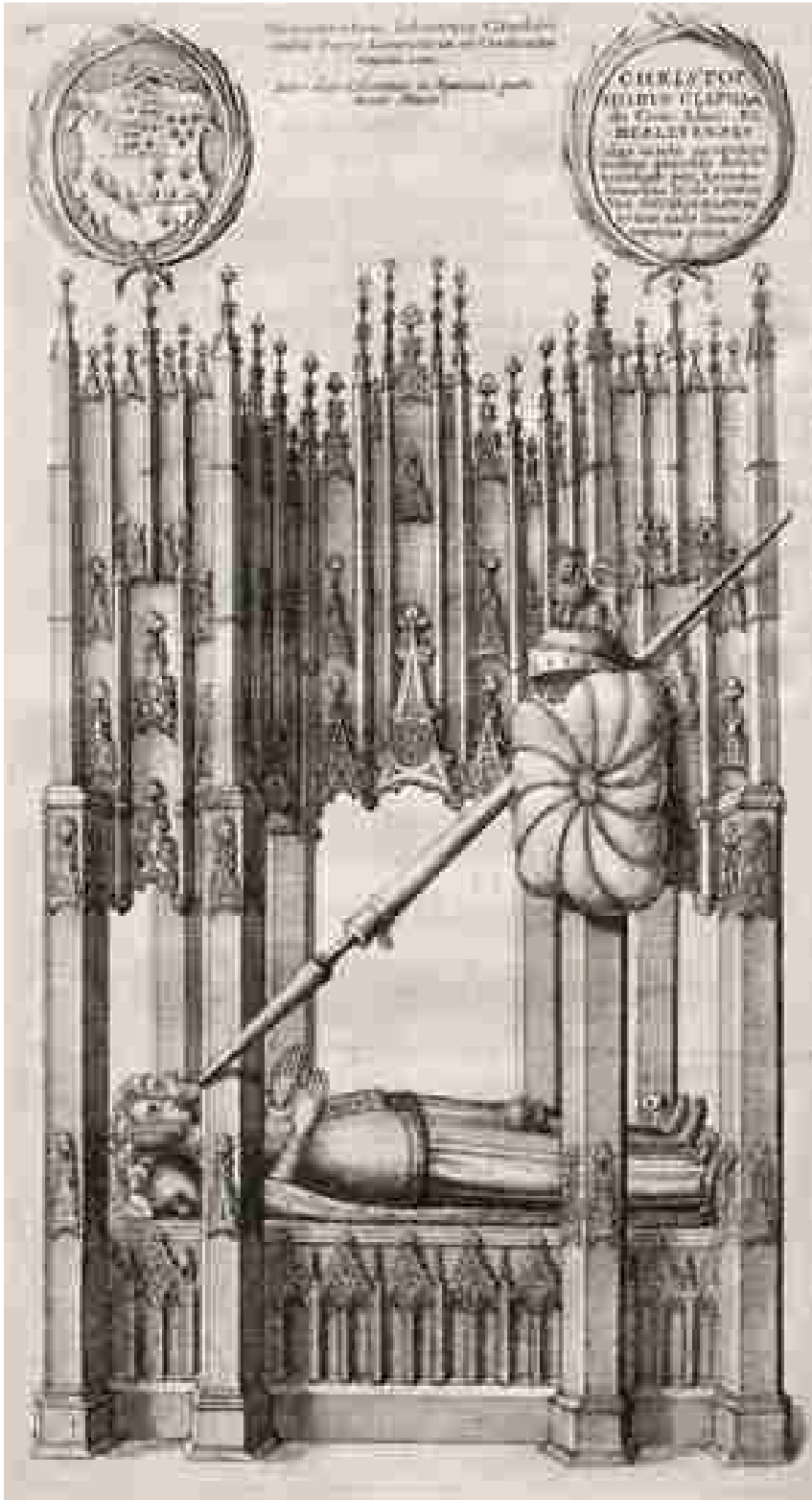
Fig 1:

The only known image of Blanche and Gaunt's tomb in Old St. Paul's Cathedral, from an engraving by Wenceslaus Hollar.

Photo retrieved from public domain.

Fig. 2: Interior of the Wilton Diptych. © The National Gallery, London

Fig. 3: Exterior of the Wilton Diptych. © The National Gallery, London

Fig 4:

Overhead view of Richard II and Anne of Bohemia's tomb.
© Dean and Chapter of Westminster, London

Fig 5:

Detailed photo of Richard II's tomb effigy.
© Dean and Chapter of Westminster, London

Fig 6: Wide angle view of Richard II and Anne of Bohemia's Tomb.
© Dean and Chapter of Westminster, London

Chapter One
Grief and John of Gaunt's Courtly Persona in the *Book of the Duchess*

> The immaterial is always defined by its relation to things…the celebration
> of the immaterial often happens in stunningly material terms: the use of
> monumental funerary sculpture, for example, to mark the leaving of this
> world for another… And because the 'imago' is not lost in the elaborate
> description that would replace the visual artifact with the verbal one, the
> materiality of the object is mysteriously reinforced.

-Jessica Brantley, "Material Culture"

I: The Death of Blanche the Duchess and the (Un)Popularity of John of Gaunt

The *Book of the Duchess* is an artifact of later 14th century mourning practices and

political identity. Commissioned by John of Gaunt, who began payments to Chaucer in 1374, [1]

the text not only commemorates his wife and acts as a container for his grief, but also reflects the

socio-political complexities of London in the 1370s. The *Book of the Duchess* begins with the

narrator lamenting his insomnia, though it is suggested that this affliction is simply a

manifestation of some other, unknown "sickness / that [he has] suffered this eight yeer" (38). In

order to cure his illness the Dreamer asks an anonymous companion for a book and starts to read

the tragic romance of Seys and Alceyone (62-230). After finishing the story and saying a brief

prayer to Morpheus, the god of sleep, the Dreamer falls asleep "right upon [his] book" almost

immediately and begins to dream (245-269). Awakening in a beautiful chamber, the Dreamer

marvels at his surroundings before being called to join the Emperor Octavian's hunt. As the

unsuccessful hunt draws to a close the Dreamer wanders through the woods, guided by a puppy,

until he comes across a Black Knight, sitting in a peculiar part of the forest, reciting a

"complaynte" (487). Intrigued by this courtly and melancholic figure the Dreamer approaches

the Knight and offers his assistance. The Knight explains that no one can help him and the

remainder of the poem is dominated by the Knight's speeches, descriptions of his absent Lady

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[1] Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 83.

White, and an elaborate chess metaphor in which the Knight loses his queen to Fortune. Throughout the interaction the Dreamer repeatedly asks for clarification, seeming not to understand the true cause of the Black Knight's sadness. The dream ends suddenly when the Knight can no longer evade the Dreamer's questions and admits that his Lady "ys ded!" (1308). As the Black Knight rides toward home, a "long castel with walles white, / … on a ryche hil" (1318-1319), the Dreamer wakes up and commits "to put this sweven in ryme" proclaiming it to be "doon" (1332, 1334).[2]

In the poem Chaucer creates spaces that aestheticize the condition of grief, and models the interactions of the Dreamer and the melancholic Black Knight after appropriate social conventions, utilizing courtly discourse as a means of re-imaging communal mourning. With the Black Knight, who acts as a literary representation of the poem's patron, Chaucer creates a dualistic persona of John of Gaunt, separating the private figure who continues to mourn, from the unpopular public figure who cultivates political discord. The Knight's heartfelt and moving speeches create a sense of his existence as a sentient being unto himself, a manifestation of grief with his own ontology and 'place' in the world. *The Book of the Duchess* attempts to construct just such a "cultural fiction," giving Gaunt a "re-start" that dreams him back to the public sphere. As L.O. Aranya Fradenburg claims, the "'certainty' of sentience, particularly in the exacerbated form of pain, can be used to 'substantiate' (to confirm the substantiality of) abstractions and 'cultural fictions' such as lordship or country."[3] This process re-casts his grief within the culturally accepted form of courtly discourse, thereby sanctifying his grief and creating a space in which Gaunt's private and public identities can unite. Chaucer's poem, however, is not the

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[2] See Robert M. Jordan, "The Compositional Structure of the *Book of the Duchess.*" *The Chaucer Review* 9.2 (1974), 103-105 for a more comprehensive look at line numbers and sections.
[3] L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 14. Here Fradenburg recognizes Elizabeth Scarry's work, *The Body in Pain*, as integral in developing this idea.

only, and perhaps not the most important material artefact that serves to demonstrate John of Gaunt's political power.

Funerary monuments were exceptionally important for the people of the later Middle Ages and the tomb Gaunt constructed for himself and Blanche is no exception. Blanche's tomb was constructed by 1376, with painting and decorating completed in 1380, at the final cost of £592.[4] By all accounts the monument was grand on an unprecedented scale, and unique in its design; the first of its kind in St. Paul's, which had no other royal crypts aside from two Anglo-Saxon tomb chests,.[5] The tomb, which was likely damaged by Protestant Reformers in the early 1660's and totally destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, was located in a particularly prestigious area of the cathedral in the north side of the choir, directly adjacent to the sanctuary and high altar.[6] It was constructed out of marble and alabaster, surrounded by ornate spires and at least forty perpetual mourners, or weepers, some of which would have been anonymous and others of which would have been decorated with individual coats of arms, or modeled after specific people. These weepers ensured that Blanche was constantly, albeit metaphorically, mourned, and, in the case of those decorated with specific arms, the weepers forged and identified bonds between the Lancaster family and their close associates, advancing the public image of a family or person.

On top of the dark marble crypt, Blanche of Lancaster and John of Gaunt were immortalized in white alabaster. Blanche was clothed in the style of the day with the light alabaster of her skin and dress likely left unpainted to mimic the color and texture of human skin, as well as her name—Blanche being a close derivative of "blanc," the French word for "white."

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[4] Oliver D. Harris, "'Une tresriche sepulture': The Tomb and Chantry of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster in Old St. Paul's Cathedral, London," *Church Monuments* 25 (2005), 9-10.
[5] Ibid, 9.
[6] Ibid, 12.

Her right hand lay across her body in order to grasp Gaunt's, a unique stylistic choice that had, as Harris notes, significant impact on later tombs, both in England and on the continent, which imitate the gesture, including the tomb Richard II would construct for himself and Anne of Bohemia twenty years later.[7] Her head rested on a pillow supported by angels and a dog lay at her feet, a common trope in later 14th century funerary monuments, symbolizing marital fidelity. As I will discuss later, Chaucer appropriates and animates this funerary animal in his poem; it is a puppy that leads the Dreamer through the forest and to the grieving Knight.

The monument utilizes a public space imbued with cultural significance to transmute Gaunt's grief into political power. John of Gaunt spared no expense on the tomb and throughout its almost three hundred year existence it drew much attention from both English observers and continental tourists. The beauty and grandeur of the tomb caused others to erect their own (less elaborate, of course) funeral monuments in St. Paul's in hopes of benefiting in the Afterlife from the crowd drawn to Blanche and Gaunt's ostentatious display. By the 14th century, prayers from the living had become an integral institution to move the deceased's soul through Purgatory, and it was just as much about quantity as quality. Placing a tomb near Blanche and Gaunt's in St. Paul's gave the deceased an opportunity to receive prayers from those visiting the larger, more spectacular monument.[8] The crowd surrounding him ultimately reinforced his own hierarchical status. While Gaunt was no doubt considering the long term effect of his tomb during its commission and construction, as well as his devotion to Blanche, the monument served a very particular purpose while he was alive. Far from being simply a way to honor his first wife, the tomb was a tangible manifestation of Gaunt's vast wealth and political power, and became a key

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[7] Ibid, 15-17.
[8] My conceptions of purgatory in the Middle Ages have been greatly influenced by Ashby Kinch, specifically a currently unpublished encyclopedia entry. For further discussion of the role of iconography in purgatorial discourse see Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). See especially "Chapter 3: Commemorating Power in the Legend of the Three Living and Three Dead."

location for him in times of political trouble. He used it annually to commemorate his late wife,

as well as during times of political importance; for example, after the 1381 Peasant's Revolt,

Gaunt celebrated "his reconciliation with the Londoners…by a special mass at St. Paul's at

which the mayor and aldermen joined him in praying for Blanche's soul."[9] As a material artifact,

the monument became a vehicle to reify the immateriality of Gaunt's political power and his

place in the English socio-political hierarchy.

Crucially, the tomb and its unveiling provide the stage for Chaucer's poem. Utilizing the

pre-existing community of grief, which gathered annually to honor Blanche of Lancaster,

Chaucer appropriates and aestheticizes social decorum and political tension to envision a secular

discourse of mourning. The text creates a caricature of John of Gaunt in the Black Knight and

then moves this figure through modes of consolation designed to re-unite Gaunt's public and

private identities, thereby stabilizing the commonwealth and easing the political tensions

brewing in the aftermath of the Good Parliament.

Defining precisely what these political tensions were and how they contributed to the

content of the poem requires identifying a specific date for the poem. Initially, scholars latched

on to dating *Book of the Duchess* because it seemed the most likely of Chaucer's poems to have

substantial historical book ends: a specific *terminus a quo* of 1368 with Blanche's death; and a

perfectly acceptable *terminus ad quem* due to John of Gaunt's remarriage in 1372.[10] Critics find

additional evidence for this 'early' dating in the allusion to John of Gaunt as the Earl of

Richmond ("Be Seynt John, on a ryche hill," 1319), since he would no longer have held the title

after 1372. It was, however, common custom in the Middle Ages to list all of a person's titles,

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[9] Oliver D. Harris, "'Une tresriche sepulture': The Tomb and Chantry of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster in Old St. Paul's Cathedral, London," *Church Monuments* 25 (2005), 10.

