Social Bonds in Middle English Ghost and Vision Narratives

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of social bonds and social commemoration in Middle English narratives about encounters with the spirits of the dead. It focuses on stories of ghostly apparitions and purgatorial visions in which the dead request commemorative aid, in the form of prayers and masses, to speed their passage through purgatory. The thesis uses commemorative practices – funerals, postmortem prayers and soul masses, almsgiving, and funerary art – to contextualise these narratives and examine how they connect with the practical concerns of late medieval English people regarding postmortem purgation and social commemoration. Middle English ghost narratives provide a model for validating lay social relationships of parenthood, marriage, and friendship by emphasizing their spiritual power in commemorative contexts. These purgatorial ghost narratives circulated across a variety of social classes and were continually being reworked to emphasize the specific concerns of social groups, including the aristocracy, gentry, merchantry, and the sworn religious, regarding commemorative agency, interpersonal sins, and the role of money in the commemorative economy. Taken together, they form a substantial narrative corpus reflecting the wide variety of ways that medieval English people thought about death, purgatory, commemoration, and the social networks in which they were enmeshed.

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Introduction

An incident in the early fifteenth-century purgatory vision *The Vision of William of Stranton* demonstrates the social dimension of narratives about purgatory. The vision describes the titular English pilgrim's visionary experience at St. Patrick's Purgatory, a cave on Station Island, County Donegal, Ireland, in 1409 or 1411.[1] The cave, reputed to contain a physical entrance into purgatory, had been a popular pilgrimage site since the late twelfth century, as witnessed by the Latin *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* of 1180-4. William of Stranton likely modelled his account of his vision on the *Tractatus*' account of the sinful Irish knight Owein, who was tormented by demons on his pilgrimage to the cave as penance for his many sins. However, where the *Tractatus* presents Owein's journey as that of a solitary penitent moving through a visionary landscape devoid of clues to his social existence, William experiences purgatory as a place where his relationships with his family members are scrutinised, held to account, and subject to spiritual correction.[2]

At a critical juncture in the vision, when William has just been rescued from demonic attack by his spiritual guide Saint John of Bridlington, he is accosted by the spirit of his

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[1] This text survives in two copies which differ on the visionary's name and the date of the vision. London, British Library, MS Royal 17 B. xliii names him as 'William Staunton', while London, British Library, MS Additional 34193 names him 'William of Stranton'. I follow the text's most recent editor, Robert Easting, in viewing 'Stranton' as correct, as William claims to be from County Durham, which contained a village by that name, now subsumed into Hartlepool. Robert Easting, 'Introduction' in *St. Patrick's Purgatory: Two Versions of Owayne Miles and The Vision of William of Stranton: Together with the Long Text of the Tractatus De Purgatorio Sancti Patricii,* ed. by Robert Easting (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1991), pp. i-xciii (pp. lxxvii-lxxviii).
[2] 'Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii', in *St. Patrick's Purgatory,* ed. by Easting, pp. 121-154.

deceased sister. She accuses William of having sinned gravely by interfering to prevent her marriage to the man she loved:

> 'Heyll, fader, ӡe are here in Goddys steyde, and I make my compleynt to yow of my broder þat here standys: that is to say, þat he hase synnyde grettly agene Gode, for thys man þat here standys luffyde me, and I luffyde hym, and eder of hus wolde have hadde other after þe law of Gode, as holy kyrke teches, and he scholde haue geton and I born thre sawles to Gode, and my broder let hus to go togedyr, for he sayde, yff we soo dyde, ther scholde noder of hush aue joye of oder, and for þat cause we lefte [hyt].'[3]

This occasion is radically different from the encounters where purgatorial visionaries such as Owein are confronted with evidence of their sins, which are usually left conventionally vague. William's encounter is, in all its details, specific to his social position within his family, to the idiosyncrasies of William and his sister's relationship in life. It is a sin which is profoundly anti-social: not only has William wronged his sister, but in doing so he has prevented the bond that would have united her to her fiancé and to her children in the process. John of Bridlington's response makes clear that the sin is in preventing actions permitted by 'þe law of God' (136), and thereby gainsaying the legitimacy of the sacrament of marriage. Implicitly, however, the presence of his sister to voice the accusation suggests that William's sin was not only sacramental but social: that the wrong he did to his sister and her fiancé in preventing her marriage has spiritual

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[3] William of Stranton, 'The Vision of William of Stranton', Additional version, in *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, ed. by Robert Easting, pp. 78-120, lines 125-133. This and all other quotations from this text will be cited by line number from the Additional text presented in this edition.

weight and must be answered to. At the same time, as John affirms that any attempt to prevent a loving marriage, even between royalty and a shepherd (137-9) is an accursed sin, the text affirms the spiritual validity of marriage and parenthood as beyond the reproach of men. The absence of the sister's unborn children, 'thre sawles to Gode', provides a measure for the damage caused by William's actions, which is at once physical, social, and spiritual. Sexual and spiritual productivity are aligned, the growth or wastage of a family mirrored by the growth and wastage of souls bound for God's kingdom. The visionary experience of purgatory becomes a means by which the visionary is brought to penitence, and through which his dysfunctional relationship with his sister is held to account and corrected.

This short but vitally positioned incident situates *The Vision of William of Stranton* in a long line of English texts that use the topos of an encounter with the purgatorial dead to validate the temporal social bonds of family, marriage, and friendship as spiritually productive in the face of the apparent severing of social ties attendant upon death. A range of vernacular texts emerged in late medieval England that used purgatory as a site for defending, scrutinising, and moderating a wide variety of temporal relationships. These texts are all predicated upon the belief in purgatory as a realm in which the dead were purged of their sins over a specific period of time, and that the actions of the living, through masses, prayers, and charity done in the names of specific deceased people, could soothe and shorten the pains those souls would have to endure before they were cleansed and fit to enter heaven. This belief underpinned a huge range of commemorative activity aimed at reducing the suffering of the dead, which comprised a great variety of liturgical, material, artistic, literary, epigraphical, and social elements and

touched every social group in late medieval English society. Narratives of ghostly visitation served as a distinct literary and imaginative response to this cultural complex of purgatorial commemoration, justifying, explaining, and elaborating on other forms of commemorative activity, and providing models for how commemorators could imagine the effects of their activity on the souls for whom they prayed. In the process, as we shall see, they frequently emphasised the social dimension of this activity, framing purgatory as a space from which the living were called to rescue those to whom they owed affection and obligation.

Audience understanding of Middle English narratives of ghostly visitation hinged on the knowledge that purgatory shared the temporal logic of the world of the living. The soul's experience of purgatory, unlike of heaven and hell, was understood to be a temporary process and not an eternal state. Souls arrived in purgatory and underwent a process of painful cleansing before they could pass onwards to their permanent destination in heaven. Jacques Le Goff observed that a 'great novelty' of purgatory was that 'time could now be measured in the hereafter… subject to various computations, evaluations, and comparisons'.[4] The practice of granting indulgences, through which a bishop or pope exercised the authority to reduce the time spent in purgatory by a fixed period of days, though originally applied to periods of penance among the living, began to be applied to the dead from at least the mid-fourteenth century.[5] Granting indulgences to the dead, residing in purgatory, applied the 'increasingly… arithmetic and mercantile

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[4] Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), p. 229.

[5] Robert W. Shaffern, 'The Medieval Theology of Indulgences' in *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* ed. by R.N. Swanson (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 11-36. (pp. 12-4, 33).

imagery' associated with indulgences by theologians to the passage of time in purgatory.[6] Robert Mills notes that 'the indulgence is only the most explicit example of the tendency for accounts of purgatory to interweave terrestrial time with eschatological time… establish[ing] a relationship between the time of this world and the time of the next in terms of concrete relations'.[7] This 'interweaving' of mortal and purgatorial time makes it possible to imagine the continuing maintenance of social bonds between living and dead, and is the factor which makes narrative literature particularly appropriate for the exploration of those bonds.

This focus on the countable passage of time makes purgatory a particularly suitable subject for narrative literature, since it inherently foregrounds the passage of time for both characters and audience. Paul Binski has argued that purgatory was far less frequently depicted than heaven and hell in the visual arts and 'was never codified in terms that could be translated visually', in part because of its disruption of the traditional visual duality of heaven and hell.[8] As Eamon Duffy notes, where purgatory was depicted in England it tended to resemble an 'out-patient department of hell' where souls were tormented by demons in a manner indistinguishable from the sufferings of the damned.[9] A rare counterexample, a wall-painting at Swanbourne, Buckinghamshire showing purgatory as a building from which prayerful souls call out to ask for aid and express their hopes, may owe its distinctly intellectual and hopeful character to its place within

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[6] Shaffern, 'The Medieval Theology of Indulgences', pp. 23-5.
[7] Robert Mills, 'God's Time? Purgatory and Temporality in Late Medieval Art', in *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, ed. by Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 477-498 (p. 482).
[8] Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), p. 194
[9] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-1580* (New Haven, Connecticut; London: Yale University Press, 2005), 2nd ed., p. 302.

the chancel, where it would serve to motivate priests in their prayers for the dead rather than to inculcate a fear of purgatory (See Figure 1). The idea that purgatory never developed a distinct visual tradition has been queried by Robert Mills, who identifies a tradition of visual depictions of purgatory 'visualised in terms of narrative development' via a 'reliance on metaphors of forward progression', in which souls are depicted as they are released from purgatory, being lifted up towards heaven by angels.[10] He draws attention to one marginal illustration in a late-fifteenth-century Carthusian miscellany from Yorkshire (London, British Library, MS Additional 37049, f. 24v; See Figure 2), in which souls in purgatory are shown carried upwards in a bucket pulled up by priests celebrating commemorative masses. Takami Matsuda, likewise, argues that most visual depictions of purgatory occur in proximity to references to the Requiem mass, and 'are in fact illustrations of intercession, rather than of Purgatory itself', focusing on the souls being released by intercessory prayer.[11] As a result, the idea of purgatory as a place where time meaningfully passed and narrative progression was possible becomes increasingly important to maintaining a distinction between representations of the two realms in the medieval English imagination.

By exploiting the narrative possibilities of purgatory, Middle English ghost narratives serve a clear didactic and emotional purpose for a lay readership. They demonstrate how commemorative masses and prayers could be used as a means to aid dead loved

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[10] Mills, 'God's Time?', p. 487.
[11] Takami Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), p. 100.

Fig.1. Detail of a wall-painting at Swanbourne, Buckinghamshire, showing three souls praying in purgatory, depicted as a burning building (right)

Fig. 2. Manuscript illustration from London, British Library, MS Additional 37049, showing souls being lifted out of purgatory towards heaven in a bucket pulled by commemorative masses and alms deeds.

ones' souls and minimise their suffering in purgatory. Purgatorial apparitions typically lay out both the urgency and extremity of their suffering, as well as the commemorative activities that could relieve them, the efficacy of which is demonstrated as the narrative progresses. In some texts this amounts to a general endorsement of commemoration, focused upon commemorative masses. In others, the narrative explicates a highly specific facet of Middle English commemorative culture, such as the promotion of a scheme of masses deemed to be especially efficacious, or a particular tradition in funerary art. In these cases, the texts allow the reader to understand these images and practices as expressions of their love, obligation, and charity towards their dead loved ones.

By viewing purgatory through the narrative lens of human relationships and focusing on those relationships as drivers of commemorative activity, ghost narratives affirm the spiritual validity and value of the relationships they portray. That ghosts appear to their loved ones in their hour of spiritual need implies divine acknowledgement, and approval, of the bonds of family and friendship. As a result, these texts imagine purgatory as a site where such relationships can be maintained, offering clarification and affirmation of evolving practices of commemoration that appealed especially to the laity who, unlike priests or the religious, might have children or spouses.

Ghost narratives are not religious treatises and do not provide a thorough theological model of purgatory. Rather, they provide an imaginative narrative model for how commemorative activities benefitted souls in purgatory. Since the emotional appeal of ghost narratives lay in their validation of social relationships like marriage, parenthood, friendship, and patronage, and of the strong emotions of love, grief, guilt, and anxiety

which might be attendant on them, these subjects are frequently prioritised over other points of doctrine. This helps to explain both the wide variety in the depictions of purgatory presented in these texts and their occasional incoherency regarding particular doctrinal details of, for example, the sacrament of confession or the mass. Such inconsistencies derive from the texts' primary concern with the efficacy of commemoration. Their presentation of intercessory prayer as a means to aid one's loved ones is prioritised over conveying clear, detailed, and authoritative models of purgatory because the former lay at the emotional core of lay engagement with ghost narratives.

This social focus explains the popularity of vernacular ghost narratives, which encompassed translations of Latin texts and a variety of new compositions for which no Latin antecedent is known. A number of these texts have numerous surviving copies and multiple versions over a substantial span of time: *The Trental of Gregory,* seemingly an English original, exists in three distinct versions and fifteen manuscripts and printed editions beginning with the Vernon Manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. A. 1) at the turn of the fifteenth century through to a version printed by John Mychell in 1536 (STC 12353), around a decade before the 1548 Chantries Act brought an end to late medieval commemorative practices. Moreover, ghost narratives appear in a wide variety of manuscript contexts: in both purely vernacular manuscripts and alongside Latin texts; alongside both religious and secular texts; in large, prestigious miscellanies produced by religious institutions and in the commonplace books of laypeople. Ed Eleazar has suggested, of the ghost narrative *Gast of Gy*, that it enjoyed unusual popularity in England because of its utility, 'because the voice [the] ghost, speaking from

his new, fiery home in purgatory… could be employed to articulate and reinforce orthodox belief' and particularly in response to Wycliffite arguments that criticised purgatorial doctrine and the commemorative practices it underscored.[12] It is likely that this had some role in the stories' dissemination in compendia of orthodox vernacular texts by church authorities (particularly in the case of Gast, which is unusually broad in its doctrinal concerns), and contributed to the apparent lack of censure of these texts.

It would be a mistake to simply equate the popularity of ghost narratives with their usefulness in promulgating approved ideas about purgatorial doctrine. To do so would be to underestimate the lay appetite for texts on purgatory that affirmed their own hopes regarding the afterlife, both for themselves and others. The audience for medieval ghost narratives was heterogeneous, drawn from a very wide range of social groups, including priests, the religious, aristocrats, gentry, yeomanry, merchantry, and the bourgeoisie; doubtless texts with other audiences have evaded this survey. The universal relevance of the topics which purgatorial ghost narratives broached no doubt contributed to their wide social applicability. When Robert Thornton, the Yorkshire gentleman who wrote out Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91, copied the Arthurian ghost narrative *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn* and the anchoritic purgatory vision *A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman*, he placed two different models of purgatorial ghost story. One is ensconced in the poetic fictions of Arthurian romance, the other a prose text authorising the visionary experience of a religious woman at a major hub of ecclesiastical power in Winchester. The theme of social commemoration,

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[12] Ed Eleazar, 'Introduction' in *The Quatrain Version of* Gast of Gy*: A Late Medieval Poem* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), p. 49.

which plays a major role in both texts, appears to have appealed to lay audiences regardless of the mode or authority with which it was approached.

The specific theme of *interpersonal* commemoration appears to have had a particular appeal to lay audiences, taking centre stage in texts that clearly target a specifically lay audience. The clergy and religious' view of commemoration reflected their position as the agents supplying prayers within the commemorative complex. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, religious ghost narratives tend to focus upon institutional commemorative relationships within the Church and cloister, and treat all other relationships with a marked ambivalence. While ordained men and women were bound into various non-religious relationships, including kinship, they could not legitimately have spouses or children: precisely the two interpersonal groups whom the laity might expect to especially rely on as commemorative agents. As a result, it was lay people to whom depictions of purgatory as a site where the living could aid their dead loved ones most broadly appealed.

The doctrine of purgatory evolved in the medieval period, and the trajectory of its development has been a subject of much discussion and debate. Jacques Le Goff's controversial landmark study of the subject, *La Naissance du Purgatoire*, in 1981 attempted to fix a rough date for the 'birth' of purgatory in the 1170s, representing the point at which a third space for the purgation of souls in the afterlife, alongside the eternal destinations of heaven and hell, was first clearly articulated.[13] This date corresponds with the first appearances of the Latin word 'purgatorium' to designate a

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[13] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory,* trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 154-167.

specific place of purgatory in a sermon by Peter Comestor, and for Le Goff the 'integrat[ion] of purgatory into theological teaching' was principally undertaken by the late-twelfth-century Parisian theologians Peter the Chanter and Simon of Tournai and those in their circles.[14] Le Goff's argument has been generally criticised for placing too great an importance on the name 'purgatorium' to the exclusion of evidence of belief in purgatory pre-dating this name.[15] Latterly, scholars such as Carl Watkins have characterised Le Goff and many of his critics as overstating the extent to which it was the '"spatialisation" of the idea [of purgatory] and the iteration of a revised tripartite afterlife that gave purgatory imaginative purchase', and that the 'spatial' understanding of purgatory remained far from unified even into the late medieval period, and that a focus on the 'geography' of purgatory is largely treated as secondary to themes of intercession.[16]

Many of the concepts inherent in what would ultimately form purgatorial doctrine, namely a temporary purgative punishment for some sins after death and the capacity of prayers for the dead to ameliorate their condition, are undeniably present well before the twelfth century. Matsuda notes that both the idea of purgation of the dead and intercession for them were known much earlier, deriving from the assertion in Corinthians 3:15 that some will be saved by fire.[17] Isabel Moreira, surveying beliefs about post-mortem purgation through late antiquity to the eighth century, argues that 'for

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[14] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory,* pp. 154-6, 165-7.
[15] Anton Gurevich, 'Popular and Scholarly Medieval Cultural Traditions: Notes in the Margins of Jacques Le Goff's Book', *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), 71-90, R.W. Southern, 'Between Heaven and Hell (Review of Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire*)', *Times Literary Supplement,* 18 June 1982, pp. 651-2.
[16] Carl Watkins, 'Landscapes of the dead in the late medieval imagination', *Journal of Medieval History* 48.2 (2022), pp. 250-64 (p. 254).
[17] Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory*, pp. 7, 13.

centuries purgatory did not need an official stamp, because it had gradually seeped into common Christian understanding of where dead Christians went', through the 'simple act of consolidating and affirming connections among ancient practices such as prayer for the dead, masses for the dead, offerings for the dead, and the hope of divine intervention'.[18] One prominent and highly influential narrative with distinctly purgatorial aspects occurs Book IV, Chapter 55 of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, in which Gregory, having had the deceased monk Justus buried in a dunghill for hoarding money in his cell, commands the monks to hold mass for Justus' soul for thirty days to reduce his suffering:

> 'Justus has now been suffering the torments of fire for a long time and we must show him our charity by helping as much as we can to gain his release. Beginning today, offer the holy Sacrifice for his soul for thirty consecutive days. Not one of these days is to pass without a Mass being celebrated for his release.'[19]

After thirty daily masses, the ghost of Justus appears to his brother Copiosus and tells him that "Up to this moment I was in misery… but now I am well, because this morning I was admitted to communion"; and the apparition confirms to Gregory that 'the dead

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[18] Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 5-6.

[19] Gregory I, Dialogues, trans. by Odo John Zimmerman (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), p. 269. The Latin text reads: 'Diu est quod Frater ille qui defunctus est, in igne cruciatur : debemus ei aliquid caritatis impendere , & eum in quantum possumus, ut eripiatur, adjuvare. Vade itaque, & ab hodierna die diebus triginta continuis offerre pro eo sacrificium stude, ut nullus omnino prætermittatur dies, quo pro abfolutione illius hoftia falutaris a non immoletur.' Gregory I, 'Dialogorum' in *Sancti Gregorri Papae I: Cognomento Magni Opera Omnia: iam olim ad manuscriptos codices romas, gallicanos, anglicanos emendata, aucta, & illustrata notis,* 17 vols, vol. 6 (Venice: Sumptibus Caroboli et Pompeati, 1768), pp. 53-355 (pp. 347-8).

monk was by the holy sacrifice delivered from his pains'.[20] This episode from a sixth-century text contains the essential elements underpinning fourteenth and fifteenth century ghost narratives: the temporary punishment of a soul for sin, the capacity of intercessory masses to relieve those punishments, and the use of this intercession to reincorporate a dead person into the community which death and sin have severed them from. Indeed, the sequence of thirty intercessory masses described here formed the basis of one of the most popular mass schedules in fifteenth-century England, the trental, which remained associated with Gregory in the popular imagination. Indeed, it is these concepts of temporary postmortem purgation and the efficacy of intercession rather than the precise 'geography' or cosmology of purgatory, that appear to demand the greatest attention. However, Matsuda notes that these perspectives on purgation and intercession still lacked 'explicit information concerning both the sins and the sinners which merit purgation after death' and thus a coherent system of penitence to establish for whom intercessory prayer was to be offered.[21] The major development of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries was to develop and clarify such a system - to develop a model of purgatory which permitted the living to seek intercession in a coherent manner. By the time the doctrine of purgatory was promulgated by the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 this system was more or less established, and it is this the practical engagement with this system, rather than the theological specifics of its development, with which this thesis is chiefly concerned. Once doctrinally accepted, purgatory became in Binski's words, 'a grey area of joint jurisdiction between God and

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[20] Gregory I, *Dialogues,* p. 269. The latin text reads: 'Nuncusque male fui, sed iam modo bene sum; quia hodie communionem recepi'. Gregory I, 'Dialogorum', p. 348.
[21] Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory*, pp. 7, 13.

the Church', where the Church could, through commemorative prayer and indulgences, reliably ameliorate the condition of the purgatorial dead.[22] This growing doctrinal certainty permitted the development and expansion of systems of commemoration across medieval Europe, and the comfort this certainty provided to the laity ensured their widespread and extensive engagement with the wide variety of practices that made up what I will call the late medieval 'commemorative complex'.

The ways in which the living sought to reduce the pains of those in purgatory were extremely varied, and many of them appear in ghost and vision narratives. Evidence regarding the range of forms which commemoration took can be gleaned from wills, commemorative monuments, and the documentary records kept by churches of commemorative bequests and foundations, though the paucity and opacity of much of this evidence renders forming hard conclusions about the prevalence of specific types of commemoration very difficult.[23] The most widespread and the most directly efficacious form of commemoration was liturgical, namely the purchase of 'soul masses' for the souls of specific named people. This was overwhelmingly understood to be the most effective form of intercession for the souls in purgatory, with John Mirk writing that 'for alle þe prayers þat ben don for helpe of mannes sowles, þe masse is chef and principal sokur to alle soules', followed by the seven penitential psalms with the litany.[24] Requests for such masses are ubiquitous in late medieval English wills. A wide array of

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[22] Binski, *Medieval Death,* p. 182.

[23] For overviews of the difficulty of using testamentary evidence in this regard, see Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation: Commemorating the Dead in the Late Medieval English Parish Church* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015), pp. 1-6; and Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls: The Parish of All Saints' Bristol on the Eve of the Reformation* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2018), pp. 59-82.

[24] John Mirk, *John Mirk's Festial: Edited from British Library MS Cotton Claudius A. II*, ed. by Susan Powell, 2 vols, vol 2, Early English Text Society Original Series 335 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 2011), p. 258.

means to arrange commemorative masses existed for individuals across the social spectrum, excepting of course those too poor to pay for any commemoration at all. Likewise, the threat of purgatorial suffering was urgent and testators often requested masses be conducted as quickly as possible. In some cases testators demanded truly enormous numbers of masses after their deaths in absurdly short timespans: Lady Alice West (d.1395) of Hinton Martel, Dorset, requested 4,400 masses to be said for her and her husband within a fortnight of her death at a cost of £18 10s, on top of bequests of 100s to each of sixteen different monastic institutions 'for to synge and rede and to praye diuine seruice' for her and her family.[25] Given that priests were allowed to celebrate the mass only once daily, Badham points out that this and similarly extravagant mass requests would have required extensive assistance from priests across a wide geographical and institutional spread, and are unlikely to have been completed in the time allotted, if at all. She notes that even much more modest mass schedules, like the 100 masses requested by John Walle (1427) of Sheviock, Cornwall, referred to the need to travel to find enough priests to say the masses quickly.[26]

Counterbalancing the impetus for testators and other commemorative agents to expand the number of soul masses to the limits of financial or logistical possibility was the belief that specific schedules of masses of certain kinds were especially effective at soothing the pains of purgatory. Such schedules existed in a wide variety of forms and often emphasised masses other than the requiem mass used for funeral services and

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[25] *The Fifty Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate, London, A.D. 1387-1439; with a priest's of 1454*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society, Original Series 78 (London: Trübner, 1882), pp. 6-8.
[26] Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 148-9; for Walle's will, see *Cornish Wills, 1342-1540*, ed. by Nicholas Orme (Exeter: Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 2007), p. 62.

associated with prayer for the dead. These schedules included the trental, thirty masses said either over the 30 days following a death or, in England, with three masses said within the octaves of ten feast days over the course of the liturgical year following the death.[27] The Sarum Missal contains wordings for masses specifically for use as part of a year-long trental.[28] Mass schedules like the trental were undeniably the form of commemoration most strongly connected with the ghost narrative tradition, as we shall see. The year-long liturgical trental in England was so closely associated with the ghost narrative *The Trental of Gregory* that Richard Pfaff considered the ritual to partly derive from the story.[29] Other ghost narratives appear to have been used to promote other specific mass schedules: the Latin *De Spiritu Guidonis*, translated into English as *The Gast of Gy*, prominently features a three-hundred mass schedule while the 1422 English prose narrative *A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman* promotes both *Spiritu*'s three-hundred mass schedule and a second thirteen-mass schedule.[30]

Soul masses of the kinds discussed above were celebrated temporarily in the days following the death, up to a year in the case of the trental, in a kind of spiritual emergency relief for the recently deceased soul. But there was also a great appetite for the regular long-term celebration of masses for specific dead souls, particularly among the higher echelons of society. Both monastic institutions and parish churches

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[27] See Richard Pfaff, 'The English Devotion of St. Gregory's Trental', *Speculum* 49.1 (1974), pp. 75-90

[28] *The Sarum Missal: Edited from Three Early Manuscripts*, ed. by J. Wickham Legg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), p. 460.

[29] Pfaff, 'The English Devotion of St. Gregory's Trental', p. 77.

[30] For a more extensive discussion of the thirteen-mass scheme described here, see chapter four. The schedule is discussed in Clarck Drieshen, 'English Nuns as Anchoritic Intercessors for Souls in Purgatory: The Employment of *A Revelation of Purgatory* by Late Medieval English Nunneries for their Lay Communities' in *Medieval Anchorites in their Communities,* ed. by Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 85-100.

maintained lists of benefactors whose names were read out during masses; in the monastic setting this was the roll of confraters, annal, or *liber vitae*, while the parish equivalent was called the bede-roll. Names on the bede-roll were usually read out on Sundays and feast days for a set period of time, though depending on the request, the church in question, and the size of the contribution, permanent inclusions were also made.[31] Both the monastic roll of confraters and the parish bede-roll were rituals for incorporating the dead into the religious life of a community. G.W. Cook notes that the 'laity often sought "to be joined" to the family of the abbeys' and notes the frequent phrasing of confraters being received 'as brothers' in monastic record, joining themselves through charity to the religious who prayed for their souls.[32] The bede-roll, being read out in the parish church where, most likely, the deceased had themselves worshipped, maintained their presence within the local community and reminded their fellow parishioners to pray for their souls. The reading of the bede-roll, like ghost narratives, contributed to a sense of a permeable boundary between living and dead parishioners, in which both remained within a shared parish community.

For those who could afford the expense, it was possible to arrange long-term commemoration outside of these benefactors' rolls by endowing a chantry, where a priest would celebrate mass regularly for the benefit of souls named in its endowment. The scale and ambition of such chantries varied dramatically. The largest form of chantry foundations were the colleges, churches with a staff of priests dedicated to the

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[31] Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 177-8.
[32] G.W. Cook, *Medieval Chantries and Chantry Chapels* (London, Phoenix House, 1947), pp. 2-4.

celebration of commemorative masses.[33] Those at the highest echelons of society might

establish staggeringly ambitious chantry foundations. The royal councillor and Bishop of

Winchester William of Wykeham (d. 1404) endowed both New College in Oxford and

Winchester College, both of which celebrated seven masses a day for the souls of

Wykeham, his parents, and the King; along with large contingent of chapel staff (ten

chaplains at New College, three chaplains and ten priest-fellows at Winchester, with

sixteen choristers each), the colleges' charters unusually required the presence of all

students at mass at least once daily.[34] Below the chantry colleges were chantry

chapels, where a single priest was specifically employed to celebrate masses for the

souls named in the endowment. These might be associated with a chantry chapel built

for the purpose as part of the foundation, for example in an extramural chapel built

abutting the existing church, or in a 'stone-cage' chapel built within the church space

between two pillars in a church's choir or nave arcade and separated by screens, a

development that was peculiar to England.[35] Patrons of such foundations often elected

to be buried there, as was the case of Sir Walter Hungerford (d. 1449), who was buried

in the stone-cage chantry he founded in 1429 at Salisbury Cathedral, where his great-

uncle Robert Hungerford (d. 1352) had himself endowed a chantry. Walter's daughter-

in-law, Margaret Hungerford (d.1478), likewise chose to be buried with her husband at

Salisbury after founding another chantry there, demonstrating a strong familial affinity

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[33] See *The Late Medieval English College and its Context*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Martin Heale (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008).

[34] Anna Eavis, 'The Commemorative Foundations of William of Wykeham', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 164.1 (2011), pp. 169-195 (p. 175-176).

[35] The surviving stone-cage chapels, and their development, are surveyed in Julian Luxford, 'The Origins and Development of the English 'Stone-Cage' Chantry Chapel', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 164.1 (2011), pp. 39-73.

for the Cathedral as a place for burial and commemoration.[36] The location of a chantry might evince strong attachments to relatives or communities in different locations: so did Lady Anne Scrope (d. 1498), who endowed chantries at East Harling, where she was buried with her first husband, and at Rushworth and Thetford, where her second and third husbands were buried.[37] Those unable to support the creation of a new chapel might endow a chantry to be performed at a pre-existing altar. Like inclusion of a bede-roll, chantries could be temporary or perpetual, but endowing a perpetual chantry could impose substantial difficulties. Property would have to be given to the church whose rents or proceeds could fund the chantry on an annual basis, and to do so required royal licence under the statutes of mortmain, which restricted the donation of land to the church without royal assent to prevent the loss of tax revenue.

The development and popularity of chantry foundations in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century has often been understood as a privatisation of religious commemoration, wherein the wealthy, in endowing priests and devising chapels and colleges sought to reserve priests and church spaces for their own familial commemorative concerns away from the wider church community. Chantries extended the options for privatising commemoration to a much broader swathe of the population providing those without the means to found monasteries or colleges a more modest and flexible way to organise commemorative masses on their own terms. Howard Colvin has argued that the development of the chantry responded to the logistical limitations of the

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[36] J.M.J. Fletcher, 'The Tome of Lord Walter Hungerford, K.G. in Salisbury Cathedral', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* 47. (1937), pp. 447-456 (p. 452); Michael Hicks, *Richard III and His Rivals: Magnates and their Motives in the Wars of the Roses*, pp. 80-2.
[37] Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women and the Fabric of Piety* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), p. 61.

monastic houses of the late thirteenth century, and represented 'a privatised means of salvation devised to cope with an increasing demand for intercession with which the established monastic corporations could not cope' as lists of deceased monks and lay benefactors for whom commemoration was needed grew unmanageably large.[38] That the chantry did represent a privatised form of commemoration does not, however, mean chantries were cut off and remote from the church communities in which they were founded. Clive Burgess, noting that the preference for retaining a specific chantry priest within a parish church was generally expensive compared to other commemorative prayers, argues that where parish church chantries were concerned 'what founders evidently valued above all – as much as if not more than the masses – was the support of a particular priest to become part of, and thereby augment, the clerical presence in the neighbourhood… guaranteeing communal profit and reciprocal benefit' for their souls from the prayerful gratitude of the parish.[39] Simon Roffey has also identified how chantry chapels were often connected visually with other altars in the church, through the use of squints, allowing the simultaneous celebration of the mass, and particularly the elevation of the host, to be co-ordinated between priests at different altars. Roffey argues that rather than privatising space within the church, such chantry chapels were 'networked into a web of communal piety where the masses celebrated at various altars interacted with each other', increasing the visual accessibility of the mass to the congregation by providing alternative focal points, while enriching the clergy and

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[38] Howard Colvin, 'The Origins of Chantries', *Journal of Medieval History* 26.2 (2000) pp. 163-73 (p.172).
[39] Clive Burgess, 'Chantries in the Parish, or "Through the Looking Glass"', *Journal of Medieval History* 26.2 (2000) pp. 100-129 (p. 106).

congregation's experience of the ritual.[40] Collegiate churches frequently functioned as parish churches whose congregation benefitted from the founder's investment in priests and church space, just as chantry chapels provided additional priests to those churches they were affiliated with, who could serve the parish community in many roles outside their role in celebrating commemorative masses. In the view of those founding a chantry, these communal benefits helped solicit prayers from their community by earning them the gratitude and remembrance of parishioners.

Chantry foundations, or inclusion on the bederoll, were often complemented by a second commemorative liturgical observance, known variously as the obit, anniversary, or year's mind.[41] This was an annual, two-day-long repetition of the liturgy and other rituals associated with the funeral of the deceased, usually on the anniversary of the funeral. Badham observes that many testators devoted particularly large sums to pay for their obit, and that in many cases such spending involved disbursements of food and alms as well as liturgical commemoration.[42] The liturgy itself was very close to that of the funeral: the Vespers of the Dead (frequently called the 'Placebo' for the first word of the service), the Matins and Lauds of the Dead (likewise collectively called the 'Dirige') and a Requiem Mass. In liturgical terms this was numerically insignificant compared to the regular masses supplied by a chantry, but the role of the obit was focused on eliciting remembrance and prayers from the deceased's community rather than

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[40] Simon Roffey, 'Constructing a Vision of Salvation: Chantries and the Social Dimension of Religious Experience in the Medieval Parish Church', *Archaeological Journal*, 163.1 (2006), pp. 122-146, (p. 139).
[41] Indeed, wills sometimes conflate the funds set aside to secure these: the will of Roger Aleyn (proofed in 1520) lays aside six sheep to pay for both his (presumably reasonably modest) obit and inclusion on the bederoll for forty years; *Bedfordshire Wills, 1484-1533,* ed. by Patricia L. Bell (Bedford: Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, 1997), p.14.
[42] Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 150-2.

maximising liturgical commemoration. As Burgess notes, 'the chantry exploited the Mass while the anniversary was… a public statement of an individual's need for intercession'.[43] The church's hearse and pall would be laid out, providing a physical focal point to substitute for the body of the deceased in the minds of participants. Funerals were typically accompanied by bell-ringing, which Badham notes was intended to act 'as a prompt for prayer to all who heard it', and this too was repeated during the obit. Indeed Burgess notes that among obits recorded at All Souls' Bristol 'the generosity of the otherwise lowly parish clerk's remuneration for bell-ringing is striking' with one especially elaborate obit (that of the Spicers), paying the clerk 2s for bellringing where each assisting priest was to be paid 4d.[44] The evident value placed upon bell-ringing would, in part, reflect the reach it had in spreading a pious reminder of the deceased's need for intercession beyond the walls of the church. The obit, more than the chantry, sought to fix the deceased within the memory of their community in as broad a sense as possible.

The social nature of commemoration across a broad swathe of the community is perhaps most obvious in the incorporation of charitable almsgiving to the poor. This almsgiving had two imagined effects on a soul's stay in purgatory. The merit accrued through alms given in the name of a dead person would lessen their suffering directly, while recipients of the alms would pray for their benefactor's soul, thereby further lightening their torment. While the expectation of prayers in return for alms is often left unspecified, some testators stipulated that alms were contingent on prayers. John

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[43] Clive Burgess, 'A service for the dead: the form and function of the Anniversary in late medieval Bristol', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 105 (1987), pp. 183-211 (p. 191)
[44] Burgess, 'A service for the dead', p. 188.