[10] Derek Pearsall, among others, still staunchly argues for this earlier range of dates saying, "The arguments for a date in 1368 or 1369 are distinctly superior to those for a later date, such as those advanced by Edward I. Condren." Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 323 n44.

regardless of temporal accuracy, and an inscription on Blanche and Gaunt's tomb listed Gaunt's titles as "King of Castile and León, Duke of Lancaster, Earl of Richmond, Leicester, Lincoln and Derby, Lieutenant of Aquitaine, High Steward of England" most which he did not hold at the time of his death. [11] Furthermore, historical records prove Gaunt's remarriage had no effect on the annual commemoration services for Blanche, which were held every August until Gaunt's death in 1399.[12] This cultural evidence is crucial to expanding from the early date to a later one and in 1971 Edward Condren advanced a new dating argument. Staking his claim largely on the Narrator/Dreamer's "eight yeer sicknesse" (*BD* 38, 37),[13] Condren's suggested date "some time during 1377"[14] is based on the then-current date for Blanche's death as 12 September, 1369, which now appears to be 12 September, 1368.[15] Therefore, I argue that this "eight yeer sickness" suggests a composition date of 1376.[16] This subsequently insinuates a dualistic interpretation of this eight year affliction and thus eludes both to the grief resulting from Blanche's death, and the previous eight years of Gaunt's tumultuous role in public politics. Attempting to close this difficult era, the tomb and poem put both a physical and metaphorical period at the end of Gaunt's politic troubles, inviting both him and the audience to embrace a new start for Gaunt's public image.

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[11] See Oliver D. Harris, "'Une tresriche sepulture': The Tomb and Chantry of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster in Old St. Paul's Cathedral, London," *Church Monuments* 25 (2005), 17.

[12] See N.B. Lewis, "The Anniversary Service for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, 12th September 1374." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 21.1 (1937): 176-192.

[13] Phillipa Hardman notes that this line only appears in Thynne's 1532 edition. See "The 'Book of the Duchess' as a Memorial Monument," *The Chaucer Review* 28.3 (1994), 214.

[14] Edward Condren, "The Historical Context of the 'Book of the Duchess': A New Hypothesis," *The Chaucer Review* 5.3 (1971), 199.

[15] See John N. Palmer, "The Historical Context of the Book of the Duchess: A Revision." *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 8.4 (1974), 253-61 for a revision of Blanche's death.

[16] Phillipa Hardman, "The 'Book of the Duchess' as a Memorial Monument," *The Chaucer Review* 28.3 (1994), 206. Also see Oliver D. Harris, "'Une tresriche sepulture': The Tomb and Chantry of John of Gaunt and Blanche of Lancaster in Old St. Paul's Cathedral, London," *Church Monuments* 25 (2005), 7-35 for further discussion of the monument's construction.

The relationship between funerary monuments and Chaucer's poem has been analyzed by Philippa Hardman who argues that the poem "animates a funerary monument," though she does not claim that it is specifically animating Blanche's tomb. Instead she proposes that the popularity of the funerary architecture and Chaucer's likely association with Henry Yevele through the court of Edward III gave him ample material to work with if he did intend to model his dream vision on the material artifact.[17] Stopping just short of concretely historicizing the text, Hardman notes that in place of an "eight yeer" malady, "the numbers two, three, four, five or six" are also metrically feasible, meaning that the poem could have been written anytime between 1370 and 1374, or in 1376, suggesting that it might have been composed for any of these annual services. I argue that a historicist reading of the poem, centered on Blanche's commemoration and tomb, allows contemporary readers to explore the extent to which Chaucer utilizes the tradition as an entry point to examine the pre-existing English socio-political structures of hierarchy and the aristocratic obsession with self-image. Reading the poem in the context of Blanche's 1376 commemoration awakens the political tensions and illuminates the role of material culture in communal grieving and public identity.

Jessica Brantley points out that in the later 14th century "[t]he immaterial is always defined by its relation to things…the celebration of the immaterial often happens in stunningly material terms: the use of monumental funerary sculpture, for example, to mark the leaving of this world for another."[18] This engagement significantly impacted the ways in which writers and artists thought about their contributions to the world, and Chaucer was certainly considering the materiality of his text, both as a physical book and as an object which was "defined by its

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[17] Ibid, 212.
[18] Jessica Brantley, "Material Culture" in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*. Ed. Marion Turner (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2013), 187.

relation to things."[19] In constructing a bridge between the material artifacts of communal

mourning (the tomb itself) and the immateriality of the text, Chaucer created a poem that was

successful both when grounded in its historical circumstance and when freed from the singularity

of history. The monument serves to materially ground the text, and the anniversary supplies its

occasion, but the poem's engagement with aestheticizing the social functions that predicate these

objects infuses the material with the a-temporality of the immaterial. In this way Chaucer

simultaneously borrows from the material and infuses it with the objectifying force of mourning

literature.

This chapter will explore the means by which Chaucer fabricates a "dehistoricized"

exchange between subjects, the Dreamer and the Black Knight, as a means to highlight the

psychological crisis of grief— its individual and personal ramifications, as well as its social and

political implications. This chapter argues, ultimately, that Chaucer urges his readers, including

Gaunt, to resist the temptation of separating the Gaunt who loves, and subsequently grieves,

from the Gaunt who acts in the public sphere. Only by reconciling these identities as intertwined

parts of the whole can he become an effective public figure. However, Chaucer also recognizes

that the practice of aestheticizing grief is central to the communal rituals of his time. His

idealization of the reified White acknowledges the importance of communal ritual and material

culture while at the same time emphasizing her absence and re-directing Gaunt "homwarde"

(1315) to his obligation to stabilize the commonwealth and quell the political chaos of the 1370s.

II: The Dreamer, the Knight, and Lady White

Chaucer's engagement with the material and the immaterial manifests itself in the role of

literature in the process of dreaming, ultimately resulting in a critique of authority. The role of

literature in dreaming and in writing is emphasized both by the story of Alcyone and Seys, which

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[19] Ibid, 187.

the Dreamer reads in hopes of curing his insomnia, and in the bed chamber that serves as the first location of his dream. A common thread of critical analysis has examined this space as a product of reading, interpreting it as proof of Chaucer's engagement with the psychology of dreaming. Much attention has been paid to the ways in which Chaucer's poem mimics the real life process of dreaming in which a person's daily experiences manifest in dreams in non-parallel ways. A.C. Spearing notes that "one of Chaucer's greatest achievements in his early poems was to make use in consciously centered works of literature of the creative and constructive methods employed by the unconscious mind to make dreams."[20] However, this tradition has paid little attention to the fact that the content of any dream is a particularly individual thing. The dream as a product of individual consciousness and collective experience emphasizes the unique utility of the dream vision as a medium for communal mourning. While the process of dreaming in the text mimics a universal psychological concept, the content is a unique product of the Dreamer. The majority of the audience, gathered with Gaunt for Blanche's commemoration, would see the story of Alcyone and Seys as a tragedy of love, representative of John of Gaunt and his late wife. However, the Dreamer's main concern is his own insomnia, and it is this problem that influences his conscious response to the story. His engagement with the story begins and ends with Morpheus, while his audience focuses on the tragedy of Alcyone and her dead husband. In this way, the story of Alcyone and Seys, and the Narrator's perception of it, mimics the process of dreaming—a process which is inherently individual for the Dreamer, but paradoxically reaffirms the social bonds of the audience. They are brought into the dream as a community with shared experience and social context, but through the mediating prism of an individual narrator.

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[20] See A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 74 for a discussion of Chaucer's psychological engagement with dreaming.

The first dream space the Dreamer and the audience encounter functions as an interior variation on the standard dream vision garden, or *locus amoenus*. It is perfect in its composition and temperature. The Dreamer wakes in his dream to the "noyse and sweetness" (297) of "smale foules" (295) in the rafters of his chamber; he believes the season to be May, "For nother to cold nor hoot yt nas" (342) and "blew, bright, clere was the ayr" (340). The room is beautifully decorated with stained glass scenes depicting "al the story of Troye" (326), and its walls are painted with "bothe text and glose, / Of al the Romaunce of the Rose" (333-334). These images are indicative of Chaucer's use of classical Ovidian tales, and his borrowings from the *Romance of the Rose*, but the chamber is curiously vacant of any reference to Machaut's *Judgment de Roi de Behaigne* or *Remede du Fortune*, which directly supply the material for much of the Knight's lament (*BD* 560-709) and his descriptions of Lady White (*BD* 817-1040).[21] Chaucer transforms his sources from classic literary texts into decorative images and in doing so re-affirms his role as author and creator of the dreamscape. However, as David Aers claims in an essay on the *Parliament of Fowles,* it is not uncommon for Chaucer to "[invite] us to rehumanize official authority, to reflect on the processes through which it is produced and propagated."[22] This tension between a literary and a humanized authority emphasizes the way in which the dream vision as a genre transforms what is often considered individual into something shared and communal.

This interior space in the *Book of the Duchess* is not all that different from the exterior space in *Parliament of Fowls* to which Aers is referring. It is a space of remembering and

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[21] These line numbers are representative rather than exhaustive. Furthermore, they do not represent inclusive, exact translations of French material, but rather point to areas in which Chaucer draws on the French traditions of Machaut more heavily. For a detailed list of Chaucer's borrowings from *Judgement de Roi de Behaigne* and *Remede du Fortune* see Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Judgement Du Roy De Behaigne and Remede De Fortune*. Trans. James I. Wimsatt and William W. Kibler. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 26-31, 48-52.

[22] David Aers, "The 'Parliament of Fowls:' Authority, the Knower, and the Known," *The Chaucer Review* 16.1 (1981), 3.

forgetting, a product both of the conscious and the subconscious. Consciously (and superficially), the Dreamer engages with the Morpheus part of the Alcyone story, but in the dream that follows the audience recognizes that subconsciously the Dreamer did indeed recognize the tragedy of love. The content of the dream, namely the Dreamer's interactions with the melancholic Black Knight, suggest that the Narrator and the audience, though they have different socio-historical experiences, share the experiences of love and loss.[23] The audience then recognizes that while dreams are a product of the individual conscienceness, the dream vision text universalizes the process of dreaming into a shared experience. This space between the dream as a product of human consciousness and the dream vision text as a universalizing communal form of mourning is amplified in the particularly ordered forest which serves as the setting for the remainder of the poem.

The Dreamer, after hearing a hunting horn, gets on his horse and rides out of his bedroom to join the hunt. We are never told where the horse came from, or how the Dreamer went from "al naked" (293) in bed to riding in "th'emperour Octovyen['s]" (368) "hert" hunt, but in a dream some things neither can, nor need be explained.[24] After an unsuccessful chase, the "forloyn" horn is blown (386) and the Dreamer, now inexplicably no longer on horseback, walks from his assigned post near a tree and is met by "a whelp" (389) who leads him through a lush and beautiful forest. The Dreamer proclaims this place "To be gayer than the heven" (407) observing that,

> Hyt had *forget* the povertee

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[23] A common thread of critical analysis has interpreted the unknown affliction to be the Dreamer's own lost love. See John M. Hill, "The 'Book of the Duchess," Melancholy, and that Eight-Year Sickness," *The Chaucer Review* 9.1 (1974), 35-37 for a synthetic summary of this tradition; or Edward Condren, "The Historical Content of the *Book of the Duchess*: A New Hypothesis," *The Chaucer Review* 5.3 (1971), 197.

[24] For further discussion of Chaucer's use of psychology to mimic a more realistic dream state see A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1976), 53-65.

> That winter, thorgh hys cold *morrows*,
>
> Had mad hyt suffer, and his *sorwes*;
>
> All was *forgeten*, and that was sene,
>
> For al the woode was waxen grene;
>
> Swetness of dew had mad hyt waxe. (410-415, emphasis my own)

Acknowledging the temporality of this space, the Dreamer emphasizes the role of forgetting through the rhetorical technique chiasmus, sandwiching "sorwes" (412) between "forgete" (410) and "forgeten" (413). The chiasmus in this section muddles the object of "forgeten," leaving the reader to determine if it is the "cold morrows" (411) or "his sorwes" (412) that have been erased from memory. In these lines, as it is with grief, the emotion and the event become intertwined. It is the absence of something which causes the pain of grief. That absence is not temporally bound to a specific moment, but a condition which continues long after the moment of loss has passed. The human tendency to associate the pain of grief specifically with a moment of death results in a conflation of the temporal and the a-temporal, a conceptual-psychological clash Chaucer rhetorically imitates in this forest with the chiasmus of "forgotten sorrows." Chaucer's rhetorical construction in this stanza draws attention to this commingling of the event of loss and the condition of grief, and in doing so, highlights that grief and sorrow exist in the spaces between memories; they are crises we are continually trying to forget, and in so doing, constantly remember, resulting in the tendency to blame grief on death, when really it is the condition of absence. In re-creating the condition of grief, and manufacturing an idealized image of the impetus for that grief, in this case Lady White, the poem provides a communal experience that hopes to symbolically "fill" this individual lack. Grief is a particularly threatening psychological crisis that must be in some way mitigated; if it were to go unchecked the desire to "die with the

dead" (Harrison 70), to no longer live in a state of absence, would become overwhelming, as it did for Alcyone, and the bereaved may succumb to macabre desire.