Chelmswyk (d. 1418) bequeathed 20s to the prisoners of Ludgate 'to pray for my soule & for de soules a-forsaide', that the phrasing is identical to the bequest made to four orders of London friars for prayers in the previous item suggests Chelmswyk conceived of this almsgiving principally as payment for the prisoners' prayers.[45]

The principal framework for conceptualising charity towards the poor in medieval England, which commemorative almsgiving overwhelmingly reflected, was the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy, a broad categorisation of charitable deeds with Biblical precedent:

1. Feeding the hungry

2. Giving water to the thirsty

3. Clothing the naked

4. Sheltering the homeless

5. Visiting the sick

6. Visiting prisoners

7. Burying the dead

The first six derive directly from Matthew 25:34-46, while the burial of the dead, taken from the Book of Tobit 1:20, was incorporated to raise the number of Works to seven, in line with Biblical numerology.[46] This framework was well known to the laity, being listed in Archbishop John Peckham's 1281 Lambeth Constitutions among the essential elements of lay religious instruction in the Province of Canterbury; a development

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[45] *The Fifty Earliest English Wills*, p. 31.
[46] Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, p. 41.

mirrored in Archbishop Thoresby's 1357 instructions for the Province of York.[47] Artistic

depictions of the Seven Works of Mercy were likewise common across England, with

around 40 examples of wall-paintings known from England between the late thirteenth

and early sixteenth centuries, and subject was well-trodden in vernacular prose and

verse, like this carol on the subject from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 302:[48]

> Fede the hungeré; the thirsté gif drenke;
>
> Clothe the nakid, as Y youe say;
>
> Vesid the pore in presun lyyng;
>
> Beré the ded, now I thee pray —
>
> > I cownsel thee.
>
> Wele is him and wele schal be,
>
> That doth the Seven Werkis of Mercé.[49]

This popular element of practical theology was applicable to all members of the Church,

and consequently underpinned much of the almsgiving organised in commemorative

contexts. The rejoinders to feed the hungry and clothe the naked were particularly

commonly followed in commemorative contexts. Such almsgiving was especially

common at funerals, which provided a practical occasion for such distribution, and as

Duffy notes 'doles to the poor in the form of money, clothing, or bread and beer became

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[47] David Griffith, 'The Seven Works of Mercy in the Parish Church: the Development of a Vernacular Tradition', in *Patrons and Professionals in the Middle Ages,* ed. by Paul Binski and Elizabeth A. New (Donington: Shaunt Tyas, 2012), pp. 292-315, (pp. 293-4).
[48] Griffith, 'The Seven Works of Mercy in the Parish Church', pp. 309-315 provides a catalogue of known painted representations of the Works of Mercy in English and Welsh churches.
[49] John Audelay, 'Carol 3: Seven Works of Mercy' in *Poems and Carols (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302),* ed. by Susanna Greer Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), pp.177-178, ll.1-7.

an invariable feature of the burials of all but the most destitute'.[50] Testators also made

bequests of food to be distributed outside the funeral dole itself; Margery Holme (will

proved 1510), a vowess of Palholme in Holderness, distributed 'to every poor house

*with*in my parish, brede, ale, and flesh to the valour of a penny' seven days after her

funeral.[51] Gifts of clothing frequently appear in wills in relation to the bedesmen, poor

men who would stand vigil during the funeral or obit with lit torches, who were often

provided clothes for the duty, as well as food and drink: the funeral of Thomas Savage

(d. 1507), Archbishop of York, provided the 'xiij poor men that watched my lorde's body

xij dais and xij neghtes, and did bere torches, every of thaym at ii d. the day, a gowne,

mete and drink'.[52] While alms for the poor were sometimes distributed as money, as in

the funeral of Robert Hirste of Leeds (will written 1498), who bequeathed 1d to 'every

man, woman and childe [at my *Dirige* and *Messe of Requiem]* like wise being that er

poore and will receive it, to pray for my soule', a preference for distributing alms as food

both honoured the first corporal work of mercy and avoided any anxiety that the alms

might be misused.[53] Monumental inscriptions often sought to remind the living of

testators' charity and in a few cases representations of charity recipients, depicted as

the old and infirm, were incorporated into tombs. The tomb of Margaret Seymour, Lady

Wadham (d. 1520) at Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight, depicts a kneeling Margaret flanked by

six infirm charity recipients, the outer two on crutches, potentially referencing her

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[50] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 359.
[51] *Testamenta Eboracensia: A Selection of Wills from the Registry at York,* Vol. 4, ed. by James Raine and John William Clay (Durham: Andrews & Co. for the Surtees Society, 1869)*,* p. 218 (footnote)
[52] *Testamenta Eboracensia,* p. 322.
[53] *Testamenta Eboracensia,* p. 161. Concerns that funeral doles distributed indiscriminately would be misused by people who were not virtuous or poor, or who would not repay the testator with prayers, are voiced by some testators, who chose alternative means to distribute alms. See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 362-6.

foundation of a hospital; the tomb of Oliver Oglander (d. 1536) at nearby Brading features two elderly charity recipients leaning on canes (see Figures 3 & 4).[54] The geographical and temporal proximity of the tombs may suggest a commemorative tradition local to the Isle of Wight, but both Wadham and Oglander clearly sought to foreground their charity within communal memory.

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[54] William Page, 'Parishes: Carisbrooke', in *A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 5*, ed. William Page (London, 1912), *British History Online* https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/hants/vol5/pp221-235 [accessed 6 September 2024].

Fig. 3. Tomb of Margaret Seymour, Lady Wadham (d.1520), Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight

Fig. 4. Tomb of Oliver Oglander (d. 1536), Brading, Isle of Wight

The most obvious and memorable form of commemorative activity to the modern reader is memorial art, encompassing not only tomb monuments, slabs and monumental brasses, but also stained glass windows and other inscriptions, images and symbols bearing the names of donors and patrons. The commissioning of such objects might accrue some spiritual merit if they were gifts which added beauty or utility to the church environment, but their principal purpose was to remind the living of the dead person and in so doing to solicit the church community to remember them in their prayers. Tombs served this function in various ways: in many cases they were the focal location for chantries and served as a stand-in for the hearse during obits. Small figures on tomb chests, or at the head and feet of the deceased (commonly referred to with the contemporary term 'weepers'), were often taken to represent family members and associates and were used as prompts to pray for them, as in the case of Elizabeth de Montfort (d. 1354) at St. Frideswide, Oxford, whose weepers Anne McGee Morganstern has identified as precisely the beneficiaries of her chantry foundation there (See Figure 5).[55] Some individuals arranged multiple monuments in various locations to which they were connected, in the hope of expanding the social community in which they were commemorated. Ralph Hamsterley (1518), who was Master of University College, Oxford 1509-1518, arranged brasses there, as well as at the Oxford colleges of Durham and Queen's, and at the church of Oddington, Oxfordshire, where he was rector, ultimately being buried at Merton College, where he was a fellow, under a joint monument which he may have commissioned or overseen.

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[55] Anne McGee Morgenstern, 'The tomb as prompter for the chantry: four examples from Late Medieval England', *Memory and the Medieval Tomb* ed.by Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 81-98, (pp. 82-4).

Fig. 5. Weepers on the tomb of Elizabeth de Montfort, Lady Montacute (d. 1354), St. Frideswide's Church, Oxford

Inscriptions on these monuments explicitly or implicitly requested the prayers of the living. A typical example would be the Latin inscription on the funerary brass of Richard de Campsale (d. c.1350-60) at Merton College, Oxford: 'Orate pro anima magistri Richardi de Camsale Sacre Pagine Professor cuius corpus hic iacet tumulatum' ('Pray for the soul of Master Richard de Camsale, Professor of Holy Writ, whose body lies buried here'), though a large number of such inscriptions, especially in parish churches, were in the vernacular.[56] David Griffith notes that 'from the mid-fifteenth century English is increasingly used to make personalised declarations to the viewer, often in conjunction with a marginal inscription in Latin recording the obituary details or with

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[56] Sally Badham and Sophie Oosterwijk, '"C'est Endenture Fait Parentre": English Tomb Contracts of the Long Fourteenth Century', in *Monumental Industry: The Production of Tomb Monuments in England and Wales in the Long Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Sally Badham and Sophie Oosterwijk (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 187-236 (p. 188).

other Latin scriptural or para-liturgical texts', incorporating the vernacular to increase the accessibility and immediacy of inscriptions which sought to directly appeal to the reader on the deceased's behalf.[57] Some used such inscriptions to recall their donations to the church or commemorative foundations they had endowed. The lost inscription of the monument of Avery Cornborough (d.1480) at Romford, Essex, recorded the exact endowments of his chantry, obit, and bede-roll; a list of the additional duties (including regular preaching at other nearby churches) and terms of election for his chantry priest; a notice as to where copies of the relevant documents were to be kept, and a prayer for his soul.[58] Such inscriptions might seek to solicit prayer rhetorically, through the 'self-denigrating, contemptuous, penitential note… with emphasis on the material finality of death, on the unworthiness of the sinner, and on the transience of earthly wealth and power' which Macolm Vale describes as particularly integral to late medieval aristocratic piety.[59] Moreover, many inscriptions are themselves prayers; as Griffith notes, prayer inscriptions like the formulaic 'Lady, mercy, Jhesu, help' are 'active verses, as much performative as commemorative' and 'each verse invites the viewer to look upon the tomb or commemoration of the deceased while he or she recites the prayer… fostering a shared sense of identity and activity' between the deceased and the reader.[60] Such monuments sought to perpetuate a continual engagement between the deceased and the congregation of the church in which the monument was erected.

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[57] David Griffith, 'English Commemorative Inscriptions: Some Literary Dimensions', in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Clive Burgess (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 251-270 (p. 260).
[58] J. Weever, *Ancient Funeral Monuments of Great-Britain, Ireland, and the Islands Adjacent* (London: Printed by Thomas Harper, 1631), pp. 648-9.
[59] Malcolm Vale, *Piety, Charity, and Literacy Among the Yorkshire Gentry, 1370-1480* (York: University of York, 1976), pp. 2-3.
[60] David Griffith, 'English Commemorative Inscriptions', p. 262.

Many objects donated for use within the church space could likewise be invested with commemorative meaning by patrons.[61] Beginning with the 1224 diocesan statutes of Winchester, the English church placed responsibility for maintaining the church nave on the laity. While Carol Davidson Cragoe has argued that such 'new arrangements were an enhancement of older structures rather than something wholly new' and that 'parishioners had always had financial and administrative involvement in parish church maintenance', the expectations for lay patronage of the nave contributed to a major expansion of lay patronage of church material and fittings.[62] The scope and variety of such gifts is too great to be recounted here but the case of hearse-cloths and palls, tied intimately to the commemorative practice of the funeral, serves as an illustrative example. The Bristol widow Alice Chestre provided 'a hearse cloth of black worsted with letters of gold of H & C [for her husband, Henry Chestre] & A & C [for herself] and a scripture in gold, *Orate pro animabus Henrici Chestre et Alicie uxoris eius*'.[63] This item, emblazoned with the Chestre's initials and a request for prayer, would have been used not only for Alice's funeral and the Chestres' obits, but also at the funerals and obits of other parishioners. Such an object ensured that the memory of the Chestres would be continuously incorporated into the parish's rituals of commemoration and mourning, reincorporating them into the social behaviour of the parish. This could be achieved over a larger social network, given the means. As part of his extended funeral procession from London to Walsingham, Sir Bartholomew Burghersh (d. 1369) arranged

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[61] For thorough survey of the immense variety of commemorative donations to parish church furnishings and fittings, see Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 65-134.

[62] Carol Davidson Cragoe, 'Belief and Patronage in the English Parish before 1300: Some Evidence from Roods', *Architectural History,* 448 (2005), pp. 21-48 (pp. 39-40).

[63] Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls,* p. 94.

to have a pall bearing the Burghersh arms donated to every church in which his body lay overnight while en route.[64] His gift attempted to fix the event of his funeral procession into the communal memory, incorporating his commemoration into the church's day-to-day funerary and commemorative rites.

It is clear, from this huge range of commemorative activity, that commemoration sought to ensure the place of the dead in a shared community of the living. Even practices that privatised commemoration and church space, such as chantry chapels and colleges, sought to contribute to and create communities who would remember their dead benefactors. Testators clearly believed in the especial power of soul masses to release the soul from purgatory, but they believed too in the power of communal memory and sought to firmly position themselves and their loved ones within it, often by asserting their continued presence in communities and relationship networks which they had been part of in life. It was within these same communal and interpersonal networks that literary ghosts were believed to move, and it is to these networks which we now turn.

The requirement to pray for the souls of the dead both depended upon and inculcated a worldview in which both the living and the dead were conceptualised as being part of a shared community of the Christian faithful, and that as such they continued to bear social obligations towards one another. One popular metaphorical depiction of this shared community was the ship of the faithful, where the cosmological distinction between heaven, purgatory, and earth was merged with the framework of a tripartite

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[64] Nicholas Harris, *Testamenta Vetusta: being illustrations from wills, of manners, customs, &c. as well as of the descents and possessions of many distinguished families*, Vol. 1 (London: Nichols and Son, 1826) p. 77.

Christian community as crewmembers on three decks of a ship: the Church Triumphant, comprising those in heaven; the Church Suffering, comprising those in purgatory; and the Church Militant, comprising the Christians on earth.[65] The dead and living were part of the same Christian community moving towards God, and it was therefore necessary and proper that they assist one another. However, although all members of Christian society were charged with a responsibility to pray for the souls of all the Christian dead, the commemorative complex of the later Middle Ages nonetheless depended upon the belief that prayers which were said for specific persons were especially effective at relieving the suffering of those named souls. This was a bedrock assumption underlying both commemorative liturgical apparatuses like chantries, bede-rolls, and lists of benefactors, as well as non-liturgical commemorative strategies that sought to preserve the names of the dead and attract prayers from parishioners for them. A soul in purgatory was most aided by those prayers that were directed especially towards their release.

As a result, an essential tension existed within all late medieval commemorative activity. Though all Christians were enjoined to pray for the souls of all the Christian dead, and the liturgy incorporated such prayers, the enormous elaboration of commemorative activity in the late medieval period was, in practice, often directed towards specific individuals along social lines other than the universal shared membership of the Christian community. While the desire to increase the network of individuals obliged or invested to pray for the deceased was a substantial element underscoring the charitable activity seen in English wills, there was a general expectation that one's firmest hope for

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[65] Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls,* p. 18.

intercessory prayer lay in one's closest associates. As Eamon Duffy puts it, although commemoration was by no means limited to kinship unions, ''if one's kin do not remember, no one else could be expected to do so'.[66] This presumption was in large part practical: relatives were likely to oversee the execution of a will and to have discussed the commemorative desires of the deceased at length beforehand, and so commemorative activity tended to flow along kinship lines. Clive Burgess points out that in many cases these familial discussions abnegated the need for extensive descriptions of commemoration and charity in many wills.[67]

It was one's kin and close friends who were likely to feel most keenly the desire to aid one's soul in purgatory, for emotional reasons of love, grief, indebtedness and anxiety tied up in relationships held in life rather than a purely spiritual pity towards all dead souls. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, commented upon this tendency in a sermon of 1520 where he enumerates the reasons to pray for the souls in purgatory. First, he notes that the dead in purgatory are the spiritual brethren of the living, and that this resemblance should provoke pity in us:

> 'we haue all one father, almighty god, the which made vs & them… They
> be his reasonable creatures and children as we be, and our spyrytuall bretheren
> in hym… Wherfore when there is so great a lykenes betwene vs and them, and
> in so many qualyties, this shold moue & styre vs greatly to haue some tender
> compassion vpon them. We may se the vnreasonable creatures how soon they
> be moued to haue ruthe, pytie, & compassion of ther resemblaunce, of suche as

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[66] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars,* p. 306.
[67] Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls*, pp. 84-5.

be lyke vnto them in nature onely… how moche rather sholde we (beynge reasonable creatures) be moue to haue pytye & styred to take compassyon of the blessed soules which nat onely be lyke vs in nature, but also by soo many spyrytalll bondes be Joyned vnto vs.[68]

Fisher here constructs an image of commemorative prayer as an obligation both universal and familial: that all Christians, being reasoning creatures, should understand each other as spiritual siblings. However, in moving on to his second consideration Fisher admits that he expects the laity to care more for the suffering of their own family and friends than the abstractly conceived multitude of souls belonging to their Christian brethren:

The seconde consideracyon, & that which peraduenture ye wyll the more regarde, is this. Euery one of vs hath som of his frendes and kynsfolke there / eyther father or mother / syster or brother, neuew or nece, or some of his nygh acquayntaunce. There is non here, but he hath there sum of his kynrede, or som of his alyaunce, or som of his frendes to whom he had in this worlde here tofore som fauour and frendeshyp. And whan is this frendeshyp moste to be shewyd, but whan his frende is in greate dystresse? […] Now therfore yf our frendeshyp be a trew frendshyp and nat fayned nor simulate… now let vs do lyke frendes, now let vs study to releue them by our prayers and almose dedes / now let vs be

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[68] John Fisher, *Here after ensueth two fruytfull sermons, made [and] compiled by the right Reuerende father in god Iohn Fyssher, Doctour of Dyuynyte and Bysshop of Rochester* (London: Printed by W. Rastell, 1532), pp. 13-14.

louyng vnto them as we pretentyd loue before vnto theym whyles they were conuersaunt with vs in this worlde here.[69]

This is a very different vision of how the dead might be incorporated into the Christian social body, one limited to temporal experience even as Fisher leverages it for persuasive emotional effect. Rather than a universal Christian brotherhood, the social world of purgatory is being treated as an extension of the world of the living, with the preferences of the living towards their family and friends preserved. Commemorative prayer becomes a process by which the laity fulfils the social obligations of friendship. While one might engage in friendship with the living out of pleasurable or material self-interest, fulfilling such relationships in death through commemorative prayer demonstrated that they were true friendships built on an altruistic love. Conversely, failure to pray for a dead friend would reveal the relationship as merely 'fayned' or 'simulate'. A relationship with a dead person invokes both positive and negative incentives to pray for their soul: both to relieve the soul of a loved one, and also to avoid debasing and dishonouring the relationship shared in life.

While Fisher's purpose is to persuade his audience of the virtue of prayer for all souls in purgatory, his admission that that audience is more responsive to the plight of dead friends and kinsmen is a profound one. It is this view of commemorative prayer, as operating through pre-existing social channels, that undergirded much commemorative activity and is expressed in ghost narratives. With the exception of the vision narratives discussed in Chapter Four, which present a monastic outlook which focuses on the

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[69] John Fisher, *Here after ensueth two fruytfull sermons*, p. 15.

commemorative activity of the religious, purgatorial narratives generally validate and celebrate the capacity of commemorative prayer to aid one's family and friends. In doing so, they respond to the lay desire to use commemoration to honour these relationships, and to imbue them with spiritual meaning.

The types of relationships through which commemorative activity occurred, and thus the types of relationships with which ghost narratives concerned themselves, were many and varied. Such evidence can be derived from wills, monuments, and documentary records of liturgical foundations, but these sources can provide only limited windows into the commemorative process and leave out much relevant information. Gaps in the surviving corpus make it difficult to form hard conclusions about exactly which types of relationships most typically spurred commemorative activity in specific times and places.[70] However, it is clear that family members, especially spouses and parents, were most commonly commemorated. Jennifer Ward, looking at the aristocracy, notes that 'Family commemoration was the main priority, especially for oneself and one's spouse' and that 'commemorations point to the importance of small family groups, and concentrate on present members rather than the remote past.'[71] The purpose of this model of familial commemoration, prioritising spouses and parents, was in part to affirm a family's view of itself and its history. Monuments helped to shape a gentry family's

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[70] For overviews of the difficulty of using testamentary evidence in this regard, see Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 1-6; and Burgess, *Right Ordering of Souls,* pp. 59-82.

[71] Jennifer Ward, 'Who to Commemorate and Why? The Commemoration of the Nobility in Eastern England in the Fourteenth Century', in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England* ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Clive Burgess (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), pp. 104-116, (p. 112).

self-identity by 'giving physical expression to their ancestral worth – in other words, to

their lineage' and to 'a family's connection with a manor, locality, or estate'.[72]

Tomb monuments frequently depict the deceased alongside their spouse whether they

were both buried there or not, a familiar arrangement known as a double tomb. Men

who had remarried might be depicted with their multiple wives, and the inverse was true

for a small number of women, as in the exceptional case of Margaret Holland (d. 1439),

whose chapel at Canterbury Cathedral depicts her flanked by her husbands John

Beaufort, the Earl of Somerset, and Thomas Lancaster, the Duke of Clarence, whose

bodies Margaret had transferred to Canterbury to lie with her (See Figure 6).[73] A

popular artistic scheme supplemented figures of the married couple with smaller figures

representing their children, either beneath the feet of the couple in brasses or as small

'weepers' on the sides of the tomb chest. This provided a visual index of the family unit,

often arranged by gender with the daughters grouped under the wife and son under the

husband, as in the brass of John (d. 1508) and Agnes (d. 1512) at Cley-next-the-Sea,

Norfolk, which also identifies each child by name (See Figure 7). In cases where

children are shown kneeling or with hands in prayer these monuments can be viewed

as images of the children praying for their parents and vice-versa. Commemoration

might expand to encompass a very wide family network even in artworks where space

was limited: William Horne (d. 1494) requested that a now-lost window in the parish

church of his hometown included images of forty people, including his wife, children

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[72] Nigel Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 131.
[73] The peculiar social position of the Holland monument is discussed in Jessica Barker, *Stone Fidelity: Marriage and Emotion in Medieval Tomb Sculpture* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020), pp. 175-200.

Fig. 6. Tomb of Margaret Holland (d. 1439), John Beaufort, Earl of Somerset (d.1410) and Thomas Lancaster, Duke of Clarence (d. 1421) at Canterbury Cathedral

Fig. 7. Brass of John (d. 1508) and Agnes Symondes (d. 1512), Cley-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, below which their eight children are shown as weepers.

parents, and all 23 of his siblings.[74] In general, however, the commemoration of children, siblings and more distant relations is rarer than the commemoration of parents and spouses; accordingly, many ghost narratives relate to the hauntings of widows and adult children by their suffering parents and husbands.[75]

The commemoration by parents of deceased children deserves some special attention here as the emotional place of young children within medieval families has been a subject of some scholarly dispute. In the mid-twentieth century, a number of scholars followed the influential position of Philippe Ariès, who suggested that medieval and early modern parents, pressured by the high child mortality rate of their societies, experienced only minimal emotional connections with their young children and were accordingly largely unconcerned with child death.[76] Ariès' view has been increasingly disputed, and it is now well-established that medieval and early modern parents 'loved their children, and that funerary and commemoration practices marking that love were widespread across time and place.'[77] Deceased children frequently appeared alongside living siblings as weepers, and individual monuments to deceased infants do survive from medieval England, often depicting them in their swaddling clothes, such as the brass of the baby John Eyre (d. 1523) at Knipton, Leicestershire. In her survey of such monuments, Sophie Oosterwijk notes that in some cases 'as late as the seventeenth

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[74] R. Marks, *Studies in the Art and Imagery of the Middle Ages* (London: Pindar Press, 2013), p. 217.
[75] The peculiar paucity of narratives about the ghosts of wives haunting their husbands will be discussed in Chapter 2.
[76] See Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Live*, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962). Barbara Kellum, following Aries, went so far as to argue that infanticide of unwanted children was commonplace and tacitly permitted by civic and church authorities. Barbara A. Kellum, 'Infanticide in England in the Later Middle Ages', *Childhood Quarterly* 1.1 (1974), pp. 367-388.
[77] Karen Barclay and Kimberley Reynolds, 'Small Graves: Histories of Childhood, Death and Emotion' in *Death, Emotion and Childhood in Premodern Europe*, ed. by Katie Barclay, Kimberley Reynolds, and Ciara Rawnsley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1-24 (p. 3).

century, monuments often depict very young children looking more like elegantly dressed adults', meaning that, where unidentified, such memorials to children would be disguised to posterity.[78] Women who died in childbirth are sometimes depicted holding their children: such is the case of Anne a Wode, who died in childbirth in 1512 and is shown holding her newborn twins in her arms in her brass at Blickling, Norfolk (See Figure 8).[79] While this thesis will not be devoting time to such texts, ghost narratives where parents encountered their deceased children also existed in medieval England. The eleventh Latin ghost narrative recorded in London, British Library, MS Royal 15. A.

Fig. 8. - Brass of Anne a Wode (d. 1512), Blickling, Norfolk

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[78] Sophie Oosterwijk, 'Chrysoms, Shrouds, and Infants on English Tomb Monuments: A Question of Terminology?', *Church Monuments* 15 (2000), pp. 44-64 (p. 58-9).
[79] Oosterwijk, 'Chrysoms, Shrouds and Infants', pp. 44-5.

xx concerns one Richard Rowntree of Cleveland, who encounters the ghost of a baby who declares himself to be Richard's unbaptised and nameless newborn son; Richard gives him a name and the child is able to stand and walk away, emphasising the importance of acknowledgement and incorporation of dead infants into the family.[80] The poem *Pearl* contains a maiden who is implied to be spirit of the narrator's deceased two-year-old daughter, and while its extremely idiosyncratic nature puts it outside the scope of the present study it remains a powerfully moving portrait of parental grief.[81] That the *Pearl*-maiden appears to be in heaven may indicate one reason why infants were not more heavily featured in purgatorial commemorative practice: provided they were baptised, those who died very young were unlikely to have committed many of the sins for which adults sought expiation.

The commemoration of individuals outside the family still occurred quite frequently, though the paucity of records often makes it difficult to establish exactly what the nature of some of these relationships were. John Verney of Fairfield, Somerset asked to establish an obit at Buckland convent 'to pray for my soule, the soule of Kateryn late my wif, my fader and moder soules, my children's souls, my good frendes souls and all cristen soules' but also asked for a joint obit for 'John Gambonde, Robert Gambonde, John Worston, Richard Sentclere, Isabell and Blanche'.[82] These may have been friends and associates whose wills he had not fully executed at the time of his death, a

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[80] M.R. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories', *The English Historical Review* 37.147 (1922), pp. 413-422 (p. 421).

[81] While this is not explicitly stated in the text, it is the mainstream scholarly consensus, based on implicit references in the text. See Andrew Malcolm and Ronald Waldron, 'Introduction' in *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, ed. Andrew Malcolm and Ronald Waldron, 5th edn. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), pp. 14-15.

[82] *Somerset Medieval Wills (Second Series) 1501-1530*, ed. by F.W. Weaver (London: Harrison and Sons for the Somerset Record Society, 1887), pp. 102-4.

common occurrence when legal or financial difficulties, sheer misfortune, or a lack of diligence frustrated the completion of a commemorative foundation. The chantry foundation requested by London vintner John de Oxenford (d. 1342) took 104 years to set up, by which time his executors had long since died and passed the responsibility on in their own wills.[83] Non-familial commemoration might also suggest a guilty conscience. The will of John Baret (d.1467) requests a year-long chantry for the souls of all those he had cheated or meddled with, and Michael Rimmer has argued that his repeated concern for the commemoration of one Edmund Tabour relates to Baret having fraudulently expropriated his assets while executing his will.[84] On occasion, such non-familial relationships might be memorialised through monuments: a lost double brass at Merton College depicts Thomas Harper (d.1508) and Ralph Hamsterley (d.1518), both college fellows, with Hamsterley ultimately being buried at the site.[85]

Trends in non-familial commemoration might reflect social distinctions. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3, the mercantile class had a greater tendency to commemorate friends and business associates, no doubt in part because they appear to have struggled to produce male heirs, for reasons that are unclear.[86] At the same

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[83] Christian Steer, 'For quicke and dead memorie masses: Merchant piety in late medieval London', in *Medieval Merchants and Money: Essays in Honour of James L. Bolton*, ed. by Martin Allen and Matthew Davies (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2016), pp. 71-92 (pp. 78-9).

[84] Michael Rimmer, 'Silver and Guilt: The Cadaver Tomb of John Baret at Bury St. Edmunds', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 172.1 (2019), pp. 131-154 (pp. 143-6). Baret's will is printed in *Wills and Inventories from the Registers of the Commissary of Bury St. Edmunds and the Archdeacon of Sudbury*, ed. by Samuel Tymms (London: Camden Society, 1850), pp. 15-44.

[85] Though Harper is given precedence in the inscription, he was not buried there, and the monument was clearly completed after Harper's death given the inscription refers to Hamsterley's election as Master of University College in 1509. George C. Brodrick, *Memorials of Merton College: With Biographical Notices of the Wardens and Fellows* (Oxford: Clarendon Press for the Oxford Historical Society, 1885), pp. 162, 240; Anthony à Wood and John Gutch, *The History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls in the University of Oxford* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1886), pp. 26.

[86] See Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 78-80.

time, however, merchants, along with many other trades, regularly engaged in systems

of apprenticeship, where an apprentice was taken into their master's household, thus

potentially generating strong non-familial ties between master and apprentice.

Aristocrats, especially those who had fought in the Hundred Year's War, also

sometimes commemorated their lords or their comrades in arms.[87] Various

organisations bound people together towards communal commemoration, most

obviously the religious guilds and fraternities that existed in many parishes. These

guilds, dedicated to saints, doctrinal truths and solemnities the Trinity, comprised paying

members who collaborated to provide commemorative support to one another: as

Caroline M. Barron notes, 'Parish fraternities, whatever else they may have been, were

essentially communal chantries', and her study of the London fraternities argues that

they developed in response to private chantry foundations to make such a

commemorative foundation affordable to the less wealthy.[88] The ordinances of the Guild

of the Corpus Christi at St. Michael-on-the-Hill, Lincoln, lay out the guild's participation

in the funeral rites:

> On the death of a brother or sister within the city, not only shall the Dean bring
>
> the four wax lights which are called "soulcandels," and fulfil all other usual
>
> ceremonies, but the banner of the gild shall be brought to the house of the dead,
>
> and there openly shown, that men may know that the dead was a brother or

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[87] Ward, 'Who to Commemorate and Why?', pp. 112-3.
[88] Caroline M. Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London' in *Medieval London: The Collected Papers of Caroline M. Barron*, ed. by Martha Carlin and Joel T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), pp. 135-163 (p. 143).

sister of the gild; and this banner shall be carried, with a great torch burning, from the house of the dead, before the body, to the church.[89]

Beyond contributions of this kind, an important aspect of guild membership was the requirement that members attend the funerals of their brethren. In the towns and cities where they were especially strong, guilds were among the most important social institutions through which communal commemoration occurred. In practice, however, successful guilds also took on many other social functions. As Sally Badham notes, 'Entry provided access to an elite social network within the local community, and consequently the opportunity to forge bonds with other members, especially through the guild's meetings, feasts, and other events', and in doing so provided business opportunities to members.[90] In this sense the religious guilds partly resembled the trade guilds, which themselves featured commemorative components (as will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3). Barron notes that prior to the fifteenth century it is difficult to fully distinguish parish religious guilds from trade guilds, and that the latter often developed out of the former in urban parishes where a given trade was well-represented.[91] Some guilds and confraternities were small, local organisations, but others spread over a large swathe of the country and commanded huge memberships and incomes. The guild of St. Mary at St. Botolph's Church, Boston, Lincolnshire became the most prominent religious guild in the country by the 1520s due to the exceptionally large indulgences which it received from Rome: R.N. Swanson notes that

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[89] *English gilds: the original ordinances of more than one hundred early English gilds*, ed. by Toulmin Smith, Early English Text Society, Original Series 40 (London: Trübner, 1870), p. 178.
[90] Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, p. 164.
[91] Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', 136.

it raised £1,550 in indulgence receipts at its height in 1521-1522, more than the total income of the See of Salisbury, and estimates that it had at least 8,000 members.[92] Religious guilds, more than any other lay institution, demonstrate the extent to which a concern for commemorative prayer shaped social ties and structures in late medieval England. These religious guilds, dedicated to supporting the dead in purgatory through prayer, became integral parts of their local social networks.

The medieval ghost story responded energetically to this huge cultural edifice of commemorative practices, and purgatory and commemoration represent a major theme within medieval European ghost narratives. The corpus of European narratives depicting encounters with the spirits of the dead is extremely large and varied, and while excellent overviews of this large and disparate corpus exist, chief among them Jean-Claude Schmitt's *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, the sheer scope of the subject obscures the ways in which specific tropes and sub-genres of ghost narrative developed and were applied to different ends by various writers for various audiences.[93] This thesis identifies one sub-category of Middle English ghost narrative and assesses how this specific type of narrative addressed the task of 'socialising the dead'. It is, in essence, an examination of the social life of a trope: how that trope circulated in late medieval English society and was appropriated to serve the emotional needs of a wide variety of different groups by affirming their developing attitudes towards the social and spiritual purposes of commemoration.

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[92] R.N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 375-6, 440-1.

[93] Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. by Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Narratives of ghostly visitations were not exclusively deployed in relation to matters of commemoration, or indeed to purgatory. Many focus on spirits who have returned from hell. These damned ghosts held a particular interest for the writers of exempla, short didactic narratives intended for use in preaching, because a story about a damned spirit could be redeployed to demonstrate the dangers of whatever sin the writer sought to warn against. Such narratives typically say little about commemoration, simply because the damned are beyond the aid of prayer. In an exception that proves the rule, the fifteenth-century poem *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* features a damned ghost who begs his devoted son not to pray for him:

> Sone, if every gras were a preste
>
> That growys upon Godys grounde
>
> Of this peyn that thou me seyste
>
> Canne never make me unbounde.
>
> Sone, thou be a preste, I wote wele.
>
> Ons or this dey seven yere,
>
> At Masse at matins, ne at mele
>
> Thou take me never in thi prayer…
>
> …For ever the more thou prayst for me,
>
> My peynes shal be more and more.'[94]

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[94] 'The Adulterous Falmouth Squire', in *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed by George Shuffelton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), pp. 351-5, ll. 120-133.

Just as those in hell are beyond redemption, *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* presents the damned as beyond any reintegration into the social community, their bonds to the living useless and requiring severance. Instead, narratives involving spirits from hell usually appear to warn the living against the sins that damned them. This sin is frequently adultery, as is the case in both *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* and a wide variety of exempla featuring the damned spirits of adulterous mothers, which have been surveyed by David N. Klausner.[95] It makes thematic sense that stories of damned spirits appearing to their loved ones would focus on sins like adultery that disrupt family relationships, so that the ultimate alienation of the soul from society in damnation echoes the anti-social nature of the sin committed.

Similarly infernal in aspect are the numerous stories reported in medieval chronicles regarding encounters with the revenants of sinners who arise after death to commit acts of disruptive violence and to spread disease. Four examples of this type of story are described in William of Newburgh's *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, in which corpses of great sinners attack their relatives, neighbours, and former employers, often accompanied by packs of dogs.[96] Stephen Gordon typifies these narratives according to the following features:

> (a) living and dying in a manner that contradicted the prevailing social norms of the community condemned the sinner's corpse to walk after death;

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[95] David N. Klausner, 'Exempla and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972), pp. 307-325.
[96] William of Newburgh, 'Historia Rerum Anglicarum' in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I,* 2 vols, vol. 2, ed. by Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeleys, 1856), pp. 474-482.

(b)   the monstrous and destabilising nature of the revenant was made

manifest through corrupted air and pestilential vapours;

(c)   only a dramatic method of assuagement could contain the corpse and

bring order to the world once more.[97]

Such 'dramatic methods of assuagement' might involve absolution or another

commemorative component – one of William's spectres is assuaged when St. Hugh of

Avalon places a charter of absolution in the man's tomb – but might as easily involve

the destruction of the body by dismemberment, cremation, and expulsion from sacred

ground.[98] Gordon argues these malefic ghosts are disruptive 'disordered beings'

contrary to natural law who 'may be reflective of social, environmental, and/or political

uncertainties', whose stories are deployed in order to mirror historical events which

disrupted the social fabric in the actions of anti-social revenants.[99] At their most

extreme, revenants are social disasters whose private sinfulness becomes a public

nuisance. Rather than be reincorporated into the social body through commemoration,

the living are driven to violently exclude them from their communities through acts of

corpse desecration, mirroring their exclusion from the Christian community as their

souls languish in hellfire for their sins.

Violent ghosts sometimes appear in an attempt to compel strangers into correcting a

sinful act they committed in life, implying that they are in purgatory and that their pains

will be reduced by such restitution. Several Latin ghost stories of this type are found in

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[97] Stephen Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters: Demons and the Restless Dead in Medieval England, c. 1050-1450* (London; New York: Routledge, 2020) pp. 112-3.
[98] William of Newburgh, 'Historia Rerum Anglicarum', p. 475.
[99] Stephen Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters*, p. 89.

British Library, MS Royal 15. A. xx, penned by an unknown monk of Byland Abbey in the early fifteen century, feature ghosts who violently accost strangers in order to obtain absolution. Story IX concerns a ghost who throws a stranger over a hedge to compel him to help the ghost receive absolution – the ghost observes that he would not have been driven to violence if the stranger had not ignored him, implying that the violence was prompted by a failure to honour basic obligations of courtesy and charity.[100] Jean-Claude Schmitt has characterised the Byland stories as highly unusual within the corpus of medieval European ghost narratives, and suggests that they likely derived from local oral tradition, with the anonymous monk 'writing an ethnological work before its time'.[101] The violence of these seemingly purgatorial ghosts, who behave in a hostile fashion despite seeking aid from the living, appears to be related to their social estrangement. Presumably, if they had friends and family on whose sympathies they could call, such ghosts would not need to engage in such menacing tactics to compel aid from strangers. The Byland monk's final story, concerning a ghost who fraudulently bestowed her husband's property on her brother, proves to be a cautionary tale about the neglect of familial bonds in death. Tom Johnson characterises the story as 'a parable with a set of complex but coherent messages about inheritance', including the priority of a woman's duties to her husband over her siblings, the inappropriateness of a wife

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[100] M.R. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories', p. 420. Several of the other stories similarly feature ghosts that engage in violence and threats to compel the living to aid them: Story II (pp. 415-8) features a ghost in the form of a burning crow which attacks a tailor and then threatens that his flesh and skin will fall off should he not seek absolution and masses for the ghost; Story VI (p. 419) features a deceased canon of Newburgh who assaults a man but is overpowered and conjured by his victim, whereupon the canon begs him to return property he stole and seek absolution for him from the prior. Stories III (p. 418) and VIII (p. 419) likewise feature ghosts which, while not violent, make a nuisance of themselves apparently to attract the notice and assistance of the living.

[101] Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, p. 147. Most of the narratives are explicitly located in Yorkshire, and many of the people involved are named – at least one of which, one Adam de Lond of Ampleforth, has been identified in the documentary record. See *The Cartulary of Byland Abbey,* ed. by Janet Burton, Surtees Society 208 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 2-3.

interfering in property matters, the moral right of heirs to their inheritance, and the capacity of divine justice to punish abuses of this kind which the law ignored.[102] While the ghost is helped by a stranger to amend her fraud, her brother refuses to return his stolen land to aid his sister, and is cursed to take her place in death as a result.[103] The ghost's appearance to a stranger foreshadows the disruption of family ties created by the cruel brother's hard-heartedness towards his sister.

The damned were permanently excluded from the Christian community, but the ghosts of those in heaven also posed difficult subjects for stories about the social reincorporation of the dead. Those in heaven were part of a community of saved, in perfect communion with God, which superseded the limited and transitory social networks that existed in their lives. This is reflected by the fact that many stories of purgatorial ghosts end immediately after the ghost confirms their admission into heaven. The spirits of the heavenly dead are, of course, frequently represented in medieval literature: appearing in visions, dreams, and apparitions forms a common category of miracles attributed to saints after their deaths.[104] Deceased saints appear in a number of the narratives to be discussed, especially vision texts, but they appear as agents of God's authority and mercy, as religious patrons, spiritual guides, rebukers of sin, and judges. Such saintly spirits are placed well outside the temporal social systems in which purgatorial ghosts and their living interlocutors are enmeshed, and thus generally lie outside the concerns of this thesis.

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[102] Tom Johnson, 'Byland Revisited, or, Spectres of Inheritance', *Journal of Medieval History* 48.4 (2022), pp. 439-456 (p. 451).
[103] M.R. James, 'Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories', p. 422.
[104] Robert Bartlett, *Why Can The Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 370-2.

Though the subject of apparitions and visions in hagiography is too broad to be surveyed here, three hagiographic ghost and revenant narratives merit further discussion. The first, *The Trental of Gregory*, is discussed in Chapter One. The others, *St. Erkenwald* and John Lydgate's *St. Austin at Compton*, depict saints encountering a miraculous talking corpse from the distant past and ritually reincorporating them into the Christian community before returning them to the grave.[105] In *St. Erkenwald* the incorrupt corpse of a virtuous pagan judge is miraculously baptised by Erkenwald's falling tear, while in *St. Austin at Compton* St. Augustine of Canterbury inadvertently rouses the revenant of a Roman Christian lord excommunicated for failure to pay tithes, and raises the man's parish priest to absolve him. Both texts speak clearly to questions of social integration, of who should be considered part of the Christian community and how the Church should wield its powers to embrace or exclude individuals. Jennifer Sisk has argued that both poems interrogate a disjunction between a 'religious wishfulness' through which the audience is invited to sympathize with a virtuous pagan and an excommunicate Christian decedent, and an 'orthodox sacramentalism' by which the saints alone are permitted to act on such sympathy, with the goal of 'stimulating readerly engagement with ideas about Christian salvation'.[106] This interplay between social sympathy and a clerical orthodoxy which seeks to constrain recurs across purgatorial petitioner narratives, and points towards the broader role the ghost

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[105] John Lydgate, 'St. Austin at Compton' in *Saints' Lives in Middle English Collections,* ed. by E. G. Whatley, Anne B. Thompson, and Robert K. Upchurch (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), pp. 224-237; 'St. Erkenwald' in *A Book of Middle English,* ed. by J.A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 221-234.

[106] Jennifer Sisk, 'Unauthorized Desire: Audience and Affect in 'St. Erkenwald' and Lydgate's "St. Austin at Compton"', *Religion and Literature* 46.1 (2014), pp. 1-23, (pp. 13, 16).

narratives had in constructing and interrogating ideas about the nature of community between living and dead in late medieval England.

If *St. Erkenwald* and *St. Austyn at Compton* are about the spiritual and social reintegration of long-dead ancestors into the contemporary Christian community, the texts with which this thesis is concerned are those ghost and vision narratives focused on the social reincorporation of the recently deceased through commemoration by the living members of their community. In these stories, the appearance of the undead is associated with what I call 'commemorative dysfunction'. This describes situations where the dead are not receiving sufficient commemorative prayers to alleviate their suffering in purgatory due to the negligence or ignorance of the living, and particularly those individuals – heirs, widows, executors, family members, friends – who bear a social responsibility to aid them. The reasons for this dysfunction are varied. The living may be greedy, uncharitable, lax, or simply too poor; the dead may have impiously neglected their commemoration, concealed their sin, or behaved in such a sinful fashion they were presumed damned. In each case the purpose of the ghost's appearance is to motivate the living to mend the dysfunction by engaging with the commemorative complex, especially liturgical commemoration. This allows the narrative to model the intended effects of commemorative prayer in alleviating the distress of the spirit suffering in purgatory.

Such stories also draw close association between the recognition and restoration of social bonds and the soul's release from purgatory. The commemorative dysfunction which precedes the ghost's appearance threatens to sever their ties to the social community of which they were a member in life, an alienation that mirrors the soul's

misery in purgatory. As the narrative progresses, the ghost is recognized by their loved ones and reincorporated into the community in which they lived at the same time as they move towards their release from purgatorial torment. Though purgation is still often treated as essentially penitential, the incorporation of the ghost's personal ties presents purgatory as a social rather than purely individualised experience, where the strength of these bonds with the living operates as an index of their progress towards final salvation. It is this type of narrative which most directly uses purgatory to examine and validate social bonds, and it is this type of ghost narrative with which this thesis is chiefly concerned.

Many of these narratives, where purgatorial ghosts appear in response to commemorative dysfunction, falls within a specific pattern which I term here the trope of the 'purgatorial petitioner'. This trope appears in a wide variety of genres, including exempla, hagiography, romance, and visionary literature, though most versions could be characterised as didactic religious narratives. The trope is generally deployed as follows:

> The spirit of a dead person appears to a living individual whom they know as an apparition, as a disembodied voice, or in a vision. This spirit reveals that they are in purgatory, possibly revealing a sin or crime they are being punished for. They ask the living to help speed their passage through purgatory through prayers, almsgiving, and possibly correcting or making restitution for a sin committed in life. The living person follows the ghost's instructions and the ghost returns, affirming the efficacy of the living person's actions.

This trope appears in a substantial number of shorter exempla but appears to have been popularised in English by two longer texts, the *Trental of Gregory*, first evidenced around 1400 though seemingly well established by that point, and the *Gast of Gy*, translated from the popular fourteenth-century Latin text *De Spiritu Guidonis* in several versions beginning in the mid fourteenth century. Both texts, which will be discussed in more detail in chapters one and two, respectively, follow the above outline very closely. Both texts were popular enough to draw comment, each circulated in three separate Middle English versions cumulatively recorded in fifteen and ten surviving manuscripts respectively (not counting a greater number of copies of *Gast's* Latin exemplar), and several later ghost narratives appear to borrow directly from one or both of them. This framework might be expanded or elaborated by introducing obstructions to the completion of the ghost's requests, either by lengthening the period between the appearance of the ghost and the understanding of its message, or by presenting events which interfere or occur alongside with the living person's ability to act on the ghost's requests. In the most mature and elaborate versions of the narrative, such as the fifteenth-century texts *Childe of Bristow* and *Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman*, the ghost makes multiple appearances as they pass through different stages of purgation and as different forms of assistance from the living are required. Texts featuring this trope appear in each of the following chapters and form the clearest chain of influence between texts of this type.

Ghost narratives of this kind were heavily intertwined with the doctrine of purgatory, and as a result they represent a position of relative religious orthodoxy. Where they are copied alongside other religious works, the overall tenor of the manuscripts in which

they appear is orthodox. To attempt to read in these texts criticisms of the spiritual

validity of purgatorial doctrine or commemorative prayer simply reflects a post-

Reformation, Protestant anxiety about the validity of purgatory. Critical attempts to read

these texts as directly critical of the spiritual validity of commemorative prayer are

misguided.[107] Attempts to read characters as being criticised for spiritual flaws for

engaging in commemorative prayer, for example, are not responding to the texts'

concerns so much as projecting a post-Reformation, Protestant worldview onto them.

Such a worldview, which presupposes the invalidity of prayer for the dead, interprets as

problematic commemorative activity which the medieval audience of ghost narratives

would have seen as spiritually legitimate and normative. Likewise, these texts do not

figure an opposition between liturgical commemoration and almsgiving, with the former

being spiritually inferior to the latter; within the logic of purgatory, both were forms of

charity. Attacks on both the legitimacy of the doctrine of purgatory and the effectiveness

and charitability of the commemorative complex were, of course, held by numerous

English writers of this period, first by the Lollards and then in the sixteenth century by

Protestant reformers such as Simon Fish, whose 1529 tract *A Supplication for the*

Beggars attacked purgatorial doctrine and commemoration along both lines. However,

as a study of the Middle English ghost narrative, the present thesis is not concerned

with these attacks.

What these narratives do display, however, is a heterogeneous approach to the

specifics of how purgatory and commemoration functioned. They often disagree on the

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[107] Several examples of this critical tendency, in relation to *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, are discussed in greater detail on pages 118-120 of this thesis.

location of purgatory, the nature and character of the pains contained within, the existence of an 'earthly paradise' distinct from heaven, and the factors which might affect the power of intercessory prayers. Often, they are simply elaborating on aspects of purgatory which were not clarified by the church authorities but their focus on the power of intercessory prayer sometimes resulted in doctrinally dubious statements on subjects such as confession or the role of the priest in the mass. As noted above, these texts often freely endorse specific schedules of masses as having special power, and these came in for serious criticism even from writers who did not doubt the general validity of purgatory. *Dives and Pauper,* a fifteenth-century commentary on the Ten Commandments probably written by a Franciscan monk which Kathleen Kamarick notes has a particularly sharp focus on explaining deficiencies in religious superstitions, extensively attacks both *The Trental of Gregory* and the tradition of the year-long trental it espoused.[108] The author treats such 'golden' trentals as unfounded and potentially simoniacal, in that they bind a priest to say trental masses rather than other masses he may be obligated to say on specific days. Attacking the Trental narrative as apocryphal while approving of the more authoritative narrative of the monk Justus in Gregory's *Dialogues*, Dives argues that such beliefs prolong the suffering of souls 'For better it is to deliuer a soule oute of peyne within vii. daies or xxx. Thanne so to let him langore in peyne al þe yere whanne he might be holpen within thritty daies'.[109] In general, however, the distribution of such narratives suggests such concerns over theological

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[108] Kathleen Kamerick, 'Shaping Superstition in Late Medieval England', *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 3.1 (2008), pp. 29-53 (p. 38).

[109] 'Here endith a compendiouse treetise dyalogue. of Diues [and] paup[er]. that is to say. the riche [and] the pore fructuously tretyng vpon the x. co[m]mañmentes ..." (London: Printed by Richard Pynson, 1493), in the digital collection *Early English Books Online.* https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A08936.0001.001. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. [Accessed April 30, 2024].

peculiarities in such stories do not appear to have particularly troubled the religious

establishment of late medieval England, who readily included the year-long trental in

Sarum Missal. As Eamon Duffy observes, 'The crudest of supernatural promises, the

most grandiloquent offers of indulgences, the most apocryphal of legends, are to be

found in collections used by educated, pious, and orthodox lay people and clerics…

Strange legends and extravagant promises were not confined to the periphery of

unofficial lay religion.'[110] That ghost narratives circulated in clearly orthodox

manuscripts demonstrate the medieval church's tolerance for heterogeneity, imprecision

and apocrypha in purgatorial texts, provided such texts ultimately supported purgatorial

doctrine.

A final note of taxonomic caution is required regarding the use of the word 'ghost'

throughout this thesis. The modern reader is usually given to understand 'ghosts' as

insubstantial, non-corporeal entities, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary's

definition III.8.a: 'The soul or spirit of a dead person or animal, conceived of as

appearing in visible form or otherwise manifesting in the physical world, typically as a

shadowy, nebulous image, a presence capable of moving objects, an eerie

disembodied voice, etc'.[111] These shadowy, insubstantial ghosts are frequently

distinguished in the minds of modern readers from the corporeal undead: physical

corpses which have risen from their graves. This dichotomy, however, did not exist

systematically in medieval sources. While some accounts clearly describe restless

physical corpses, and others describe invisible and intangible ghostly voices, these

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[110] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 260.
[111] Entry 'ghost (*n.*), sense III.8.b', *Oxford English Dictionary,* https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8921399213, [Accessed 30 April 2024].

examples stand at either end of a spectrum within which, as Martha McGill notes, 'The bodies of the undead were, in fact, persistently ambiguous, and blended elements of corporeality and spirituality.'[112] This ambiguity reflects a generally ambiguous medieval attitude towards the relationship between visibility and materiality that Caroline Walker Bynum has discussed with regards to the wider category of religious visions and miraculous experiences: descriptions of religious visions are 'highly somatic and material' and redound with examples of images of Christ and the Saints taking physical form and agency.[113] It follows that a religious culture that was comfortable with the miraculous blurring of boundaries between the visual and somatic would be likewise comfortable with the ambiguous physical states of the ghostly apparitions of the dead.

This ambiguity over the physical nature of the undead is most pronounced in the accounts of malicious violent undead. The term 'revenant' has been widely adopted to describe 'ghosts that *appeared* to be fleshy, physically attacked or fed upon the living, and whose agency was dependent on the status of the corpse, regardless of whether it was controlled by the devil or the deceased'.[114] These qualities, however, make the term a poor fit for discussions of ghosts which, though apparently fleshy, cadaverous, or recently buried, clearly possess human souls, hail from purgatory, and have the ultimately amicable aim of requesting commemorative prayer and commemoration. Where a purgatorial petitioner is described in a manner that clearly resembles a corpse, I will instead use Andrew Murray Richmond's less loaded term 'ghost-corpse',

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[112] Martha McGill, 'Bodies of earth and air: corporeality and spirituality in pre-modern British narratives of the undead', *Journal of Medieval History* 48.2 (2022), pp. 265-81 (p. 281).
[113] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), pp. 102-3.
[114] Gordon, *Supernatural Encounters,* p. 12.

emphasising as it does the essential ambiguity of their material nature while maintaining their generic similarity to the other ghosts under discussion.[115] Elsewhere, terms such as 'ghost', 'spirit', or 'spectre' will be used interchangeably in reference to apparitions which appear in the world of the living, while only the term 'spirit' will be used for the dead encountered by visionaries within purgatory itself.

Having thus delineated the various forms of ghost narrative in circulation in medieval England, our focus from this point forward will be on Middle English ghost narratives based around the social reincorporation of purgatorial ghosts within pre-existing or newly produced social connections of kinship and friendship. While some texts within this corpus, particularly the romances, have attracted substantial critical interest, the only substantial analysis of them as a collective corpus, undertaken by Takami Matsuda, focused exclusively on their representation of purgatorial doctrine and the topography of purgatory.[116] The present study instead focuses upon the social context in which these texts frame the interactions between the living and the dead, to illuminate the way in which death and commemoration interacted with, problematised, and helped to constitute the various ties which made up the social existence of people living in late medieval England. This methodological focus on social bonds reveals an intriguing collocation between the types of social bond discussed within each text, and the social class of its protagonists and audiences. Accordingly, the thesis is arranged around

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[115] Andrew Murray Richmond, 'Fluid Boundaries in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Sir Isumbras*', *Open Library of Humanities* 4.1 (2018), pp. 1-30 (p. 2).
[116] Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Literature*, pp. 67-78.

chapters which are each based on a specific type of commemorative relationship, and a socio-economic group with which each chapter's texts are concerned.

The first chapter, 'Ghostly Forebears', focuses on a central pillar of medieval commemoration: the relationship between dead parents and their living children. The chapter begins with the A-version of *The Trental of Gregory*, likely the most influential ghost narrative initially composed in Middle English. This alliterative hagiographical poem, in which the ghost of Pope Gregory's mother appears to him to request commemorative prayers, provides an initial opportunity to discuss the relationship of the ghost narrative with liturgical commemoration and the purpose these texts served in validating spiritual and commemorative aspirations of both parents and children. The latter part of the chapter turns to two alliterative poems, *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Three Dead Kings*, which channel this concern with parental and lineal commemoration towards the specific concerns of the aristocracy, for whom such commemoration was so closely linked to their class identity. These two texts represent very different, distinctly gendered, models of aristocratic dynastic commemoration. *Awntyrs,* focusing on a relationship between mother and daughter, focuses on familial sympathy and pity, while *Three Dead Kings* enforces sons' commemoration of their fathers through invocations of debt and punishment for filial commemorative negligence.

The second chapter, 'The Ghost's Wife', examines the role of widows in both the Middle English *Gast of Gy* tradition and episodes in the visionary text *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* and the romance *Sir Amadace.* The chapter situates these diverse texts within the context of medieval conservative reactions to the social and economic status accorded to widows of means, and the widespread role of widows as

commemorative agents. Each text contributes to the long-standing medieval tradition of writing about widows. Rather than focus on their chastity or sexual incontinence, as seen elsewhere in the hagiographical and satirical traditions, they focus on the widow's commemorative capabilities in service to her husband's memory. Widows are judged by their capacity to serve as living commemorative memorial to their husbands, and their commemorative activity is subordinated to male structures of clerical authority. After examining the episode of the goldsmith's widow in *Eynsham* as an example of spousal commemorative neglect, the chapter moves on to discuss the balance that *The Gast of Gy* strikes between upholding the spiritual worth of even a flawed marriage and placing the sinful widow under clerical control. The final section examines the depiction of a virtuous but impoverished widow in *Sir Amadace*, an image of exemplary spousal piety whose commemorative agency is nonetheless restricted in order to uphold a masculine fantasy of female acquiescence.

Although the third chapter, 'Unkindred Spirits', retains the bourgeois setting of the stories of the prior chapter, it shifts focus from family relationships towards relationships of friendship, professional, and religious affiliation. The three texts in consideration in this chapter, *Sir Amadace*, *The Childe of Bristow*, and the latter's story's variant *The Merchant and his Son*, all focus on social relationships among and between merchants, and focus on the productive power of the money economy to create new social bonds. All three texts are overtly concerned with the merchantry, and they circulated among merchant, gentry, and yeoman readerships in a period when the mercantile class was becoming increasingly prominent. The first part of the chapter provides a broader examination of *Sir Amadace*, and the anxieties it expresses regarding the role of money

and money-based relationships within the commemorative complex. This is exemplified by the fraught relationship between an impoverished knight and the ghost of a merchant who assumes the form of a knight. Here the poem explores conflicts and tensions between professional contracts and chivalric oaths as generators of social connections. The latter part of the chapter moves from an anxious gentry perspective to a celebratory mercantile one in discussing *Childe of Bristow* and *The Merchant and his Son,* two closely-related poems focusing on a young man who demonstrates his exemplary mercantile virtue in the execution of his wicked father's will, an act which allows him to substitute a villainous biological father for a virtuous adoptive father in the form of his master in his apprenticeship. Taken together, these texts probe the role of money in the late medieval commemorative complex, by turns questioning and lionising the spiritual worth of the modes of friendship among the burgeoning professional class.

Where the first three chapters principally consider narratives of apparitions which focus on commemoration among the laity, the final chapter, 'Spectral Brothers and Spiritual Sisters', considers the treatment of social relationships among the professed religious. It focuses on two visionary texts whose protagonists meet the spirits of their religious brethren in purgatory, discussing monastic writers' more ambivalent attitudes towards their temporal relationships. The chapter opens with a broader discussion of *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* examining the tension between its episodic structure, which bespeaks a structural fascination with the visionary's episodic encounters with former friends and acquaintances, and its avowed ambivalence regarding the spiritual worth of such relationships, which are treated as both potentially sinful and potentially spiritually productive. The latter part of the chapter examines *A*

Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman, produced in 1422 by a Winchester anchoress, as a skilful reappropriation of the trope of purgatorial ghost away from the familial concerns of *The Trental of Gregory* towards an anchoritic viewpoint which prioritises the power of commemorative prayers themselves and the commemorative agency of the religious. Both texts avow a model of purgatory and commemoration based on spiritual obligation and rigour rather than interpersonal affection, but nonetheless present purgatory as a productive means of productive social interaction in death.

Chapter One - Ghostly Forebears: Parents and children in *The Trental of Gregory, The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn,* and *Three Dead Kings*

Of the many and varied social relationships in which late medieval Christians were enmeshed, it was close familial relationships which most urgently drove commemorative activity and prayers for the dead. Testamentary evidence suggests that people were most motivated to organise prayers and commemoration for their parents and spouses. Accordingly, literary depictions of ghosts beseeching aid from the living often focus on marital and filial bonds. While the former will be discussed in the next chapter, it is the latter with which Middle English ghost narratives are more frequently and extensively concerned, and upon which the present chapter will focus.

The critical importance of the parent-child relationship to purgatorial commemoration was due to the confluence of many social, religious, legal, and emotional factors. With the exception of the most unfortunate, all people had a parental relationship of some kind, and provided they survived to adulthood their parents would likely predecease them. The role of one's children as heirs meant they would likely be involved in the fulfilment of the deceased's will, and they were very frequently selected as executors. Likewise, the importance of lineage in determining one's social status made the overt commemoration of parents key to maintaining family and class identities for many parts of medieval society. If we add to this the Biblical injunction to honour one's father and mother (Exodus 20:12), and the psychological importance of ensuring that one's parents are appropriately honoured and remembered, it is hardly surprising that

concerns about the postmortem fate of parents loomed large in the popular imagination where purgatory and commemoration were concerned. Such concerns were acute both to children seeking to aid their deceased parents, and to living parents whose strongest hope for commemoration often lay with said children.

This chapter will focus on three narratives, all alliterative poems from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, in which parental ghosts request masses from their children to speed their release from purgatory. The first part of the chapter will discuss the *Trental of Gregory*, possibly the most influential Middle English ghost narrative, which uses the story of a pope commemorating his mother to reimagine a common formula for liturgical commemoration as a tool of specifically familial and filial commemoration. The second part of the chapter will explore how the concerns raised in the *Trental of Gregory* were adapted by the authors of *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn* and *Three Dead Kings* into stories where sinful aristocratic protagonists take the place of Pope Gregory.

In transforming the narrative archetype provided by the *Trental* to feature lay protagonists, both these texts further emphasise the importance of commemoration between lay people and within lay family networks. In different ways, each text repurposes *Trental*'s broad focus on the commemorative liturgy into a reflection on aristocratic commemorative ideology. Both respond to concerns about the moral dimensions of dynastic power and identity, which depended so heavily on lineal inheritance. It should be noted that although these two texts feature aristocratic protagonists, the manuscript evidence does not directly suggest an aristocratic readership for either poem. Although Rosamund Allen has argued for an aristocratic

audience for *Awntyrs,* and even suggested it may have been written for Joan Neville,

Countess of Westmoreland, this suggestion remains speculative.[1] Both known owners

of copies of the *Awntyrs* - Robert Thornton, who owned Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS

91, and the Ireland family who owned Princeton University Library, MS Taylor 9 – were

members of gentry, and the ownership of the other two copies remains unknown.[2]

Three Dead Kings, meanwhile, survives solely in Bodleian Library, MS Douce 302,

compiled by John Audelay, a chantry priest at Haughmond Abbey and former chaplain

of Baron Richard Lestrange of Knockin, to whom the personal appeal of a text about

aristocratic commemoration, as a commemorative agent closely associated with an

aristocratic family, seems self-evident. Ghost narratives about aristocratic

commemoration thus appealed to a variety of non-aristocratic audiences, who may have

seen them in terms of moral edification, entertainment, aspirational wish-fulfilment, or all

three. The combination of religious discussions of morality, penitence, and

commemoration with elements of aristocratic opulence and danger familiar from the

romance tradition, along with the evident skill and sophistication of the verse itself

doubtless provided a variety of entry points to a variety of audiences. The most

important effect of the shift from a saintly protagonist to a sinful royal, for our purposes,

is that it allows for a consideration of commemoration from a distinctly lay perspective.

Narratives of aristocrats haunted by their parents can centre both commemorative

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[1] Rosamund Allen, '*The Awntyrs off Arthure* - jests and jousts', in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. by Jennifer Fellows et al., (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 129-142 (p. 137).

[2] For a discussion of Robert Thornton's life and position within the Yorkshire gentry, see George R. Keiser, 'Robert Thornton: Gentleman, Reader and Scribe' in *Robert Thornton and his books: essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts* ed. by Susanna Fein and Michael Johnston (York: York Medieval Press, 2014), pp. 67-108 (pp.70-72). For a discussion of the Ireland family's ownership of Princeton MS Taylor 9 see Michael Johnston, *Romance and the gentry in late medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 226-8.

dysfunction and commemorative piety even more assuredly within the structure of the lay family network, further developing the familial concerns found in *The Trental of Gregory*.

These three texts are narratives of recognition, in which living children are confronted by distorted, horrific, physically deteriorating ghosts whom they ultimately recognize as their parents. This process of recognition acts as an affirmation of the filial-parental bond, and a negotiation of the moral obligations attendant upon the child in the context of death, purgatorial suffrage, and commemoration. All three make use of the topos of the gruesome apparition, and fit well within Susanna Greer Fein's concept of 'the ghoulish and the ghastly', where extended alliterative descriptions of gruesome and fantastical creatures are used to provoke an awareness of earthly transience and sinfulness.[3] This shared aesthetic on the grotesquery of the spirits of the dead and the fear of the living accords with their shared interest in the process by which filial bonds are recognized and navigated. The process by which family relationships are negotiated is rendered more complex, urgent, and fraught by the ways in which death has altered their parents beyond recognition. In each poem it is commemoration which redeems (or, at least, productively disburses) these fraying ties of filial piety.

The Trental of Gregory: Ghostly mothers and sainted sons

Of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century English narratives depicting parental ghosts appearing to their children, the *Trental of Gregory* tradition must be understood as the most popular and influential, ranking among the most widely-imitated ghost narratives of

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[3] Susanna Greer Fein, 'The Ghoulish and the Ghastly: A Moral Aesthetic in Middle English Alliterative Verse', *Modern Language Quarterly* 48.1 (1987), pp. 3-20, passim.

the period.[4] As Stephen Gordon notes, 'The composition of *Þe Pope Trental* is a perfect example of how culturally acceptable, habitually persistent beliefs concerning the function of the dead could flourish, meme-like, across genre type', with motifs and narrative structures in the *Trental of Gregory* tradition being reworked and redeployed in a wide variety of milieux to speak to the commemorative concerns of various audiences.[5] I use 'tradition' here because the *Trental of Gregory* survives in several substantially different versions. The Digital Index of Middle English Verse lists four distinct versions (DIMEV 134, 2777, 4979, and 4980), cumulatively surviving in eleven manuscript witnesses and three sixteenth-century print witnesses.[6] Albert Kauffman identified two versions, which he labelled 'A' and 'B', in his dual-text edition of 1889, but the few subsequent critics of the *Trental of Gregory* have, with the exception of Martin Connolly, ignored this distinction and focused exclusively on the 'A' version.[7] A third version, DIMEV 134, is so close to A as to make extensive discussion unnecessary in the context of this thesis.[8] A fourth version in quatrains rather than couplets and preserved only in sixteenth-century print editions, was identified by William A. Ringler.[9]

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[4] As well as *The Awntyrs off Arthure*, other narratives derived from the *Trental of Gregory* include *The Childe of Bristow*, *The Merchant and his Son*, and *A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman*, discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

[5] Stephen Gordon, 'The Vitality of the Dead in Medieval Cultures', *Journal of Medieval History*, 48.2 (2022), pp. 155-65 (p. 164).

[6] Linne R. Mooney and others., *The DIMEV: An Open-Access, Digital Edition of the Index of Middle English Verse*, <https://www.dimev.net/>, [Accessed 18 July 2024].

[7] 'A' and 'B' correspond to DIMEV 2777 and 4980, respectively. Albert Kaufmann, *Trentalle Sancti Gregorii: Eine Mittelenglische Legende in Zwei Texten, Erlangen Beiträge 3* (Erlangen: A. Deichert, 1889). For more on the critical treatment fo the A and B version, see Martin Connolly, 'Promise-Postponement Device in *The Awntyrs off Arthure:* A Possible Narrative Model' in *Arthurian Literature XIII* ed. by Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), pp. 95-108.

[8] This version is listed as DIMEV 134; a copy, deriving from British Library MS Cotton Caligula A. II, is printed alongside the DIMEV 2777 version from Bodleian Library MS Eng. Poet. A. 1, in *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS*, ed. by Carl Horstmann and F.J. Furnivall, Vol. 1, Early English Text Society, Original Series 117 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1892), pp. 260-268.

[9] This version corresponds to DIMEV 4979. William A. Ringler, 'A quatrain version of the trental of St. Gregory', in *Studies in Honor of DeWitt T. Starnes*, ed. by Thomas P. Harrison (Austin: University of Texas, 1967), pp. 131-61.

This version, which is referred to here as the 'C' version, preserves the demonic interference seen in the B-*Trental* but is over twice the length of the couplet versions and introduces many major additions and changes to the narrative's plot.[10] Ringler argues that the C-*Trental*'s author was likely an ecclesiastic, and many of the additions serve to add intellectual breadth and complexity to the story by introducing a variety of theological topics through a series of debate sequences.[11] However, these additions also reduce the central prominence of Gregory's mother within the poem. She no longer provides the trental schema to Gregory directly and is reduced to being only one of a number of supernatural visitors and apparitions with whom Gregory speaks. The C-*Trental*, in introducing this breadth of material, necessarily forfeits the close focus on the maternal commemorative relationship seen in the couplet versions, and in the interests of concision it will not be discussed in detail here.

The exact relationship between these versions is not currently settled, save that 'A' appears first in the literary record, appearing twice in the Vernon Manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. A. 1, from the last decade of the fourteenth century, that the 'A' and 'B' versions appear to derive from a shared source, and that the 'C' version derives from the 'B' version.[12] Both A and B proceed as follows: Prior to Gregory

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[10] Among the numerous alterations, the C-*Trental* adds a debate between Gregory and a demon who insists that his mother's soul is damned, a vision of Christ upon the altar during the first mass Gregory performs, a vision of St. Peter, who provides the scheme of the liturgical trental to Gregory in place of his mother, an apparition of Gregory's mother midway through the mass schedule, and a visitation from an angel near the conclusion of the trental who engages with Gregory in a debate about free will. The poem also focuses much more on Gregory's actual celebration of the masses within the trental schema.

[11] Ringler, 'A quatrain version of the trental of St. Gregory', p. 135.

[12] Connolly, 'Promise-Postponement Device', pp. 96-7; Ringler, 'A quatrain version of the trental of St. Gregory', pp. 134-5. Richard Pfaff has speculated that some version of the *Trental* legend must have existed in the thirteenth century, possibly developing out of a conflation of several motifs in the fables of Odo of Cheriton (the apparition of a priest's damned mother and the relief of a soul trapped in a block of ice by means of a trental). 'The English Devotion of St. Gregory's Trental', pp. 77-8. Ringler suggests the *Trental* may have been influenced by a tradition, originating in Hartmann von Aue's thirteenth-century

I's conception, Gregory's mother falls pregnant either pre- or extra-maritally and kills the resulting child. Her crime goes undetected, and she becomes well-respected for her piety. After her death she appears to Gregory during mass as a gruesome phantom, revealing her crime and asking Gregory to provide a trental for her soul. A year later, with the trental complete, she returns, purified, and affirms the trental's efficacy in delivering her from purgatory.

Two major plot differences separate the A and B versions. Firstly, in A Gregory's mother dies unconfessed, while in B she confesses to her son on her deathbed. Secondly, B adds an extended sequence in which devils attempt to trick or convince Gregory to abandon the final mass in the trental. Substantial differences in theme and style are also present. As Martin Connolly notes, the A version heavily emphasises the ghost's horrifying appearance, while the B version is 'more attentive to doctrine and [the] characters' perspectives', hewing closer to orthodoxy by avoiding the suggestion that Gregory's mother entered Purgatory despite wilfully refusing final confession.[13]

As the title generally used for the tradition implies, the power of commemorative prayer, and in particular the liturgical formula of the trental, is central to all surviving versions of the narrative. They refer to the distinctively English form of the devotion, in which thirty masses are spread out over the course of the year, as opposed to the 'simple' trental comprising thirty masses said on consecutive days after the burial. In the more

German poem *Gregorius vom Stein* and popularised via the *Gesta Romanorum*, in which Gregory is depicted as the child of incest who marries his mother and becomes pope after repenting. Ringler, 'A quatrain version of the trental of St. Gregory', pp. 133, 137.

[13] Connolly, 'Promise-Postponement Device', pp. 99-100.

elaborate year-long trental, which first appears in a mid-thirteenth-century Sarum Missal from the scriptorium of Salisbury Cathedral (Manchester, John Rylands University Library, MS Latin 24), three masses are said within the octaves of ten major liturgical feasts.[14] All complete extant versions of the *Trental* give a full account of this schema:

> "Fful wel I-holpen I mihte beo
>
> Holpen and saued I mihte beo wel
>
> Hose vndertoke a trewe trentel
>
> Of ten cheef festes of al þe ȝer
>
> To synge for me in þis Maneer:
>
> þreo Masses of Cristes Natiuite,
>
> And of þe Ephipan oþur þre,
>
> þreo of þe Purificaciun
>
> And þreo of þe Annunciaciun,
>
> þreo of þe Resurrexiun,
>
> And þeo of þe Ascensciun
>
> Of þe Pentecost oþur þre,
>
> And þreo of þe holy Trinite
>
> þreo of Maries Natiuite
>
> And of hire Concepcioun oþur þre" -

---

[14] Both types of trental were in use from at least the thirteen century but are hard to distinguish in the historical record because the same terms were usually used for both forms. The distinguishing term 'simple trental' for the month-long trental was coined by Richard Pfaff and is used here for convenience. See Richard Pfaff, 'The English Devotion of St. Gregory's Trental', *Speculum* 49.1 (1974), pp. 75-90 (pp. 87-9).

þeose weoren þe cheef festes ten

þat souereynliche socourde synful men (A, 105-120).[15]

The list given in A differs slightly from both B and C, as well as the overwhelming evidence of the missals, where the feast of the Assumption is included rather than the Conception.[16] Likewise, each version includes the wording of an orison to be recited with each mass:

"God, vr verrey Redempciun,

Vr soþfast soules sauaciun

Þat chose al oþur londes bi-forn

Þe lond of bi-heste to be born

And þi deþ suffredest in þat same

Diliuere þis soule from gult and blame,

Tak hit out of þe fendes bond,

And þat lond from þe heþene hond

And people þat leueþ not in þe

Þorwh þi vertu amended mote be;

---

[15] 'Þe Pope Trental', in *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS*, ed. by Carl Horstmann and F.J. Furnivall, Vol. 1, Early English Text Society, Original Series 117 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1892), pp. 260-268, ll. 135-46. This text is derived from the second copy of the A-*Trental* found in Bodleian Library MS Eng.poet.a.1, folios 303v-304r.Unless otherwise noted, quotations and line numbers from the A-*Trental* will be taken from this edition and distinguished from the quotations of the B-*Trental* with the note 'A' before the line numbers.

[16] Penny J. Cole, 'Purgatory and Crusade in St. Gregory's Trental', *The International History Review* 17.4 (1995), pp. 713-25. The only complete copy of the C-*Trental* omits the feast of the Trinity, presumably by accident, since the poem elsewhere refers to ten feasts.