As a means to contain this grief, Chaucer creates a particularly ordered forest in which,

> …every tree stood by hymselve
>
> For other well ten foot or twelve—
>
> So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
>
> Of fourty or fifty fadem lengthe,
>
> Clene withoute bowgh or stikke,
>
> With croppes brode, and eke as thikke—
>
> They were nat an ynche asunder— (419-425)

The methodical ordering of this space makes it easy to identify anything out of place, anything that shouldn't be there, or anything that is missing. In this sense Chaucer has aestheticized and organized the psyche, allowing the audience to easily detect any absences or excesses. As a result, the Dreamer and the audience quickly recognize the Black Knight and his melancholy as an "excess" in the space. The audience, gathered to memorialize Blanche, would recognize that it is her absence which creates the lack in this space; their communal grief fills the social void and becomes an important stabilizing factor in the community.[25]

Our introduction to the Black Knight very clearly distinguishes him from nature and from the rest of the text. Chaucer houses the Knight's eleven line complaint in this "in between" space of grief, repeating the phrase "ten… or twelve" (462) before transcribing the Knight's eleven line complaint (475-486).[26] Set apart by its stanzaic form from the rest of the text, composed in

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[25] L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 84-87.

[26] Thynne's 1532 edition is the only MS which adds a line and rearranges the order of the complaint to "correct" faulty rhymes. Most editions now leave his added line out, but number as if it were still there (*Riverside*, 970).

octosyllabic couplets, his complaint is a rhetorical manifestation of the "in between" spaces

Chaucer cultivates for the Knight and the Dreamer. The complaint, in a very literal way, both to

the ear and on the page, sets apart and aestheticizes the Knight's grief, even if it does not fully

reveal to the Dreamer the cause of the Knight's grief. Some critical traditions claim that the

Dreamer does indeed recognize that the Knight's lady is dead. This tradition explains the

moments in the text where the Dreamer apparently does not know of Lady White's death by

suggesting that his ignorance is a strategy, employed in order to respect their class difference.

Alternatively, this tradition also argues that the Dreamer's ignorance could also be a clever

consolation strategy to get the Knight to directly admit his loss.[27] Other scholars, who do not

believe that the Dreamer's ignorance is strategic, have said that he is slow or "befuddled:" he

simply does not understand, or does not really listen to the Knight's complaint.

However, these assumptions ignore the fact that the Dreamer is not part of this historical

community and is not gathered to commemorate a death. He is an unknown, de-historicized

subject: an avid reader suffering from insomnia, symptomatic of his own lost love. Therefore, his

"failed" response to the Knight's complaint may be more reasonably interpreted as a result of the

Dreamer's presence outside a pre-existing community of grief. If we examine the language of the

complaint we can see that the references to the Lady's death are ambiguous. The Knight makes

allusions to her absence, but he qualifies his loss saying she "Is *fro me* ded and ys agoon" (479,

emphasis mine).[28] It is true that as a reader or member of an audience we know the historical

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[27] For a discussion of the Dreamer as a mode of consolation see Richard Rambuss, "'Processe of Tyme': History, Consolation, and Apocalypse in the *Book of the Duchess*," *Exemplaria* 2.2 (1990): 659-83. For a discussion of the role of courtly language in the Dreamer's relationship with the Black Knight see L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 110-115. See Susan Schibanoff, *Chaucer's Queer Poetics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 66-77, for a discussion of the narrator as a 'queer foil' to the courtly Black Knight.

[28] This claim was derived from a seminar discussion with Ashby Kinch and Katie Neher. I am deeply indebted to both of them for their contributions to my thinking on this project. A similar version of this interpretation also appears in Ashby Kinch's dissertation (University of Michigan; 2000).

circumstances for the piece, and quite easily make an unquestioning leap from the content of the complaint to the death of the Knight's lady, but we must be more self-reflective about these critical moves. In quickly assuming an unintelligent Dreamer we project our own knowledge of the circumstances onto him. Instead we must question what kind of information and experience the Dreamer is bringing with him to his understanding of the complaint and how that knowledge functions most effectively in the context of the poem. Both common lines of analysis, the Dreamer as a befuddled narrator and the Dreamer as an astute consolatory device, are based on him being an omniscient character, aware of the historical circumstances of his world.

These traditional views on the *Book of the Duchess* as a consolation device often base their interpretation on the standard Boethian model from *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in which a bereaved individual verbally laments his circumstances and a wise guide slowly moves the bereaved through the steps of consolation.[29] This interpretative model incorrectly assumes both that the genre of 'dream vision as consolation' remained the same for over one thousand years, and that Chaucer intended to follow its conventions.[30] As Kathryn Lynch points out, although both Machaut's *Judgement* and *The Romance of the Rose* do indeed follow the Boethian convention, Chaucer's Dreamer has no guide.[31] He is a flawed character who encounters another flawed character, indeed one who appears to be worse off.

In a doubled reading of Gaunt, the Knight represents the idealized courtly figure whose existence in a literary world allows him to continue mourning Blanche without posing a threat to the real world Gaunt, who had re-married a foreign bride. In an effort to idealize John of Gaunt and imbue him with the honorable qualities of courtly culture Chaucer's Knight "ches love to

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[29] For further discussion of Chaucer's break from the Boethian model see Kathryn Lynch, "The *Book of the Duchess* as a Philosophical Vision: The Argument of Form," *Genre* 21.3 (1988), 279-305.
[30] Ibid, 280.
[31] Kathryn Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 35.

[his] firste craft" (791). Furthermore, this compartmentalization sanctifies Gaunt's new marriage, suggesting that it in no way demeans his love for Blanche, or usurps his dedication to her memory. It is the John that chose to follow Love who mourns Blanche; the John who must move on from his grief (and service to Love) in order to fulfill socio-political obligations to the commonwealth who re-marries. The Black Knight and his melancholy are a part of John of Gaunt, a burden he must *carry with him*, rather than *separate from him*. In the case of public crisis, the "hanging-on" to grief—mediated by the forced boundary of mourning literature or art—becomes an effective tool of rule without becoming debilitating, allowing the aristocratic mourner to respond ethically and publically to the psychic crisis of grief. As a character, a body with boundaries, the Black Knight provides a specific place of containment for the "immensity of the interior that lacks."[32] Although grief is an ongoing and subsequently boundless condition, the Black Knight aestheticizes the state of mourning, becoming a place of grief and nullifying the effects of its boundlessness. This aestheticization functions not only as a mechanism to objectify the audience's collective grief, but also to reinforce hierarchical structures, namely John of Gaunt's political power, which came under great scrutiny in the aftermath of the Good Parliament in the summer of 1376.

Gaunt utilized Blanche's annual memorial service in August of 1376 to re-establish his place in the monarchy and his political power. Gathering an audience to commemorate Blanche placed the community staunchly within the "place" of grief; they were there to honor and mourn. Grief creates a community that recursively validates the political structure which is both a pre- and post- existing condition and a legacy of grief; it is because of Blanche's place in the

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[32] L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 93.

hierarchy that a community gathers annually to celebrate her life. Simultaneously, they are there to support John of Gaunt, and in doing so, reinforce the social hierarchy.

Chaucer capitalizes on the existing community and its pre-established custom of grieving to aestheticize the social order, drawing attention to the role of courtly discourse in the grieving process and its functionality in reifying political power. In glorifying the courtly nature of the Black Knight by allowing him to idealize his deceased lady, and establishing grief as an impetus for the gathering, Chaucer simultaneously draws attention to its function as a political tool. Courtly discourse serves as the conceptual bridge between the community of grief and its role in the political hierarchy.[33] The audience identifies with the Black Knight in regard to his grief, while the Dreamer represents a more personable and accessible character. Having "stalked" (458) up on the Knight to hear his complaint, the Dreamer moves closer in hopes of getting the figure's attention. The Dreamer "went and stood right at his fet, / And grette hym; but he spak nought" (502-504); bound by the circumstances of his lower class, the Dreamer must then wait to be acknowledged by the Knight, removing his hood and standing silently in front of the grieving man. When finally the Knight replies, he is the epitome of courtesy, and the Dreamer immediately draws attention to the Knight's speech by saying "Loo, how goodly spak thys knight" (529). Chaucer's technique of pointing out the Knight's mode of discourse here not only illustrates the class difference between the characters, but showcases Chaucer's capabilities as a writer, namely his skillful use of courtly discourse, even if the Dreamer is prevented from using it himself.

While Chaucer's use of courtly language conforms to social rules of patronage, creating a social and intellectual divide between the Dreamer and the Knight, it also re-imagines courtly

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[33] For further discussion of the role of courtly discourse see Susan Schibanoff, *Chaucer's Queer Poetics: Rereading the Dream Trio* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 68.

discourse as a discourse of grief. Chaucer ventriloquizes his fluency in the courtly idiom through the Black Knight, even as he abases himself socially through the guise of the un-courtly Dreamer. Crucially, the Dreamer gives an audience to the Black Knight's courtly rhetoric which is "heightened through the figure of the friend-as-interlocutor, whose presence in the text invited attention to the arts of attentiveness. The witness in turn magnified the importance of grief by promoting it to the dignity of something worthy of witness."[34] The Dreamer's presence in the forest, even though he lacks the eloquence and courtliness of his counterpart, is sanctified because of his utility in unlocking the Knight's grief. The fluidity of this relationship collapses the courtly knight and the courtly poet, rendering them, if not socially equal, equally necessary.

The failure of communication between the Dreamer and the courtly Knight serves to create a community specifically between the Knight and the audience. [1] As Robert Jordan says, "if the knight's subject [of the chess metaphor] is not really a lost "fers," neither is it plainly understandable, at this stage of the poem, as a dead lady. The superiority of our understanding of the chess metaphor over the kind of understanding embodied in the dreamer's response is based in the gentility we share with the knight, a gentility—measured by language—from which the dreamer is excluded." As the Knight once again attempts to explain his loss, he adopts the metaphor of a chess game between himself and Fortune:

> At the ches with me she gan to pleye;
>
> With hir false draughts dyvers
>
> She stall on me and tok my fers
>
> And wan I sawgh my fers away
>
> Allas, I kouth no lenger playe,

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[34] L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love: Psychoanalysis, Historicism, Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 112.

But seyde, 'Farewl, swete, ywys,

And farewell al that ever there ys!'

Therwith Fortune seyde 'Chek her!' (652-659)

This moment further illustrates the Dreamer's presence outside the community of grief; he is unable to understand the metaphor because he still does not recognize that the Knight's Lady is dead. This subsequently creates a community of "gentility" that we, as an audience, share with the Knight, predicated on our mutual understanding and solidified through the discourse of the courtly idiom.[35] As a shared cultural experience the use of courtly idiom serves to build on existing communal ties. By isolating courtly language with the Black Knight's elegiac speech, Chaucer explores its consolatory potential, allowing the Black Knight to come to terms with his Lady's absence.[36]

Courtly language is the only means by which the Knight can properly glorify his relationship with Lady White, and his condition of having "had" her is the reason for his melancholy. Lady White's, and subsequently Blanche's, absence is an unchangeable condition. The only way to offer reprieve from the grief which results from this absence is to imagine the lost loved one and mine the happy memories of their presence. Much of the Black Knight's speech is dominated by his metacognitive reflections on Lady White, celebrating both her unparalleled goodness and his happiness. The versification of her virtues, though it does not do her justice, is as close as the Black Knight can come to making his Lady alive again:

I have no wit than kan suffise

To comprehende hir beaute.

But thus moche dar I sayn, that she

[35] Robert Jordan "The Compositional Structure of the 'Book of the Duchess,'" *The Chaucer Review* 9.2 (1947), 110.
[36] Phillip C Boardman, "Courtly Language and the Strategy of Consolation in the 'Book of the Duchess,'" *ELH* 44.4 (1977), 575.

> Was whit, rody, fressh, and lyvely hewed,
>
> And every day hir beaute newed. (902-906)

As he explains his melancholy to the Dreamer, he focuses not on the fact that she is no longer present, but on the times they were together and indeed begins his tale by "repeating what he did *before* he had her."[37] The Knight constructs a biography of sorts in order to relive Lady White's existence. By beginning his story with how they met, the Knight gives himself as much time as possible to re-imagine his lost love. However, he must eventually face the fact that this biography always ends with her death. In this sense then courtly language is not only a tool at the poet's disposal, but rather the most effective means with which to provide a consolatory text—it becomes a secular discourse of mourning, allowing him to re-imagine the cause of his grief in the public sphere. This process gives the absent Lady White's image the same social mobility that the poem gives to the moment. Through this story-telling he is able to project his private thoughts into the public world, exposing his grief to an audience thus submitting it to a set of communal rituals conflating his public and private-selves.

While the Black Knight's courtly language fails to communicate effectively with the dreamer, it is successful in idealizing Lady White, and subsequently, aestheticizes her absence. In the translation from the immaterial to the material, Blanche's absence has been substituted by the presence of John of Gaunt. The physical description of "goode faire White" begins in standard rhetorical fashion, imparting a stiffness which points to the stone motif of her alabaster effigy:[38]

> For every heer on hir hed,
>
> Soth to seyne, hyt was not red,

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[37] Richard Rambuss, "'Processe of Tyme': History, Consolation, and Apocalypse in the *Book of the Duchess,*" *Exemplaria* 2.2 (1990), 675.

[38] Phillipa Hardman, "The 'Book of the Duchess' as a Memorial Monument," *The Chaucer Review* 28.3 (1994), 9.

Ne nouther yelowe ne broun hyt was.