And alle þat trusteþ In þi Merci,

Lord, saue hem sone and soþfastli!"   (A, 135-46)

This prayer is a vernacular translation of the Latin *Oratio* recorded for masses performed as part of the year-long trental, as found in the Sarum Missal:

Deus qui es nostra redempcio, et in terra promissionis ante omnes terras nasci elegisti mortemque ibidem sustinuisti / libera propicius animam famuli tui, N, de manibus demonum et eandem terram de manibus paganorum ut populus qui in te non credit per uirtutem tuam emendacionem habeat, et illis omnibus qui in te confidunt, pro tua magna succure pietate per dominum nostrum.[17]

[God, who are our redemption and have chosen to be born and suffer death in the Promised Land in preference to all other lands, liberate in your mercy the soul of your servant .N. from the hands of demons and that land from the hands of the pagans so that the nation who does not believe in you may be changed through your virtue, and help all those who trust in you in consideration of their great piety towards you.][18]

This account of the trental's liturgical framework is not an explanatory digression. It is spoken directly to Gregory by his mother's ghost (or, in the C-Trental, St. Peter), forms the motivation for her appearance, and is the method by which the plot is resolved. These passages, though little discussed critically, are vital to the aims of the *Trental*.

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[17] *The Sarum Missal, edited from three early manuscripts*, ed. by J. Wickham Legg (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916), p. 460.
[18] Translated by Cole, 'Purgatory and Crusade', p. 714.

The poems, in effect, act as a narrative apparatus through which the audience is invited to interpret the purpose, effect, and meaning of the liturgical trental. Of the extant versions, it is the *A-Trental* that most strikingly uses this apparatus to frame the liturgical trental specifically as a means of familial commemoration and aid. This reframing is partly visible in the elements of the liturgical text which remain incongruous within the rest of the narrative: in the *A-Trental* there are no references or occurrences which recall the *Oratio*'s prayer for the liberation of Jerusalem, for the conversion of pagans, or indeed any reference to the 'fendes' in whose 'bonde' purgatorial souls are caught.[19] Instead, the A-*Trental* adapts tropes and preoccupations common to exempla narratives focused on the confession of sinful women for the purpose of both emphasising the power of commemorative prayer, and the importance of familial relationships in the commission of that prayer.

A principal difference between the A- and B-versions of the *Trental*, and one which has escaped critical notice, is the former's focus on reputation, shame, and the danger of incomplete confession. This may provide an explanation for the peculiar decision, in *Trental A*, to present someone who intentionally avoided confession of mortal sins as entering Purgatory. It is possible that the two principal didactic strands (the efficacy of the trental, and the dangers of excessive shame preventing a complete confession) worked at cross-purposes, and the author of the *Trental* chose to sacrifice strict orthodoxy for the sake of narrative coherence.[20] This theme of reputation and shame

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[19] For a discussion of the role, origin, and purpose of the prayer for Jerusalem in the liturgical trental, see Cole, 'Purgatory and Crusade', passim. The *B*-Trental's repeated demonic intrusions upon the trental provide, if not a direct reference to crusading, a clear framing of the trental as a spiritual weapon in the battle with demons over the mother's soul.

[20] It is possible that this development may have been influenced by the legend of Gregory and Trajan, wherein St. Gregory miraculously prays successfully for the soul of the pagan Roman emperor. For

directly informs the way in which the poem treats the recognition of Gregory's filial bond with his mother, so must be discussed first.

In the poem's opening, before the holy reputation of Gregory's mother is expounded, her story is attributed to Gregory himself:

> I-writen I fynde a good stori
>
> Þe Pope hit wrot seinte Gregori
>
> Of his modur and of hyr lyf,
>
> Þat alle men heolden an holi hosewyf,
>
> So sad of Maner, so myld of Mood
>
> Þat alle men heolden hire holi and good
>
> De-boner, deuout, so milde of steuene
>
> Þat alle men gesset hire worþi to heuene
>
> As holi I-holden as heo was,
>
> Þe fend ȝit falled hire in a foul cas,   (A, ll. 1-10)

This catalogue of the mother's virtues emphasises the external view of her as an exemplary Christian wife. The accretive effect of the alliteration, particularly the repetition of the words 'heolden' and 'holi' (the action by which the reputation is constructed and the central element of that reputation) conveys the weight, consensus, and seeming unassailability of her holy reputation. The formulaic attribution to St. Gregory subtly assists in this framing. By introducing the story as the writings of a saint

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further discussion of this tradition see Gordon Whatley, 'The Uses of Hagiography: The Legend of Pope Gregory and the Emperor Trajan in the Middle Ages', *Viator* 15 (1984), pp. 25-64; and Jeffrey Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp.141-153.

about his mother before listing her extensive reputation for virtue, the poem shifts

between a literary, posthumous, reputation accorded authority by its saintly authorship,

and a social, contemporary reputation lent weight by consensus. These two forms of

reputation-building are thrown into discordance by the knowledge of the mother's fall

into sin. *Trental B*'s much briefer description of Gregory's mother's reputation omits the

attribution and focuses on her pious actions such as 'fasting, prayers, almesdede/And al

other gode thynges of mede' (B, ll.5-6) instead of the A-version's focus on the attributes

and characteristics ascribed to her.[21]

Trental A's expanded treatment of the mother's reputation has direct consequences for

both the presentation of her clandestine pregnancy and her relationship with her son.

The description of the pregnancy and infanticide emphasises that her motive is to avoid

detection, hiding her pregnancy 'So preueliche… Þat þer-of nas no wiht I-war.' (A, ll. 15-

16) and killing her child 'for no wiht schulde wite hir cas' (A, l. 17). Prior critical comment

on infanticide in the *Trental* tradition has been limited to either early twentieth-century

statements of critical distaste, or studies of possible sources or analogues, and it has

previously been accorded little thematic importance.[22] Historians have differed in their

views regarding social attitudes to infanticide in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century

England: Barbara Kellum argued that infanticide was common and treated less

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[21] Unless otherwise noted, quotations and line references for the B-*Trental* refer to the text given in Richard Jordan, 'Das Trentalle Gregorii in der handschrift Harley 3810', *Englische Studien* 40 (1909), pp. 351-371. This text is edited from the version appearing on ff. 75b-86b of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Harley 3810.

[22] Examples of the former include Gregory Neilson 'Crosslinks between *Pearl* and *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *The Scottish Antiquary or Northern Notes and Queries*, 26.62 (1901), pp. 67-78, and Gordon Hall Gerould, *Saints' Legend*s (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), p. 254, which mischaracterizes the *Trental* as a 'sadly distorted' version of the legend of Gregory and Trajan. The latter include James Root Hubert, 'The Sources of *St. Erkenwald* and *The Trental of Gregory*', *Modern Philology* 16.9 (1919), pp. 485-493; Pfaff, 'The English Devotion of St. Gregory's Trental'; and David N. Klausner, 'Exempla and the *Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Mediaeval Studies* 34 (1972), pp. 307-325.

seriously than adult homicide, while Sara M. Butler, surveying infanticide charges in English court records, suggests that 'the records give no sense that officials or jurors treated the death of children differently than they did adult deaths.'[23] Butler's survey suggests, however, that jurors may have distinguished between different forms of infanticide, and that while courts may have been more merciful towards some types (e.g. more readily accepting defences of insanity put forth by mothers accused of murdering their children), 'lenience did not extend to singlewomen who killed their newborn children'.[24] Such women were presumed to be acting, as Gregory's mother does, with a conscious desire to cover up evidence of their sexual sins. Infanticide was conceived of as a highly gendered crime, and could be viewed as a violent culmination of the previous sexual sin. Jacqueline Murray notes that the penitential literature treated infanticide as one of the few violent sins women were capable of committing, reinforcing an overall tendency in such literature to envision women as 'primarily, even exclusively sexual'.[25] In such a context, infanticide's position as a violent sin generated by sexual sin makes it the antithesis of medieval constructions of female virtue.

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[23] Barbara A. Kellum, 'Infanticide in England in the Later Middle Ages', *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1.1 (1974), pp. 367-388; R.H. Helmholz, 'Infanticide in the Province of Canterbury During the Fifteenth Century', History of Childhood Quarterly 1.3 (1975), pp. 379-90; Sara M. Butler, 'A Case of Indifference? Child Murder in Later Medieval England', *Journal of Women's History*, 19.4 (2007), pp. 59-82. For a non-committal survey of relevant research regarding infanticide in late medieval England see Josephine Billingham, *Infanticide in Tudor and Stuart England* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), pp. 65-72.

[24] Butler, 'A Case of Indifference?', p. 71. This form of infanticide is distinguished by Butler from 'overlaying', in which a child is smothered while sleeping in the same bed as its parents and was often attributed to negligence rather than malice, and 'filicide', the killing of older children. Modern medical practice distinguishes the killing of newborn babies, such as occurs in the *Trental,* as 'neonaticide'.

[25] Jacqueline Murray, 'Gendered Souls in Sexed Bodies: The Male Construction of Female Sexuality in Some Medieval Confessors' Manuals', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. Biller and A.J. Minnis (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1998), pp. 79-99 (p. 83).

The formulation of infanticide as a distinctively gendered crime derived from female

sexual sin is seen in other narratives, including a number of preaching exempla, short

narratives collected for use in preaching to illustrate specific moral points for a lay

audience. The exempla most reminiscent of the *Trental* are 'adulterous mother'

narratives in which a damned woman appears to her priestly son to reveal her sexual

sins. David N. Klausner notes that only one surviving 'adulterous mother' exemplum,

found in the late-thirteenth-century, MS Egerton 1117 (f. 189b) involves an infanticidal

mother.[26] Margaret Robson notes that this 'Adulterous Mother' is typically employed to

establish 'the holiness of male children and the fleshly, evil nature of their mothers (and

perhaps, by implication, of the whole female sex)'.[27] That infanticide is missing from

later narratives suggests that its presence was seen as an optional outgrowth of the

sexual sin preceding it.Though not an infanticide, a ghost narrative in the St. Alban's

Chronicle likewise presents a dead, illegitimate child as an outgrowth of sexual sin: a

ghost is forced to carry the supernaturally heavy child born to a married woman under

her care.[28] The *Trental* likewise presents children killed by their mothers more as

symbols of the extremity of sin rather than as individual souls in their own right. Both

elsewhere in the exemplum tradition and beyond it, infanticide is often associated with

incest and particularly with maternal incest, which as Elizabeth Archibald notes was the

most commonly depicted type of incest in medieval writing.[29] An association between

the two sins is thematically congruent: both maternal incest and infanticide are extreme,

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[26] David N. Klausner, 'Exempla and the *Awntyrs off Arthure*', pp. 311-2.
[27] Margaret Robson, 'From Beyond the Grave: Darkness at Noon in *The Awntyrs off Arthure'* in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. by Ad Putter, pp. 219-236, (pp. 229-230).
[28] Robert Easting, 'Peter of Bramham's Account of a Chaplain's Vision of Purgatory (c. 1343?)', *Medium Aevum*, 65 (1996), pp. 211-229.
[29] Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 111.

gendered sins associated with female lust and a severe distortion of the approved

maternal role. Such depictions reinforced the view that women had intrinsic propensities

towards the sin of *luxuria* (lust) and presented this as leading towards other serious

sins.[30]

The deployment of adulterous infanticide, then, is an extreme inversion of Gregory's

mother's outward persona as a virtuous and devout woman: rather than embodying an

archetype of virtue, she actually embodies an archetype of vice from the exempla

tradition. In *Trental A*, however, the specific deployment of the sin of infanticide adds to

the development of a thematic thread beginning with the elaborate description of her

reputation and leading into her failure to confess her sins. Medieval incest is often

presented as what Jean-Charles Payen referred to as the 'péché monstrueux', or

monstrous sin – a sin chosen for its extremity in order to demonstrate how 'even the

most heinous behaviour can be forgiven though God's grace if the sinner is truly

repentant'.[31] The *Trental*'s infanticide has additional resonance in this context, since it is

a crime motivated by precisely the factor that drives Gregory's mother away from

confession: shame. Mary C. Flannery views shame as a complex and ambivalent

emotion in late-medieval English Christian writing, noting how shame could be both 'a

tool for discipline, correction, and conversion' but also 'a potential threat, an unexpected

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[30] One exemplum in which sexual sin leads to another form of intrafamilial violence is the popular exemplum of the incestuous daughter who commits parricide, seen in a number of exempla collections and surviving in fragmentary form in the fifteenth-century dramatic fragment *Dux Moraud*.

[31] Jean-Charles Payen, *Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale* (Geneva: Droz, 1967), cited by Archibald, p. 106.

route to unsuccessful confession or even outright sin'.[32] Coupled with pride, shame can drive one away from confession, placing one's soul in jeopardy.

Trental A provides a perfect example of a narrative with a focus on the potential dangers of excessive, unproductive shame. Both narrator, and later the spirit, identify shame and fear of exposure as preventing her confession. She fails to confess 'ffor heo wolde holy I-holde be/Heo tolde neuer presy hire priuite' (A, ll 23-4), again echoing the holy/holden collocation with which her reputation was originally elaborated, emphasising the continuing control her pride in her reputation has over her actions. The same point, framing her reputation against her fear of confession, is repeated a few lines later after Gregory's birth:

> Men heolden hire holy wiþ al heore hope,
>
> Þerfore heo schonede hir schrift to schowe.
>
> Leste by schrift hire cas weor knowe. (A ll.32-4)

In the second of the two versions found in the Vernon MS, this is followed by four lines which use this example to make a broader didactic point about the danger of unproductive shame:

> So schome makeþ men schone heor schrift
>
> And leose þe grace of godus ȝift,
>
> And siþen to liuen so sunfulli
>
> And sorily dyen and sodeynli.   (A, ll.35-38)

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[32] Mary C. Flannery, 'The Concept of Shame in Late-Medieval English Literature', *Literature Compass* 9.2 (2012), pp. 166-182 (p. 174).

Considering the narrative's attention to Gregory's mother's reputation and fear of shame, the infanticide assumes a thematic purpose beyond its role as an antithesis to female virtue. As a crime committed to conceal her previous sexual sin, the infanticide is itself an act of the same destructive, unchecked shame that prevents Gregory's mother from confessing her sins.

Up to this point, the *Trental* resembles a narrative on the theme of the péché monstrueux, where the mother's shame is emphasised so that the extent of God's mercy, and the efficacy of confession, can be demonstrated more emphatically later on. The *Trental* differs from this model by redirecting its focus, from the power of the act of confession to allow the penitent to avoid hell to the power of commemorative masses to shorten the pains of purgatory. A confession scene does occur in the B-*Trental*, and indeed Gregory notes the enormity of God's mercy in the process:

> "Goddes mercy is mychill more
>
> My dere moder, than is thy synne,
>
> If thy hert be sory with-inne."   (B, 36-8)

In a confession-oriented exemplum this would represent the culmination of the narrative, but in the *Trental* this only marks the beginning of the main sequence. There is no supernatural sign of Gregory's mother's sin which leads her towards confession, as in the example of the infanticidal mother in the *Gesta Romanorum* whose hand becomes stained with a red inscription revealing her sin, or the infanticide in *Jacob's*

Well who is harassed by a demon publicizing her crime.[33] Instead, the supernatural only appears within the narrative after the mother's death, driving Gregory towards the completion of the required soul masses. In the B-*Trental* this is because the mother's deathbed confession prevents her completing adequate penance, but in the A-*Trental* Gregory's mother dies entirely unconfessed. While there are examples of péché monstrueux narratives where God forgives an unconfessed sinner, these focus on the sinner's perfect inward contrition, demonstrated by a miraculous sign, as in the parricide in *Jacob's Well* who dies of heartbreak over her sinfulness only for a tree with silver leaves to grow from her heart, which is inscribed with a message demonstrating God's forgiveness.[34] In the A-*Trental* there is no such sign, and there is every indication that Gregory's mother has died unconfessed and uncontrite.

The A-*Trental*'s focus on Gregory's mother's reputation and shame inflects the text's portrayal of her spirit's appearance before her son by adding thematic emphasis to Gregory's difficulty in recognizing his mother. In a narrative motif also present in *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings*, the appearance of Gregory's mother's spirit before him at Mass is preceded by a sudden, unnatural darkness (*A* ll. 51-2) that 'was derke as hit weore midniht' (54) along with mists (55), and a 'stunch… so grisly he was a-gast' (57-8). Christine Chism views this trope as a means to 'associate the dead with a bewildering trackless wilderness… signif[ying] their exclusion from society' by evoking 'natural forces that exceed, resist and threaten human/social jurisdiction'.[35] While

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[33] *Gesta Romanorum,* ed. by Hermann Oesterley (Berlin: Weidmann, 1872), pp. 291-4; *Jacob's Well*, ed. by Arthur Brandeis (London: Early English Text Society, 1900), p.66.
[34] *Jacob's Well*, ed. by Brandeis, p.172.
[35] Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p.246.

Chism's focus on imagery of nature is more apposite for *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings*, the supernatural darkness serves to obscure the surroundings and dissolve distinctions, creating a perfect setting for the crisis of recognition which follows. The mother's spirit is likewise not easily identifiable, being principally presented as demonic in appearance. Unlike in *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings*, the spirit does not explicitly resemble a corpse:

> A wonder grisly creature,
>
> right aftur a fend ferde hire feture
>
> So Ragget, so Rent, so elyng, so euel,
>
> As hidous to bi-holden as helle-deuel;
>
> Mouþ and Neose, Eres and Eȝes
>
> fflaumed al ful of furi liȝes.   (A, ll. 61-6)

This is an obvious example of the 'grotesque stranger' alliterative topos described by Fein, with its accretion of 'vivid synonyms, onomatopoeic verbs and colorful adjectives in vigorous array' for the purposes of intensifying the gruesomeness of the scene.[36] Given the demonic elements of her appearance, it is hardly surprising that Gregory immediately mistakes his mother's spirit for a devil, compelling her by the power that 'alle deueles schal dreden' (68), addressing her as 'þou cursede wrecche' (A, ll. 73), and presuming her purpose is to disrupt his mass ('me at Masse to derue and drecche', l. 74). However, in a poem that has so insistently collocated variants of 'holden' with 'holi' when discussing Gregory's mother's earthly reputation, that she is now 'hidous to

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[36] Greer Fein, 'The Ghoulish and the Ghastly', p.6.

bi-holden as helle-deuel' marks an ironic inversion of her earthly reputation. By sinning

to preserve her earthly reputation, Gregory's mother has become unrecognisable even

to her own son, as her horrifying and deteriorated form has taken on a second

reputation, a demonic inversion of the one she bore in life.

Challenged by Gregory to explain her reason for appearing, she identifies herself and

her punishment for unconfessed sins:

> "I am þi Moodur þat þe beer,
>
> Þat for vn-schriuene dedes derne
>
> In bitter peynes þus I berne."   (A, ll. 76-8)

This identification, instantly accepted by Gregory, begins a sequence of dialogue

between mother and son which is marked by the anaphoric avowal of their filial bond:

> "Allas!
>
> Allas, my Modur, þis wondur cas!
>
> Allas my Modur, hou may þis be,
>
> In such aray I þe to seo?" (A., ll.79-81)[37]

This repetitive naming continues throughout the extended conversation which follows,

with Gregory opening nearly every new speech, statement, or line of enquiry with some

variation of 'Modur' (as in lines 87, 97, 147,151); Gregory's mother responds in kind,

with variations of 'my sone' (89 and 175), and, as she lays out the trental which she

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[37] This reduplication of 'modur' does not appear to be the result of an eyeskip error. The version of the A-Trental found in MS. Cotton Cal. A. II, fol. 86 (also edited in Horstmann, *Minor Poems*, pp. 260-267), re-orders the lines but maintains the repetition of 'Modur': "Alas, alas/Modur þis ys to me a wondur case/A, leef, modur…" (ll. 75-7).

requires, "Mi deore blessede sone" (103). It is as if they are performatively restating their filial/parental connection in response to Gregory's initial failure to recognize his mother's spirit, repairing through these avowals the familial bond which his mother's unconfessed sins have so severely distorted. This concludes with his response to his mother's request for a trental:

> "A modur," hed seide "þat wol I do,
>
> ffor I am mon most I-holde þer-to -
>
> Þou were my Modur, I was þi sone -
>
> To synge þe Masses I schal not schone. (147-152)

This explicit affirmation of Gregory's filial obligations affirms the primary role of the child in the organization, or direct enactment, of commemorative prayer. As the ghost's son, Gregory is under an intense obligation to seek relief for the suffering soul, above that of the general requirement to pray for the souls of the dead. The strength of this familial obligation overrides whatever reticence her monstrous crime might produce in him. Gregory's virtuous filial piety stands outside the sphere of reputation with which she was so inappropriately concerned.

The mirrored nature of the affirmations ("Þou were my Modur, I was þi sone") meanwhile, emphasizes the bidirectional nature of the relationship, even given the extremity of the imbalance between the tormented mother and her saintly son. This diverges significantly from the 'adulterous mother' exempla, where the damned spirits of mothers are placed beyond the scope of their sons' sympathy or social engagement, and exist only to reveal their sins, which being highly genedered have no direct

relevance to their sons. Gregory's affirmation of their relationship continues as he beseeches her to appear again in a year, referring to her with the intimate pronoun þou which constructs and communicates their intimate familial relationship:

"I halse þe heiȝliche, Modur deere,

Þis tyme twelf-Moneþe to me a-peere

Hol þin a-stat to me þou schowe,

Þat, hou þou fare, I mouwe wel knowe!" (A, 151-156)

This request aligns the narrative's didactic need to demonstrate the trental's efficacy with Gregory's emotional need for assurance over his mother's condition. The ghost agrees to return in a year and disappears. In the A-*Trental* at least, the trental itself is passed over very quickly although the narrative voice is eager to continually remind the reader of the ghostly mother's role as recipient, motivator, and instigator of the masses, noting that Gregory 'for-lette neuer his Masse…to helpen his Modur þat was so pynet' (160-2) and 'tok þe Orisun...as his Modur preiȝlede him do' (A, 163-4).

A year later, Gregory's mass is interrupted for second time by his mother, although her identity is once again concealed to produce a second scene of familial recognition. Gregory's mother appears purified, and her description directly contrasts her previous appearance as a grotesque, demonic phantom:

He sayȝl a swiþe selli sight

A comely ladi, so dresset and diht

Þat al þe world of hire schon bright,

Comely Corouned as a Qwene,

Tween Angeles ladde*n* hire hem bi-twene. (A, 168-172)

This entrance is obviously an inversion of the first supernatural apparition: encroaching darkness is contrasted with the light from the shining lady, raggedness is replaced with royal dress, the figure is no longer solitary but flanked by angelic retainers. Whereas the first figure was defined by its grotesque illegibility, too distorted even to be recognized as human, this figure's description bears numerous markers of her humanity, gender, status, and membership of the heavenly community. Indeed, Gregory immediately assumes she is the Virgin Mary:

He grette hire wiþ wel mylde steuene

And seyde: "ladi, Qween of heuene,

Moodur of Ihesu, Mylde Marie,

ffor my moodur Merci I crie."

"Do wey," heo seide, "I nam not heo

Ne whom þou wenest þat I beo,

Bote, soþlyche, as þou seost me her,

I am þe Moodur þat þe beer." (A, 177-184)

It is not wholly surprising that Gregory fails to recognize his purified mother. Although Sophie Oosterwijk notes that 'It was believed that parents and children would still know each other at the resurrection', the resurrected dead were not presumed to appear in

precisely the form they took in life.[38] Medieval images of the dead tended to present idealized depictions rather than specific likenesses, with the identity of the effigy being evinced through inscriptions, heraldry, merchant's marks, and rebuses.[39] Gregory similarly interprets his mother's identity by using iconographic signifiers (her crown and angelic escort), and in this context his answer makes perfect sense (four of the specified feasts of the trental were Marian feast days). Furthermore, it was traditionally believed that the resurrected dead would appear at a 'perfect age' regardless of their age at death.[40] Although this was usually presumed to be the age of Christ at his death (between thirty and thirty-three), Kim M. Phillips has argued that in practice, 'representations of the perfected woman's body in death depict the woman as a maiden' in her teens; the Virgin Mary especially was sometimes depicted as a maiden even on her deathbed.[41] It is entirely possible that Gregory's mother appears here as a maiden, thereby heightening the parallels with Mary and exacerbating Gregory's confusion.

That said, this second misidentification further plays with the distortion of the mother's reputation, the irony of which is heightened by Gregory's iteration of Mary's titles. Purified through her son's prayers, Gregory's mother's appearance now matches the expectations of the living for her to be in heaven, 'set in souerveyn blisse' (46), upon death. The difference between the first ghost's first and second appearances can thus be paralleled with her first and second childbirths: an initial destructive and sinful

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[38] Sophie Oosterwijk, 'A swithe feire graue: the Appearance of Children on Medieval Tomb Monuments' in *Familly and Dynasty in Late Medieval England* ed. by Richard Eales and Shaun Tyas (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), pp. 172-192 (p.182).
[39] Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 226-7.
[40] Oosterwijk, 'A swithe feire graue', p. 181.
[41] Kim K. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England, 1270-1540* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 43-51.

maternal relationship is replaced with a spiritually productive model of motherhood. The revelation of her hypocrisy, however, has alienated her from that reputation so far that, in fulfilling that 'holy' reputation, she is no longer recognizable as herself. Alice G. Hornaday has discussed revenant narratives as providing a dialogue in which both parties receive aid in 'earn[ing] citizenship in the celestial fatherland by achieving ideal selves', with the qualification that those 'who succeeded in constructing an ideal self in the medieval fashion no longer presented any individuality… having purged human failings, quirks, and sins [and having partaken] of the ideal self which is everywhere one and the same'.[42] Hornaday's thesis applies with particular force to the apparition of Gregory's mother, who, having committed sin through pride, can expiate this sin only through the dissolution of her earthly identity and reputation. Both her perception as a 'holy housewife' and her identification as a murderer ruled by prideful shame are stripped away during her stint as a purgatorial spectre, so that a new identity as an ideal, purified Christian woman can be constructed.

In mistaking his mother for the Virgin Mary, Gregory responds to her not just as an icon of holiness but as a mother, the central element of her purified identity which remains legible to him. This is the culmination of the poem's emphasis on the maternal relationship, centring Gregory's mother's reproductive role one final time within the narrative, thereby resituating her within socially acceptable bounds of medieval feminine

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[42] Alice G. Hornaday, 'Visitors from Another Space: The Medieval Revenant as Foreigner' in *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 110-156, (pp. 110-1).

behaviour. As she avows the trental's efficacy to her son, the purified mother announces that:

> "Þorwh help and vertu of þi preyer,
>
> from derknesse i-dresset to blisse clere.
>
> þe tyme beo blesset þat I þe beer!"   (A, 188-190)

In blessing the birth of her legitimate son, Gregory's mother inverts the situation of her earlier infanticide. Her sins of pride, lust, and infanticide were viewed as particularly female, and dangerous because they threatened to undermine ideas of feminine social roles. Her legitimate saintly son helps her to align herself, in death, with the social and spiritual norms she had flouted in life without detection – her position as a virtuous, legitimate mother to Gregory allows his prayers to transform her into a virtuous maternal figure, despite her sins, which contravened all expectations of medieval maternal behaviour.

The transference of focus in the *Trental* tradition from the mother's confession to the act of commemorative prayer ultimately proposes a positive model for maternity. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, describing twelfth- and thirteenth-century saint's lives, notes how 'the model of the penitent, purgatorial, and purged woman.... creates its own subgenres of reading, concerned indirectly or directly with the profound ambivalences aroused by the indispensably fecund and non-virgin female body'.[43] A general view of motherhood as spiritually inferior to virginity created the need among women (for whom there might be

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[43] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 132.

no socially viable route to lifelong celibacy) for alternative spiritual models which affirmed the spiritual importance of motherhood. In Wogan-Browne's formulation, hagiographies of 'penitent harlot saints' provided a model for 'the spirituality of the honorary virgin, while allowing a measure of restored virginity to women who have had to postpone celibacy until after marriage'.[44] In shifting the process of purgation from acts of earthly penitence to purgatorial suffering and commemorative prayer, however, the *A-Trental* goes beyond the symbolic expiation of maternity through purgation, instead rendering the ghost's motherhood as critical to her successful deliverance from purgatory, and to her assumption of 'honorary virginity' when she is mistaken for Mary. When the ghost pronounces a blessing on Gregory's birth, she acknowledges that her own motherhood has been instrumental in securing her spiritual purification and an end to the suffering generated by her original, maladaptive childbirth. While a thematic connection is maintained between the infanticide and the birth of Gregory, a distinction is drawn between the mother's earlier sexual sin, which results only in suffering and the death of her first son, and her later, socially appropriate motherhood, which generates a productive connection with her saintly son, a connection through which the trental is deployed. Thus, the A-*Trental* associates successful motherhood with spiritual benefit, in the form of children who can aid in the relief and purification of the soul through the framework of commemorative prayer. To return to the presentation of the liturgical trental itself, the narrative apparatus provided by the A-*Trental* insistently frames it as a mechanism for aiding, and beseeching aid from, one's family, and specifically one's parents and children. It presents the trental as evidence of God's validation of such

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[44] Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, p. 137.

familial love and obligations as a route for the deliverance of purgatorial spirits, even in extreme cases.

The Awntyrs of Arthur at the Terne Wathelyne and *Three Dead Kings*: Royal families and cadaverous ghosts

While Gregory wields ecclesiastical authority in his position as pope, this has little bearing on the *Trental* narrative, which is not concerned with his social status except as a means to lend its narrative credibility. Social status is, however, key to the remaining poems discussed in this chapter, *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn*, and the *Three Dead Kings*, both of which focus on post-mortem encounters within royal families. The theme of parental/filial bonds in discussions of commemorative prayers held obvious significance for the aristocratic class, as it accorded well with legal and social frameworks of heredity which underpinned their wealth and power. Both *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings* featuring aristocratic protagonists, differ from the *Trental* in presenting these interactions as essentially reciprocal. *Trental* contrasts a sinful mother with a saintly son and paints the interaction as essentially unidirectional. Gregory aids his mother, whose input amounts to providing a prompt and instructions, and benefits himself only from the spiritual rewards of his own prayer and the emotional reward of delivering his mother's soul from purgatory. In *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings*, however, the living and dead are of comparable spiritual stature, and the interaction is closer to an exchange: the dead request prayers, but also provide spiritual advice and admonishment to their children. In this sense, they occupy a midway point between the *Trental* and the damned parents of the exemplum tradition, who lie beyond the help of the living but appear to provide moral warnings to their children to avoid their fate.

Like the *Trental of Gregory*, both *Awntyrs and Three Dead Kings* dramatise the recognition of the identity of the dead, and thus their familial relationships with the living, but both the tone and mechanism of this recognition are starkly different. In *Awntyrs* this recognition develops gradually, through a mirroring in both the descriptions and speech of the mother and daughter, creating a sense of emotional intimacy between them which enforces their moral obligation to one another while threatening to distract from the warnings of the dead. In *Three Dead Kings,* the obligation to commemorate one's parents is much more formalised through the channels of the commemorative complex, obviating the sympathetic emotional intimacy of the filial bonds seen in *Awntyrs* and the *Trental* in favour of a model of indebtedness, whose main emotional tenor is of fear and guilt*.*

The date of the *Awntyrs* has not been firmly established, with suggested dates ranging from the mid-fourteenth-century up to 1430, though it clearly uses the A-*Trental* as a source.[45] Four early and mid-fifteenth-century copies of the text survive: Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91 (the celebrated Lincoln Thornton manuscript), Bodleian Library, MS Douce 324, Lambeth Palace Library MS 491, and Princeton University Library, MS Taylor 9 (the Ireland-Blackburn manuscript). No manuscript appears to derive directly from any of the others, suggesting that *Awntyrs* was reasonably popular. The poem, an Arthurian romance, is split into two episodes of roughly equal length:

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[45] Richard Firth Green and Ralph Moffat, 'Schynbalds in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* (l. 395): Two Notes', *Notes and Queries* 67.2 (2020), pp. 185-190 (pp. 185-8); *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyn: An Edition based on Bodleian Library MS Douce 324*, ed. Ralph Hanna (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1974), 52.

During a royal hunt near Carlisle, Gaynour (the text's name for Queen

Guinevere) and Gawain are separated from the others by a storm. Sheltering by

a marshy lake, they encounter a gruesome, decaying ghost who identifies herself

as Gaynour's mother. The ghost laments her purgatorial suffering, gives Gaynour

spiritual advice, and says that thirty trentals will release her from purgatory. At

Gawain's request, she prophecies the downfall of Arthur and indicts his

covetousness before departing. In a second episode, the Scottish knight Galeron

appears and to protest Arthur's seizure of his lands, which were gifted to Gawain.

Galeron and Gawain duel and are badly injured before Gaynour convinces Arthur

to end the duel. Arthur returns Galeron's lands, gifts Gawain new lands, and

inducts Galeron into the Round Table. Gaynour commissions masses for her

mother.

The lack of apparent connection between the two episodes has led to a critical divide

between scholars who believe the poem to be a single unified work, and those who view

the text as two separate poems combined by a later adaptor, a position originating with

Hermann Lubke and popularised nearly a century later by Ralph Hanna.[46] However, all

extant manuscripts of *Awntyrs* preserve the unified structure, and no clear evidence for

separate versions of the two episodes exists. Critics who view the poem as a single

work, meanwhile, have generally followed A.C. Spearing's comparison of a poem to a

diptych, where the discontinuity between two self-contained episodes 'makes possible a

creative gesture in which the… reader himself participates', creating additional meaning

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[46] Hermann Lubke, *The Aunters of Arthur at the Tern-Wathelan, Teil I: Handschriften. Metrik. Verfasser* (1883, Berlin), Dissertation; Ralph Hanna, '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: An Interpretation', *Modern Language Quarterly* 31.3 (1970), pp. 275-279, p. 277.

through the juxtaposition of the two episodes with one another.[47] While Spearing's

assessment of the story's unity is compelling, the poem's *commemorative* concerns are,

save for a short coda, limited entirely to the first episode.

As previously mentioned, *Three Dead Kings* survives in Bodleian Library, MS Douce

302, a book of poems, carols and prayers compiled in the early fifteenth century by

John Audelay, chantry priest and former chaplain of Lord Richard Lestrange.[48] While

Audelay composed many of the poems in this manuscript, Ad Putter has refuted the

ascription of *Three Dead Kings* to him on linguistic and scribal grounds, localising it to

the 'northern fringe of the West Midlands, perhaps Lancashire'.[49] While the poem's

commemorative concerns themselves seem consonant with Audelay position as a

chantry priest, it also matches a penitential strand running through the manuscript which

may reflect Audelay's personal response to a major scandal he was involved in as

Lestrange's chaplain. On Easter Sunday 1417, Lestrange started a sacrilegious brawl

with one Sir John Trussell at the Church of St. Dunstan-in-the-East, London, in which

the fishmonger Thomas Pedwardynne was killed trying to stop the fighting; Audelay was

present during the brawl and made public penance alongside Lestrange.[50] Susanna

Fein has argued that the manuscript, composed in Audelay's old age, anticipates

Audelay's death and invokes his own name and contributions so heavily throughout in

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[47] A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 129-132.

[48] The date 1426 is included in a colophon, but it is unclear over how much time the manuscript was compiled.

[49] Ad Putter, 'The Language and Metre of "Pater Noster" and "Three Dead Kings", *The Review of English Studies*, 55.221 (2004), pp. 498-526 (p. 511).

[50] Susanna Fein, 'Good Ends in the Audelay Manuscript', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003), pp. 97-119 (pp. 99-100); *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-I443*, ed. by E. F. Jacobs, Vol. IV, Canterbury and York Society 116 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 169-75.

an attempt to prompt prayers for his soul. *Three Dead Kings* is included near the end of the manuscript and, as the last text added by the original scribe, may represent Audelay's original intended ending to the book, an Fein argues it is represents a 'deliberate outside selection, purposefully placed to provide a meditative end and contemplative mirror', reminding the reader of the approach of death and the power of commemorative ritual at the conclusion of a manuscript consciously representing Audelay's last living contributions to the world.[51]

The poem's verse form is exceptionally elaborate and restrictive, displaying intermeshed rhyme and interlinear alliteration schemes; its verse form and metre have been more fully discussed by Ad Putter, who considers its restrictive level of formal complexity unique in Middle English.[52] The poem is the only surviving free-standing English literary version of the widespread visual tradition of the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead.[53] The Legend depicts three living people meeting three walking corpses or revenants in a didactic encounter, usually depicted in two groups of three figures with the living on the left and the dead on the right. The 'Three Living' were usually men, though a few artworks feature a woman and two men, and might be depicted crowned, while hunting or hawking, on foot (the norm in English versions) or on horseback (more common on the continent), and might be delineated by age; the dead were exclusively depicted on foot.[54] The Legend was extremely popular: Kinch

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[51] Susanna Greer Fein, 'Life and Death, Reader and Page: Mirrors of Mortality in English Manuscripts', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 35.1 (2002), pp. 69-94, (n.p.).

[52] Putter, 'The Language and Metre of "Pater Noster" and "Three Dead Kings"', pp. 511-3.

[53] A six-line Middle English verse dialogue, which appears exclusively alongside visual depictions of the legend in manuscript illustrations and wall paintings, will be discussed later.

[54] For a fuller account of the variations of visual depictions of the Legend, see E.C. Williams, 'Mural Paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead in England', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association,* 7 (1942), pp. 31-40. For photographs and discussions of many of the surviving English wall

notes that there are nearly two hundred extant murals on the subject from across the continent, along with dozens of illustrations in manuscripts and over a dozen poetic versions in English, French, Italian and German, along with numerous now-lost variations appearing as sculptures, exterior murals, and instances incorporated into larger images.[55] The plot of *Three Dead Kings* is a narrative elaboration of the Legend: An unnamed narrator watches three kings hunting. A sudden storm separates the kings from their companions. Three decaying ghost-corpses approach them, and each king reacts in turn with horror and lamentation. The dead identify themselves as the kings' fathers, and each gives a speech accusing them of having neglected their fathers' commemoration, of unjust rule, and of being too concerned with earthly things, reminding them of the inevitability of death. The dead depart, and the living amend their ways, building a chantry where the story of their encounter is written on the wall.

Even the briefest assessment of *Three Dead Kings* alongside *Awntyrs* establishes numerous commonalities beyond the encounter between living and dead. The shared setting of a royal hunt, which is present in several depictions of the Legend (such as the wall painting at Charlwood, Surrey, see Figure 9) provides a comfortable setting of aristocratic leisure which is then severely disrupted by the arrival of the dead. Conversely, *Three Dead Kings* incorporates elements present in *Awntyrs* (and the *Trental* tradition) but not typical of the Legend. This can be demonstrated by comparison with the main English literary composition associated with the Legend, a

paintings of the Legend, see Anne Marshall, ''The Three Living and the Three Dead: A Medieval Morality', (Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church, n.d.) <https://reeddesign.co.uk/paintedchurch/three-living-three-dead.htm> [Accessed 31 August 2024].
[55] Ashby Kinch, 'Image, Ideology and Form: The Middle English "Three Dead Kings" in Its Iconographic Context', *The Chaucer Review* 43.1 (2008), pp. 48-81 (p. 49)

verse dialogue appended in numerous versions to manuscript illustrations (see Figure

10) and wall paintings of the Legend (the first three lines are framed as being spoken,

one line a piece, by the living, and the last three by the dead):

Fig. 9. Wall painting at Charlwood, Surrey, depicting the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead. Three crowned figures on horseback (left) confront three walking corpses (right)
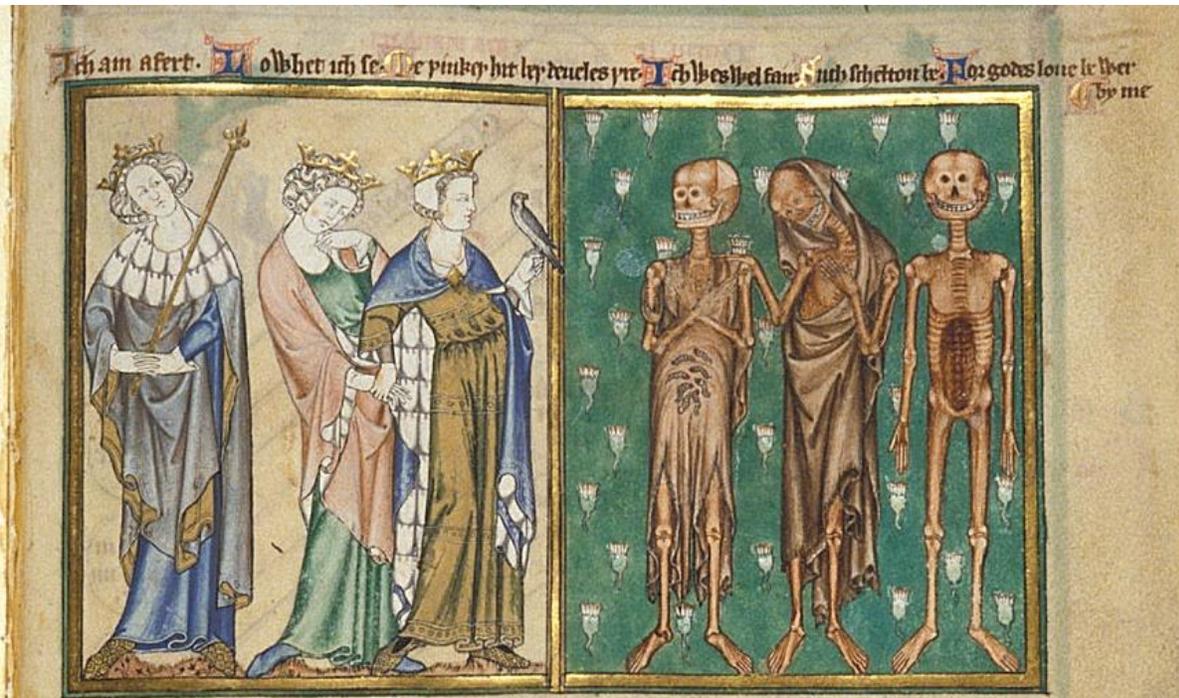
Fig. 10. A manuscript illustration of the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead in the De Lisle Psalter, London, Arundel British Library MS Arundel 83, f.127r, alongside a French poetic version of the Legend. The six-line Middle English poem 'Ich am afert' is written above the illustration, providing dialogue spoken by the figures.

Ich am afert.

Lo whet ich se.

Me þinkeb hit beþ develes þre.

Ich wes wel fair.

Such scheltou be

For godes loue be wer by me.[56]

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[56] This version accompanies an illustration of the Legend in the De Lisle Psalter (British Library MS Arundel 83, f.127r), which itself accompanies an insular French poetic version of The Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead. Another version of the same poem appears in the Taymouth Hours (British Library MS Yates-Thompson 13, f.179v), where the same scene illustrates the eighth lesson of Matins, Job 19:20, describing the wasting away of flesh. The verse also appears in fragmentary form in wall paintings, often as speech scrolls issuing from the mouths of the participants: examples include the church at Wensley, North Yorkshire and Heydon, Norfolk. Williams, 'Mural Paintings', pp. 37-9.

This *memento mori* message implies no connection between the living and the dead beyond the universal human commonality of a shared fate in death. The lineal relationship between the living kinds and their dead fathers is, however, central to Audelay's poem. Moreover, Ashby Kinch notes that its 'insistent focus on intercessory prayer, rooted in the implication that the three dead are in Purgatory rather than Hell' is unique among versions of the Legend.[57] *Three Dead Kings*, like *Awntyrs,* uses the recognition of the identities of the dead (and thus their filial relationships with the living) as a key component of the dead's message, with implications for how these texts present aristocratic familial relationships and power.[58]

Common to both texts is the image of the 'mirror of death', whereby the dead are presented as mirror images of the living. This was a common didactic trope, a *memento mori* providing a reminder of earthly transience and the viewer's eventual fate. Both *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings* have the dead instruct the living to view them as a mirror:

> "Muse on my mirrour;
>
> For, king and emperour,
>
> Thus dight shul ye be."   (*Awntyrs*, 167-9)[59]

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[57] Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis: Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2013)*,* p. 148.

[58] An earlier English instance of the Three Dead being the fathers of the Three Living can be found in the wall painting at St. Oswald's Church, Widford, Oxfordshire dating from the first half of the 14th century, where the words 'our sonnes' appears in a fragmentary speech panel, apparently addressed to the Living by the Dead. See John Edwards, 'Widford Wall-Paintings: More new Decipherments', *Oxoniensia* 49 (1984), pp. 133-139 (p. 137).

[59] 'The Awntyrs off Arthure' in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 169-226, (ll. 167-9). Unless otherwise noted, all further references to this poem refer to this edition.

"Makis your merour be me! • My myrthus bene mene" (*Three Dead Kings*, 120)[60]

In both cases, the call to recognize in the dead the inevitability of the viewer's own death, and through such contemplation to amend one's living, is intermingled with the demand for a specifically aristocratic humility: that the wealth and status enjoyed in this life will mean nothing in death. There is no mirror imagery of this kind in the A-*Trental* and it would be incoherent there, but it is a key element of the visual tradition of the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead. Susanna Greer Fein identifies the space between dead and living in visual depictions of the Legend as a 'mirror-point, the site of inversion between the realm of the Living and that of the Dead' representing the 'sacral divide between the here and the hereafter, between time and atemporality', developing an analogy between the didactic encounter depicted and the didactic encounter between (living) audience and (dead) image.[61]

Like the visual depictions of the Legend, both *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings* employ binary or mirror-like structures throughout. *Three Dead Kings* reflects the generally static arrangement of the figures in the Three Living and Three Dead visual tradition through its restrictive structure, with each figure accorded a single stanza to react to the encounter and speak before the encounter dissolves. Likewise, critics have long seen mirroring and pairing as the principal structural devices in *Awntyrs*, drawing both from the numerous instances of mirrored actions and descriptions within the text, as well as the text's two-episode, diptych-like structure.[62] Even critics such as J.O. Fichte, who

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[60] 'Three Dead Kings' in John the Blind Audelay, *Poems and Carols (Oxford Bodleian Library MS Douce 302)*, ed. by Susanna Greer Fein (Kalamazoo, Michigan; Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), pp. 218-222, ll. 53-4. Unless otherwise noted, all further references to this poem refer to this edition.
[61] Susanna Greer Fein, 'Life and Death: Mirror and Page', n.p.
[62] A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, pp. 129-130.

rejected the unity of the composition, acknowledged that mirroring maintains a structural function, suggesting that 'Perhaps inspired by the mirror image in Part I… the redactor meant the second part to be read as a mirror of the first'.[63] Alex J. Zawacki has gone so far as to argue that *Awntyrs'* overall structure is modelled on a two-layered *transi* cadaver tomb (where an effigy of the deceased in life is placed above an effigy of a decaying corpse), intended to 'highlight the interconnectedness of the seemingly opposed states of life and death'.[64]

However, while the didactic use of mirror imagery in service of a *memento mori* message is well-attested, the 'mirror of death' trope could be deployed for both commemorative and didactic purposes simultaneously. One formulation of this interplay can be found in the fifteenth-century cadaver tomb of John Baret (d. 1467) in St. Mary's church in Bury St. Edmunds, where the side of the tomb next to the effigy's head reads 'Ho that wil sadly beholde me with his ie/May se his own merowr and lerne for to die', set between the words 'John Baret' (See Figures 11 and 12).[65] The inscription intermingles a didactic call to recognise in the cadaver one's own worldly future (and hasten thereby to amend one's life while it lasts) with the commemorative call to

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[63] J.O. Fichte, *'The Awntyrs off Arthure:* An Unconscious Change in the Paradigm of Romance' in *The Living Middle Ages: Studies in Mediaeval English Literature and Its Tradition*, ed. by Uwe Böker, Manfred Markus and Rainer Schöwerling, pp. 129-136 (p. 135).

[64] Alexander J. Zawacki, 'A Dark Mirror: Death and the Cadaver Tomb in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Arthuriana* 27.2 (2017), pp. 87-101, (p. 87). Given the widespread currency of other mirror-like representations of death (such as the Legend), a direct causal connection with the *transi* is not necessary to explain the features Zawacki discusses.

[65] Michael Rimmer, 'Silver and Guilt: The Cadaver Tomb of John Baret of Bury St. Edmunds', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association,* 172.1 (2019), pp. 131-154 (p. 137). David Griffith argues that Baret, who had literary interests and refers to having written poetry in his will, likely composed the several verse inscriptions on his tomb, which contain echoes of the Middle English penitential monologue *Pety Job*, himself. David Griffith, 'English Commemorative Inscriptions', pp. 268-9.

Fig. 11. The cadaver tomb of John Baret (d. 1467), St. Mary's Church, Bury St. Edmunds
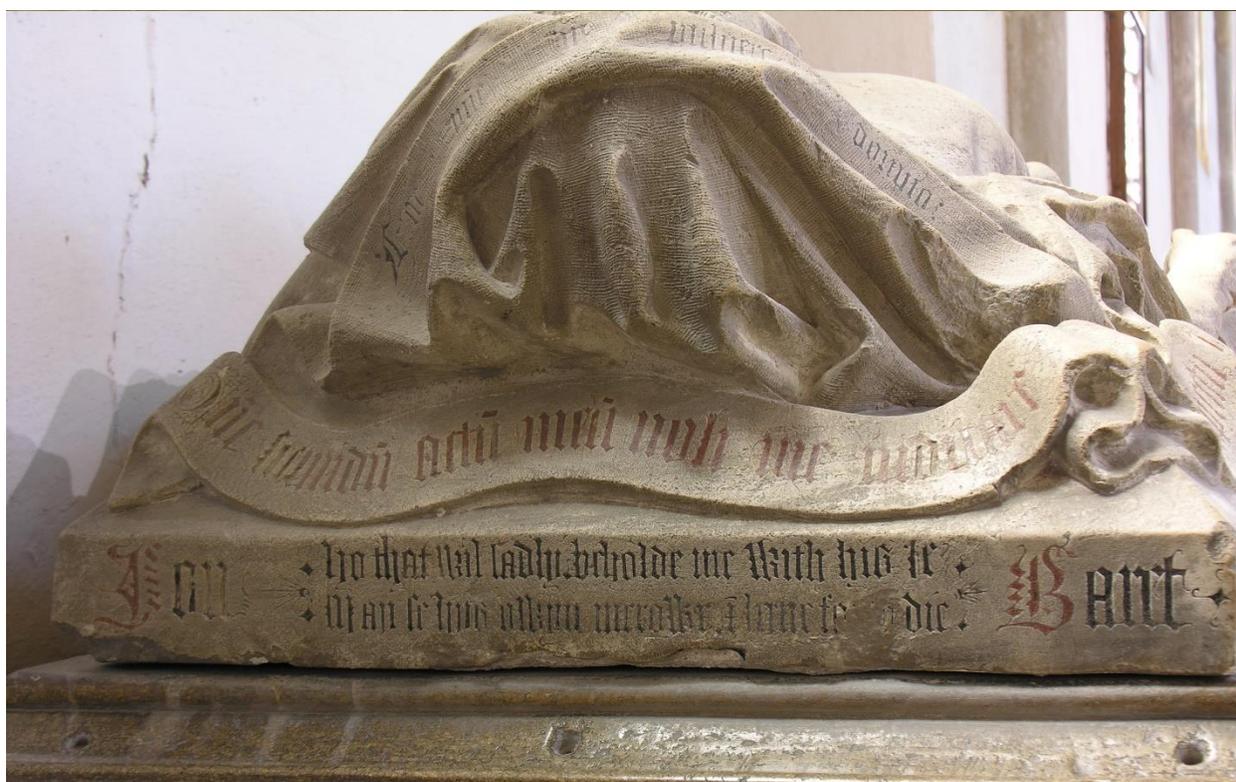
Fig. 12. Detail of the tomb effigy of John Baret, showing the verse inscription, and Baret's name, on the plinth beneath the effigy's head.

recognise in the cadaver a specific fellow Christian deserving of prayer. Contemplating

the 'mirror' of the dead is not meant to efface the identity of the dead, but to draw out

the similarity between the living viewer and the specific dead individual, to draw out a

reciprocal, sympathetic social relationship between them. Likewise, *Awntyrs* and *Three

Dead Kings* use their mirroring structures to dramatise the process by which the social

relationships between their royal protagonists, and the obligations attendant upon them,

are recognized and performed in a commemorative context.

In *Awntyrs*, Gaynour's mother, like Gregory's mother, is not initially recognizable due to

her monstrous appearance, and is likewise framed in demonic terms, bearing 'the

lyknes of Lucyfere, laytheste in Helle' (84). *Awntyrs* repeatedly emphasises the

similarity between Gaynour and her dead mother, mirroring their descriptions and

actions, in a way absent in *Trental*. This process begins before the mother's spirit is

introduced as the iterative poetic accounts of both women's appearances amount to a

matched pair of *descriptiones*, firstly in a conventional *descriptio* of Gaynour's finery,

and then, inverted, in the grotesque description of her mother's decaying form.

Gaynour's initial description forms the entire second stanza:

> In a gleterand gide that glemed full gay -
>
> With riche ribaynes reversset, ho so right redes
>
> Rayled with rybees of riall array
>
> Her hode of a hawe huwe, ho that here hede hedes
>
> Of pillour, of palwerk, of perré to pay;
>
> Schurde in a short cloke that the rayne shedes,

Set over with saffres sothely to say,

With saffres and seladynes set by the sides;

Here sadel sette of that ilke,

Saude with sambutes of silke;

On a mule as the mylke,

Gaili she glides. (14-26)

Although adhering to *descriptio*'s typical head-to-toe schema, this portrait focuses

purely on Gaynour's attire and avoids any direct reference to Gaynour's body, save for

her 'hede', which is itself hidden from view. Instead, the poem focuses on her clothing,

and thus on the elements that designate her social position and her queenly status, as

well as emphasising sumptuous excess of the court of which she is part. Sunhee Kim

Gertz notes that the *descriptio* became so conventional as to function 'as a complete

unit in and of itself… as do individual words and metaphors', in which the conventional

highlighting of the 'relation between surface and inner worth' gives '*descriptiones*… set,

conventional meanings which a poet may, however, jostle in order to infer additional

levels of meaning'.[66] For the *Awntyrs*-poet, this 'jostling' places the broadly conventional

descriptio of Gaynour in juxtaposition with the grotesque description of her mother's

decaying form. A.C. Spearing noted the general style of the poem's opening, filled with

conventional material and 'semantically empty asseverations' presenting a 'conspicuous

consumption of words and of time, formalised in the necessarily repetitive stanza-

linking' which establishes an aristocratic 'atmosphere of normality… on which the

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[66] Sunhee Kim Gertz, 'The "Descriptio" in Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde', *Papers on Language and Literature* 35.2 (1999), pp. 141-166 (p. 145).

abnormal is to intrude.'[67] Thus, Gaynour's *descriptio* establishes a conventional baseline for a romance, against which the descriptions of her mother can be contrasted.

The full *descriptio* of the ghost does not immediately follow the ghost's appearance, however. Instead, its initial description focuses on auditory, rather than visual, descriptions, as it suddenly emerges from the lake 'In the lyknes of Lucyfere' (84), howling and wailing:

> Yauland and yomerand, with many loude yelle.
>
> Hit yaules, hit yameres, with waymynges wete,
>
> And seid, with siking sare,
>
> "I ban the body me bare!
>
> Alas! Now kindeles my care;
>
> I gloppen and I grete!"   (83-91)

The sudden assault on Gawain and Gaynour's senses is emphasised through the heavy, rhythmical alliteration, presenting the ghost as a potentially-dangerous demonic intruder. The 'wheel' of short lines, however, shifts to present the ghost's speech directly, as she identifies herself as human and introduces the first reference to familial and maternal connections (albeit negatively) by cursing her own mother, the 'body that me bare'. Nick Davis has perceptively discussed how, in a 'wheeled' stanza form, 'the long alliterative line might be heard or felt as a series of such 'impacts', whereas the rhymed and less insistently alliterative lines suggest a certain standing back from the phenomenal rush' - here the transition matches the shift from initial shock to the first

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[67] A.C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry*, pp. 133.

indications of the ghost's humanity, and thus her enmeshment in a familial network.[68]

Accordingly, this is followed by the first instance in which the poem uses the concatenating stanza-linking structure (where words from the final line of a stanza are repeated in the first line of the next) to transfer a word or action from the ghost to Gaynour (a device which will be used repeatedly throughout the episode). Here, Gaynour reflects the ghost when she 'Then gloppenet and grete' (92) in response, the transposition of noise from the revenant to Gaynour recontextualising the ghost's threatening noise as a sign not of demonic aggression, but of suffering.

Gawain, apparently convinced of the ghost's humanity, attempts to speak with it that he might determine 'What may the bales bete/Of the body bare' (103-4). It is only at this point that we receive a lengthy description of the gruesome 'ghost-corpse', to use Andrew Murray Richmond's apposite description:[69]

> Bare was the body and blak to the bone,
>
> Al biclagged in clay uncomly cladde
>
> Hit waried, hit wayment as a woman,
>
> But on hide ne on huwe no heling hit hadde.
>
> Hit stemered, hit stonayde, hit stode as a stone,
>
> Hit marred, hit memered, hit mused for madde.   (105-110)[70]
>
> […]
>
> On the chef of the cholle,

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[68] Nick Davis, 'Narrative Form and Insight' in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet* edited by Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, N.Y.; D.S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 329-350 (p.340)
[69] Andrew Murray Richmond, 'Fluid Boundaries in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *Sir Isumbras*', *Open Library of Humanities* 4.1 (2018), pp. 24-57 (np).
[70] The description is interrupted by Gawain's approach at this point.

> A pade pikes on the polle,
>
> With eighen holked ful holle
>
> That gloed as the gledes.
>
> Al glowed as a glede the goste there ho glides,
>
> Umbeclipped in a cloude of clethyng unclere,
>
> Serkeled with serpentes all aboute the sides
>
> To tell the todes theron my tonge wer full tere.   (114-121)

This, like the description of Gregory's mother in her demonic guise, is a clear example of Fein's 'grotesque stranger' topos, but in this context it acts as a distorted mirror of the earlier *descriptio* of Gaynour*,* featuring a disordered, naked body*.* Jan Ziolkowski has discussed how, where *descriptiones* of beauty and ugliness are paired together in medieval literature, the effect is usually either used to contrast youth with age or to 'demonstrate the consequences of low life by tracing the bodily manifestation of moral collapse'.[71] The grotesquery seen at this point in *Awntyrs* combines elements of both these forms, showing a dead body of the previous generation suffering as a result of the sins she committed in life. However, the description serves a third purpose: to draw out the personal connection between Gaynour and her mother, planting elements that underpin Gaynour's sympathy for the ghost-corpse even while emphasising its macabre appearance. Notably, this description begins the gradual process by which the ghost's identity becomes increasingly clear, as her gender is established by the way in which she 'wayment as a woman' (107). The pronoun 'hit', used intensively in the initial

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[71] Jan Ziolkowski, 'Avatars of Ugliness in Medieval Literature', *Modern Language Review* 79.1 (1984), pp. 1-20, (pp. 5-6).

descriptions of the ghost's actions in the Douce text, ceases to be used for the ghost after line 110; suggesting that the ghost is no longer being conceived of as inhuman.

After a tense description of the ghost-corpse's approach, she finally begins to identify herself to Gawain:

"I was of figure and face fairest of alle,

Cristened and knowen with kinges in my kynne;

I have kinges in my kyn knowen for kene."   (137-139)

The ghost-corpse first establishes her former beauty, and then, repetitively, avows her membership of a royal kinship community whose loss she laments, complaining of being 'caught oute of kide to cares so colde' (151). This description is immediately followed by a further identification that bridges the gap between the two descriptions of Gaynour and the ghost: "Quene was I somwile, brighter of browes/Then Berell or Brangwayne" (144-5). In doing so, she draws a further connection between herself and Gaynour as royalty ('Quene' is in fact transferred from a reference to Gaynour in the preceding stanza), as well as confirming their shared generic position as romance exemplars of royal female beauty. Leah Haught perceptively notes that this passage departs from the recognition sequence in the A-*Trental*: rather than identifying herself principally as the protagonist's mother, as Gregory's mother does, Gaynour's mother identifies herself 'first and foremost as a dead royal, characterising her suffering in recognizably secular terms… the epitome of the aristocratic ethos embodied by Gaynour' now presented as 'kinless and community-less… a figure offering a universal

warning about the *vanitas* of the ruling elite'.[72] But the ghost's remembrance of her lost

community also points towards the vital role that her family (more specifically her

daughter) will have in bringing about her remedy through commemorative prayer. The

ghost's comments about her isolation are directed solely to *Gawain*, rather than

Gaynour, and the moment she and her daughter are brought together, she identifies

herself as Gaynour's mother and begins the process of repairing their parental/filial

bond:

> After Gaynour the gay Sir Gawyn is gon,
>
> And to the body he her brought, the burde bright.
>
> "Welcom, Waynour, iwis, worthi in won.
>
> Lo, how delful deth has thi dame dight!" (157-160)

The ghost's identity is revealed only when she and her daughter are brought together

physically so that Gaynour can "muse on [the ghost's] mirrour" (167). The closer the

ghost draws spatially to Gaynour, the more information is revealed about her, and the

more that information confirms her position as Gaynour's deathly double - first her

humanity, then her gender, her royal station and former beauty, and finally her

relationship with Gaynour. As Richard Moll notes, the ghost-corpse is 'not simply a

mirror for any passer-by', but an individual whose identity, and maternal relationship

with Gaynour, enhances the specificity and import of her spiritual message.[73] Not all of

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[72] Leah Haught, 'Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers: Gender and Genre in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Arthuriana* 20.1 (2010), pp. 3-24, (pp. 9-10).
[73] Richard Moll, *Before Malory: Reading Arthur in later medieval England* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 130.

these relationships are necessarily visible to the characters but must be inferred by the reader.

This specular encounter, in which the living queen is asked to recognize in the decaying corpse both her own identity and her mother's, prompts a proliferation of identifiers and actions. The prior stanzaic concatenations are now deployed so that the two women respond to each other by subtly reframing each other's speech:

> "If thou be my moder, grete mervaile hit is
>
> That al thi burly body is broughte to be so bare!"
>
> "I bare the of my body; what bote is hit I layn?"

This shift re-emphasises the gendered connection both between mother and daughter, as well as the temporal connection between the deteriorating cadaver and fecundity of her body in life. This subtle punning also creates, through poetic artifice, a sense of emotional intimacy between mother and daughter which might approach playfulness, were the circumstances not so serious in nature. At times, however, the mapping of associations between the two women also produces potential difficulties, as if the task of identifying the ghost as both mother and mirror proves too great for Gaynour. The ghost's injunction to 'Thenk hertly on this/Fonde to mende thi mys… Be war be my wo" (192-5) is transformed from a call for self-examination back into a cry of sympathy, "Wo is me for thi wo," (196), thereby utilising the very mutability invited by the specular encounter to redirect attention back to the suffering body of the dead and away from oneself. Familial sympathy draws ghost and queen together and enables productive

dialogue, but in extremity it threatens to obscure the ghost's didactic message by collapsing the possibility of contemplating the self in the body of the other.

The concern over the potential overspecificity of familial sympathy as a basis for spiritual development is of particular importance to our understanding of the poem given the intense critical debate regarding the effectiveness of Gaynour's response to her mother's message. This debate rests in large part on the ghost's repeated calls for charity, as she asks Gaynour to "Have pité on the pore - thou art of power" (173). The ghost notes the importance of charity towards the poor four more times, noting that after 'mekeness' and mercy' (250) one should 'have pité on the power, that please Heven king/Sithen charité is chef, and then is chaste,/And then almessedede aure al other thing.' (251-3). Although Gaynour promises to honour the ghost's request to 'Gyf fast of thi goode/To folke that failing the fode' (232-3), there is no direct evidence of these actions anywhere in the poem. Similarly uncomfortable is the delay of some 280 lines between the ghost's final request for prayers (320) and their commencement (703-708), as well as the generally pessimistic view of the Arthurian court espoused by the ghost. Asked by Gawain about the fate of the chivalric class as represented by the Round Table, the ghost indicts Arthur for covetousness (265) and warns that 'this chivalrous Kinge chef shall a chaunce' (269), that and that Arthur and 'al the rial route of the Rounde Table/Thei sullen dye on a day' (304-5) at Mordred's hands. In light of this prophesied collapse, Christine Chism argues that Gaynour's 'perfunctory expiation' by way of masses, accompanied by 'no self-examination at all', contributes to 'the poem's picture of a doomed aristocracy more invested in their possessions and self-inflating

performances than in the justice they are entrusted to serve.[74] J.O. Fichte views this

delay as emblematic of the deleterious thematic and generic disjunction between the

two episodes, concludes his analysis by speculating that the final stanza is a later

interpolation 'added by some kind soul to achieve a semblance of formal closure'.[75]

Jean E. Jost goes so far as to dismiss the poem's conclusion as a 'grand gesture of

ordering masses to be said by others – a denial of personal responsibility'

demonstrating the Gaynour has learned nothing from the vision.[76] As the commission of

masses was the mainstay of aristocratic commemoration and the ghost repeatedly

avows their efficacy, it is hard to believe that any but the most heterodox medieval

audience would view Gaynour's actions this way. As Helen Philips argues, 'Modern

readers should probably be wary of assuming that the poet makes a sharp distinction

between prayer and practical charity, and rates the former low', and when the *Awntyrs*

is read against other purgatorial ghost narratives, which universally endorse

commemorative prayer, the idea that we are meant to understand Gaynour's

commemorative actions as insufficient is hard to support.[77] The critical discomfort with

Gaynour's commemoration stems from an unwillingness to engage with the poem's

earnest belief in purgatory. Rather than understand this commemoration as charity,

such critics instead project onto the text a post-Reformation Protestant worldview, which

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[74] Chism, *Alliterative Revivals*, p. 252.

[75] J.O. Fichte, '*The Awntyrs off Arthure:* An Unconscious Change in the Paradigm of Romance'. p. 136

[76] Jean E. Jost, 'Margins in Middle English Romance: Culture and Characterisation in *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne* and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*' in *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 133-152 (pp. 137).

[77] Helen Philips, 'The Ghost's Baptism in *The Awntyrs off Arthure*', *Medium Aevum* 58.1 (1989), pp. 49-58 (p.53).

denies purgatory's existence and thus the moral value of charity towards purgatorial souls.

There can be little doubt that the *Awntyrs* features a particularly robust criticism of Arthurian society, but this criticism is separate from the advice offered to Gaynour. It commences in earnest only when Gawain, curious and seemingly guiltily concerned with his complicity in having 'defoulen the folke on fele kinges londes' (262), asks 'How shall we fare...that fonden to fight' (261). It is Gawain's interruption here that reroutes the ghost towards a consideration (and scathing indictment) of the scope of Arthurian history as defined in the Chronicle tradition.[78] Leah Haught notes that this amounts to a 'redirection of the ghost's insight to address more traditionally male desires' which 'begins the process of not only controlling but also silencing the female voice as a prophetic source of knowledge', subsuming the ghost's message 'back into the more worldly and explicitly chivalric romance' of the opening, and of the second episode.[79] The distinction between the advice given to Gaynour and the warning given to Gawain is one of both genre and gender - Gaynour receives spiritual advice and Gawain receives a prophecy of political doom. Given this heavy distinction it seems reasonable to suggest that the poem views these two spheres – commemoration and charity on the one hand, political catastrophe and Arthurian history on the other – as separate but connected concerns, wherein the failure of the Arthurian court does not necessarily frame Gaynour's commemoration of her mother in a negative light.

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[78] Judging by a matching description of Mordred's heraldry ('in sable/With a saurer engreled of silver full shene') the poet may have been specifically familiar with the *Alliterative Morte Arthur*, with which the *Awntyrs* shares the Thornton manuscript.
[79] Leah Haught, 'Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers', p. 14.

The lack of any direct reference to charity in Gaynour's final actions remains problematic, but this absence is perhaps not so alarming in a commemorative context as it first appears. As discussed in the introduction, medieval English conceptions of charity depended heavily upon the framework of the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy: feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners, and burying the dead. A second framework existed for the Spiritual Works of Mercy, of which the last is prayer for the living and dead. The inclusion of the dead in both the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy meant that the dead, both in body and soul, were recognizable as objects of Christian charity, and the cadaverous ghost-corpse of Gaynour's mother is such an object twice over.[80] In keeping with this position as both suffering soul in purgatory and cadaver in need of burial, Gaynour's mother's hideousness is used to convey vulnerability and suffering as much as she inspires terror. This aspect is also seen in *Three Dead Kings*, where the dead kings are also depicted as physically deficient:

> Schadows unshene • were chapid to chow,
>
> With lymes long and lene • and leggys ful lew,
>
> Hadyn lost the lyp and the lyver • sethyn thai were layd lowe. (43-5)

The emphasis lies on the revenants' thin limbs and weak legs – the poet later describes one as having 'lyndys ful lene/With eyther leg as a leke' (118-9). This imagery closely accords with both artistic depictions of the Three Dead, which usually appear either

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[80] In practice, however, people in medieval England appear to have often been reticent to interact with dead bodies found in suspicious circumstances, due to the burden imposed on both individual and community of being caught up in a coroner's inquest, a situation which 'almost invariably resulted in financial loss to the township or hundred' in which the body was found. R. Hunnisett, *The Medieval Coroner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 9-12.

skeletal or emaciated, as well as the emaciated, sometimes partially skeletonized

corpses that appeared on cadaver tombs, which first appear in the 1420s, roughly

contemporaneous with the poems' likely dates.[81] Christina Welch notes that these

monuments typically present the corpse in an idealized, unrealistically emaciated state,

functioning as a symbolic representation of the commemorated individual's inner piety

whose 'nakedness and obvious emaciation speak of spiritual piety' in an expression of

humility.[82] Similarly, despite their gruesome appearances, the ghost-corpses of the

dead kings and Gaynour's mother are carefully presented in accordance with an

aristocratic representation of spiritual humility. Just like commemorative sculptures,

whose ultimate purpose was to petition prayer, these poems seek to bolster lay

commitments to commemorative prayer through representing the vulnerability and

suffering of the suffering aristocratic soul through bodily representations.

While in *Three Dead Kings* the vulnerability of the purgatorial revenants' bodies is not

heavily iterated or cast into precise schema, the descriptions of the ghost-corpse in

Awntyrs seek very insistently to mark Gaynour's mother as an object of Christian prayer

and charity by paralleling her suffering purgatorial form with the recipients of other,

indirectly related Works of Mercy, thus associating commemorative prayer with those

acts. The heavy emphasis on the 'bare' and 'uncomly clad' body of Gaynour's mother

has already been discussed, but this focus also associates her with the recipients of the

third work of mercy (the clothing of the naked). When Gaynour's mother describes

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[81] The first conclusively dated cadaver tomb in England is that of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, at Canterbury Cathedral, constructed in 1425, 18 years before Chichele's death.
[82] Christina Welch, 'The Imagined Emaciated Body in Late-Medieval English Memorial Sculpture', in *Bodies of Information: Reading the Variable Body from Roman Britain to Hip Hop,* ed. by Chris Mounsey and Stan Booth (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 39-61 (p. 51).

herself as 'Naxte and nedefull, naked on night' (185), she is specifically drawing attention to her nakedness (previously presented as an element of her hideousness) as a sign of her vulnerability and dependence on Gaynour's charity towards her. This accords with representations seen in cadaver tombs, which are usually depicted naked, lying in an open burial shroud which modestly covers the genitals. Descriptions of the ghost-corpse's confinement and isolation in the painful environment of purgatory draw further associations between the dead and both the homeless and prisoners, recipients of the fifth and sixth Corporal Works of Mercy. As we have already seen, the trental liturgy explicitly presented souls in purgatory as being held captive by demons, a state paralleled with Jerusalem under Muslim rule, both being 'represented as suffering in a state of bondage imposed by an unholy captor'.[83] Gaynour's mother likewise presents purgatory as a 'dongone' (184) where she is persecuted by a 'ferde of fenders of helle' (186), and the earlier, less specific images of confinement, of being 'Into care… caught and couched in clay' (152), focus intently on her suffering for the purpose of drawing sympathy conducive to commemorative prayer.

The most explicit of the parallels between Gaynour's mother and recipients of the Seven Works of Mercy occurs in the mother's final instructions to Gaynour:

> "Fede folke for my sake that failen the fode
>
> And menge me with matens and Masse in melle.
>
> Masses arn medecynes to us that bale bides;

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[83] Penny J. Cole, 'Purgatory and Crusade', p. 714.