And whiche eyen my lady hadde!

Debonaire, goode, glade, and sadde,

Symple, of good mochel, noght to wyde.

Therto hir look nas not aside

Ne overthwert, but beset so wel

Hyt drew and took up everydel

Alle that on hir gan beholde. (855-865)

The Knight's Lady White is an unmoving figure whose life-like, but past tense description gives her presence a sense of timelessness. Lady White's scrutiny falls on all her subjects equally and with intense thoughtfulness, a gesture which simultaneously idealizes Blanche of Lancaster as the ideal patron. The audience or the reader instantaneously feels the pressure to return her "Debonair, goode, glade, and sadde" (860) gaze making the absent woman feel quite present. As an idealized representation of Blanche, Lady White's gaze embodies everything to which a female member of the gentry should aspire. She is physically appealing in that her eyes are "Simple, of good mochel, noght to wyde," (861) but also emotively fascinating as an example of the perfect object of courtly love:

Alle that on hir gan beholde

Hir eyen seemed anoon she wolde

Have mercy; fooles wenden so

But it was never the rather do. (865-868)

Capitalizing on the established circumstance of Blanche's death, Chaucer aestheticizes a courtly statue, creating a figure which represents a perfect version of chivalric culture.

The tension between the immaterial presence of Lady White and the material absence of Blanche of Lancaster is put into stark contrast with Lady White's only spoken word, "Nay" (1243), which is her initial response to the Knight's advances. The tomb, as the centerpiece of the 1376 commemoration, provided the audience with an image of Blanche of Lancaster; the text gives that image social mobility. In the same way that Chaucer appropriates and animates the dog carved at Blanche's feet, he re-animates Blanche's effigy. This process imbues the figures with the social mobility of the text, amplifying their consolatory potential by re-imagining them within the framework of mourning literature and harnessing their 'objectifying' potential. With this single word—"Nay"— the audience becomes aware of the Lady as something more than a stone figure; she becomes a woman with her own ontological identity. Paradoxically, this moment also concretizes her absence from the text. Her "nay" is spoken for her by the Black Knight; it is not really a placeholder for her existence, but a reminder of her absence. In this moment the reader is aware that she is a dead person, and that the Black Knight is the focus of the piece. The community originally gathered for grief, to ritualize the mourning process, but ultimately this process is marginalized in order to reinforce John of Gaunt's position in the social hierarchy. The progression of this realization culminates in the last few lines of the poem, which concludes as succinctly as White's absence is realized. Immediately upon admitting his loss, "'She is deed'" (1309), the Knight rides toward home, "A long castel with walles whyte" (1318).

The Black Knight's return home suggests that the "work of mourning" has been completed: "al was doon" (1312). With "the hert-huntyng" (1313) complete, the knight is able to leave the forest—the place of grief—and return to his castle and to the social responsibilities of

his knighthood.[39] Having re-created his dead Lady through his elaborate speeches, the Black

Knight engages in the aesthetic objectification of grief. The Dreamer, in supplying an audience

for this objectification, functioned as a symbolic representation of the community and allowed

the process of objectification to successfully mitigate the Knight's psychic crisis of grief. The

Dreamer is awoken by the sound of bells and returned to his bed. Having effectively borne

witness to the Knight's lament, the Dreamer is left to complete his task of bearing witness and

vows to "put [his] sweven in ryme" (1332). Chaucer's role as a poet is to move this private,

symbolic grief into a public space where it can be memorialized, submitted to a set of ritualized

customs, mitigated and subsequently utilized to re-establish political power. The text resolves the

Black Knight's melancholy, and suggests that, in order to become an effective political leader,

Gaunt must do the same by reconciling his private and public identities.

The public commemoration of Blanche of Lancaster created a community of grief, one

that Chaucer ultimately appropriated and aestheticized to re-imagine a discourse of mourning.

By exploring the psychological component of the dream vision genre and creating spaces which

call into question the individual and communal potential of the dream vision, Chaucer invites his

audience to humanize authority and explore the universal emotions of love and loss.

Furthermore, by aestheticizing grief as a crisis which exists 'in between' that which is

remembered and that which is forgotten, he transforms a private place into a public space which

allows the secular modes of consolation to complete the work of mourning. Showcasing courtly

discourse, both as a means of re-enforcing the norms of social order and as a tool for evoking the

memory of a lost loved one, Chaucer presents a form of elegiac consolation based in the

spectacle of remembrance and the reconciliation of aristocratic identity. *The Book of the Duchess*

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[39]For a Freudian interpretation of the "work of mourning" accomplished by the text see Richard Rambuss, "'Processe of Tyme': History, Consolation, and Apocalypse in the *Book of the Duchess,*" *Exemplaria* 2.2 (1990): 659-683.

creates a bridge from the material to the immaterial, aestheticizing both the condition of grief and the role communal mourning plays in reifying political structures. Chaucer's project ultimately imagines a secular discourse of mourning that stands in stark contrast to the theological modes that dominated in the later 14th century. Tailoring his vision to the political and cultural circumstances permeating the social fabric of London in 1376, Chaucer not only addresses his patron's concerns about his public persona, but also suggests that the pre-established modes of communal ritual provide an ideal stage for political as well as personal reconciliation.

As an alternative to Chaucer's secular discourse of mourning, my next chapter will explore the ways in which the predominant theological discourse of mourning is appropriated in Richard II's court after the death of Anne of Bohemia. In contrast to Chaucer's secular discourse of mourning which collapses the public self and the grieving self, the religious discourse of mourning in *Pearl* sublimates the grieving process through Christian doctrine and the Eucharist,. The *Pearl* poem is a work that reflects the changing iconography of death in the 1390s as well as the symbolic and material culture of Richard II's orthodox Cheshire court in the years after his return to power.

Chapter Two
Richard II's Theology, Kingship, and Political Persona in the *Pearl* Poem

> In its perfect likeness of the person who has passed away, the corpse withholds a presence at the same time as it renders present an absence…One could say that the corpse is the aboriginal locus of the temporal ecstasies in and through which our thinking, signifying, projecting and recollecting derive their measure of finite transcendence.

> -Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*

I: The Death of Anne of Bohemia and the Regal Image of Richard II

Anne of Bohemia, Queen of England, died childless after twelve years of marriage on the 7th of June, 1394. Her widower, King Richard II, was deeply and made profoundly distraught by her death. Her funeral, on 3 August, 1394, was an intense and lavish affair, marked by the first use of a wooden funeral effigy for a queen and only the third one in all of England. The event also precipitated a physical conflict between Richard and the Earl of Arundel, whom Richard punched after Arundel arrived late and asked to leave early. The altercation drew blood and the service was delayed until "Arundel's blood could be cleared and the church reconsecrated."[1] Normal political tensions and emotions were exacerbated because, as Michael Van Dussen notes, Anne's death "brought to the fore a looming crisis of succession, part of a more widespread anxiety about Ricardian legitimacy. Richard was under enormous pressure, then, to turn the occasion of Anne's funeral to his own political advantage."[2] The key theme for Richard was "unity;" he needed the ceremony to cultivate a stabilizing milieu and bolster his kingship, while simultaneously performing the communal work of mourning required in the aftermath of the Queen's death. Much in the same way that John of Gaunt used his dead wife and her annual

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[1] Michael Van Dussen, "Three Verse Eulogies of Anne of Bohemia," *Medium Aevum* 78.2 (2009), 231. See also Phillip Lindley "Absolutism and Regal Image in Ricardian Sculpture," in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 61-63.
[2] Michael Van Dussen, "Three Verse Eulogies of Anne of Bohemia," *Medium Aevum* 78.2 (2009), 231.

commemoration to reassert his wealth, power and English-ness, Richard needed to use Anne's

death as means to gather support for his tenuous reign. Though Richard's coronation in 1377 had

been positively received by the people of London, the limitations to his royal prerogative in 1387

had brought back memories of Edward II's disastrous reign, and, after reclaiming his power in

1389, Richard's attempts at re-branding himself throughout the relatively peaceful years of 1390-

1397 were never entirely successful.[3] Richard's devotion to his first wife and obsession with his

own self-image is not only well chronicled by his contemporaries, but also quite evident in works

like the Wilton Diptych and their tomb.[4] Philip Lindley notes that in these works we can see that

a "coherent, if untenable, ideology of kingship underlines and informs the King's

commissions."[5]

The Wilton Diptych, a personal devotional painting, depicts a young Richard kneeling

before the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus, flanked by his patron saint, John the Baptist, in addition

to two English Kings—Saint Edward the Confessor, and Edmund the Martyr.[6] The figuration of

Richard as a child mimics his early ascent to throne at the age of ten. Furthermore, the image

manufactures an idea of his kingship as divinely ordained through its association with a

prominent saint and "saintly" kings known for their piety and virtue, rather than military

prowess. Nigel Saul also notes that the image on the interior of the Diptych aesthetically

reinforces Richard's emphasis on "the use of the term 'prince', hitherto rare in England, [which]

implied recognition of Richard's role as supreme lawgiver in a sovereign realm" and highlighted

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[3] Phillip Lindley, "Absolutism and Regal Image in Ricardian Sculpture," in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 65-71.

[4] See Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 93-94, 455-457 for a discussion of their relationship and contemporary responses.

[5] Phillip Lindley, "Absolutism and Regal Image in Ricardian Sculpture," in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 61.

[6] Dillian Gordon, "The Wilton Diptych: An Introduction," in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 19.

the "essentially sacral character of his kingship—in other words, that he held his office by the working of Divine grace."[7] The outside of the Diptych is decorated with a white hart, Richard's personal emblem, lying among rosemary and ferns— plants associated with his late wife Anne of Bohemia.[8] According to Saul, though cryptic "the subject-matter of the Wilton Diptych bears witness to the fusion of secular and religious ideas that is so vital to an understanding of Richard II's kingship;" he argues that "[Richard] saw himself as 'God's substitute', 'a deputy…anointed in his sight."[9] Crucially, this conflation of secular and religious ideology directly informed Richard's concept of obedience; he saw "obedience [as] the secular counterpart of orthodoxy" and emphasized his own orthodoxy as a means to cultivate obedience in his subjects.[10] Most scholars now agree on a date for the Wilton Diptych sometime around 1395, making it almost exactly contemporaneous with the commission of Richard and Anne's tomb, which was ordered on 1 April, 1395.[11] It is in this context of royal memorial commissions that I wish to place *Pearl* based on John Bower's convincing book-length study claiming that the poem "was composed about 1395."[12]

Pearl tells the story of a melancholic jeweler, who, while searching for his lost Pearl in a garden, falls asleep and experiences a dream vision in which an idealized representation of what is commonly believed to be his dead daughter, the eponymous Pearl Maiden, attempts to help him work through his melancholy by redirecting, toward Christ, his earthly desire for a reunion

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[7] Nigel Saul, "Richard II's Ideas of Kingship," in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 31.
[8] Caroline M. Barron, "Introduction" in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 13.
[9] Nigel Saul, "Richard II's Ideas of Kingship," in in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 27.
[10] Ibid, 29: "Obedience was in a sense the secular counterpart of orthodoxy, it was founded on a similar assumption of the acceptance of authority, and it was seen as the essential precondition for the establishment of a united realm."
[11] Phillip Lindley, "Absolutism and Regal Image in Ricardian Sculpture," in *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*. Eds. Dillian Gordon, Lisa Monnas, Caroline Elam. (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1997), 61.
[12] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2001), 23.

with her. She explains to the Dreamer, through a mix of allegory and metaphor, that he must understand Christ as a way to fill the void left by her death, and accept the Lamb as his savior in order to rid himself of his melancholy and balance his internal emotional chaos. Unlike the *Book of the Duchess*'s "mirror" of Guant in the Black Knight, in *Pearl* we have a more abstract "triangle" in which the Dreamer/Jeweler has no direct correlation to the poem's patron, Richard II. Instead the Dreamer serves as a case study of sorts, an example for Richard to reference as he works through his own grief.

The intricate structure of the poem, composed in twelve line alliterating stanzas with an ababababbcbc rhyme scheme that are linked through concatenation words or phrases, creates a circular shape to the narrative. These concatenation, or linking, phrases change in each of the poem's twenty sections and serve to identify unifying themes both ideologically and literarily, with the phrases often relating to an overarching topic in that stanza. In the same way that the poem ends where it began, with a jeweler in a garden, each stanza begins and ends with similar, if not identical, words. This structure moves the Dreamer and the Maiden through their conversations. The rhetorical structure simultaneously aestheticizes the recursive qualities of grief, which constantly circles between the conscious and subconscious. David Aers, in an essay on the *Pearl* poem, recognizes the danger of the jeweler's grief and says that "death is a massive challenge to the human identity, the disclosure of an utter powerlessness framing our will to control others or environments and ourselves."[13] Though clearly appealing to late medieval religious belief, the poem also resonates with the culture of grief surrounding Richard II and his new orthodox identity.

The earliest criticism of *Pearl* and the other works of the MS Cotton Nero A.x. attempted to identify its author, and prove common authorship across the four poems contained in the

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[13] David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*," *Speculum* 68.1 (1993), 57.

manuscript.[14] The next wave of scholarship, which persisted through the mid to late twentieth

century, was dominated by the allegorical tradition. This tradition often disregarded the question

of authorship, and used the generic "later 14th century" for a date, preferring to read the poem in

theological terms, illuminating the symbolic potential of the text through connections to

prevalent trends of theological philosophy in the later 14th century. Furthering the allegorical

tradition, a book length study by A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain-poet: A Critical Study*, dealt with

the collected works of the anonymous poet— *Pearl, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,*

Cleanness, and *Patience—*making broad claims about authorship, dating, and potential

influences.[15] Criticism has expanded in the last thirty years to include feminist readings of the

Pearl Maiden, examinations of courtly language, studies of metrical structure, the role of liturgy

as a political tool;[16] but it remains true that few scholars attempt a strict dating of the poem.