> Us thenke a Masse as swete
>
> As eny spice that ever ye yete." (323-7)

Gaynour's mother parallels and intertwines charity and prayer as the two constituent elements of her commemoration. The soul masses which she requires are framed as both food and medicine, metaphorically both feeding the hungry and visiting the sick. At the same time, the actual feeding of the poor, being done 'for my sake', amounts to an alternative form of commemorative activity. This mirrors the widespread tradition of the dole, in which food and drink were distributed at funerals and other commemorative occasions. Just as the funeral dole acted as both spiritually beneficial charity and a prompt for prayers from the poor beneficiaries who received it, Gaynour's mother benefits both from the spiritual benefit associated with the fulfilment of the Works of Mercy on her behalf, as well as from the prayers supplied by the poor in exchange for the alms thus distributed. This implication is made explicit by Gaynour's mother's explanation of the spiritual power of almsgiving:

> "The praier of poer may purchas the pes -
>
> Of that thou yeves at the yete,
>
> Whan thou art set in thi sete,
>
> With al merthes at mete
>
> And dayntés on des."
>
> "With riche dayntés on des thi diotes ar dight,
>
> And I, in danger and doel, in dongone I dwelle,
>
> Naxte and nedefull, naked on night."(178-82)

The ghost is not a calling for a radical reformulation of aristocratic relationships with the poor, so much as the vigorous adherence to a normative medieval concept of aristocratic charity directed towards the benefit of aristocratic souls. Charity forms part of a network of inter-class spiritual exchange in which the aristocracy use the spiritual power of the poor, acquired through charity, to 'purchas' their liberation from purgatory. Further there is no suggestion of a rupture in society's class structure - the powerful remain comfortably 'set in thi sete' while the poor are set outside 'at the yete'. The aristocratic soul in purgatory, moreover, is set in even greater hardship, cast out beyond physical aid into a dangerous prison. In this fashion commemorative masses and charitable almsgiving are both equated with one another, two complementary practices through which the poem's royal women can hope to ameliorate purgatorial hardship. Just as Carl Grey Martin views the second episode's duel as a means to demonstrate the moral self-sufficiency of the chivalric class through the purgative suffering of ritual combat, the extremity of the ghost's purgatorial suffering means that all her references to charity towards the poor can be directed back towards her own suffering aristocratic soul.[84] This is not necessarily to say that Gaynour rejects engaging in any form of charity beyond the explicitly completed prayers - she does in fact promise to abide by her mother's request to 'Gyf fast of thi goode/To folke that failen the fode' (232-3) - but that their social value is in the final account so far subordinated to their role in securing spiritual benefits for aristocratic ghost that they are not mentioned. In sum, the aims of all Gaynour's mother's requests of her daughter are fundamentally commemorative, and eloquence with which they are invoked should not persuade the reader into believing

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[84] Carl Grey Martin, '*The Awntyrs off Arthure*: An Economy of Pain', *Modern Philology* 108.2 (2010), pp. 177-198, (p. 192).

that they gesture towards any radical moral or social change which Gaynour then fails to fulfil. The essential focus of the text remains on the commemorative relationship between mother and daughter as the centre of an emotive portrait of idealised aristocratic sociality and morality.

In *Three Dead Kings*, while the filial bonds and obligations in play are very similar to those in *Awntyrs*, the attitude towards commemoration is remarkably different, in a manner that occurs along highly gendered lines. In *Awntyrs*, discussion of commemoration is insistently located within a mother-daughter relationship, a discussion which is structurally contrasted with Gawain's questions for the ghost, which relate to the concerns of masculine-chivalric military and political power that become especially prominent in the poem's second half. This is not to say that the poem entirely divorces Gaynour, her mother or commemoration from the sphere of masculine political power; Leah Haught has persuasively argued that the deployment of Gaynour and her mother's conversation early in the poem foregrounds a feminine perspective that 'queries the narrow and frequently ossified foundations upon which knowledge and sovereignty are conventionally asserted', destabilizing the presentation of masculine power throughout the poem.[85] Instead, where *Awntyrs* separates these two discourses, centring the ghost's discussion of commemoration on Gaynour, and her discussion of Arthur's political power on Gawain, this allows them to be held up against each other for comparison by the reader, in one of the poem's many diptych-like moments. In *Three Dead Kings,* however, concerns around commemoration and masculine political power are synthesised into a focus on dynastic questions of the succession of power between

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[85] Leah Haught, 'Ghostly Mothers and Fated Fathers, p. 4.

royal fathers and their male heirs. Commemoration becomes an urgent, practical matter which legitimises the living ruler by showing their fidelity to the lineage through which their power has been inherited. Likewise, the emotional register of *Three Dead Kings* differs markedly from *Awntyrs*. Where *Awntyrs'* developing interest in the emotional bonds between Gaynour and her mother obscures the poem's penitential concerns, *Three Dead Kings*, by contrast, retains a negative emotional register dominated by the language of fear, indebtedness, and the threat of punishment.

This register of the parental commemorative relationship as a fearful obligation is reflected by the poem's exceptionally restrictive structure, which provides no opportunity for the kind of touching, sympathetic exchanges seen in *Awntyrs*. The poem's stanzas are strictly distributed by subject: four stanzas describing the kings' hunt and the appearance of the dead, followed by one stanza of speech and reaction for each living king, followed by one stanza for each dead king, then a single stanza concluding the narrative. This structure reflects the visual tradition of the Legend, where the living and dead are placed in static three-figure rows, facing each other across a central dividing space, which is often marked in manuscript illustrations by the page gutter.[86] This highly determined structure, as well as reflecting the fixed structure of *Three Dead Kings*' artistic forebears, also intensifies the sense of fearful paralysis which the poem develops: Susanna Greer Fein has noted how the action of the poem moves 'inexorably towards fright and stasis', with the poem 'enact[ing], narratively and metrically, an

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[86] Greer Fein, 'Life and Death, Reader and Page' (n.p.). Similarly, the Legend at Raunds, Northamptonshire, painted over three bays in the north arcade of the parish church, uses the peak of the central bay to mark the dividing space between the living and dead. E.C. Williams, 'Mural Paintings of the Three Living and Three Dead in England', pp.37-8.

entrapment or ambush; the world it progressively figures is sensed as uncomfortably confining, confusing, and impossible to navigate without divine aid'.[87] The living repeatedly voice their anxiety that the dead may have trapped them, that they may have 'bene tane' (65) or that the dead might 'duttyn uche a dore' (91), and the first king's horse and falcon refuse to move out of fear (55-6). More importantly for our purposes, the formal constraint also forecloses the possibility of genuine dialogue between the living and the dead, as seen in the *Trental* and *Awntyrs*. Unable to generate reciprocal, intergenerational dialogue, the encounter instead generates a series of frozen speech acts. Afforded no opportunity to respond to the speeches of the dead, the living cannot directly affirm their relationship with, or their responsibilities to, their dead fathers even after they identify themselves. There is no possibility of the kinds of interchange and wordplay that contribute to our sense of Gaynour's bond with her mother. Nor is there any opportunity for the living kings to lament their dead fathers' state. Indeed, there is no expression anywhere in the poem of sympathy or concern for their fathers at all.

Where the living kings' emotions are described or articulated, they are overwhelmingly focused on their own fear of the dead. The first speaks exclusively about the fear and woe he feels, lamenting his lost 'gladchip' in a speech overflowing with references to himself:

> "Now al my gladchip is gone! • I gre and am agast
>
> Of thre gostis ful grym • that gare me be gryst.
>
> Fere of have I walkon • be wodys and be wast,

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[87] Susanna Greer Fein, 'The Early Thirteen-Line Stanza: Style And Metrics Reconsidered', *Parergon* 18.1 (2000), pp. 97-126, (pp. 116-117).

Bot was me never so wo • in word that Y wyst —

> So wo was me never, I wene;

> My wit is away other wane...!"   (57-61)

If the first king vocalises his own solipsistic fear, the third is physically overwhelmed with terror, undermining his ability to react productively to the ghosts. He vividly describes the bodily effects of his fear, his clenching fingers and trembling heart, saying that 'My hert fars fore freght as flagge when hit foldus' (85) and that 'Uche fyngyr of my hond fore ferdchip hit feldus' (86). This shock of seeing the dead is likened to a cow being slaughtered, 'a carful knyl • to his hert coldis,/So doth the knyf ore the kye — • that knoc kelddus!' (81-2). The third king is the only one who tries ineffectually to persuade his companions to flee.[88] In their self-pitying terror and unthinking bodily panic the living kings very much resemble Gaynour when she first encounters her mother's ghost unaware of her identity. But unlike Gaynour, the kings are, emotionally, frozen in this moment of uncomprehending dread, with the text uninterested in mapping any emotional transformation from fear to understanding, sympathy, and familial love.

Instead, the only affirmation of the relationship given by the living is the silent recognition by the first king of his father's pall-cloth, laid over his coffin at his funeral:

> The furst king he had care . his hert ovrcast,

> Fore he knew the cros of the cloth . that coverd the cyst.

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[88] The third king's behaviour is similar to a king depicted in the lost version of the Legend at Belton, Suffolk, who was shown trying to turn his horse, announcing in a speech scroll 'I wyl fle'. A small number of examples, such as a full-page illustration of the Legend in the Hours of Joanna I of Castile, British Library MS Additional 35313, f.158v, show the living actively fleeing the pursuing dead on horseback.

The first king's immediate reaction elides his recognition of his father's identity, and displaces the focus from the gruesome revenants, as if the king is dissociating, focusing on the pattern of the pall-cloth to avoid taking in the horrific sight of his father's rotting body. Rather than leading to an avowal of sympathy and obligation that we see in the *Trental* and *Awntyrs*, here recognition leads only to internal, object-less 'care'. The parallel between the living king's 'ovrcast' heart and the pall 'that coverd the cyst' suggests a parallel between the living king's emotions and the corpse in its coffin, but this connection appears to centre around a fear of entrapment and death, rather than a sense of sympathy for his father.

It is striking that it is the cloth, and thus the paraphernalia of his father's funeral and not the father himself (who has decayed beyond recognition), which the first king recognises. This cloth presumably bears the dead king's arms as well as the mentioned 'cros', as was common in the funerals of the nobility, which featured the heraldry of the dead prominently.[89] Both Christine Chism and Ashby Kinch read this moment as an ironic commentary on the role of wealth and heraldic prestige in the funeral process. Chism describes it as 'posthumous heraldry' that 'flouts the masking rituals by which by which medieval society had progressively averted its face from the dead', referring to the progressive accretion of a 'euphemistic funerary architecture' in the form of coffins, palls, and catafalques that obscured the form of the dead body.[90] Kinch, meanwhile, notes the disintegration of the dead king's identity, as he is 'subsumed into the sign of wealth and power that replaces him', ironising the use of heraldry 'to cultivate a

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[89] Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2015), pp. 199-200.
[90] Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 247.

connection with the dead'.[91] The dead king, recognizable only by his funerary heraldry, has transformed into a symbol of his lineage: the living king is being confronted at this point not by the recognizable image of his father but by a macabre representative of his own bloodline.

That the first king only recognizes the 'cloth' and not the corpse, however, has two further effects. Firstly, it re-routes the nature of the filial relationship between living and dead kings towards the channel of pre-existing funerary and commemorative rituals. Secondly, it embodies the living kings' unwillingness to recognize and affirm their relationships with their fathers. The first king mentions his recognition nowhere in his subsequent speech (57-65), the only hint of his awareness being that he correctly identifies the apparitions as 'gostis' (58). Nor does he attempt to connect or communicate with his dead father, as Gregory, Gawain and Gaynour do.The first king's failure to give voice to his recognition results in a string of speeches by the living in which the other kings pointedly fail to recognize their parents or produce any productive response to them. The final king demonstrates his ignorance by mistaking the dead for 'warlaws' (83) and 'dewyls' (90), and admitting "Can Y no cownsel bot care" (89).[92] Rather than the gradual, sympathy-driven recognition of *Awntyrs*, the recognition here is suspended, known to the audience but obscured to and resisted by the living kings for three stanzas, leaving them in a state of confused paralysis until the dead declare their identities. The first king's unwillingness to acknowledge his father leaves the living

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[91] Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis*, pp. 153-4.
[92] The role of misidentifying the dead as demons appears to have been traditional for the third member of the living in the Three Living and Three Dead tradition: the short verses accompanying Three Living and Three Dead illustrations in the Taymouth Hours and the De Lisle Psalter both attribute such a line to the third Living.

trapped within the formal stasis of the specular encounter with the dead represented by the visual form of the Legend without any route to productive interaction with the dead.

Mirroring the muted recognition of the first living king, it is the first dead king (who we might well presume, on the basis of the mirroring structure, to be the first living king's father) who focuses his speech on his parental connection to the living:

> "Nay, are we no fyndus," quod furst, • "that ye before you fynden;
>
> We wer your faders of fold • that fayre youe have fondon.
>
> Now ye beth lykyr to leve • then levys on the lynden,
>
> And lordis of oche towne • fro Loron into Londen.
>
> Those that bene not at your bone • ye beton and byndon;
>
> Bot yef ye betun that burst, • in bale be ye bondon." (92-97)

What is particularly striking is how, after his initial affirmation of kinship, the dead king proceeds to give a fluid account of the post-mortem transfer of their dynastic power. The dead have placed the living in power, the living prosper, the living abuse their power and endanger their souls. The model of a royal paternal relationship here is seen exclusively through formalised power relations, and will remain this way throughout, in a manner very different from *Awntyrs*. The encounter itself plays out the promised post-mortem retribution, as the abusive living kings find themselves 'bondon' in terror.

Again, mirroring the first living king's momentary recollection of his father's funeral, the first dead king, gesturing first to the worms devouring him, then to the tie-band of his grave-shroud, recalls the event:

"Lo, here the worms in my wome - • thai wallon and wyndon!

Lo, here the wrase of the wede • that I was in wondon!

Herein was I wondon, iwys,

In word wan that me worthelokyst was.

My caren was ful cumlé to cysse; (98-102)

The funeral, in the dead king's telling, represents a heightened moment of worldly commemoration undermined by the subsequent filial neglect in maintaining long-term spiritual commemoration. There are no references to the spiritual elements of the funeral, instead focusing on the materiality and social prestige afforded by the occasion. A medieval royal funeral in England fell within the category of the 'heraldic' funeral, and as Badham puts it, by the fourteenth century 'it had become the practice at funerals of royalty and the nobility for a prominent display of heraldry to become included in the pageantry of the event, and these heraldic funerals became increasingly elaborate statements of the deceased's social status and wealth'.[93] The dead king, 'In word… worthelokyst', in fact reached the pinnacle of his social prestige with this funeral. His 'caren… ful cumly to cysse' is a far cry from the decaying horror that confronts the living. Instead, beautified by the pomp and finery of the funerary occasion, the king's dead flesh prompted regard and perhaps even, alarmingly, desire. This ritualized social affirmation has clearly not been of great enough benefit to the kings' souls, manifesting, as Chism notes, anxieties regarding the 'the lurking potential of a ritual exchange to fail'.[94] It is not the brief moment of the funeral that is necessary to relieve their souls'

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[93] Badham, *Seeking Salvation,* 197.
[94] Chism, *Alliterative Revivals,* 241.

torment in Purgatory, but the long-term maintenance of commemorative masses. In this context the first dead king's choice to call attention to both the worms eating him and the 'wrase' of his shroud amounts to a shaming reminder of the funeral's insufficiency, emphasised by the visual similarity of the tie-band with a worm: the brief, socially prestigious, eye-catching pomp of the funeral has done nothing to protect him from worms. And in gesturing to his shroud (this is the king whose 'cloth' the first king had recognized), he draws attention again to the symbol of his shared kinship with the living, in his failure to do his commemorative duty.

This admonishment differs starkly from both *Awntyrs* and the *Trental* in that *Three Dead Kings* treats commemoration as a pre-existing obligation of which the living kings ought to be aware but have neglected. Whereas Gregory and Gaynour's mothers present new information to children whose holiness and/or sympathy drives them to immediately aid their parents, the dead here castigate their children's failure to apply their wealth to commemorative purposes, saying "we have made youe mastyrs amys/That now nyl not mynn us with a mas" (103-4). The basis of the dead's expectation here is, as Kinch rightly points out, that 'the living Kings have abrogated a central ritual of inheritance' by attempting 'to assume the power bequeathed by the dead father... [and] the surplus created by death' without the necessary commemorative exchange.[95] The act of commemoration is not presented as an act of familial love, nor even as particularly spiritual; it is a practical exchange attendant on the negotiated transfer of power between living and dead, one for which the living are in arrears. That the living have

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[95] Kinch, *Imago Mortis,* 157.

negligently broken their promise to the dead renders *Three Dead Kings* a narrative of correction rather than production.

This accords with the representation of the dead kings' relationship with the community which they ruled, and from which they have now been cast out, where their social relationships were defined by domination rather than enmeshment. The third king's account paints him as an essentially cruel and self-deceptive ruler:

> Wyle I was mon apon mold, • morthis thai were myne;
>
> Methoght hit a hede thenke • at husbondus to hene —
>
> Fore that was I hatyd • with heme and with hyne —
>
> Bot thoght me ever kyng • of coyntons so clene. (121-4)

The repetition of 'thoght' here, not driven by alliterative concerns, draws particular attention to the king's foolishness and pride in ignoring the opinions of his subjects and presuming himself to be well-regarded, 'of coyntons so clene' (124). It is relevant that it is also this king who utters "Makis your merour be me!" (120), since he is the only dead king to speak to his own sins, and they closely resemble those of the living kings. Like the *Awntyrs*-ghost, he does not function as a general image of death equally accessible to all as an object of contemplation; instead, he functions as a very specific mirror to his son and the other living kings, whose social status, gender, and sinful propensities he mirrors.

 His 'mirror' reflects the self-delusion of the oppressive ruler's sense of their own reputation. Though his power won empty flattery in life, his abuse of power has alienated him so far from his subjects that 'Now is ther no knave under Crist to me wil

enclyne' (125) and offer prayers for his soul. This is exactly the state of proud

obliviousness that characterises the living kings' failure to have masses said for their

fathers. Just as the dead king neglected his obligations to rule his subjects justly and

was oblivious to the social and spiritual consequences of his actions, the living kings

have neglected their commemorative obligations and are oblivious to the spiritual

consequences. This collapse of the abusive king's reputation when he hands over his

power to his heir in death intensifies the importance of the filial obligation. Each king

centres the question of commemoration firmly on the paternal/filial relationship,

minimizing any other forms of commemoration as non-existent or insufficient (the third

king has alienated anyone else who might prays for him, and the second king's wife

implicitly survived him but has no role in his commemoration). This model blurs the lines

between commemoration and dynastic succession, such that all meaningful

commemorative practice derives from one's heirs and thus from the exchange of power.

The commemorative complex becomes subordinated, even more so than *Awntyrs*, to

the management of obligations within royal families.

The immutability of this obligation is demonstrated by the poem's concluding stanza. No

attempt to reply or address the dead is made before they depart for their graves, and

the only immediate reaction, that 'Then began these gomys graythlé to glade' (132)

betokens relief from fear rather than engagement with the messages of their dead

parents. Indeed, the poem's conclusion seems to take the view that no such emotional

reaction is necessary, since the living kings are all instantaneously transformed into

models of just rule who 'Holde thai never the pres' (135), 'ay the hendyr hert' (136), and

'mend ham that myde' (137). While the internal aspects of the kings' conversion to

virtue are rendered in vague terms, their actions are specifically stipulated: they cease their tyrannical oppression and construct a chantry:

> And throgh the mercé of God • a mynster thai made.
>
> A mynster thai made with masse,
>
> Fore metyng the men on the mosse,
>
> And on the woghe wrytyn this was. (138-141)

Notably, this final stanza makes no reference to the paternal nature of their encounter, with the ghosts being simply 'men on the mosse', their specific identity reabsorbed into the general image of the uncanny outsider on the fringe of society. Kinch notes that this chantry, perhaps like the chantry at Haughmond Abbey to which John Audelay retired, 'emerges as the ideological fantasy of an aristocratic guilt ledger: induced by the use of excessive force in the form of bad lordship but converted into an effective investment in the spiritual economy of the community'.[96]This assessment capably locates the chantry's ideological purpose in responding to the kings' abuse of their subjects, but in the context of the paternal/filial relationship the chantry's inscription also recodifies the living kings' lineal obligations.On the one hand, the public representation of their fathers epigraphically acts as public and formal demonstration of their lineal acknowledgement, reincorporating their fathers into the community. On the other, it acts as a lesson and warning to their own heirs to maintain the necessary commemorative exchanges to ensure the royal dead are appropriately compensated in prayers for the power that they bestow.

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[96] Kinch, *Imago Mortis*, 148-9.

Taken together, it is tempting to view *Three Dead Kings* and the first episode of *Awntyrs* as creating their own diptych of sorts, a pair of aristocratic narratives about specular encounters between living royals and their dead parents through which commemorative dysfunction is corrected. Where *Awntyrs*, focusing on commemoration between royal women, focuses an emotional form of pious sympathy and charity that stands apart from the murky world of Arthurian imperial politics, *Three Dead Kings*, focusing on royal men, views lineal commemoration as enmeshed with the exercise and inheritance of royal power, a necessary system for the management of royal sins and guilt, more fearfully consequential in the breach than the observance. *Awntyrs* models the positive consequences of commemoration as an act of filial love; *Three Dead Kings* the anxiety and spiritual danger attendant on commemorative neglect and filial impiety. That texts with such similarities in terms of the motifs and concepts they deploy adopt such contrasting emotional registers demonstrates both the nuanced complexity of attitudes towards interpersonal commemoration even within an apparently narrow milieu, and the great flexibility of the purgatorial ghost narrative to adapt to and embody the variety of concerns so evoked by questions of parental commemoration.

Family relationships formed one of the most common contexts for the commission of liturgical commemoration by the lay community, and the desire to commemorate deceased family members, in order to ameliorate their suffering spirits in purgatory, was a major driver of their use. Given the limited flexibility of the liturgy to provide a framework for interpreting commemoration in a familial context, it is not surprising that by at least the late fourteenth century, a vernacular literary tradition, in the form of the *Trental of Gregory*, had developed. This tradition provided a narrative framework for

viewing this liturgy as an expression of familial commitment. Utilising a narrative model deriving from the exemplum tradition regarding the redemption through confession of sinful women in extremis, the *Trental* offered a model whereby familial relationships, and familial sympathy, are foregrounded as key elements of the process of commemorative prayer. In the process, they also validated the spiritual status of mothers through emphasising the role of children speeding their parents' souls through purgatory.

This emphasis upon the post-mortem role of family ties, in the *Trental* tradition and elsewhere in the context of commemorative prayer, was adapted for specifically aristocratic purposes in the early fifteenth century, of which the *Awntyrs off Arthure* and the *Three Dead Kings* represent two particularly masterful examples. These poems treat the encounter with the parental royal dead as a mutual exchange of commemorative prayers for spiritual advice. In their specular encounters, the identity of the dead royalty as parents, as much as their cadaverous bodies, provide means by which the living can gather far more specific meanings than a simple remembrance of oncoming death. The two texts, however, diverge along lines of genre and gender. The adaptation of the *Trental* narrative in the *Awntyrs* into romance (a genre itself deeply invested in concepts of the family) has resulted in a text in which the importance of filial sympathy, present in its source, is foregrounded within a broader ideological framework of aristocratic spiritual self-sufficiency, as the suffering queenly body is positioned as the natural object of filial sympathy aligned with Christian charity. *Three Dead Kings*, in keeping with its survival in the self-memorialising manuscript of a penitent chantry priest, focuses far more insistently on the mechanisms of commemoration, staging the

redirection of a malfunctioning filial relationship through the approved channels of liturgical and material commemoration. These acts of commemorative ritual are presented as the practical means to manage the transition of dynastic power between living and dead along the line of male succession, eliminating the motive of filial sympathy entirely. In divergent ways, *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings* use the act of commemoration, and the encounter with the dead, to apply aristocratic concerns to the spiritual and commemorative dimensions of the relationship between parents and children.

Chapter Two - The Ghost's Wife: Widows in Middle English ghost narratives

In medieval England the state of female widowhood was at once commonplace and anomalous: as women with legal and spiritual sanction to operate outside the direct authority of male relatives, widows occupied a highly ambiguous and multifaceted social position.[1] However, it was their critical role in commemorative activity that assured widows' appearance in ghost narratives. Among the numerous types of social relationship recognized by commemorative activity in medieval England, marriage was the most common personal tie remembered, even more so than parental and filial relationships. Indeed, for women, the commemoration of deceased spouses was seen as one of the central legitimate concerns of a widow's life, and this function is well-represented in literary ghost narratives of the late medieval period. Like the parental-filial bond, the marital bond constituted one of the most common and strongly culturally codified social relationships in which lay people engaged, and this was reflected in commemorative trends upon death. What is surprising, however, is that despite the critical role of spousal commemoration in medieval England, the three texts discussed in this chapter (the *Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham, The Gast of Gy,* and *Sir Amadace*) all distance widows from the ghosts of their dead husbands. Unlike the parental/filial spectral encounter, where parents appear directly to their children, texts

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[1] Louise Mirrer, 'Introduction' in *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*, ed. by Louise Mirrer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 1-17 (pp. 1-2). For an overview of the position of widows as independent legal persons in late medieval English private law and its economic implications for individual widows, see Thomas A.J. McGinn, *Widows and Patriarchy* (London: Duckworth, 2008), pp. 55-65.

featuring widows instead seek to mediate the widow's involvement in both the spectral encounter and subsequent commemorative endeavours through a male intermediary (religious in the first two cases, and knightly in *Sir Amadace*). Rather than reflect the real, major role which widows played as independent commemorative agents for their husbands, these stories restructure the commemorative economy to restrict and elide the crucial role which widows played in the commemoration. Instead, they reflect a masculine fantasy in which widows' commemorative agency is undermined and their contributions to their husbands' spiritual wellbeing reincorporated under the auspices of male spiritual authority.

The role of the surviving spouse in commemorative practices is demonstrated by testamentary evidence. Designating one's widow as an executor was very common, and in certain groups and contexts it approaches universality. For example, Derek Keene notes that only two fourteenth-century London tanners stipulated an executor other than their widows, in what appear, respectively, to be a case of senility and a case of total marital breakdown.[2] Likewise, Robert A. Wood found that the seven surviving wills of married women from the Archdeacon's court of London in the period 1393-1415 all name their husbands as executor or supervisor of the executors.[3] Designating one's widow as one's executor provided an additional benefit in the context of commemorative practice, since it allowed ample opportunity to discuss one's preferred commemorative strategies before death. Clive Burgess notes that these opportunities to make informal

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[2] Derek Keene, 'Tanners' Widows, 1300-1350' in *Medieval London Widows 1300-1500*, ed by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London: Bloomsbury, 1994) pp. 1-28 (p. 16).
[3] Robert A. Wood, 'Poor Widows, c. 1393-1415', in *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500,* ed by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), pp. 55-70 (p. 55-6).

arrangements with a spouse may explain the brevity of many married men's wills, since 'Testators evidently trusted executrices, in particular, to implement requirements with minimal instruction' while widows themselves 'tended to leave wills couched in rather more detail, particularly concerning their devotional provision' since 'they had no alternative but to trust others less apprised of their plans than they had been of their husbands'.[4]

When they had the means, widows could and did greatly exceed the commemorative expectations stipulated in their husband's wills, as in the case of Sir John Turville, whose widow and executor Kateryn commissioned a tomb at Thurlaston substantially more elaborate than the ten marks set aside for it in his will could have allowed for.[5] Nor do wills necessarily represent the scope of a widow's commemoration. Alice Chestre (d.1485), a wealthy Bristol widow and trader, invested lavishly in commemoration for herself and her husband in the fifteen years between their deaths, through major gifts to her parish church of All Saints', Bristol, comprising drapery, vessels, carved fixtures, a processional cross, and a new rood loft, as well as a twelve-year chantry foundation and the establishment of a Friday Mass of Jesus. None of this appears anywhere in Henry's will and is recoverable only because of the preservation of the list of benefactions for her parish church at All Saints. Lady Margaret Hungerford, in the cause of commemorating her husband Robert (d.1459), went so far as to misrepresent her husband's will, falsely claiming from 1471 that it ordered the establishment of a chantry chapel at Salisbury Cathedral. M. A. Hicks notes this white lie may have served to help

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[4] Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls,* p. 101.
[5] F.A. Greenhill, 'Seven Leicestershire Wills', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 38 (1962), pp. 9-20 (pp. 9-11).

justify the expenditure to the grantees of family lands.[6] The commemorative activity of wealthy widows appears to have been felt substantially amongst their local community, where it shaped the material and liturgical environment within their churches. In Burgess' assessment the commemorative contributions of wealthy widows in All Saints substantially shaped both the church fabric and liturgy, so much so that they 'assumed and maintained a devotional leadership within the parish' through their pious generosity, and thus provided 'both an inspirational and pace-setting role' within the church.[7]

The influential nature of widows' commemorative practices was made possible by the unusual legal status of widows in late medieval English society. After her husband's death, a widow was no longer legally subordinate to a spouse or male relative, and unlike wives, gained the legal right to own property, head households, operate her late husband's business, and act as an independent legal person. Furthermore, the widow had a firmly established legal right to a portion of the husband's estate for life in the form of the dower. This was fixed at the church door on the day of the marriage, varied somewhat by local custom (it amounted to one-third of the husband's estate in London, or half if the marriage was childless), and though it could be supplemented by wills, it was customarily protected in cases of intestacy.[8] This unusual level of legal agency allowed widows, especially those who were wealthy or comfortably supported, a measure of social and economic as well as spiritual agency which was not always attainable while married.

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[6] Hicks, *Richard III and His Rivals*, p. 105.

[7] Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls,* pp. 161-2.

[8] Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'The Widow's Mite: Provisions for Medieval London Widows', in *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 21-45.

That this chapter overwhelmingly discusses widows and not widowers reflects how

medieval English society viewed the two states, discussing the former extensively while

obscuring the existence of the latter. As Margaret Hallissy notes, 'While widowhood was

an estate and the widow a stock literary figure, it is difficult for historians even to

establish the existence of widowers, much less trace their behaviour', with few

references to widowers as a group in texts of any kind.[9] This does not suggest that

widowers were rare, or disinterested in commemorating their wives, but they were more

likely to remarry if their spouse died. Margaret Pelling notes that male remarriage was

'the major factor affecting the prominence if not the incidence of widowerhood'; while

widowers undeniably existed, they were not identified as such because it was perceived

as an essentially temporary state.[10] Since wives did not generally make wills and

husbands' wills were often vague in their provisions, little evidence of widowers

commemorating their wives survives in the documentary record. Some spousal

monuments commissioned by widowers survive, such as the brass at Owston, West

Yorkshire, depicting Ada Hatfield (d.1409) and her husband Robert (d. 1417), the

French inscription of which specifically notes both their love and that Ada predeceased

her husband (See Figure 13).[11] Likewise, previous wives appear fairly frequently

alongside their husbands who remarried in monuments like the brass of Sir Thomas

Stathum (d. 1470) and his two wives as Morley, Derbyshire - he is flanked by two

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[9] Margaret Hallissy, *Clean Maids, True Wives, Steadfast Widows: Chaucer's Women and Medieval Codes of Conduct* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1993), p. 141.

[10] Margaret Pelling, 'Finding widowers: men without women in English towns before 1700', in *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* ed. by Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (Harlow: Longman, 1999), pp. 37-54 (pp. 44-5).

[11] David Griffith, 'A Living Language of the Dead? French Commemorative Inscriptions from Late Medieval England', *The Mediaeval Journal* 3.2 (2013), pp. 69-136, (pp. 81-3).

identical female figures, under which his coat of arms is depicted twice, impaled with the

arms of each respective wife (See Figure 14). The most obvious discrepancy between

Fig. 13. (Above) Double brass of Ada (d. 1409) and Robert (d. 1417), Owston, West Yorkshire, with a French inscription referring to Robert's love for his deceased wife.
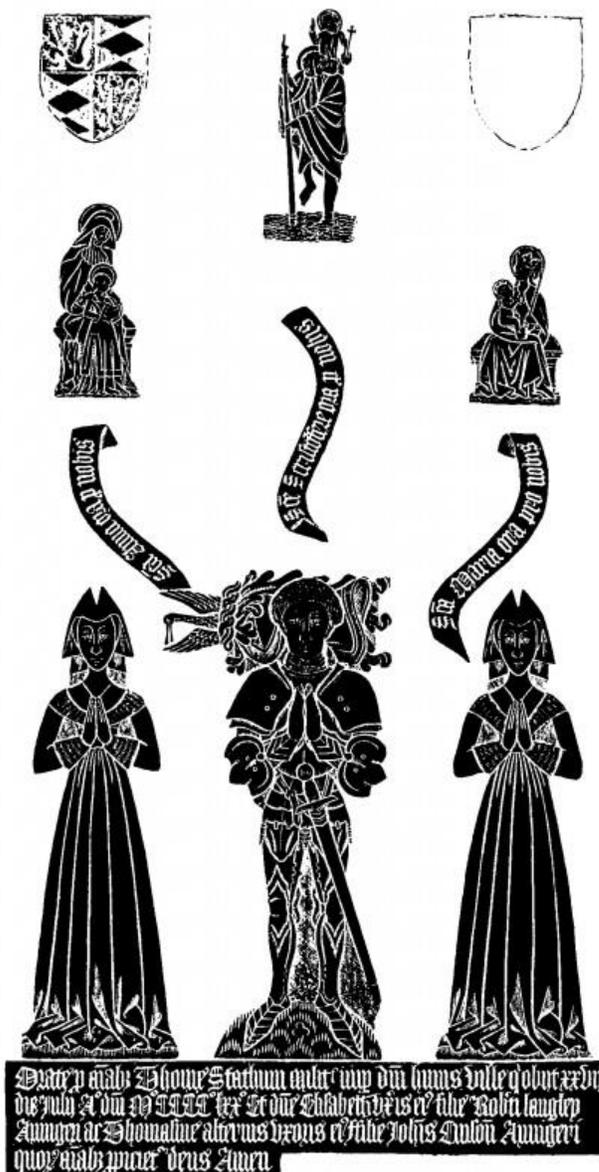
Fig. 14. (Right) Brass of Sir Thomas Stathum (d. 1470) and his wives Elizabeth and Thomasine, Morley, Derbyshire, with two shields showing Thomas's arms impaled with the arms of his wives.

widowers and widows, however, was that being widowed was not as legally

transformative for men as it was for women. It generally neither disadvantaged them nor

accorded them new rights.[12] As a result, widowers were seldom referred to as such

officially and can usually only be identified contextually within the documentary record

where evidence survives of a man's wife as being deceased and his remaining single,

such as when a man's will referred to a deceased wife but includes no reference to a

present marriage.[13] Likewise, the state of widowerhood received little notice in Christian

scripture or commentary, and so did not develop the spiritual implications it did for

women. Middle English ghost narratives essentially reflect this occlusion of male

widowerhood, favouring depictions of widows encountering their husbands' ghosts.

The ambiguous position of medieval widows as legitimately independent women

rendered them subject to a contradictory set of spiritual, legal, and social discourses

regarding their agency, behaviour, and spiritual status. This ambiguity is influenced by

St. Paul's highly influential writing on widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-15. Paul acknowledges

the obligation of the church community to support virtuous widows over the age of sixty

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[12] Gwen Seabourne notes one situation in which male widowhood did have legal ramifications. This was the common law institution of 'tenancy by the curtesy of England', in which a man was permitted life tenure of lands which his deceased wife had brought to the marriage, provided the couple had produced live offspring, even if those offspring predeceased her. However, Seabourne notes that 'there are… difficulties in making definitive statements as to [tenancy by curtest of England's] actual incidence at any given period, since there was no requirement for a widower who regarded himself as a tenant by curtesy to do anything likely to generate a "parchment trail": when his wife died, he simply retained the seisin he was already regarded as having'. Accordingly, references to tenancy by curtesy tend to appear in the documentary record only in those cases where a legal dispute ensued. Gwen Seabourne, '"It is necessary that the issue be heard to cry or squall within the four [walls]': Qualifying for Tenancy by the Curtesy of England in the Reign of Edward I', *The Journal of Legal History* 40.1 (2019), pp. 44-69 (pp. 45, 47).
[13] Katherine L. French, surveying 230 wills of people in Westminster proved in the Prerogative Courts of Westminster and Canterbury between 1445 and 1550, identifies twenty-seven men's wills as showing clear evidence of the testator being a widower, but notes some widowers in the sample may not have left such evidence of their status in their wills. Katherine L. French, 'Loving Friends: Surviving Widowhood in Late Medieval Westminster, *Gender & History* 22.1 (2010), pp. 21-37 (p. 25).

in genuine distress (1 Tim 5:9-10) but contrasts them with younger widows who become idle gossips and are driven by sensuality. The solution Paul counsels is to avoid further sin through remarriage where necessary, having noted that 'the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives' (1 Tim 5:6). This codification of widowhood as the potential staging ground for both virtue and sin set the broad pattern for church thinking about widowhood throughout the medieval period. The complex and contradictory nature of cultural attitudes towards widows also reflected the 'exceptionally varied status' of widowhood, in which 'not only personality but also locale, socioeconomic standing, and age affect[ed] each woman's response to the death of her husband.'[14] The death of a husband only accentuated the ambiguity of a woman's position in medieval culture; as with women in general, widows were considered by turns holy and vulnerable, as well as potentially uncontrolled and lascivious.

Outside hagiographical writing, the most prominently discussed examples of widows in Middle English literature would appear to fall into the latter category: women whose simultaneous sexual experience and freedom from male control renders them suspect.[15] Perhaps the most famous depiction of spousal commemoration in Middle English literature, the description given by Chaucer's Wife of Bath of her fourth's husband's tomb and funeral, is a satire in this vein. Alisoun appears sardonically disinterested in the spiritual dimensions of spousal commemoration. She first litotically downplays the ostentatiousness of her husband's tomb as 'noght so curyus/As was the

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[14] Judith M. Bennett, 'Widows in the Medieval English Countryside', in *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 69-127 (p. 74).

[15] Katherine Clark provides a discussion of widows' hagiographies in 'Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16.2 (2007), pp. 169-203.

sepulture of hym Daryus' (497-8) since 'It nys but wast to burye hym preciously' (500), and then describes her successful performance of the customary displays of grief while hiding her interest in another mourner, Jankyn, who goes on to become her fifth husband:

> Whan that my fourthe housbonde was on beere,
>
> I weep algate and made sory chere,
>
> As wyves mooten, for it is usage,
>
> And with my coverchief covered my visage,
>
> But for that I was purveyes of a make
>
> I wepte but small, and that I undertake. (587-592)[16]

Alisoun is cannily exploiting the traditional signs of mourning to mask her indecorous interest in a new partner, representing an example of the lecherous widow recognizable from both clerical and secular writing since at least Ovid.[17] This image of the lecherous widow, though clearly widespread in medieval writing, is not seemingly central to representations of widows in ghostly narratives. While *The Gast of Gy* contains a substantial discussion of sexual sin, this sin clearly occurs *during* marriage rather than after it. Instead, where widows are presented in a directly negative light, the focus tends to be on a failure to fulfil their husband's commemorative needs.

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[16] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Fragment III: The Wife of Bath's Prologue' in *The Riverside Chaucer* ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), pp. 105-116. All further references to the works of Chaucer, unless otherwise noted, will be to this edition.

[17] Hallissy, *Clean Maids, True Wives, Steadfast Widows*, p. 144-5. Hallissy argues that adherence to the lecherous widow image is found throughout Chaucer's representations of widows. See also Conor McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature and Practice* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), pp. 150-158.

A second mode of discourse surrounding widows, more relevant to their depiction in ghost narratives, was the conception of the widow as essentially vulnerable, representing the category of powerless persons whose interests Christian society was obligated to defend. Hallissy notes that this association has precedent in Biblical depictions of widows, who typically personify vulnerability and loss.[18] Canon law held widows to be a specific group of disadvantaged persons whom bishops had a particular obligation to safeguard. James A. Brundage notes that in practice church officials did distinguish between widows depending on their means, allowing poor widows to petition the ecclesiastical courts for redress of wrongs done to them as a first resort, but only permitted this to wealthy widows in extreme cases, such as secular judicial neglect or dispossession by violence.[19] The need to protect the interest of widows, particularly poor widows, was widely acknowledged in medieval society, and Hanawalt argues that the 'emotional connection between the widow's defencelessness and her poverty were a constant theme in medieval culture'.[20] Despite the relative security and agency which widowhood afforded to some, such concerns over the condition of widows were well-founded. While far greater evidence survives regarding the activities of wealthier widows, Bennett states that 'experience of widowhood varied dramatically according to the solvency of the household left by the husband… widows of poorer husbands often struggled for their basic livelihoods', with Keene noting that poor fourteenth-century

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[18] Hallissy, *Clean Maids, True Wives, Steadfast Widows*, pp. 136-7.
[19] James A. Brundage, 'Widows as Disadvantaged Persons in Medieval Canon Law' in *Upon My Husband's Death,* pp. 193-206 (pp. 197-8).
[20] Hanawalt, 'The Widow's Mite', p. 21.

widows congregating in 'cheap accommodation, often in marginal localities' constituted a 'distinct urban group' whose hardship marked them as recipients of charity.[21]

The church's concerns regarding the potential dangers posed both by and to newly independent widows meant that they were enjoined by church teaching to avoid remarriage and pursue a chaste spiritual life. While permitting remarriage, the church's preference for perpetual widowhood was in practice stronger than Paul's, since it dispensed with the presumption that widows below sixty were inherently unsuited for living virtuously without a husband. Jerome's equation in *Adversus Jovinianus* of the thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold reward in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 with the respective states of marriage, widowhood and virginity was likewise highly influential in positioning perpetual widowhood as a blessed state preferable to marriage. Bernhard Jussen argues that by the thirteenth century this framework, which had originally been broadly deployed as a rhetorical shorthand for the moral order of society, was increasingly applied as a narrowly sociological schema specifically referring to women, thereby heightening the circulating social polemic in favour of perpetual widowhood.[22] Church practice reflected and reinforced these views: though permitted, second marriages could not be blessed, while the *Benedictio Viduae*, a formal ceremony modelled on the initiation ceremony for nuns, existed to recognize the vows of those widows (known as vowesses) who pledged to live chastely and never remarry. Such a ritual provided both a formal affirmation of the spiritual benefits of perpetual widowhood and, as Susan Steuer notes, 'emphasises the vowesses's "political"

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[21] Keene, 'Tanner's Widows', p. 8.

[22] Bernhardt Jussen, '"Virgins-Widows-Spouses": On the language of moral distinction as applied to women and men in the Middle Ages', *The History of the Family,* 7.1 (2002), pp. 13-32.

position' by making her 'responsible to ecclesiastical authorities but still not directly

accountable to God and thus very much a part of a hierarchical system'. Their vows in

fact specifically referenced the provincial Archbishop as the vow's ultimate recipient,

and officiating priests were sometimes rebuked for accepting vows outside of the

Archbishop's auspices.[23] Thus the church sought to both promote perpetual widowhood

over remarriage, and then to control these legally independent widows under the

hierarchical authority of the church.

In addition to the economic hardship suffered by poor widows, widows were also

potentially vulnerable to legal exploitation, most frequently fraudulent attempts to deny

them their dower. Further, since dower (and other property) was usually retained on

remarriage under the authority of the new husband, a comfortable widow might find

herself at risk of forced marriages through abduction or coercion, several allegations of

which are furnished by Hanawalt's investigation of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century

London Husting Rolls.[24] A lofty socioeconomic status might not protect them. Elizabeth

de Burgh, one of the richest noble dowagers in early fourteenth-century England, was

allegedly abducted by her second husband Theobald de Verdun in 1316, and was

pressured by Edward II into a third marriage only a year later; her tribulations appear to

have ceased only when her second cousin Edward III assumed the throne in 1327.[25]

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[23] Susan Steuer, 'Identifying Chaste Widows: Documenting a Religious Vocation' in *The Ties that Bind: Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, ed. by Linda E. Mitchell, Katherine L. French, and Douglas L. Biggs, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 87-103 (p. 92-3). Steuer notes that where the wordings of these vows are preserved they make specific reference to the provincial Archbishop as the ultimate earthly recipient of the vow, and that officiating clerics were at times rebuked for accepting a vow outside of the Archbishop's auspices.
[24] Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'The Widow's Mite', pp. 36-7.
[25] Jennifer C. Ward, 'Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady Clare (d. 1360)', in *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*, ed by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (Bloomsbury, 1994), pp. 29-46 (pp. 29-30).

Indeed, one of the attractions of becoming a vowess may have been that it provided a defence, through the church's protection, against forced remarriage. At the same time, women might need to remarry due to their circumstances – sometimes rapidly, especially if they had young children, or inherited an estate with serious legal issues or a trade they could not practice alone.[26]

The prominence of perpetual widowhood as the church's preferred mode of post-marital existence for women naturally accorded with the attention shown towards the commemoration of dead husbands. Perpetual widows might be signalling both a new spiritual commitment to chastity and a continuing spiritual commitment to their deceased husbands by aiding his soul in purgatory. A widow's commemorative activities were an extension of her marital responsibilities in a new penitential and commemorative mode, focused on the needs of her and her husbands' souls – what Katherine Walter Clark terms 'spiritual housekeeping'.[27] This accorded with pre-existing social models that emphasised the involvement of women in preserving family memory. Bronach C. Kane's study of the gendering of late-medieval concepts of memory notes that '[s]ocialised to care for the sick and dying and to pray for their souls, women and widows in medieval culture had long been regarded as memory specialists in the remembrance of the family's dead', a role which intensified upon widowhood and which was 'more marked higher up the social scale' due to the increased role of the widow as executor.[28] Beyond their practical involvement in commemorative practice, widows were also conceived of

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[26] Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), p. 56.

[27] Katherine Clark, *The Profession of Widowhood: Widows, Pastoral Care, and Medieval Models of Holiness* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), p. 236.

[28] Bronach C. Kane, *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England: Men, Women, and Testimony in the Church Courts, c.1200-1500* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2019), p. 161.

as occupying a similar position to the dead themselves, and equated with the experience of their dead husbands in particular. Katherine Walter Clark, surveying accounts of holy widows in hagiographical and exempla texts, notes that according to the aforementioned 'wives, widows, virgins' framework of spiritual merit, widows occupied a position which, being both blessed and liminal as well as predicated upon repentance of prior carnality, was analogous to the position of souls in purgatory compared to those in heaven and those on earth.[29] This similarity, wherein the purification of the husband's soul in purgatory formed a simultaneous parallel with the widow's experience of living as a perpetual widow, further cemented the importance of spousal commemoration as a particularly fitting activity for widows.

Indeed, commemorative activity directed towards a husband often also included the living widow: chantries and other liturgical commemorations usually commemorated both husband and wife,[30] as did some material gifts such as the hearse-cloth gifted by Alice Chestre and inscribed with an exhortation to pray for both her and her husband.[31] This trend was likewise well-enshrined in commemorative monuments, where the double tomb, which depicted both spouses together in a single composition, became increasingly popular in England from the mid-fourteenth century onwards. Jessica Barker's observation that the double tomb, usually erected after the first spouse's death, 'collapses the spatial and temporal boundaries between the deceased and living spouse' and represented a 'continuing relationship between the spouses: an image of

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[29] Katherine Clark, *The Profession of Widowhood,* p. 236.

[30] The chantry commissioned by Bristol widow Agnes Fyler's will (d.1467) for her and her parents, which unusually contains no reference to either of her husbands, is nonetheless recorded by her parish as a joint chantry for Agnes and her second husband Thomas Fyler. Agnes' commemorative activity is discussed at length by Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls*, pp. 121-8.

[31] Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls,* p. 132.

past unity and future reunion', might well describe other forms of commemoration directed at both spouses.[32] Just as parental/filial commemoration provided a spiritual model to legitimise procreation, spousal commemoration reinforced the importance and spiritual legitimacy of marriage (now shorn of its suspect implications of carnality) even as it presented widowhood as a higher spiritual state for women. In terms of interpersonal commitments, widowhood transformed and improved, but did not erase, the marital bond. The spectral appearance of the dead husband, then, literalizes the collapse of the distinction between dead and living set forth in commemorative imagery equating husband and widow by placing the spirit of the husband back within the material world occupied by his surviving spouse.

As we shall see, however, widows' involvement in narrative encounters with dead husbands is persistently placed at a remove, mediated through male and predominantly religious intermediaries. Unlike the highly corporeal ghosts of the last chapter, spectral husbands appear to their widows as insubstantial visions and invisible poltergeists. This was not the only way of framing encounters with dead husbands. Ghostly husbands might be physical and violent, accompanied by an atmosphere of sexual threat, like in the case of the Buckingham widow described by William de Newburgh, whose damned husband's corpse pressed down on her in her sleep.[33] A similarly threatening, if invisible, ghost appears in the account of Gervase of Tilbury, in which a widow is bludgeoned to death with a mortar by her husband's ghost for breaking a vow never to

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[32] Jessica Barker, *Stone Fidelity: Marriage and Emotion in Medieval Tomb Sculpture* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020), pp. 24, 54.
[33] See William de Newburgh, 'Historia Rerum Anglicarum', pp. 474-5.

remarry.[34] However, in the three longer narratives discussed in this chapter – *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham, The Gast of Gy,* and *Sir Amadace* – the narrative is less focused on the threat posed by the ghost, or indeed on concerns regarding a widow's sexuality, than on the importance of commemoration. Nor are such encounters predicated on the widow's recognition of the spectre (thus producing the proactive familial sympathy that underwrites their subsequent efforts to free them from purgatory). The widow is presented in each text as essentially debilitated, unable or unwilling either to recognize and interpret the ghost, or to fulfil the commemorative work which its soul requires. Such representations emphasise widows' vulnerability in order to constrain and limit the agency of widows in commemorative work. The resulting framework incorporates pious widows, whose commemorative activity could in practice have a powerful influence over their local religious environment, as essentially passive participants in the spiritual economy reliant on aid, mediation and instruction from a source of masculine authority. Without this, they cannot properly honour their responsibilities towards their husbands.

The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham: The penitent widower and the reluctant widow

The *Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* is the fifteenth-century Middle English translation of the late twelfth-century Latin narrative, the *Visio Monachi de Eynsham*, composed in 1196-7 by Adam of Eynsham and recounting the vision experienced by his

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[34] Gervais of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, ed. and trans. by S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 752-5.

monastic colleague Edmund over two days at Easter 1196.[35] The *Visio Monachi de Eynsham* achieved great popularity across Western Europe: Easting lists thirty-four surviving manuscripts, with two more believed destroyed and and further eight attested, as well as three independent translations into New High German and a now lost translation into French verse, known only from a retranslation into Latin found in British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A v. iii.[36] Extracts and discussions of the *Visio* are found in at least nine surviving visionary, chronicle, and theological texts, and four specific episodes, including the episode of the drunken goldsmith discussed in Chapter Two, also circulated as exempla, sometimes misattributed to Peter the Venerable [37] Of these versions, Easting suggests *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* was translated from a copy of *Visio* close but not identical to the version found in MS Selden Supra 66, which shares with *Revelation* various structural devices.[38]

The *Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham,* meanwhile, exists in only two printed copies issued in London in 1483 by William de Machlinia: London British Library, IA.55449, and Oxford, Bodleian Library Auct.IQ.5.28. Variations between the two show that they were printed in different runs with variant typesettings.[39] The text is unusual among de Machlinia's surviving output, which mostly comprised legal texts; an edition of Johannes

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[35] These names do not occur in the text of either the *Revelation* or the *Visio*, but they do appear in the running titles of several early manuscripts of the *Visio*; these names are used here for convenience throughout.

[36] For a full consideration of the *Visio Monachi*'s manuscript history see Robert Easting, 'Introduction', *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* ed. by Robert Easting (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 2002), pp. xx-xxx.

[37] Easting, 'Introduction', pp. xx-xxix.

[38] MS Selden Supra 66 represents the third major redaction of the *Visio*, termed 'C' by Easting. The A redaction appears to be a half-finished draft version that ends with the promise to continue the narrative; the B version completes the narrative but leaves in the incongruous promise found in A; C appears to be a later, more fully-synthesised version which omits the promise.

[39] These editions erroneously print 'Evvisham' in place of 'Eynsham' in the title, an error which is propagated in several subsequent editions.

Wotton's *Speculum Christiani* is the only other known spiritual text issued by de

Machlinia. That de Machlinia printed a Middle English translation of the *Visio Monachi*

nearly three centuries after its composition testifies to the longevity of interest in the

Visio as a narrative and an anticipated demand for the narrative in the vernacular,

though this argument must be qualified by the lack of evidence of the story circulating in

the vernacular beyond de Machlinia's printing. Certainly, the translator appears to have

anticipated a lay readership and interpolates passages explaining monastic terms

unfamiliar to a lay person.[40]

A fuller account of the plot will be saved for the more intensive examination of this text

in chapter four. For now, it suffices to say that the narrative follows Edmund, a monk

who experiences a vision of purgatory and the earthly paradise while lying catatonic for

two days, in which he is led through purgatory by St. Nicholas and speaks to various

souls (mostly religious), whom he knew in life. *Revelation* is the product of a monastic

milieu and falls within the genre of the otherworld vision, which remained widely popular

across Europe throughout the medieval period.[41] Eileen Gardiner has noted that the

genre 'almost universally' focused on monks as 'visionaries, vision scribes, or both' but

it could be deployed both towards strictly monastic as well as lay concerns, 'reaffirming

the well-attested liminal nature of the monastic and establishing the liminal nature of this

monastic genre'.[42] Although *Revelation* focuses principally on monastics and clergy in

its descriptions of the spirits encountered by Edmund (and thus on issues relating to the

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[40] Easting, 'Introduction, *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham,* p. lxvii.
[41] For a summary and bibliography regarding the genre in English, see Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997).
[42] Eileen Gardiner, 'Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Monastic Literature', *Downside Review* 139.1 (2021), pp. 24-43 (p. 24).

sins of the religious) it also features a number of lay spirits, two of whom reveal

something about the writers' attitudes to widowhood. It does not seem unreasonable to

suppose that, in the altered context of the print translation, these lay spirits would have

assumed greater significance due to their closer approximation of the text's new

audience. The principal concern in these images of widowhood, however, remains to

provide a refracting mirror for monastic concerns regarding penitence and communal

spiritual responsibility towards the dead.

Among the spirits described in purgatory, only one is clearly described as widowed,

and, unusually, it is a man.[43] This is the knight in Chapter XXXIII (1821-1856), whose

'wyfe dide afore him almoste .xxx. Wyntyr, after hoys dethe he leuyd continent and

chaste, in a wydwardys lyfe' (1830-2).[44] Electing not to remarry was unusual for a man,

especially one bereaved fairly young, and the text treats it as an indication of the

knight's virtuous living in later life: his 'widower's life' is not only chaste but 'redy and

benyuolente to alle men' (1832-3), charitable (1829-1830) and 'honeste of leuyng and

wele condycyonde in hys demening' (1833-4). His life as a widower was so virtuous that

Edmund 'gretely merueylde' (1833) that he was still in Purgatory ten years after his

death. The knight, however, is suffering for sins committed in his youth when 'for

felishippe… [he] was drawyn to many noy[e]ful thyngys' (1839-40). The knight's virtuous

widowerhood therefore functions as a penitential period of amended living. This

penitential widowerhood has reduced his time in purgatory, and by the time of the

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[43] The only laywomen in purgatory presented in the *Revelation* are a lecherous woman who is rescued from hell by the intercession of Saint Margaret, to whom Edmund does not speak, and a poor woman who 'dyde this laste yere with her husband' (ll.1716-6).

[44] *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* ed. by Robert Easting (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 2002), p.107. All further references will be to this edition and will be cited by line numbers in the text.

monk's vision he has 'ouercome alle his grete peynys' (1824) and is progressing 'wele

toward the ioys of paradyse' (1826). Notably, he is still being punished for his over-

attachment to falconry, which he continued during his widowerhood, not knowing it was

sinful (1849), suggesting that the longevity of this punishment relates to his failure to

avoid the sin during his widowerhood. Widowerhood and purgatory are depicted as

sharing an essentially penitential nature, both serving as stages in the knight's recovery

process of being purified of his sins in youth. Widowerhood is presented as an internal

state inherent in the knight's moral behaviour rather than in relation to his dead spouse,

who goes unmentioned save for the fact of her death. This reflects the broader concern

of the *Visio Monachi*, noted by Kim Diane Gainer, with the internal progression of

penitence among purgatorial spirits, with a distinctive 'emphasis on the psychology of

sinning' deriving from late twelfth-century concerns with the psychological aspects of

confession which presaged stipulation of yearly confession at the Fourth Lateran

Council in 1215.[45]

The framing of the knight's widowerhood as a sign of his inward penitence differs

markedly from the presentation of *Eynsham*'s sole female widow. This is the widow of

the drunken goldsmith of Osney, whose interactions with Edmund take up chapters 19-

23 (lines 928-1241). This episode is especially prominent within the narrative. The

goldsmith is the first soul Edmund speaks to in purgatory, it is the longest individual

episode, and the goldsmith represents one of the most detailed characters in the

narrative, 'creat[ing] himself as a character by spinning a mini-autobiography filled with

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[45] Kim Diane Gainer, 'Prolegomenon to Piers Plowman: Latin Visions of the Otherworld from the Beginnings to the Thirteenth Century', PhD Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1987, pp. 180, 191-3.

details of time and place and person and cause', in Gainer's words.[46] The narrator is self-conscious regarding its prominent placement within the narrative, noting that he will 'be seyn here sum-what to brake out fr[o] the order of the narracion' (937-9) in describing the encounter. Furthermore, the episode clearly held a particular appeal for writers of exempla, appearing as an adapted exemplum in nine separate texts identified by Easting, sometimes under an erroneous attribution to Peter the Venerable.[47] What little information we have about the reader reception of the Middle English *Eynsham* also favours the episode. The hand that annotated the London copy in Latin, which mostly provides a summary of key words or lists, breaks from this pattern both to lament the goldsmith's drunkenness and to compare one of the goldsmith's claims with an incident in the Life of St. Edmund.[48] The plot of the episode runs thus:

> Edmund meets the spirit of a goldsmith whom he knew: while pious, the man was an alcoholic and died in a drunken stupor, meaning that Edmund is surprised that he was not damned. The goldsmith explains that St. Nicholas, to whom he was especially devoted, interceded to give him space to make internal confession in the instant before his death. After Edmund recovers, the goldsmith's son reports to the abbey that his father's ghost has appeared repeatedly to his widowed mother, demanding she fulfil her spiritual obligation to him and maintain his donations to the chapel of St. Nicholas.

[46] Kim Gainer, 'Prolegomenon to Piers Plowman', p. 184.
[47] *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* ed. by Robert Easting, xxviii. The episode also looms large in modern critical reception of the text: it is repeatedly referred to as an example episode by Easting and Gainer, and the goldsmith is the only spirit specifically mentioned in Barry Windeatt's synopsis - see Barry Windeatt, '1412-1534: texts' in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. by Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 195-224 (p. 216).
[48] Easting, 'Introduction', p. xlvi.

As well as providing an introduction to the narrative's main structural template (the dialogic encounter with a purgatorial spirit focusing on their sins in life, their experience of their sufferings, and their inward movement towards completing their penances), the episode reveals to Edmund the identity of his spiritual guide and is the first element of the vision which is corroborated by events in the outside world, in the form of the haunting of the widow.

The goldsmith's death follows three days of heavy drinking beginning on Christmas day, a fact that arouses particularly great 'horror and heuynes' (1057-8) in him, and which he repented of the next morning, only to fall again into sustained drunkenness up until the moment of his death. Having returned home late at night and fallen asleep in bed 'clothyd and schod' (1075-6), he momentarily awakes, believing that he has heard the church bell ring for matins:

> And anone Y woke and wold haue resyn, and seyd, as Y wente, that then yt had
>
> ronge to matens. But my wyfe told me, 'Nay' and so Y layde my downe ageyne.
>
> Trewly, thanne fyrst Y toke a slepe, and anone after Y toke my dethe. (1076-
>
> 1080)

In telling her husband to go back to bed, the goldsmith's wife inadvertently contributes to his dying without receiving last rites. The sound of the matins bell has particular penitential significance for the goldsmith, who notes earlier that 'how mekyl euer Y gaue me towarde euyn to dronkynnes, Y vsyd euer-more to be at matens, for anon as Y range Y wulde be ther, and often-times afore the parysh pryste' (1019-1022). This bell, seemingly audible only to the goldsmith, amounts to a supernatural call to repentance

that presages his death. It also parallels Edmund's vision itself, which began with Edmund hallucinating a voice calling to him just before matins and ends with a heavenly bellringing. The wife's role in the account of the goldsmith's death is thus to prevent him from heeding this miraculous intercession in his favour. The goldsmith is thereby prevented from making full penitential use of his scant remaining minutes, being able only to make an inward vow to confess and abandon drunkenness (1082-1096)'. Likewise, the suddenness of the death during the night prevents his wife from seeking last rites for her husband, since his 'soule was gonne and paste out of my bodye yere [his] wyfe vnderstode or knewe hit or sende to calle for the pryste' (1184-6). These failures by the wife are understandable, if unfortunate. But in the context of the wife's later interactions with her husband's spirit they form a recurring pattern wherein the wife's inability to recognize supernatural events is connected to a lack of sufficient concern for her husband's soul. While the widower's wife is simply absent from the text without comment (perhaps because the widower himself is deceased, or because she has already completed her stint in purgatory, having substantially predeceased him) in a living widow such lack of concern is implicitly a cause for criticism.

The incident in which the goldsmith's ghost appears occurs over the span of three days (mirroring the timing of the vision itself), beginning twelve days after the vision, and is reported to the writer by the goldsmith's son, who 'wytnesyd wyth gret sweryng' (1201) that he 'herde hys mother talking and spekyng longe tyme with [the goldsmith's ghost] and somme-tyme enquryng and also somme-tyme answeryng hym' (1202-1204). While the goldsmith's spirit does not speak negatively regarding his wife's conduct before his death, he clearly finds fault with her actions after his death: she 'knowledged… that he

was full of ire and wrathe and moche blamed her because that he was forgotten and putte owte of mynde fro her' (1209-1211). However, there is no indication that 'putting her husband out of mind' involves any form of sexual impropriety, as in the case of the Wife of Bath. Instead, the goldsmith is concerned with disobedience to his wishes. She failed to do an unspecified 'lyttyl thyng for hym' (1213) which he requested of her during previous ghostly visitations, again suggesting her reluctance to heed her husband's requests. We are also told that the ghost asked Edmund to ensure his widow maintained his 'seruyce and worschyppe the whyche he was wonte to do in hys lyfe and they also by example to Seynt Nycholas' (1225-7), which included maintaining a light in Saint Nicholas's chapel and other 'thyngys that were necessary to the ornamentys of the chyrche' (1023-4) – a it seems reasonable to infer that the 'lyttyl thyng' is related to these donations. Thus the central concern of the goldsmith appears to be the maintenance of his devotion to St. Nicholas by his widow, a concern that accords with the thematic emphasis on the power of the saints, and specifically St. Nicholas, seen throughout both this episode and the rest of the narrative.[49] The goldsmith's actions reaffirm his continuing authority as husband over his widow, ordering her to "Sende wythoutyn taryyng thedyr as Y commaunde" (1217-8) to corroborate his account with Edmund's. Likewise, we are told that the goldsmith asked Edmund to 'stere and alsoo moue bothe hys wyfe and hys sone, and on hys behalf commande hem' (1224-6) to maintain and improve the devotions to St. Nicholas. The goldsmith essentially delegates

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[49] Easting notes that the *Revelation* greatly increases the number of direct references to St. Nicholas by name over those present in the *Visio*, suggesting that 'the English translator is more interested in the saint's powers of intercession and spiritual guardianship, functions that could appeal to a lay audience concerned with personal salvation'; Easting, Introduction', *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham,* p. lxxiii.

Edmund as a substitute figure of masculine authority over his widow. By enforcing the goldsmith's wishes, male authority is transferred from a lay context to a monastic one. Within the context of the marriage, then, *Revelation* takes the position that a man maintains authority over one's wife after death. The widow's principal fault is a failure to demonstrate appropriate marital obedience in commemorative matters.

The widow's explanation for failing to heed her husband's ghost, like the explanations for her actions preceding his death, appears both reasonable and indicative of a reduced receptiveness to supernatural spirituality. She tells her son that she 'excused her that for the oncertente of vysyons sche dyfferde hyt, leste that hyt sculd haue bene supposyd that sche hadde be desceyued and begylde' (1214-6). A concern with distinguishing between encounters with 'ghosts' from instances of fraud, delusion, or demonic influences is a common feature of medieval descriptions of supernatural encounters, a specific form of the broader doctrine of *discretio spirituum* which governed distinctions between true and false visionary experiences. *Discretio spirituum* was of especial importance as a discourse for evaluating the claims of women visionaries because of scepticism regarding the trustworthiness of female claims of supernatural experiences. As Nancy Caciola notes, 'women were more often perceived as conduits for supernatural spirits, whether good or evil… the "fragile sex" was thought to be more susceptible to the depredations of demons, and thus more likely to mistake possession by an angel of darkness for the inspiration of an angel of light' and Rosalynn Voaden notes that 'the conjunction of deceitful woman and deceiving visions demanded

very stringent checks and controls by ecclesiastical authorities.'[50] This scepticism

towards lay women's accounts of the supernatural is reflected in the marginalisation of

the widow's account within the text. Her account is mediated through the testimonies of

men, first her son and then the narrator, through a chain of reported speech which in the

Latin is so circuitous that it caused substantial deviation in the manuscript tradition and

motivated the translator to transpose some of the son's account into direct speech

simply to retain clarity of sense.[51] Her son's testimony is strongly affirmed and

'wytnesyd wyth grete sweryng' (1201) but is ultimately unable to corroborate anything

other than the widow's own statements, having 'herde no maner wordys of [the

goldsmith] talkyng or spekyng vnto her' (1206-7). The legitimacy of the visitation,

moreover, ultimately derives not from the testimony of the widow, but from the

corroborating testimony of Edmund's vision. The widow's testimony itself is heavily

mediated, marginalized, and impossible to verify without reliance on the authoritative

vision of the monk. As a result, the widow's skepticism and reticence to report the

apparition derives from the understandable belief that, given the church's hesitancy in

crediting women's experience of the supernatural, her testimony may be both mistaken

and disbelieved. Yet at the same time this very reticence is used to demonstrate her

spiritual incompetence, continuing her characterization as one spiritually dull, resisting

the spiritual urgency of supernatural events in favour of a prosaic normalcy. She

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[50] Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic, Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 19; Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval, 1999), p. 40. See also Voaden, pp. 66-72, for further explication of this point.
[51] Easting, 'Introduction', *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham,* p. lxxii.

remains a marginal figure whose principal role is to hamper her husband's spiritual progress through neglect, and to corroborate a more authoritative visionary.

Though the widow is marginalised, she provides a focal point for considerations of communal responsibilities towards the dead, one that is directed back towards the monastic community of Eynsham and Edmund in particular. The widow's unwillingness to fulfil her husband's requests mirrors a broader communal reluctance to pray for the goldsmith's soul since, as one that 'bode not only yn the synne of dronkynnes to hys dethe, but also he fylle yn-to dethe doing that same synne' (954-5), he was presumably damned. Edmund himself notes that, although he 'famylarly louyd' (932) the dead man, he was reluctant and sluggish in his prayer for the goldsmith's soul:

> ...what schulde Y thynke or fele of hym more worthior than not for the pray for him, le[s]te my prayer before the ryghtwes luge schulde be voide and no-thing helpyng hym? Neuertheles, Y vsyd to pray for hym, thawghe yt ware slowly, not verily certified of so soroful a fane and happe.   (963-7)

The community appears to have generally believed the goldsmith to be damned, since Edmund confirms that 'alle we that ware thy friends sorowde… supposyng verily that thow hadyste be dampde' (990-3). Edmund's reluctance to pray for the goldsmith is analogous to the widow's reluctance to credit the apparition of her husband: they both resist completing one's spiritual obligation towards the dead. Both excuse their negligence as a form of rigour through a process of categorisation (of categories of deceased sinners on the one hand, and visionary experiences on the other) which nonetheless risks foreclosing awareness of the exceptional possibility of divine mercy.

Those who presumed the goldsmith to be damned did so 'not knowyng the goodnes and mercy here of my presente lorde, Sente Nicholas' (986-7) who 'had not sofrid me… to be dampde and loste euerlastyngly' (987-9).

This sense of the need to remain open to the miraculous nature of divine mercy is strengthened by the correspondences between the salvation of the goldsmith and the central miracle of the narrative, Edmund's own vision of purgatory. The goldsmith's ordeal and Edmund's vision contain a number of striking similarities. As well as featuring a hallucinatory call to matins, both prominently feature St. Nicholas as a guiding and protective figure (the goldsmith reveals to Edmund that his guide is St. Nicholas), and in both their bodies become the focus of communal attention due to their ambiguous status between living and dead (the goldsmith's household is unsure if he 'schulde haue reuyuyd' (1181-2) due to the redness and warmth of his body). The situation of the goldsmith, the most prominent lay figure in the text, thus reflects back onto the situation within the monastic community. At the same time the widow's neglect of her dead husband's spiritual needs parallels concerns within the monastic community, implicitly warning them to ensure that they do not likewise neglect their duty to provide spiritual aid to the dead within both the cloister and the wider community.

In sum, the *Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* presents widowhood as particularly connected to both penitence and a spiritual duty towards one's dead spouse. Elements focusing on widowhood are less specifically formulated in *Eynsham* than in the texts which follow, no doubt reflecting its monastic milieu. They would, however, have taken on particular interest to a fifteenth-century urban lay audience accessing the text in its printed form, for whom the role and significance of widows in commemoration would

have been more socially prominent. What is particularly striking, given the unusual inclusion of both widowed men and women in the text, is the stark gendering of these conceptions of widowhood. The male widower is formulated principally through concepts of internal progress through penitence, to be continued after death in purgatory; his relationship with his wife is elided entirely. The female widow, however, is viewed only externally, being heavily marginalised within the text through several layers of male mediation. The goldsmith's widow represents an object lesson for the text's audience, as one who has failed in her spiritual duty towards the dead. Her spiritual ignorance requires masculine correction from both her husband's ghost and from the monastic visionary before she can fulfil her commemorative duties. It is this depiction of the widow as commemoratively incompetent which provides the most direct correspondence between *Eynsham* and the ghost narratives that came into existence between the composition of the *Visio* and its translation into the vernacular in the fifteenth century.

The Gast of Gy: The sinful widow and the invisible ghost

Where the *Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* treats issues of widowhood only glancingly, *The Gast of Gy* makes a widow's interactions with her husband's ghost a central element of the narrative. As we shall see, however, this centrality only makes more blatant the narrative strategies which mediate and marginalise the widow's role in spousal commemoration. The *Gast of Gy* represents the Middle English branch of a Latin narrative tradition popular across Europe, the transmission of which has been

most fully traced by Ed Eleazer.[52] The Latin source is *De Spiritu Guidonis,* which describes an investigation purportedly conducted by Dominican prior Jean Gobi into a haunting in Alés, France in the winter of 1323-4. Originating as a first-person account sent to Pope John XXII shortly after the events reportedly took place, the account was subsequently adapted, by the mid-fourteenth century into a longer, third-person narrative that proved enormously popular across Europe in a variety of Latin and vernacular versions.[53] Eleazer estimates that the Latin versions 'survives in no fewer than seventy-five manuscript copies, perhaps as many as a hundred', and the text was translated into French, Catalan, Italian, German, Dutch, Swedish, Welsh, and Irish, as well as English.[54]

The Middle English branch of the tradition contains three translations going by the title of *The Gast of Gy*: one in prose, one in quatrains, and one in couplets. A brief account of the manuscripts follows:

Prose

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[52] Ed Eleazer, 'Ghostly Politics in the Middle English *Gast of Gy*', *Medieval Perspectives* 18 (2003) 94-115; Ed Eleazar, 'Introduction' in *The Quatrain Verse of* Gast of Gy: *A Late Medieval Poem*, ed. by Ed Eleazar (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), pp. 1-88.

[53] Eleazer distinguishes at least five versions of the Latin narrative, one of which is lost: the original deposition (L) which was likely adapted into a lost third-person text (X) which was independently adapted into two redactions, A and U, of which A is substantially shorter and closer to L. A provides the basis of the surviving continental vernacular translations (excepting the German tradition). U, however, underwent a further expansion into a final surviving redaction, Q, which provides the basis of the English *Gast of Gy* tradition as well as the tradition in German. See Ed Eleazer, 'Introduction' in *The Quatrain Verse of* The Gast of Gy*: A Late Medieval Poem,* pp. 1-31; for a briefer precis, see Eleazer 'Ghostly Politics'.

[54] For a list of non-English vernacular manuscripts (excepting the Dutch and Swedish translations), see Eleazer, 'Introduction', pp. 35-6.

- Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175: An early fifteenth-century miscellany from the southeast Midlands, compiling pious romances along with a life of St. Catherine and a versified version of the Hours of the Cross.

- London, British Library, MS Additional 22283**:** A religious miscellany from the West Midlands, produced between the late 1480s and the first decade of the fifteenth century. Also known as the Simeon Manuscript.

- Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. a. 1: Religious miscellany produced in the West Midlands, copied alongside the smaller Simeon Manuscript with which it shares its main scribe and many affinities of content and decoration.[55] Also known as the Vernon Manuscript.

- Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Additional C 285: Late fourteenth-century, contains only *Gy* and a copy of *Mandeville's Travels*.

- Oxford, Queen's College, MS 383: Written around 1400 in the Southwest Midlands by Edward Jenkyn, contains *Mandeville's Travels* along with a calendar, several charms, and a recipe.

Quatrain

- Cambridge, Magdalen College, MS Pepys 2125: Late fourteenth-/early fifteenth-century religious miscellany in both Latin and English from the Southwest Midlands, possibly Gloucestershire.

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[55] Various locations for the production of the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts have been proposed, including the Cistercian abbeys of Bordesley and Stoneleigh, as well as Lichfield Cathedral. For a summary of evidence on this point see A.I. Doyle, 'Codicology, Palaeography, and Provenance' in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. a. 1,* ed. by Wendy Scase (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 3-25.

- Leeds, Leeds University Library, MS Brotherton 501: Mid-fifteenth-century Middle English religious miscellany from the Northeast Midlands, possibly southwest Lincolnshire.

- Tokyo, Takamiya, MS 32: Middle English poetic miscellany produced in Kent in the 1450s. Contains several extracts from Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, the *Canterbury Tales,* along with *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* and *The Vision of Tundale*, both verse afterlife-visions.