Recently there has been a trend to re-imagine the theological aspects of the poem, not

simply in allegorical terms, but within a wider context of performative religious customs in the

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[14] See Casey Finch's "Introduction" to *The Complete Works of the 'Pearl' Poet*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1-3 for further discussion of suggested authors and, for an in-depth discussion of common authorship studies see Malcolm Andrew, "Theories of Authorship" in *A Companion to the Gawain Poet*. Eds Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson. (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 23-34. Notably, Casey Finch includes *St. Erkenwald* in his recent translation of the *Pearl* poet's works.

[15] *Pearl* was also included in various dream vision genre studies including Paul Piehler's *The Visionary Landscape* and A.C. Spearing's *Medieval Dream-poetry*. J.A. Burrow, in his 1992 study *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland and the Gawain Poet,* attempted to synthesize the major works of the London School (Chaucer, Gower) and the Alliterative Revival (Langland and the *Pearl*-Poet) under the banner "Ricardian Poetry," citing major thematic similarities. While his work wouldn't exactly be called a historicist reading of the poems, it certainly did attempt to ground the poems of the Cotton Nero A.x. in a particular timeframe.

[16] See Sarah Stanbury, "The Gaze on the Body of *Pearl*'s Dead Girl." *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*. Eds. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993. 96-115; Charlotte Gross, "Courtly Language in *Pearl*." *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the 'Pearl'-Poet.* Troy, NY: Whitston, 1991. 79-92; Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject." *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010): 294-322; Jean Beal, "The *Pearl*-Maiden's Two Lovers." *Studies in Philology* 100.1 (2003): 1-21; David Coley, "*Pearl* and the Narrative of Pestilence." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013): 209-262; David DeVrise, ""Unde Dicitur": Observations on the Poetic "Distinctiones" of the *Pearl*-Poet." *The Chaucer Review* 35.1 (2000): 115-132; Susanna Fein, "Twelve-Line Stanza Forms in Middle English and the Date of *Pearl*." *Speculum* 72.2 (1997): 367-398; Elizabeth Harper, "*Pearl* in the Context of Fourteenth-Century Gift Economies." *The Chaucer Review* 44.4 (2010): 421-439; J. Allan Mitchell, "The Middle English *Pearl*: Figuring the Unfigurable." *The Chaucer Review* 35.1 (2000): 86-109; Sandra Peirson Prior, *The 'Pearl' Poet Revisited*. New York: Twayne Press, 1994; Ann Chalmers Watts, "*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss." *PMLA* 1.1984 (99): 26-40.

later 14th century. This school builds on studies of key features of late medieval religion that have emphasized the centrality of, for example, the Mass in later 14th century religious ceremonies. John Bossy's "The Mass as a Social Institution" examined the ways in which Mass created a community of the living and the dead through a discourse of sacrifice.[17] His work suggests that the dead had a prominent and active place in the social world of the Middle Ages, claiming that the Mass created a community amongst the living that subsequently served the dead. This process was essential to concepts of religious individuality in the later Middle Ages whereby individual subjects defined themselves in relation to the dead:

> Even before the doctrine of purgatory had been fully formulated, the dead had come to be seen as a double of the society of the living, their 'souls', in the imagination of ordinary people, scarcely less physical than their own bodies; they formed a collectivity which had its allotted space in the territory of the community, an 'age-group' between whom and the living intricate relationships of concern, devotion and fear, and a complicated passage, obtained…For our purposes it is only necessary to grasp the quick and the dead as two distinct, contrasted and, in some respects, opposed articulations of a single social whole; their distinction being emphasized in the canon by the intervention of the consecration between their respective commemorations.[18]

The community created by Mass was central to "the devotion, theology, liturgy, architecture, finances, social structure and institutions of late medieval Christianity [which were]

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[17] See also Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; and Ann Astell, *Eating Beauty: The Eucharist and the Spiritual Arts of the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 2006 for sustained discussions of the Eucharist's development and function in the Middle Ages.
[18] John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution: 1200-1700." *Past & Present* 100 (1983), 37.

inconceivable without the assumption that the friends and relations of the souls in purgatory had an absolute obligation to procure their release, above all by having masses said for them."[19] Like all important social institutions, Mass was eventually appropriated by the aristocracy in order to reify their own socio-political status; as Jennifer Garrison notes, by the "fourteenth-century aristocratic liturgical practices were often individual—both in the sense that the aristocracy's experiences of the Mass were typically internal, and in the sense that aristocrats used their wealth in order to mark out their individual social status within their churches."[20]

This premise drives her interpretation of *Pearl*, in which she argues that the Eucharistic end to the poem "becomes a ritual method for the aristocratic subject to reform himself."[21] Garrison's assertion expands Bossy's study of the social potential of Mass and examines the ways in which the *Pearl* poet appropriated the Eucharist to offer a form of Christian consolation that hinges on "the reform of the interior self" through the recognition that God is an absent presence. Her argument, however, makes no attempt to date the poem, or ground it in concrete socio-historic circumstances. I argue that grounding the *Pearl* poem within the context of Richard's court shortly after Anne's death further illuminates the poet's engagement with the performative potential of the Eucharist. The poet utilizes Eucharistic discourse and imagery to ground the poem in the orthodox Christian ideology that permeated Richard's court, thereby engaging with the consolatory potential of transforming the central image of an absent presence into a discourse of communal and individual mourning centered on Richard II and Anne of Bohemia as the ideal couple, linked in a mutually-beneficial, post-mortem spiritual realm.

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[19] Ibid, 42.
[20] Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject," *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010), 296.
[21] Ibid, 295.

Bowers claims that the poem's "poignant formulations contributed to the sense of collective loss felt at Richard's court following the death of his beloved Queen Anne."[22] Citing the socio-economic conditions of England in the last years of Richard II's reign, his devout piety, and the francophilic nature of the Cheshire court as evidence for this claim, Bowers provides the first sustained argument historicizing the *Pearl* poem as a product of Richard II's patronage shortly after Anne of Bohemia's death. Connecting the text of *Pearl* to the cultural themes of Richard's court, Bowers examines the text's content as evidence of its historic circumstances. His dating argument is thorough and well researched, and my analysis does not attempt to refute his claim or present additional historical evidence. I accept his suggested date of composition— 1395— in hopes of illuminating the association between the poet's aestheticized representations of grief, wider cultural beliefs of death and mourning, the political implications of patronage, and ritualized commemoration in the later 14th century.

In this chapter I show that *Pearl* responds to the cultural shifts in death iconography as well as the material culture of Richard's court— namely the Wilton Diptych and the architectural custom of funerary monuments. This dual engagement results in a piece of literature that mimics these important aesthetic changes in order to provide guidance to a mourning patron by invoking a moral imperative of emotional control. The text's figuration of the idealized Pearl Maiden alludes to a shift in death iconography in the later 14th century, as well as the importance of recognizing the role of the corpse and Christ as an absent presence in terms of reconciling grief. The political implications of this reconciliation are brought to the foreground through the Eucharistic discourse, which advocates for a balance of internal emotional states, suggesting that the Dreamer, and in turn Richard, must turn to Christ in order to reach an internal equilibrium and provide a solid foundation for a united commonwealth.

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[22] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2001), 166.

II: Anne's Absent Presence

As a poem about mourning, *Pearl* is part of the larger literary and iconographic culture of death and mourning in the later 14th century. Aesthetic representations of death mediated the experience of death and provided a guide for the living on how to recognize death (as in the monastic compendium, "Signs of Death"). Confronting images of death was considered a profound and effective way to bolster one's spiritual state. In this sense, public commemoration of the dead played a role not only in the purgatorial rhetoric of the Middle Ages where the soul needed prayers to advance through and eventually out of purgatory; but also as a means to solidify a community, bonding through the shared experience of mediating death. Both artistic representations of death and mourning literature aestheticized this encounter between the living individual and the corpse, providing a framework for encountering death, as well as mediating grief. Authors utilized existing communities of grief and the public ritual of commemoration in hopes of "becom[ing] privileged vehicles for contemplating death," thereby "affirm[ing] not just the identity of the patrons and communities for which they were produced, but also their own artistic identities."[23] The symbolic representations of the dead body in *Pearl*, and the poet's attempt to create spaces between the living and the dead reflect the attitude of the later 14th century toward the corpse as an important mediating image of inevitable human death, as well as to aestheticize the discomfort of encountering the decaying body of a loved one.[24]

When interpreted through the socio-historic lens of Anne's death, the first lines of the poem introduce her dead body as an absent presence through a series of symbolic representations

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[23] For further discussion of the relationship between visual death culture and the poets who respond see Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis: Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1-16. Quoted from page 16.

[24] For further discussion of the reactions to the corpse in the Middle Ages, see Kenneth Rooney, *Mortality and Imagination* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 33-39.

of her corpse—beginning with the Dreamer's lost pearl, buried in the earth.[25] Her death, and

subsequently her corpse, while never physically present, creates a symbolic center of meaning

for the text; they frame not only its historical context, but also the Dreamer's movements and

interactions with the Maiden. In his analysis of the poem, David Aers combines psychoanalysis

and an analysis courtly love to make sense of the complicated interactions between the Dreamer

and his Pearl. He suggests that the Dreamer is stuck in a recursive model of Freudian substitution

and is constantly trying to corner the Maiden into reciprocating his lack, thereby filling the void

left by the deceased Pearl Maiden:

> His strategy is to draw her in to acknowledging the reality of this memory.
>
> Once she does so, the fantasy of the past can frame the present relationship
>
> in a way that will allow him to continue the familiar masculine role that
>
> combines rhetoric of worship with the practice of controlling female
>
> identity to fit the idealization and demands of male language.[26]

The poem gives the poet a setting within which he can enact the modes of courtly discourse that

apply pressure to feminine subjects to reciprocate the love of male subjects by suggesting that in

denying the male they are in fact responsible for his death.[27] Furthermore, I believe that the poet

is countering the Dreamer's masculine efforts by creating physical space between him and the

Maiden. The settings and movements throughout the poem prevent the Narrator/Dreamer from

coming in contact with, or even in close proximity to, the symbols of Anne's body, thereby, as

David Aers claims, creating a landscape "which gives him time, space, and provocation to

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[25] For further discussion of "absent presence" see Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15-17 and 180n71.

[26] David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*," *Speculum* 68.1 (1993), 60.

[27] See Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 332.

change, to redirect his being from identification with the dead person,"[28] mitigating the desire to "die with the dead" which occurs when the psyche succumbs to the grief of losing a loved one.[29] This space then, is not only a means to psychologically transform the dreamer, but also an astute aesthetic response to the growing iconography of the decaying corpse.

The first stanza, which describes the perfection of the Jeweler's pearl (1-8), also reveals its loss. Here, the melancholic Jeweler alludes to the pearl's symbolic potential when he not only genders the pearl as "hyr" (her), but references the act of burial, saying

> Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
>
> *Þur gresse to ground hit fro me yot.*
>
> I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
>
> Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot. (9-12)[30]

As he wanders through the garden the Jeweler cannot help but imagine his pearl rotting in the earth; he thinks of "…hir color so clad in clot" (22).[31] The image of the pearl as a decaying body is further evidenced by the spread of spices around the lost pearl (25). Richard II's overly hygienic court would recognize this gesture as a means to mask the smell of death: Nigel Saul notes that "Richard was a highly fastidious man, with an interest well in advance of his times in cleanliness and hygiene. It is known that he had bath-houses constructed at Eltham and Sheen, and it has been suggested that he invented the handkerchief."[32] Additionally, the growth of

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[28] David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*," *Sepculum* 68.1 (1993), 59.

[29] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 70.

[30] "In a graden green with grass, my cheer / Was lost! It lunged to land. O lot! / A lovelorn, longing look I bear / For that precious pearl without a spot" (9-12). All quotations from *Pearl* are taken from *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, Ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (University of Exeter, 1987) and all translations, unless otherwise indicated, are from *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*. Trans. Casey Finch (University of California Press, 1993). Notably, not all line numbers for the translations will exactly match the original text.

[31] This whole line is translated as "In dreams of her, though wrapped in rot!" (22)

[32] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 332-333 for a discussion of Richard's unique advancements in court and personal hygiene.

"blomez blayke and blwe and rede" (27) which, the narrator points out, grow best when planted over "graynez dede" (31) suggest the presence of a dead body beneath them.[33]

In the absence of a completed tomb (to be constructed by Henry Yevele between 1396 and 1399[34]), which would ultimately serve to idealize Anne in a state of eternal life, the *Pearl*-poet develops a different kind of material artifact that transmutes the fluid relationships between humans, funerary monuments, and literary symbols. The poem manufactures a symbolic representation of Queen Anne's earthly, decaying body in the Jeweler's lost pearl and allows this to perform the same function as a funerary monument. Such a gesture references the potential of the dead to affect the spiritual state of the living, while also recognizing the extreme discomfort of encountering a decaying corpse. This trope of denying the decay of the Queen's body is also present in one of the three verse eulogies composed by Englishmen for the occasion of her death. These eulogies served to express the sense of loss felt by the English people in the wake of Anne's death, and were "carried to Prague within years of her death [to] commemorate Anne of Bohemia in explicit terms."[35] Reflecting on Anne's piety, these eulogies highlight the ways in which her devotion to God and Richard was "used to advance royalist devotional and political agendas."[36]

The "Anglica regina" in particular addresses the impact Anne made during her time in England, saying that, while "Germany and all Bohemia will grieve at heart…England, and with it Wales, weep for her death" (11-12).[37] Idealizing her pious and devoted service to England the

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[33] "blooms of yellow, blue, and red" (27)… "From dying husks new husks are spread" (31).
[34] Information obtained from Westminster Abby.org: http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/royals/richard-ii-and-anne-of-bohemia.
[35] Michael Van Dussen, "Three Verse Eulogies of Anne of Bohemia." *Medium Aevum* 78.2 (2009): 231-232.
[36] Ibid, 232.
[37] Ibid, 252.

eulogy ends by creating an image of her dead body frozen in time, untouched by the elements of rot. "Anglica regina" acknowledges her death, but denies the bodily effects of the condition:

> Dead in body, she is afterwards endowed with marble,
>
> Since no creature now existing or to come in this world
>
> Will, by any provision, escape death.
>
> This noble woman was pious and sweet in every way
>
> Her flesh is rosy, nor will it rot with rains and worms. (20-24)[38]

According to Ernst Kantorowicz this tension surrounding the dead body of a monarch was often translated into religious terms in order to maintain notions of a dual body politic "which cherished its own eternal values and had achieved its moral and ethical autonomy alongside of the *corpus mysticum* of the Church."[39] While alive, the body of the monarch enjoyed a privileged place in religious and secular hierarchies, deriving power from the divine ordination inherent to the position of king or queen. However, in death, the body of the monarch becomes susceptible to the base corruption of bodily decay. Kenneth Rooney notes that representations of decay, while often employed "by middle-ranking gentry and high-ranking clergy," were never adopted by "princes of blood" despite the ideological significance of the cadaver to "insulate the idea of the king's body from corruption."[40] This insulation was crucially important and inherently complicated because of the secular and the religious collided in the monarchy; kings and queens stood at the ideological pinnacle between the secular arm of the law and the divinely ordained arm of God. Idealizing Anne's royal body reflects the tensions surrounding the rotting body,

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[38] For discussion of three extant eulogies for Anne of Bohemia see Michael Van Dussen, "Three Verse Eulogies of Anne of Bohemia," *Medium Aevum* 78.2 (2009): 231-260.

[39] Ernst Kantorowicz, *The Kings Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 268. See the chapter "Politically Centered Kingship" for an in-depth discussion of this dual body politic; 193-272.

[40] Kenneth Rooney, *Mortality and Imagination: The Life of the Dead in Medieval English Literature* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 5.

while simultaneously extoling the virtues of Anne's piety and her inherent closeness to God by stopping short of depicting her rotting corpse. The *Pearl*-poet then advances this notion by re-imagining an idealized version of Anne, cast as the Pearl Maiden, in his poem.

The text, through its symbolic representations of Queen Anne, then achieves the re-inscription of her image into the community, without directly cultivating a facsimile of her corpse. It creates a performative space for Richard to mourn without posing a threat to his physical or psychological autonomy. Finally succumbing to his grief and bombarded by the sensory overload of the garden which surrounds his lost pearl, the narrator falls "vpon þat floury fla t" (57). While the pearl does not visually resemble the decaying body, the Narrator's proximity to it still represents a problem for the poet, who must necessarily strive to separate the griever from the deceased body in order to move the bereaved on from their loss. As a result, the Jeweler is immediately transported away from the space in a "slepyng-sla te" (59).[41] Kenneth Rooney argues that this movement, instigated by the proximity to the symbolic corpse, "marks a repudiation of intimacy with the corpse," claiming that "the poem's eschatological strategy demands leaving the body behind."[42] The need for space between the Dreamer and Maiden will reach its climax when the Dreamer eventually ignores the Maiden's teachings and attempts to cross the river to join her: he is awoken and sent back to his earthly body before he can complete the task. Creating this space between the symbolic representation of the deceased and the grieving Jeweler is important to the poet and the function of the poem as a consolatory device; as Bowers says,

> [p]ersonal grief exists in the frame of a discourse by which the deceased
>
> is translated into a powerful symbolic order. To bury the dead according to

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[41] "swooning dream" (59).

[42] Kenneth Rooney, *Mortality and Imagination: The Life of the Dead in Medieval English Literature* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 67.

the rituals of Christian society, as Queen Anne was entombed in Westminster Abbey, meant reinscribing her image in a social and spiritual discourse that permitted the lover's grief to be configured in a cycle of never-ending remembrance.[43]

Although the reality of her death and the existence of her rotting corpse pose a significant threat to her mourning widower, the need to recall her memory is crucial in the commemorative culture of later 14th century England. As her husband, Richard had a responsibility to continue to remember Anne, to continue to pray for her, but, as a King, he had to move on from her into a new marriage. This movement away from the body (both symbolic and physical) of the deceased redirects the melancholic mourner from the ineffable desires of real world loss and transforms the text into a container of grief. Indeed, the movement away from the decaying body marks a series of transformations: from earthly garden to Heavenly garden; from melancholic Jeweler to curious Dreamer; from pearl to Pearl Maiden; and, from decaying corpse to animated and idealized body. These transitions mimic the 'real-world' transformations of dead body: from organic and decaying body, to an inorganic artistic rendition— like the *Pearl* poem and various eulogies—until its timelessness is finally concretized as it becomes a stone effigy.

The Dreamer, conscious of his body's place on earth, explains how his "spyryt þer sprang in space" (61)[44] and describes his new, rich surroundings in language quite antithetical to that which he used to describe the earthly garden which houses his sleeping body. His surroundings in this Heavenly garden are no longer defined by his grief; they do not hold the body of his lost pearl. Here the Dreamer finds comfort in the newness of this world; he is distracted by its bright colors, crystal cliffs and abundance of precious gems. His elation in this second section is

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[43] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 167.
[44] "My sole soared from that spot to the sky" (61).

elevated by the concatenation word "adubbement," often translated as wonderment, or adornment.[45] However, this bliss is fleeting and soon his "adubbement" is replaced with longing. As he reaches the river, an initially physical, though later understood to be ontological, barrier between himself and the pleasures of New Jerusalem, the concatenation phrase becomes "more and more," reflective of his growing desire to cross the water. Walking along the river's edge the Dreamer describes his intense yearning to enter the walls of the city beyond the river:

> More and more, and ȝet wel mare,
>
> Me lyste to se þe broke byȝonde,
>
> For if hit watz fayr þer I con fare,
>
> Wel loueloker watz þe fyrre londe. (144-148)[46]

His desire is predicated on his belief that the world waiting for him across the river is far, far better than the world he currently inhabits, a true enough assumption in a culture so deeply invested in the Christian idea of Heaven. He longs for an escalated aesthetic experience to re-fill the void left by the loss of his pearl. This desire to re-possess the Maiden is reflective of Aers' Freudian substitution critique. The Dreamer feels he has seen and experienced all he can from his current locale and seeks to replace the initial feeling of overwhelming splendor by moving across the river and re-creating that experience in a new, grander locale. However, as the Dreamer will soon learn, death is a necessary condition of life in Heaven, and in order to cross the river first "Þy corse in clot mot clader keue" (320).[47] This as of yet unarticulated condition of crossing the river manifests in the Dreamer's mounting fear (151-155), which is not simply of the dangers of the river, but of dying. In this sense, the text becomes a vehicle for a kind of penitential discourse

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[45] E.V Gordon and Sarah Stanbury translate "addubement" as "adornment or splendor"; J.R.R Tolkien and Casey Finch translate "addubement" as "wonderment"; and Marie Borroff translates "addubement" as "embellishment."

[46] "More and more and ever more/ I pined and longed to penetrate / That fine fresh abode. For fair / As was my side, far fairer yet / Did seem that sweet, opposing shore" (144-148).

[47] "…to forge this way you first / Must sink beneath clay's canopy" (319-320).

that, rather than utilizing the macabre cadaver, chooses to re-imagine the corpse as an idealized Maiden. This process of melding the genres of theological penitential discourse and literary oracular dream vision crafts an aesthetic representation of these immaterial tropes appropriate to a courtly audience, allowing the text to permeate the court atmosphere and do the work of mourning that is necessary for a memorial text. It is in this moment of fear of death that the Dreamer sees "A mayden of menske, ful debonere" (161)[48] sitting at the base of the cliffs across the river.

The Dreamer describes the Maiden, dressed in all white, and covered in pearls (193-204, 217-240), as a "perlez py t," (192)—translated as a "pearl prepared"—which serves as this section's concatenation phrase. The phrase here suggests that this maiden is the idealized—or prepared—form of his lost pearl, and, by extension, Anne's corpse. She embodies not only a body freed from the earthly inevitability of decay, but also a human who has reached spiritual perfection in Heaven. Various critics, including Jessica Brantley and John Bowers, have noted that the crown "of marjorys and non oþer stone" (206)[49] worn by the Maiden bears a remarkable resemblance to the crown of pearls that Anne brought with her from Bohemia as part of her dowry.[50] Both the words "perlez py t"—"Pearls prepared"—and the Maiden's crown suggest that the absent signifier in the text continues to be Anne's corpse. Aesthetically her body has been transformed; what began as a symbol of Queen Anne's rotting corpse, arrives from the city of Heaven a fully idealized woman. However, the continued separation between the Dreamer and the Maiden perpetuates the absent presence of the corpse; he is no more able to come in contact with this idealized figure than he is with the pearl that symbolizes her earthly counterpart.

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[48] "And seated below that citadel / was a child, a maid of noble blood" (161-162).

[49] "she wore a crown, prepared with pearl / of striking hue: no other stone / but pearly pinnacles awhirl" (205-207).

[50] See Jessica Brantley, "Material Culture" in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*. Ed. Marion Turner (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2013): 187-206; and John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 106-107.

The theological and the literary collide in the figure of the Maiden. As a figure of courtly love she represents the earthly desires upon which grief is predicated, but as a Heavenly figure, she is the Dreamer's guide to living a better life. Here the dead body relinquishes its psychologically disrupting force in favor of a Heavenly setting. The common penitential sermon is appropriated into the pleasing aesthetic of the dream vision, by-passing the uncomfortable and disturbing encounter with the corpse. The poem displaces the traditional death ritual, using the body itself as means of performing the work of mourning. Throughout these first four sections the poet has deftly re-inscribed Queen Anne into the symbol of the pearl and the Pearl Maiden; however, as the Dreamer begins to interact with the Maiden the poet must become quite conscious of the dynamic between King, patron, and poet, observing socio-cultural standards of communication between king and subject.

III: Patronage and the Political Ethic of the Eucharist

Cognizant of his courtly readership, the poet capitalized on the necessary use of courtly rhetoric to entertain an audience in addition to honoring a patron, creating a de-historicized subject which transcends the circumstantial boundaries of mourning literature and appeals to a broad audience. This process not only insulates the poet from any kind of direct critique of the grieving Richard, but also establishes his poetic prowess throughout the court. Throughout the Middle Ages social boundaries between classes were often exemplified by the use of courtly language. Particularly useful in literature, David Aers claims, "[t]his discourse assumed models of gender, individual identity, and community, which were intrinsic to ruling elites. It hinged on producing a sense of lack which was to be met by distinctive forms of erotic desire and bound up with a complex web of courtly language and behavior."[51] The *Pearl* poet utilizes this system of communication to navigate the murky waters of composing mourning literature, which must

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[51] David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*" *Speculum* 68.1 (1993), 54.

necessarily presume to provide some kind of guidance, for the most powerful patron in England, Richard II. Capitalizing on Richard's obsession with his orthodox image, the *Pearl*-poet sublimates Richard's ethical responsibility to mourn effectively and provide a stable foundation for the commonwealth into and through Eucharistic discourse. Throughout their interaction the Maiden attempts to redirect the Dreamer's desire from a reunion with her to an acceptance of Christ as an absent presence. It is this struggle, rather than the resolution, that becomes the central problem and purpose of the poem; this is where the work of mourning occurs. As the head of state, if the king is unable to work through his grief he condemns his subjects to the same fate; though they may not 'grieve' in the same way as the king, his subjects are at the whim of his grief and its unpredictable consequences. The Maiden's effort to re-trench the Dreamer's desire in Christ is not only a means of private consolation, but also, when applied to a king, a way to stabilize the commonwealth.

As the Pearl Maiden nears the bank of the river the Dreamer cannot hold his tongue any longer. He speaks first, asking if she is indeed the pearl he lost on earth: "'O perle,' quod I, 'in perlez py t, / Art þou my perle þat I haf playned, / Regretted y myn one on ny te?'" (241-243).[52] He laments how Fate could have taken her to live "[i]n paradys" (248)[53] while leaving him "in þys del and gret daunger" (250).[54] The epitome of courtesy, the Maiden places her crown on her head and gazes steadily at the Dreamer before replying that the Dreamer is mistaken about the situation. She tells him that the lost Pearl is happy and safe in Heaven, not grieving her death (257-264).[55] The re-direction of the question recapitulates the lesson the Dreamer must learn in

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[52] "'O pearl,' I asked, 'prepared in white, / Are you my pearl for whom I've pined / And hung my head each hopeless night / When gall and grief my heart confined?'" (241-244).
[53] "In paradise" (248).
[54] "and left me here in great danger" (250, my own translation).
[55] For further discussion of the Maiden's gaze see Sarah Stanbury, "Feminist Masterplots: The Gaze on the Body of *Pearl*'s Dead Girl" in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* Eds. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Phiadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 96-115.

redirecting the resolution of his grief from solely personal investment into broader communal concerns. The Maiden never answers directly whether or not *she* is the lost pearl, but she does confirm that the pearl is in the "gardyn gracios gaye" (260)[56] and will remain there to play. Regardless of this ambiguity the Dreamer, and most critics, believe that she is indeed the lost pearl and the remainder of their conversation proceeds as if she had answered his question affirmatively.[57] Her speech is modeled on courtly discourse, and she conveys her elevated theological standing well. The Dreamer, however, with his sorrowful and possessive discourse fails to achieve the grace of the Maiden's courtly rhetoric— his speech remains stilted and clunky:

> "'Iwyse,' quoþ I, 'my blysfol best,
>
> My grete dystresse þou al todrawez
>
> To be excused I make request
>
> I trawed by perle don out of dawez" (279-282).[58]

Although the Dreamer is making an effort to observe courtly standards by addressing the Maiden as "'my blysfol best,'" his response lacks the smooth eloquence of the Maiden's speech. Indeed, Bowers suggests that in order

> [t]o help conceal a whole range of esoteric contents in *Pearl*, the
>
> Cheshire poet's principle subterfuge resides in the first-person narrator
>
> whose personal sorrow has a touching realism but whose professional

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[56] "As is this garden. Gracious, gay" (260).

[57] A recent ecocritical reading of the poem by Gillian Rudd claims that the maiden deflects this question and denies being the lost pearl but, being rather radical and very new the reading has not yet been widely accepted in the scholastic discourse of the poem; *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

[58] "'O richest one,' said I, 'to rest / You've laid the misery that marred / My peace. Your pardon I request; / I thought my pearl killed, not cured'" (279-282).

class [sic] excluded him, by literary decorum, from expressing any

authentic grief in the language of the courtly élite.[59]

When read out-loud the Maiden's words and alliterative lines move smoothly across the palate;

the reader is not overwhelmed with hard consonants, or slowed down by too many long vowels;

however, the Dreamer's speech feels trapped just behind the reader's teeth. Much of his language

is pronounced with the front of the tongue and is very clearly distinct from the Maiden. In his

effort to mimic the structure of courtly discourse, he is betrayed by his poor word choice and

ultimately revealed to be a fraud. The poet draws on the social convention of courtly discourse

to insulate himself from the nature of his poem—a consolatory device delivered from poet to

patron— which, in the remaining stanzas, will take the form of a debate for the Dreamer, and a

sermon of sorts for the Maiden who attempts to guide the Dreamer away from his erroneous

views of Heaven and earthly loss. Although Richard does not have a correlative character in the

poem, the poet must still be aware of transmission of the text between himself and his patron.

The poet cannot presume to dictate an appropriate spiritual path to his king. By insulating

himself from the portion of the text which chastises the grieving Dreamer, the author deftly

navigates the boundary of patron and poet—providing theological guidance without breaking

social protocol. The ambiguity with which the poet constructs the characters further emphasizes

his efforts to produce a piece that sufficiently glorified Anne and Richard, but avoided figuring

them too literally. While Chaucer had the benefit of eight years between Blanche's death and

composing the *Book of the Duchess*, the *Pearl*-poet, writing only a year after Anne's death,

shows much more caution.

In addition to observing socio-cultural customs, the use of courtly language also

resonates with the poem's audience who would recognize that"[i]n this familiar courtly language

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[59] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001) 164-165.

the lost object fulfills the traditional feminine role of nurturing life source."[60] She is both a

theological figure, the guide of the dream, and a woman who has the potential to fill the

Dreamer's lack. In these early stanzas the Dreamer's conception of her is framed "purely in

terms of male needs."[61] He has failed to recognize that the purpose of this dream is not to reunite

him with his lost pearl, but to redirect his desires, to make him a better Christian by reuniting his

spiritual/private and corporeal/public selves. Similar to the kind of consolation provided for John

of Gaunt in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, the *Pearl* poet suggests that in order to be an

effective king Richard must unite his private self with his performative, orthodox public self.

After she explains to him that she is not cursed in this garden but cured, the Dreamer requests

"[t]o be excused" (281) and explains

> 'I trawed my perle don out of dawez;
>
> Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste,
>
> And wony with hyt in schyr wod-schawez,
>
> And loue my Lorde and al His laws
>
> Þat hatz me bro t þys blys ner.
>
> Now were I at yow bey onde þise wawez,
>
> I were a joyful jueler.' (282-288)[62]

In an attempt to mimic ideal courtly fashion he asks forgiveness, attempts to summarize what he

has learned—in this case that the pearl is pleased to be in the garden— and then goes about

explaining how he will cross the river and restore his happiness by repossessing his lost pearl.

The Dreamer's earthly attachment to the Maiden is expressed in his "pitiable but often comic

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[60] David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*" *Speculum* 68.1 (1993), 57.
[61] Ibid, 61.
[62] "'I thought my pearl killed, not cured. / But now, by her pure presence blessed, / I'll stay with my sweet joy, assured / Of God's great laws, and praise the word / Of Him Who brought my bliss so near! / I'll wade this water, undeterred, / And be, indeed, a joyful jeweler" (282-288).

misapprehension of spiritual matters," and failed courtly rhetoric.[63] Only through this unification

will Richard be able to work through his grief, re-marry, produce an heir, and stabilize the

commonwealth. The remarkably different circumstances of composition between the *Book of the*

Duchess and *Pearl* result in contrasting approaches to the mode of consolation and

characterization in each poem. With Chaucer's poem being commissioned eight years after

Blanche's death and in the wake of Gaunt's deteriorating public reputation, the Black Knight is

manufactured very specifically as an idealized version of John of Gaunt. The Knight's

melancholy, though perhaps exaggerated, is meant to evoke feelings of sympathy for the patron.

Alternatively, the *Pearl* poem, composed only a year after Anne's death and at the request of a

king, directly avoids any direct correlation between Richard II and the melancholic Dreamer.

Instead, it is the highly wrought form and rich, ornate descriptions that mimic the aesthetic of

Richard and his opulent court. The Dreamer and his journey are simply an example for the

grieving king.

Rebuking the Dreamer's advances once again, the Maiden replies that he speaks without

thinking and reminds him that he cannot cross the water:

> 'Wy borde ꝫe men? So madde ꝫe be!
>
> Þre wordez hatz þou spoken at ene:
>
> Vnavysed, forsoþe, wern all þre.
>
> Þou ne woste in worlde quat on dotz mene;
>
> Þy worde byfore þy wytte con fle.
>
> […]
>
> Þe þrydde, to pass þys water fre:

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[63] Charlotte Gross, "Courtly Language in *Pearl*" in *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the 'Pearl'-Poet* (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1991), 79.

Þat may no joyful jueler.' (290-294, 299-300)[64]

A debate ensues for ten more stanzas. The Dreamer charges the Maiden with being his only

chance at happiness while she attempts to explain that he must instead "sech Hys blyþe ful

swefte" (354).[65] The Dreamer's happiness cannot be predicated on the Maiden because in order

to join her he must also be dead. It is through the interaction between Dreamer and Maiden, the

tension between the courtly lover and the unattainable female, that the poem solidifies itself as an

a-temporal piece of court literature. While the Dreamer's position reflects the ideological

structure of courtly love, as well as the genre tropes of the later medieval romance, the Maiden

never succumbs to this rhetoric. As her sermon begins to dominate the conversation, the poem's

emphasis shifts from being a courtly love story, to a solemn theological guide for the Dreamer to

work through his suffering. In this way, courtly discourse serves not only to observe social

decorum between patron and poet and appeal to the poet's fellow courtiers, but also, in Jennifer

Garrison's terms, "to condemn the dreamer-narrator, whose rejection of the comfort of reason

and religion is made clear by his inappropriate rhetoric and conceits."[66]

In an essay that re-imagines the role of the Eucharist in the poem, Jennifer Garrison

suggests that the primary purpose of the Eucharistic symbolism is to show that the Dreamer must

realize his "moral obligation to maintain the boundaries of his emotional state" and redirect his

desires to God in order to overcome his melancholy.[67] Garrison's argument does not address a

date for the poem, but rather interprets the significance of the Eucharist through work like John

Bossy's, mentioned above. For her, the poem's use of the Eucharist is its central focus. By

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[64] " 'You jest! Or is this lunacy? / Three things you've said to be, I glean. / All three are false, pure foolery. / You speak not knowing what you mean; / Your words are thoughtless! / … / … You last aver / You'll wade this water easily. / You can't at all, my joyless jeweler!" (290-294, 298-300).

[65] "And see God's goodly grace" (354).

[66] Ibid, 83.

[67] Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject." *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010), 306.

grounding Garrison's argument in the specific cultural context of Anne's death and Richard's grief this "moral obligation" becomes politically charged and suggests an ethic to the mourning process that her argument does not address. The poem most certainly accomplishes the kind of work Garrison suggests in creating a de-historicized subject, but it also performs a very specific task for its immediate audience—specifically Richard II. The Dreamer and the Maiden serve to act out the process of uniting Richard's public performative-self, and private-self, with the Maiden symbolizing the Eucharist, both imaginatively and ideologically. In her perfect whiteness, and likeness to a pearl, the Maiden is an animated image of the wafer which symbolizes the body of Christ.[68] As a Eucharistic image, she helps guide the Dreamer to Christ, in the same way that the Eucharist, as presented by a priest, served to connect the observers to the body and blood of Christ.

Offering to walk along the bank with the Dreamer, the Maiden begins to tell her story, but cautions him that while "[f]or now þy speche is to [her] dere. / Maysterful mod and hy e pryde, / … arn heterly hated here" (400-403).[69] His failed courtly rhetoric is not only ineffective, but insulting in Heaven. His job now is not to question but to listen, and for the remainder of the poem the Maiden dominates the conversation. She tells him that although she was young when she died, the Lamb took her in marriage and made her a queen in Heaven. When the Dreamer interprets this as the Maiden usurping Mary, she falls to her knees and chastises him for his earthly conception of hierarchy. She explains that Mary is the 'quen of courtaysye,'[70] matchless in Heaven and that all other members of Heaven are kings and queens, living in harmony.

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[68] I am indebted to Dr. Paul Dietrich for my thinking here. He helped greatly in developing my conception of the Eucharist's role in the poem, specifically in regard to the Pearl Maiden.

[69] "'…your worthy words are dear. / But bear in mind that boasting, pride, / And haughtiness are hared here'" (400-403).

[70] "Queen of courtesy" (concatenation phrase for section VIII)

Unable to free himself of the rigid, earthly conceptions of hierarchy, the Dreamer cannot accept her position as a queen:

> 'Þou lyfed not two er in our þede;
>
> Þou cowþez neuer God nauþer plese ne pray,
>
> Ne neuer nawþer Pater ne Crede—
>
> And quen mad on þe fyrst day!' (483-486).[71]

In response to his reticence, the Maiden eschews her courtly rhetoric to present a slightly distorted version of the Parable of the Vineyard in which Christ agrees to pay all his laborers a penny for the day, regardless of the quality or time of the work.[72] As Bowers notes, the Maiden's "rendering of the Parable of the Vineyard centers specifically upon the lord's right to enforce his contract with the workers," a detail not present in St. Matthew's original version the story.[73] The switch in rhetoric and the augmentation of the tale certainly serves to reach the Dreamer in a new way. The Maiden has thus far failed to redirect the Dreamer's desires and the tale could easily be read as a new tactic. However, within the context of Richard's court in 1395, the parable also serves to align the poet with his patron politically. Labor contracts in post-Black Death England presented a significant problem to the land-holding gentry who, due to a reduced labor force, found it difficult to enforce previously established labor agreements. The change in rhetoric reinforces the gentry's prerogative. By forgoing her previous courtly rhetoric and mimicking the speech of the working classes, the Maiden appeals to the aristocratic ideal of a conforming labor class which supported the gentry in their right to establish and enforce contracts as they saw fit. Furthermore, this connection served to reinforce the divine ordination of Richard's kingship.

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[71] "'Not two years old, on bended knee / You neither learned to praise nor pray / The Pater or the Creed's decree, / Yet queen were deigned within a day!" (483-486)

[72] John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 84.

[73] Ibid, 45.

While the politics of labor contracts appealed to the gentry, the correlation between the lord

enforcing his contracts and Christ appealed to the King. For Richard, a man who "fused" the

sacred and the secular, the mandate from Christ to uphold his labor contracts would likely have

mimicked his own ideas about the tenuous relationship between laborers and lords.[74]

The Dreamer, who resents the parable, concludes only that it suggests "'lasse in werke to

take more able, / And euer þe lenger þe lasse þe more'" ("'Less work more wealth is payable. /

So more is less and less is more!'") (599-600). In response the Maiden reminds him that when

God gave up his son, Jesus Christ, letting him "'dy e in doel out of delyt'" ("'die a joyless death

in blight'") (642)[75] he did not do so with the intention of only saving those who had sinned less,

but to save all mankind. She follows with a penitential sermon, telling the Dreamer that he will

find cure for his suffering in Christ:

> 'Grace innogh þe mon may haue
>
> Þat synnez þenne new, if hym repente,
>
> Bot with sor and syt he mot hit craue,
>
> And byde þe payne þerto is bent.' (661-664)[76]

She illustrates the Lamb's generosity by describing how she was welcomed into Heaven without

delay, "'coronde clene in vergynté,'" ("'crowned me queen in virginity'") (767) and clothed in

"perlez maskellez" ("'And robed me in these pearls pure'") (768), suggesting that her virginity

saved her from purgatory. It may well be that the earlier reference to the Maiden as a child who

died in infancy was simply a narrative tool to glorify her virginity. As Sarah Stanbury notes

"[w]ith the exception of the infant Christ, very young children seldom appear in medieval

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[74] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 325.
[75] "'die a joyless death in blight'" (642).
[76] "'Good grace enough might those men have / Who, sorrowed by their sins, repent, / Who suffer grief, and cry and crave / In pain, all patient, penitent" (661-664).

fictions, particularly in such central positions; when they do, it is rarely as the object of elegiac mourning," thus suggesting that, rather than being a narrative trope, the child figure was chosen deliberately in order to instill the Maiden with the specific qualities of child.[77] Apart from playing to Richard's fear of and obsession with purgatory, the Maiden's virginity justifies Anne and Richard's childless marriage. The purpose of any royal marriage is to produce an heir and secure the throne. Richard would have been particularly familiar with the political implications of this since his own "lawful right of succession" was a key focal point both of his coronation and "the first parliament of [his] reign."[78] Whether Richard and Anne were simply barren, or favored a spiritual marriage to a physical one, the lack of children weighed heavily on the people of England who understood that without a solid line of succession the country could easily dissolve into turmoil.[79] In order to present their childlessness as a virtue rather than a failure the poet glorifies Anne's virginity, suggesting that a spiritual marriage between Richard and Anne allows her to bypass purgatory and enter Heaven immediately after her death. In this way the Maiden's virginity becomes a reference to Queen Anne's chastity and the Dreamer's dead child a fictitious vehicle for her virginity.

The Dreamer listens intently to the Maiden's story of her marriage amongst the 144,000 brides of Christ and thanks her for her words, but his next question, "'Haf e no wonez in castel-walle / Ne maner þer e may mete and won?'" illustrates that he has not at all abandoned his earthly obsession with the material (917-918)[80]. Exasperated with his refusal to make meaningful spiritual change, the Maiden then tells the dreamer that the Lamb has agreed to let him watch the

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[77] Sarah Stanbury, "The Gaze on the Body of *Pearl's* Dead Girl," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*. Eds. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 108.
[78] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 26-27.
[79] Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 455-456. Saul cites C.M Barron as a proponent of Richard and Anne committing to a chaste marriage, but admits that Richard's need for an heir likely outweighed his piety, claiming that infertility is a more likely explanation of their childlessness.
[80] "'Have you no well-wrought castle wall? / Don't you demesne and manor own?'" (917-918)

procession of the brides. She leads him to a hill from which he can see the city of New Jerusalem and The Dreamer describes his vision in great detail, exactly as it is depicted in John's Revelation. From this hill he can also see that the river runs from the wound in the Lamb's side, an image which, if he hasn't yet understood the river as an ontological barrier, makes the boundary and the consequence for crossing it quite clear. As a living person he is not yet able to cross the river that separates him from the Maiden—the river made from the blood of Christ. He must substitute the reality of being washed in the blood of Christ with the symbolic process of the Eucharist—an imaginative union between the living, and the blood and body of Christ. This opulent setting not only serves as an aesthetic representation of God's salvation but also provides comfort to Richard, who need not dwell on the condition of Anne's corpse, because her body, in its idealized form, resides in the splendor of Heaven. Crucially, the lavishness of Heaven poses no threat to Richard's court; he is not expected to compete with its opulence as he would be with an imagined earthly court. In fact, his divinely anointed rule, and the court it inspires, is a direct descendent of this blissful and ornate City. The beauty of New Jerusalem reifies the material culture of Richard's court, further supporting iconographic orthodoxy.

The Dreamer wonders at the splendor of the city and, momentarily, his spiritual state seems to match his physical elevation. He briefly redirects his desire to God saying "Best watz He, blyþest, and most to pryse" (1131).[81] However, as soon as he sees the Pearl Maiden in the procession he reverts to his earthly desires and attempts to ford the river:

> Quen I se   my frely, I wolde be þere,
>
> By   onde þe water þa   ho were walte.
>
> I þo   t þat noþyng my   t me dere
>
> To fetch me bur and take me halte,

---

[81] "'I held Him worthier of praise'" (1131).

And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,

To swymme þe remnaunt, þa I þer swalte

Bot of þat munt I watz bitalt;

When I schulde start in þe strem astraye,

Out of þat caste I watz bycalt:

Hit watz not at my Pryncez paye. (1155-1164)[82]

Thirteen lines describe the Dreamer's impression of the Maiden and his desire to be reunited

with her *before* he enters the river. Garrison notes that "[a]t this moment, the [D]reamer's 'luf

longyng' is more obviously sinful than the emotion that drove his grief at the start of the poem"

since he no longer seeks to save her from death, but rather to reunite with her, regardless of the

clearly defined consequences. [83] For this moment to be Eucharistic, the Dreamer would need to

cross the river for Christ; his desire would have to be predicated on, and directed toward, the

Lamb. His decision to cross the river is based solely on re-uniting himself with the Maiden; and

he does so without regard for the consequences of his actions. For the Dreamer, this consequence

is death, but for the poem's patron the consequence is much more severe: a breakdown of the

social order. If the heirless Richard were to die, or generally abdicate his duties to wallow in his

grief, there would be political chaos; his decision is one that affects not only himself, but his

subjects.

In a conclusion similar to Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* in its abruptness, the poem ends

almost immediately after the Dreamer wakes from his dream and returns to his sleeping body. He

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[82] " 'The more I saw that maid nearby / The more I pined to reach her side; / And thinking nothing would deny / My way, I swelled with silly pride, /And vainly, madly, vowed to try / To swim that stream although I died / Before I crossed that river wide! / Before I reached such ecstasies, / A beckoning told me to bide: / My plan did not my true Prince please" (1155-1164).

[83] Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject." *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010), 310.

awakens "in gret affray" (1174),[84] but praises the Maiden for showing him "þys veray avysyoun" (1184).[85] He recognizes that it was his own error which caused his dream to end and tells us that since its end he has remained true to God:

> Ouer þis hyul þis lote I la te,
>
> For pyty of my perle enclyin
>
> And syþen to God I hit byta te,
>
> In Krystez dere blessing and myn,
>
> Þat in þe forme of bred and wyn
>
> Þe preste vus schewez vch a daye.
>
> He gef vus to be His homly hyne
>
> And precious perlez unto his pay. (1205-1212)[86]
>
> Amen. Amen.

These last lines have been the source of much debate amongst scholars who often divide neatly into two camps. David Aers contends that the ending seems both "peripheral" and "theologically superficial and psychologically superficial."[87] Alternatively, Jennifer Garrison reads the ending as a genuine reflection on the spiritual transformation of the Dreamer. Garrison's argument hinges on the cultural weight of the Eucharist as "a ritual method for the aristocratic subject to reform himself."[88] Garrison's sociological reading of the Eucharist makes an excellent case for

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[84] "'My mid was marred with agonies'" (1174).
[85] "In showing me this shining sight" (1184). While Finch's translation maintains the alliteration of the line, it fails to capture the significance of "avysyoun," a word which suggests a very important dream—often referring to dreams of a prophetic nature.
[86] "'… For mine / Was a fair fortune when on height / For my pure pearl I swooned, supine. / Since then I've stayed both true and right. / so with Christ's blessings, free and fine, / Which in the form of Bread and Wine / Many a mortal daily sees, / Oh, may we serve Him well and shine / As precious pearls our Lord to please.'"
The last line is always included, but rarely considered in overall line counts.
[87] David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*," *Speculum* 68.1 (1993), 70-73.
[88] Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject," *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010), 295.

its role as a performative act which allowed the aristocracy to display "their wealth and devotion as ways of constructing their own individual spiritual lives."[89] Public performance certainly had an important role in the identity of the aristocracy, particularly for Richard who was fully aware and engaged with the importance of image-making, and regularly displayed his piety as most central to his individual identity. Therefore, a reading based on a 1395 composition date must necessarily examine the political implications of the Eucharistic ending. The Eucharistic potential of the text and the Maiden is crucial to the work of mourning for Richard who must recognize this moment as a reflection of his own unresolved grief and come to terms with the political implications of his interior emotions. The poet utilizes Eucharistic discourse as a way to tie together the social community of the living and the dead as well as reinforce the Maiden's teachings, which Garrison suggest are grounded in the principle that "emotional containment is a moral imperative."[90]

This lesson certainly permeates the entire Christian community, but holds particular significance for Richard, who, as King, must consider the far reaching implications of his emotional states in terms of the good of the commonwealth. In the end, then, much like Chaucer's poem for Gaunt, the *Pearl*-poet suggests that Richard must necessarily reconcile his grieving self with his public orthodox identity, and turn to Christ to fill the interior void left by Anne's death. By suggesting that Richard must unite his private-self with his public orthodox self, the text offers a form of consolation tailored specifically to a king, one which presumes to incorporate an ethic of grieving that is amplified given his position as head of state. In utilizing pre-existing material culture, the *Pearl*-poet is able to appropriate the style of Richard's court, grounding the poem within his court and appealing directly to Richard's sensibilities as a patron.

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[89]Ibid, 298.
[90]Ibid, 307.

This process allows the poet to access the wider community of grievers in Richard's court by uniting them through common themes of courtly discourse, theological doctrine, and material culture, thereby bolstering the work of mourning and reifying Richard's position. The poet then simultaneously suggests that both Richard and the community must engage thoroughly with the private and public work of grieving in order to maintain social and political stability. The poet re-imagines theological discourses of mourning, expanding on prevalent themes of death iconography in the later 14th century, and appropriating theological symbols that united a community and bridged ontological boundaries between the living and the dead. In this way the poet suggests that it is necessary to sublimate grief through existing communal channels, thereby submitting it to modes of ritualized objectification which mitigate the psychic crisis of grief.

Conclusion
Grief, Patronage, and the Performance of Public Identity

Ultimately, both of these texts re-imagine discourses of grief. Their tradition looks back to the orchestrated wailings of antiquity and reflects the growing engagement with public, political performativity and material culture in the later 14th century. This mourning literature re-imagined the work of objectification, re-casting the role of the community within Christian customs. Each poet appropriated, and re-imagined existing modes of communication to create their own particular brand of consolation: Chaucer creates a secular discourse of mourning, and the *Pearl*-poet redefines theological discourses of grief by utilizing the private, yet paradoxically communal, tradition of the Eucharist—internally and individually divinizing the self in the presence of others— to offer consolation to a bereaved patron.

Although this study has considered multiple facets of later 14th century art and death culture, there are many complications that I have not yet explored. In longer, future projects I would like to more thoroughly investigate the historical role of 'courtly discourse' and 'court culture' in order to expand on those notions and the ways in which both authors are replying to, and transforming the existing topoi and discourses of courtly idioms. Additionally, this project has focused on the ethics of mourning for the surviving, royal male which begs the question about the ethical role of the dead, aristocratic female. Issues of gender percolate beneath the surface of this study and I would like the future of this project to include investigations into the roles gender and sexuality played in medieval death and mourning practices.

Chaucer's project abstracts the foundations of courtly discourse, mixing the tradition with the material culture of funerary monuments, in order to re-inscribe the material artifacts with the social mobility of the immaterial culture that (re)defines them. This process capitalizes on the pre-existing community, who gathered to participate in the traditional death and mourning

rituals, and utilizes this audience to reify John of Gaunt's political power. By creating subjects that have real-world counterparts, Chaucer draws attention to the role of community in the grieving process, while simultaneously memorializing Gaunt's dead wife and inventing a persona that contains Gaunt's grief. By ending the poem with the image of the Black Knight returning to his castle, Chaucer provides a method of consolation that enacts an ethic of grief, suggesting that, for public leaders, it is necessary that they unite their private and public identities. Gaunt must recognize that compartmentalizing his grief is not a sustainable strategy for himself or for the commonwealth.

Similarly, the *Pearl*-poet intertwines his consolation poem with the prevalent material culture of Richard's court, appropriating an aesthetic that bolstered the role of mourning literature and appealed to its patron's sense of performative identity. By creating a piece of public literature that dealt directly with the performance of the Eucharist, the poet unites the private and public selves of Richard II, suggesting that the King had an ethical obligation to grieve appropriately and effectively, returning to his responsibilities and stabilizing the state in the wake of its loss. By constructing their poems, not only in relation to their patron's public personas, but also through common cultural mechanisms, like the idiom of courtly poetry, death and mourning customs, and significant artifacts of material culture, both poets succeed in creating a mourning text that unified public and private modes of mourning, and erasing temporal boundaries. Both of these texts create a "de-historicized" subject that functions both when concretely grounded in the social milieu of their respective courts, but also when freed from the temporal bounds of history.

This process re-imagines discourses of mourning in an effort to instill an ethic of mourning rather than simply a method of working through mourning. This ethic links the public

and private spheres of loss by encouraging powerful patrons to recognize the dangers of individual melancholy and its negative impact on complicated socio-political systems. In utilizing existing communities of grief to advocate for a unification of public and private selves, Chaucer and the *Pearl*-poet not only recognize the unifying power of grief, but also that, for great men, the public self is always intricately linked with private self; their public lives are not simply performative, but rather an extension of their identities which must be acknowledged and balanced effectively. The encounter with death, then, serves as the pre-requisite for this encounter with the public and private selves and ultimately presents itself as an opportunity for great men to express their vulnerability while simultaneously reifying their political power.

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