Couplet

- London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius E.VII: Late fourteenth-century Middle English compilation of religious verse, including the *Speculum Vitae* and the second expansion of the *Northern Homily Cycle*.

- Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlison poet. 175: Mid-fourteenth-century Middle English religious miscellany comprising prose and verse.

As this list suggests, the English *Gy* appears principally in English religious miscellanies from the Midlands, with all copies appearing in the period between the mid-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries. The relationship between three English *Gy* versions is unclear, though the quatrain version, which correctly preserves place-names that appear erroneously in the other versions, must have been translated from a different Latin copy.[56] The quatrain version in Leeds, MS Brotherton 501 includes a preamble (likely copied from the exemplar) claiming that the scribe translated the quatrain version personally from Latin, but Eleazar convincingly argues that the scribe supplemented an

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[56] Eleazer, 'Introduction', p. 33-4.

existing English version with his own translations from a divergent Latin version of the legend.[57] When both Latin and English versions are considered, the story appears to have been particularly popular in England, with thirty-five manuscript witnesses, more than any other country. The English versions all derive from closely related versions of the longest extant version of the Latin narrative; all other continental translations, save for those into German, derive from a shorter third-person version.

Being derived from the same version of the Latin source, all three versions hew relatively close to the same plot: In the French town of Alés in December 1323, the widow of the burgher Gy de Corvo is tormented in her home by an invisible spirit. She seeks assistance from a Dominican prior, who investigates, conducting a series of liturgical rituals in the house's bedroom. The ghost speaks, identifying itself as Gy. The prior tests if Gy is a ghost or a demon in a lengthy *Disputatio* on the subjects of purgatory and intercession. Gy miraculously identifies a hidden Eucharistic host on the prior's person. The widow suffers a sudden torment as punishment for an unnamed, previously confessed sin committed by the couple, but recovers when Gy tells her God has forgiven it. After a second series of disputations, Gy agrees to cease the haunting if his widow has masses said for them both and never remarries. On Epiphany, the prior speaks to Gy again, who confirms the efficacy of the masses and answers or rebuffs questions about purgatory and the future. By Easter, Gy's spirit has vanished.[58]

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[57] O.S. Pickering, 'Brotherton Collection MS 501: a Middle English anthology reconsidered', *Leeds Studies in English*, 21 (1990), pp. 141-165 (pp. 152-4); Ed Eleazar, 'Introduction', pp. 78-81.

[58] This summary by necessity elides the substance of the prior's dialogue with Gy on the nature of purgatory, the efficacy of intercessory prayer, and the form and nature of spirits, to which most of the text is devoted. A general summary of the text's model of purgatory, is given by Takami Matsuda, who characterises it as a pragmatic simplification of Aquinas' conception of a 'double purgatory'. Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Literature,* pp. 63-7.

Of the three versions, the couplet text is the longest and generally the most extensive

account. The Middle English iterations of the *Gast of Gy* are generally accepted as

being aimed at a lay audience. Takami Matsuda notes that the 'introductory nature of its

theological content' suggests it was aimed at popularising and clarifying the doctrine of

purgatory for a lay audience and Alexander J. Zawacki notes that the explanatory

translations of liturgical Latin in the couplet version indicate that 'this text was crafted for

consumption by nonclerical audiences who were not fluent in the tongue of the

Church'.[59] These assessments are supported by the preamble to the quatrain version

present in MS Brotherton 501, which addresses the manuscript's intended recipient,

referred to elsewhere as 'my chylde' and 'brother', who will find the story of Gy

'profytabil… forto haue yt translatyd fro Latyn into Ynglysh… for þe more intellection for

the þat canst no Latyn'.[60] Beyond this, Eleazar has suggested that the longer Q version

of *De Spiritu Guidones* was translated because its expansions were useful in combating

Lollard ideas about a diverse range of doctrines, including transubstantiation and the

legitimacy of lethal violence against pagans.[61] In any case, the Middle English *Gast of*

Gy is a translation of a Latin, Dominican monastic text intended for use by the religious

in preaching into a vernacular text for a lay readership, providing a thorough (if

'introductory') orthodox account both of purgatory and a variety of other religious

doctrines.

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[59] Takami Matsuda, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Literature,* 63; Alexander J. Zawacki, 'Spirit Readings: Spectral Hermeneutics in the Middle English *Gast of Gy*', *Preternature* 9.2 (2020), pp. 139-169 (p. 152).
[60] Eleazar, 'Introduction', pp. 77-8.
[61] Ed Eleazar, 'Ghostly Politics', pp. 99-106.

Gast's opening incident resembles the apparition of the *Eynsham* goldsmith: a widow

experiences a private haunting connected to her marriage, within her domestic space,

and contacts an appropriate monastic authority to corroborate and resolve the disruptive

presence of the dead husband. Compared to the goldsmith's widow, the actions taken

by Gy's widow demonstrate greater alertness and perceptiveness in her response to the

supernatural: she immediately seeks aid from an appropriate religious authority to

scrutinise the occurrences. Gy's initial haunting, however, is far less clear and

comprehensible than the goldsmith's. The initial period of the haunting is defined,

particularly in the poetic versions, by the ghost's invisibility on the one hand, and the

excessive and unintelligible sounds it produces on the other. As a result, Gy's haunting

more closely resembles the modern concept of the poltergeist – an invisible spirit that

creates unexplained noise and commotion – than the highly visual ghostly encounters

discussed in the previous chapter.[62] It is not, however, any less distressing for the

widow.

The prose text only briefly describes the haunting itself, noting that Gy's spirit 'wiþ-outen

sihtlich forme apeered to his owne wyf and tormented hire gretliche' (Prose 293).[63] Both

poetic versions expand the description of the haunting, focalising the haunting through

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[62] Gy's invisibility accords with the pattern described by Jean-Claude Schmitt in which invisible ghosts appear particularly in autobiographical accounts (such as the original version of *De Spiritu Guidonis*), in contrast with non-specific accounts or those which had widely circulated orally before being written down: 'as doubts and hesitations about the appearance of the dead person corresponded to the subjective and oneiric experience of the apparition, so did an objectivisation of the ghost go hand in hand with the socialization of the tale'; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, p. 195.

[63] Anonymous, 'Spiritus Guydonis', in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and his Followers*, vol. 2, ed. by Carl Horstmann (New York: Swan, Sonnenschein and Company, Macmillan; 1896), pp. 292-333. Note that it is the prose text edited from the Vernon Manuscript, supplied by Horstmann in the footnotes which I am citing here, rather than the couplet text printed above it. All references to the prose text will be to this edition and will be cited in-text by page number, as the text is not lineated.

the widow's viewpoint by emphasising her suffering. In doing so, both texts emphasise

the juxtaposition of visual absence with excessive and unexplained sound:

> Hym yse myȝt man non,
>
> Bute perceyue by þe noyse -
>
> Did hure hym vp and downward gon,
>
> Crynge wiþ his voys.   (Quatrain, 25-32)[64]

> Bot of him myght scho have no sight,
>
> And in his chaumber myght scho here
>
> Mikell noys and hydous bere   (Couplet, 48-9)[65]

Intriguingly, these two treatments provide a dichotomy in terms of their gendered

focalization of the spirit's sound. The quatrain text presents the scenario through the

eyes and ears of an abstracted, hypothetical observer, generalised as male, while the

couplet text focalises the haunting through the experiences of the widow herself. In the

quatrain text, the male observer can unambiguously identify the noise as a voice and

can accurately track the voice as it moves about the house. The couplet text, in

contrast, mirrors the widow's experience by eliding the source and nature of the sound;

rather than a discrete voice whose source can be located and identified, the terrible

uproar simply fills up the chamber, too excessive and ambiguous for the frightened

widow to parse. In medieval theories of speech and sound, this 'Mikell noys and

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[64] Anonymous, *The Quatrain Verse of the Gast of Gy*, ed. by Ed Eleazer (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), lines 25-32. All references to the text of the quatrain version will be to this edition unless otherwise noted and will be cited in-text.

[65] Anonymous, 'The Gast of Gy' in *Three Purgatory Poems: The Gast of Gy, Sir Owain, The Vision of Tundale*, ed. by Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), lines 25-32. All references to the couplet text will be to this version unless otherwise noted and will be cited in text.

hideous bere' appears similar to *vox inarticulata illiterate* - vocal sounds without legible meaning which cannot be transcribed.[66] Valerie Allen notes that this illegible noise harboured demonic connotations for medieval audiences as 'the inverse of rational language… demonic *clamor* that stops reason in its tracks'.[67] As Stephen D. Craun discusses, these connotations reflect Augustinian notions of the voice as messenger of human reason; unintelligible noise thus representing a suspect diversion of the voice away from its divinely-allotted purpose.[68] While the ghost is not demonic, the focus on its pseudo-demonic unintelligibility emphasises the threat that the widow fears, focalising the text through the widow's plight and her inability to resolve or navigate the situation. Likewise, the couplet version shows greater interest in the widow's suffering: the Quatrain says that Gy 'died hure so gret torment/Þat wery sheo was of hure lif' (Quatrain 26-7), but the couplet text, which dedicates some 15 lines to the haunting, notes how Gy 'suede hir with mykell payne/and did hir dole both day and night' (Couplet 46-7) and how she 'was so rugged and rent/That for sorrow scho was nere schent' (Couplet 51-2). This expanded description of the widow's suffering is unusually alliterative for the poem, a stylistic decision which, as in the alliterative ghost narratives discussed in the last chapter, provides a sense of heightened intensity that further aligns the reader with the widow's plight.

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[66] This category, and the system of fourfold categorisation of vocal sound based on presence or absence of grammatical meaning and of the capacity to be transcribed, derived from the *Institutiones Grammaticae* of the sixth-century Latin grammarian Priscian, whose work was extremely popular across medieval Europe. A fuller description of these categories in a medieval context can be found in Valerie Allen, 'Broken Air', *Exemplaria* 16.2 (2004), pp. 305-322 (pp. 305-310).

[67] Allen, 'Broken Air', p. 309.

[68] Stephen D. Craun, *Lies, Slander and Obscenity: pastoral rhetoric and the deviant speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 26-37.

The gendering of the widow's inability to interpret and identify her husband's ghost is further emphasized by her request for aid from the monks, where, again, the level of awareness exhibited by the widow varies between texts. In the prose version, she appears unaware that the ghost may be her husband, noting only that she 'ne wuste wheþur hit weore a gilerie of þe fend or non' (Prose, 294). The quatrain widow is more proactive, asking the prior to 'pray for my spouse' (Quatrain 34). In the couplet text's, the widow conveys her awareness that the spectre may be her husband, based on perceptive 'wyterly' inferences regarding its seeming fixation with the marriage bed:

> …scho hoped ryght wyterly,
>
> It was the gast of hir lord Gy;
>
> For in that chaumbre oft herd was he,
>
> Whare hir lord was wont to be,
>
> To spyll that bed wald he noght blyn,
>
> That Gy, hir lord, and scho lay in.   (Couplet, 71-6)

The spirit has either returned to, or usurped, Gy's appropriate and habitual presence in the symbolic location of bed and bedchamber. The haunting's focus on the bed implicitly indicates, as Robert Stuart Sturges notes, that 'the widow's suffering may be in some sense sexual, and specifically connected with marriage', an implication that will be borne out later in the narrative.[69] However, Hollie L.S. Morgan has noted that the

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[69] Robert Stuart Sturges, 'Purgatory in the Marriage Bed: Conjugal Sodomy in *The Gast of Gy*' in *Representing Rape in the English Early Modern Period*, ed. by Barbara J. Baines (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp. 57-78, (p. 63). Sturges treats only the prose version of *The Gast of Gy*, which partially asseverates the sexual implications of the bed at this point, since it provides the alternative justification that the bed is haunted because Gy died in it ('þe spiret was in þe bed þat hire hosebonde died inne', Prose l. 294).

marriage bed was associated in late medieval English culture not only with the sexual aspects of marriage, but also with both rest and free, equal, private spousal communication.[70] The haunting, with an invisible but threatening presence replacing the body of the husband in the marriage, inverts and disrupts the idealised image of the marriage bed on a variety of levels. It transforms a space associated with rest into a site of suffering and torment, in which husband's ghost toils unceasingly ('withouten blyn'). The ghost, in working to 'spyll' (make desolate) the bed, threatens to sterilise and waste the sole legitimate space for procreation.

The haunting also inverts the communicative resonances of the bedchamber. While the bed may have been a space for private discussion between Gy and his wife, Gy's spirit now makes only frightful and unintelligible noise, communicating nothing to his widow. Given that private, informal marital communication, of exactly the sort associated with the marriage bed, appears to have played a substantial role in planning for spousal commemoration, the couplet text can be viewed here as staking a claim regarding the role of marriage in commemoration. Although the widow's emotional bond with her husband, touchingly reinforced by her 'hope', means that she is able to infer the ghost's identity, he will not speak to her and so his purpose and nature remain threateningly opaque. The replacement of marital speech by ghostly noise indicates that while marriage may have been a productive channel for communication in life, upon the husband's death private spousal communication becomes inadequate for addressing the commemorative needs of the soul.

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[70] Hollie L.S. Morgan, *Beds and Chambers in Late Medieval England: Readings, Representations and Realities* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2017), pp. 146-7.

Establishing the inadequacy of the widow in interpreting Gy's ghostly visitations serves as a complement to the *Gast's* interest in the interpretative authority of the clergy in supernatural matters, as the widow seeks and receives help from the Dominicans. In each case the widow admits that she cannot determine the nature of the spirit tormenting her:

> And scho ne wist noght witerly
>
> Whether it war the gast of Gy
>
> Or it war fandyng of the fende,
>
> That so had soght hir for to schende. (Couplet 55-9)

Here again is the question of the discernment of spirits that confronted the Eynsham goldsmith's widow - the essential difficulty of distinguishing between ghostly visitation and demonic trickery. By contrast, however, Gy's widow does not lapse into hesitancy but instead seeks outside counsel from an approved source. Indeed, it is precisely the source to which the widow of *Revelation* is directed: the institutional authority of a male monastic community. Alexander J. Zawacki has discussed *Gast*'s preoccupation with establishing priests as the only appropriate hermeneutic interpreters of supernatural events, a role predicated on a combination of "book-learning and clerical authority", the latter itself predicated on both an ineffable divine sanction and the clergy's communal and literary knowledge base.[71] Although the prior is the only representative of the church to play an active role in the investigation, he clearly acts on the advice and sanction of the entire monastery, whom he convenes to form a plan 'ordaind be thair

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[71] Zawacki, 'Spirit Readings', pp. 143-5.

comon assent' (Couplet 112) since the counsel 'omang many wytty men' (Couplet 99) is more secure than any man alone. This communal model of clerical knowledge contrasts again with the widow, who is presented as an isolated figure, save for the prose text's fleeting mention of the Prior entering 'wiþ þe servauns of þi hous' (Prose 296). The widow, alone amidst exceptional supernatural circumstances which she cannot adequately interpret, is required to petition the church to both provide prayers and give her direction. Only the church can render the widow's situation comprehensible, a framing which curtails and undermines the possibility of a widow engaging proactively in commemoration.

The prior investigates the ghosts through a series of liturgical rituals: the house is sprinkled with holy water, the hymn 'Veni Creator' is sung followed by a collect and a second sprinkling, before the prior approaches the bed and recites the opening of St. John's Gospel and the entire Office of the Dead.[72] Sturges has noted that the second rite of sprinkling echoes the ritual blessing of the bedchamber as part of the marriage rites of the Sarum use, and therefore represents the legitimating role of the clergy.[73] The subsequent interrogation of Gy by the prior is also pursued (initially) via a formulaic pattern of questions which Stephen Greenblatt connects to the formulae for *discretio spirituum,* focused on determining the identity, origin, and purpose of the ghost in order to provide a regulating formal structure in the event of a supernatural encounter.[74]

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[72] Edward E. Foster notes that this schedule emphasizes prayers to the Holy Spirit. 'The Gast of Gy' in *Three Purgatory.Poems,* ed. by Edward E Foster, pp. 173-4 (footnote).

[73] Sturges, 'Purgatory in the Marriage Bed', pp. 63-4.

[74] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory,* expanded edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 103. It should be noted that Greenblatt's use of the term *discretio spirituum* refers to specific interrogatory processes for supernatural entities, rather than the broader principles for discerning the nature of supernatural or visionary experiences, as discussed by Voaden and Caciola.

These institutional, formulaic structures by which Gy is both conjured and interrogated emphasise clerical expertise and authority. Despite the prominent use of the Office of the Dead, the transactional element of commemorative benefaction is inverted: rather than the widow commissioning specific liturgy from the prior, here the prior chooses the liturgy without her input. These clerically directed rituals prompt, at last, a docile and comprehensible response from Gy's ghost:

> "Agnus Dei" than said thai thryse,
>
> And ane than answerd on this wyse:
>
> A febyll voyce than might thai ken
>
> Als a child sayand: "Amen." (Couplet 205-8)
>
> And whenne at "Agnus Dei" þey were,
>
> Hy hurde a wonder þynge -
>
> A voys syngynge, ["Amen" þere]
>
> As a child criyinge. (Quatrain 125-8)

This response is transformational: at once the ghost's sounds change from threateningly excessive *vox inarticulata illiterata* to articulate speech so feeble that it can scarcely be heard. The transformation of the soul's voice into a childlike state accords with a medieval tradition of representing the soul of the dead as a child, but has a double effect in shifting the focus towards the relationship between prior and lay ghost and away from the relationship between husband and widow. By representing Gy as a child, his voice is shorn of identifiers; he is made unrecognisable both to his wife, as a man and as a husband, further distancing the ghost from any notion of conjugality suggested by the bedchamber setting. At the same time the child-like voice figures Gy

as a lay subordinate to his clerical interlocutor, a subordination further patterned out by the interjection being "Amen", precisely the appropriate lay response to the liturgical formula with which Gy is presented.

The majority of the poem from this point on is given over to the dialogue between Gy and the Prior. This is a theologically orientated tête-à-tête between the prior, who seeks to uncover any possible deception or equivocation by Gy, and the ghost, whose experience of purgatory allows him to rebut and at times contradict the prior. These discussions are not directly related to commemoration or to the widow, and structurally speaking they subordinate the urgency of the widow's situation to the prior's authoritative desire to thoroughly investigate the theological dimensions of the haunting. The dialogue only breaks off when, after Gy agrees to follow the prior out of the bedchamber, he invisibly passes his widow (who had apparently fainted in another bed), causing her to suffer pains.[75]

> whon he com to þe wyues bed pat was in pe lufthalf of pe chauwbre, his wyf liggynge in pat ilke bed anon bigon to grenne wiþ hire teþ and criȝede riht heiȝe wiþ-oute fourme of vois in be Maner of a wood wommon. (Prose 320)

Once again, the marvel of the haunting focuses on the widow, suffering in bed, but now the excessive, unintelligible *vox illiterata inarticulata* comes from the widow rather than the ghost. Alliteration, last seen in the initial haunting sequence, creeps back into the couplet version as the widow 'Grysely for to gnayst and gryn' (Couplet 1362). The

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[75] Again, the couplet text is more prominently concerned with the widow since the prior specifically 'ogayne gan pass/Unto the wydow' (1355-6); in the prose and quatrain the prior is interrupted passing her on route to the threshold.

couplet version also draws out a physical similitude between dead husband and living widow, saying that the widow 'lay lyke unto lede/In swounyng doune als scho were dede' (Couplet 1371-2).[76] The widow rapidly cycles through two forms of resemblance to her dead husband: first as the suffering ghost crying out inarticulately, then, swooning, as the silent and inanimate corpse recently buried in the grave.

Indeed, with the widow lying 'as dead' her bed itself begins to resemble a funeral bier or tomb on which an effigy is lying. The widow lay in bed with Gy while he lived and will presumably lie with him in the tomb after death, but now she appears trapped in an interstitial space between these two marital frameworks – visually alone, but still affected by her husband's invisible presence: a visual symbol of widowhood as a purgatorial, liminal space between living marriage and death. Sturges perceptively notes how the widow's body, wracked with supernatural pain, functions in this scene as a replacement for the visually-absent Gy as an object of visual spectacle, immediately following as it does Gy's refusal of the Prior's demand to appear 'siȝtiliche' (Prose 320).[77] The implication of these correspondences is that the widow, after her husband's death, has entered a state whose liminality is both analogous to, and connected with, that of the returning ghost of her husband.

In this liminal state, ghost and widow remain connected by their marital bond, creating a similitude between them that goes beyond a specular relationship, instead forming a connection wherein the ghost's invisible, unvoiced purgatorial suffering appears to be translated visibly onto the body of his widow, literalising the idea of husband and wife

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[76] The quatrain text here reads 'She lay as a womman ded' (Quatrain 1034).
[77] Sturges, 'Purgatory in the Marriage Bed', p. 68.

being 'one flesh'.[78] The version of the couplet version preserved in MS Cotton Tiberius E. VII makes this suggestion explicit in the early description of the haunting, where Gy '[to] his wife… went ogayne/and schewed hir porcioun of his paine'.[79] The marital bond then, has allowed for a kind of preternatural communication between the couple, but one very different from the legible speech with which Gy converses with the prior. It is of experience rather than information, lying outside the realm of formal expression and predicated on a literalization of the Biblical description of husband and wife as 'one flesh', the widow being bodily sensitive to the husband's spiritual pain.

Furthermore, this translated experience of purgatorial suffering appears to prompt an appropriate spiritual response from the widow. When the prior, baffled by the widow's outburst, attempts to question Gy regarding the cause of his wife's distress, the ghost refuses and directs him to address the widow, since "Scho wate hirself, als wele als I" (Couplet 1382). Gy seems confident that the widow now understands the cause of the haunting, implying that the experience of sharing her husband's pain has granted her an understanding of its purpose. As a result, while the widow simply ignores the prior's questions, she does react and stir from her swoon:

> And scho lay styll and answerd noght
>
> […]
>
> Ans sone than scho bigan to crepe
>
> Upon hir knews, so also scho may,

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[78] Mark 10:7-8; Matthew 19:5.

[79] Anonymous, 'Spiritus Guydonis', in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and his Followers*, vol. 2, ed. by Carl Horstman (New York: Swan, Sonnenschein and Company, Macmillan; 1896), pp. 292-333, lines 49-50. Note that I am referring to the couplet text printed in this edition rather than the prose text printed alongside it.

> And cryand loud thus gan scho say:
>
> "Lord Jesu, also Thou boght me
>
> Of my payne, Thou have peté
>
> And graunte me of Thi help in haste." (Couplet 1388, 1392-7)

Again, this third stage of the widow's torment draws a parallel to the ghost's behaviour – namely, the ghost's position as a prayerful penitent. Gy, fully aware of his position as a beneficiary of God's mercy, appears to exist in a state of continuous, inaudible and invisible prayer, continually 'honouring' the Eucharist when it is brought into his presence although the witnesses 'persayved it noght' (Couplet 1321-4). In particular, the weakness of the widow's movements, pitifully crawling on the ground, parallel the weakness of Gy's feeble and child-like voice when conjured by the Prior, emphasizing the penitent's humility and vulnerability. The widow's torment has thus proceeded through three stages, each reflecting model of the purgatorial dead: first as disruptive spirit, second as dead body, and third as suffering penitent.

As we learn in short order, both Gy and his widow's suffering are directly connected to their marital relationship, on account of an unspecified 'unkyndely syn' (Couplet 1426) that occurred within their marriage, 'betwixt us twa here in this stede' (Couplet 1428), which the pair confessed but had not completed penance for when Gy died. This sin is almost certainly sexual in nature, and Sturges makes a compelling but inconclusive argument that it is marital sodomy.[80] A very wide variety of factors could render marital

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[80] Sturges, 'Purgatory in the Marriage Bed', p. 70-1 and *passim*. Schmitt suggests infanticide as a potential alternative, but this fits poorly with the rest of the text, and as discussed in the previous chapter infanticide was principally conceived of as a crime committed by singlewomen and adulterers. Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, p. 115.

sex sinful - including mindset, the time of year, a woman's physical condition, position, or any practice meant to enhance desire or pleasure - and Gy himself notes this, saying 'thare er many common case/In whilk wedded men may trispase' (Couplet 1455-6). In any case, attempting to identify the precise sin runs counter to the text itself, where Gy forcefully rebuts any attempt to identify the sin, arguing that as it was confessed, he cannot be forced to reveal it:

> God wul nat þat man it here
>
> Þat þat is yput awey
>
> By shrift of mowþe fram Goddys ere.   (Quatrain 1081-4)

Indeed, the Brotherton scribe cites Gy's argument here as his rationale for copying the text, intending to reassure the manuscript's recipient, who is apparently anxious about the efficacy of confession, that 'God wyll not quoþhe that what tyme ys onys truly shreuyn ony man of her sennys to tell hem euyr aȝen'.[81] The disclosure of sexual sins in marriage is firmly restricted by Gy to private confession, reflecting normative practice. James A Brundage notes that 'Intimate details of sexual habits of married persons rarely came before the courts… Confessors presumably heard more about such practices more often than judges did.'[82] In refusing to name the sin, Gy resists the notion that their marriage can be interrogated by circumventing the widow's involvement, through an interchange between husband and priest.

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[81] Ed Eleazar, 'Introduction', p. 78. MS Brotherton 501 is also one of several manuscripts that anthologize *Gast* alongside forms of confession.

[82] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Civic Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.453.

Gy's steadfast refusal to reveal the duly confessed sin he and his wife committed is part of *Gast*'s concern to defend the marital bond that Gy and his widow share, and the love they clearly feel for one another. Indeed, Gy makes explicit that it is his love for his wife that ultimately motivates his haunting. When asked why he did not appear before 'men of religioune' (Couplet 1490) who ''war mare nere/To God than any wemen' (Couplet 1494-5) and thus could understand him, Gy replies:

> "I lufed mare my wyfe
>
> Than any other man on lyfe
>
> And tharfor first to hir I went;
>
> [...]
>
> I asked God of His gret grace
>
> That my wife myght warned be
>
> For to amend hir mys bi me.
>
> And of His grace He gaf me leve
>
> On this wise hir for to greve
>
> And for to turment hir biforne,
>
> So that scho suld night be lorne
>
> Ne that scho suld suffyr pyne
>
> For hir syns, als I do for myne,
>
> Bot do it here in hir lyf days."   (1497-1511)

While Gy's haunting has caused his widow substantial suffering, his rationale is to reduce her pains overall by warning her to complete her penance and thus avoid suffering more in purgatory. Moreover, while Gy earlier notes that God's granted

permission for Gy's haunting was so it might warn married people away from sin, Gy *asked* for permission specifically out of love for his wife. God's granting of Gy's request is a serendipitous alignment of divine purpose and human love that implicitly sanctions Gy's impulse of love towards his wife. Moreover, while Gy notes earlier that God permitted him to haunt his wife in order that his example might serve as a general warning for married people, his granting of Gy's request to haunt his wife provides the ultimate sanction for his own impulse of love towards his wife. This powerful justification of marital love is viewed by Kristin Noone as generically incongruous, 'its undercurrents of devoted earthly love and individuality exist in an odd tension with its primary concern with purgatorial doctrine', to the extent that she considers it 'not a simple purgatory poem but a type of romance'.[83] While Noone's argument depends on an unwarranted dismissal of the 'simple purgatory poem' as flatly didactic and uninterested in relationships, the prior's view of the haunting as a didactic spectacle for the enlightenment of the church exists in undeniable tension with Gy's view of the haunting as a mechanism to spare the wife he loves from pain.

Such a tension, however, indicates a sophisticated strategy by which the text seeks to appeal to a lay audience by legitimising their emotional concerns against the current, as it were, of the text's general concern with establishing the didactic and interpretative authority of the clergy. Gy's affirmation of his love for his wife over 'any other man' immediately follows the only direct exchange between husband and widow in the text, in

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[83] Kristin Noone, 'A King, A Ghost, Two Wives, and the Triumph of Love: Romance, Confession, and Penance in *Sir Orfeo* and *The Gast of Gy*', *Marginalia* 7 (2008), n.p.

which the prior is briefly displaced from his role as mediator between spouses as the

widow is driven by her plight to address Gy directly:

> "Gud Gy, for luf of me,
>
> Say if I sall saved be
>
> Or I sall dwell in dole ever mare
>
> For that syn that thou nevend are,
>
> Wharf, I wate, God was night payd."
>
> The spirit answerd sone and says:
>
> "For that ded thou dred thee noght
>
> The penaunce nere tyll end es broght
>
> Thou sall be saved, for certayne."
>
> And than the woman was full fayne
>
> And sayd thare kneland on hir kne
>
> A Pater Noster and ane Ave.
>
> Scho loved God with word and will. (Couplet 1467-79)

In breaking away from the mediated exchanges that characterize the rest of their

interactions, Gy dramatically restates the general point he had earlier made, that God

forgives all sins which are properly confessed – precisely the point which the Brotherton

scribe describes wishing to convey to the recipient of his copy of *Gast* in his preamble –

and rearranges it into a specific personal message of consolation for his wife: that she

will not be damned for the sin she committed with him and that her suffering is close to

an end.[84] The bond of their marriage, incorporating both their love for one another, their status as 'one flesh', their mutual sin, and their shared penance, allows for a direct, highly emotive depiction of the suffering through which they are struggling together. The husband's love permits him to step outside the prior's mediation and directly voice God's mercy towards his wife.

However much the *Gast of Gy* presents unmediated interactions between husband and wife about their shared penance, when the question of commemoration arises, the widow is once again marginalised by the prior in her interactions with the ghost. After the widow completes her prayer, the prior interjects to instruct her to 'do almusdede' (Couplet 1482) as penance for her sins. Gy approves of this, asking her "Whan thou do almus, think on me/For to alegge som of my payne" (Couplet 1485-7), again reorienting the prior's advice to focus on their suffering as a joint, marital penance. From this point on, however, the Prior's interrogation once again takes over the narrative. After a second lengthy dialogic exchange on purgatorial doctrine between ghost and prior, the widow interjects, requesting that the prior seek to bring the haunting to a firm resolution:

> "For Godes loue aske of hym hou I may be dilyuered of þis peyne þat he doþ to me." (Prose 330)

> Thenne seyde þe wodewe wiþ heuy chere,
> "Gude priour, aske hym þowe

> Howe lunge shal þis peyne dere
>
> þat Yche haue vpon me nowe."   (Quatrain 1371-5)

> The woman to the Prior prayd.
>
> That he wald spek the gast untyll,
>
> Si that he dyd hir no more ill.   (Couplet 1860-2)

Again, we see the couplet poet reducing the widow's awareness of the situation. Where the prose and quatrain widows accept their culpability (in having neglected their penances) for their present predicament and are asking for clarifications, the couplet widow simply asks the prior to stop Gy from haunting her. In making and acceding to these requests, widow and prior reinstate the dynamic created between them at the poem's opening, with the prior taking the role of 'facilitat[ing] communication between the living and the dead, the passing of messages between this world and the next… in the middle of the spirit and the wife'.[85] That the prior steps back into this role now, at the point when Gy has begun speaking directly to his widow without an intermediary, affirms that ecclesiastical authority over the supernatural is innate. It is no longer the case that the widow lacks the *means* to understand Gy, but rather that she is not considered a suitable interlocutor. It is striking that Gy does not explain to his wife the conditions necessary to complete their joint penance, but rather explains them to the prior when he attempts to conjure Gy to cease his haunting:

> "That may I noght for nanekyns nede,
>
> Bot scho lyf chaste in wydowhede

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[85] Zawacki, 'Spirit Readings', pp. 158-9.

And allswa ger syng for us twa

Thre hundereth messes withouten ma:

A hundreth of the Haly Gast sall be

Or els of the Haly Trinité,

And a hundreth of Our Lady

And of Requiem fyfty

And other fyfty als in fere

Of Saint Peter, the apostell dere." (Couplet 1871-1880)

This provision is yet another long, complex mass schedule. In all three versions, Gy stipulates which masses are to be said for both widow and husband, again emphasising the spiritual connection between them. Saying masses for both living and dead in this way was not unusual within medieval commemorative practice, particularly in spousal contexts where masses were either organized by the surviving spouse or jointly as part of the husband's will.[86] *The Gast of Gy* both provides a rationale and endorsement for this practice by equating widow with ghost, and widowhood with purgatory. Just as the spiritual connection inherent in his marriage allows Gy's purgatorial punishment to be translated onto his widow, so too are the spiritual benefits of the mass distributed between husband and wife.

Gy also requires that his widow remain in 'chaste' perpetual widowhood. As discussed earlier, perpetual widowhood was the church's preferred course for widows, and one

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[86] A wide variety of joint chantries founded for the benefit of a married couple, often while the widow was still alive, are discussed by Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women and the Fabric of Piety* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), pp. 52-62.

which women took themselves for a variety of reasons both spiritual and practical. In this context it also resembles a mode of spousal control, similar to that seen in the wills of some husbands who made bequests to their wives conditional on their perpetual widowhood, partly out of concern for the interests of their heirs.[87] Schmitt typifies concerns regarding remarriage in medieval ghost stories as being 'to fantastic tales what the charivari was to ritual procedures of social control', a warning intended to dissuade widows from remarrying against the will of husband or community.[88] Legal conditions barring remarriage, however, were not especially common – Hanawalt's survey of the London Hustings Court found them in only 3% of surveyed married men's wills, and even here they might also represent mutual agreements intended to safeguard the widow from pressure to remarry. The brevity and vagueness of the demand, however, compared with the extent and specificity of the requested masses, suggests that the Gy is concerned more with the penitential aspect of perpetual widowhood than with a threat of coercion.

Although all three Middle English versions of *Gast* proleptically show the widow's comprehension and completion of the requests at this point, and the couplet text explicitly notes that she 'herd tho wordes wele' (Couplet, 1881), the text takes pains to have the prior reiterate and expand the ghost's instructions. After Gy vanishes, the prior redundantly informs the widow 'scho suld kepe hir clene and chaste/Als scho was warned with the gaste', adding that she should commission a priest to 'synge/Contynuely thare in that place' (Couplet 1932), which Gy did not request, noting

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[87] Hanawalt, 'The Widow's Mite', p. 26.
[88] Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, pp. 187-8.

that she did 'Als the Pryor gan hir byd' (Couplet 1937), with the prior's instructions supplanting those given by Gy. This reiteration once again posits the prior as an intermediary, responsible for interpreting, adjusting, and conveying messages between ghostly husband and living wife, but in this context, it can also be read as clerical intervention into the private arrangement of commemoration between husband and wife. Gy's requests, like those of other purgatorial ghosts, amount to a kind of will-making in reverse, where the ghost corrects their commemorative arrangements in response to their knowledge of purgatory. Occurring in the private space of the bedchamber, this might resemble precisely the private spousal discussions of commemoration which Burgess argues must have typified the ante-mortem commemorative strategies of married couples.[89] The presence of the prior as a mediator, however, transforms this private arrangement into one directly managed by the church. Indeed, the added commission of a priest to sing for Gy's soul each day at that spot, cements the position of a clerical intermediary in the bedchamber to dissipate its role as a private marital space. The prior's interjection prevents the priest's commemorative role from being reduced to the pliant fulfilment of the commemorative commissions of the laity. This process simultaneously erodes the widow's agency, so that even after receiving Gy's instructions she remains reliant on clerical counsel.

Likewise, the prior's 'counsaile/That scho suld kepe hir clene and chaste' (Couplet 1928-9) transforms a request which is either privately penitential or derived from the marital bond into one underwritten by the institution of the church. It is unclear if Gy's widow becomes a vowess or simply makes an informal, private determination of

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[89] Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls,* pp. 84-5.

perpetual widowhood – these two types of chaste women were not always culturally distinguished.[90] Susan Steuer notes that 'tacit profession', where a widow publicly adopted the role of a chaste widow without a formal vow (analogous to novices who became professed nuns without formal ceremony), 'must certainly have been a possibility for widows' and 'may have been rather common', particularly where location or financial circumstances made the formal process inaccessible, among older widows subject to less pressure to remarry, and those who 'had strong, affectionate ties to their husbands and might adopt the clothing of a religious widow in grief'.[91]

The final sections of the narrative, in which the prior returns to the house on the day after Epiphany and speaks to Gy a second time, complete the task of sidelining the widow. Despite having successfully organized the requisite masses, she 'dorste not entren hire hous for drede' (Prose 331) and convinces the prior to return to Gy's house, thus absenting herself from the narrative's crucial site. Unlike the first request, there is no substantial description of the widow's state or motives, and the prior's motives (not given in the prose) are in the couplet version merely 'to here and herken mare' (1947). Indeed, when Gy appears he complains that this second interview appears unmotivated: "Whi greuest þou me þus al day? hit is not long þat I ne onswerde ȝow to al ȝor askynges, ffor-[t]hi what haue ȝe more to asken me?" (Prose, 332) Despite Gy's widow being the instigating factor in the prior's arrival, he neglects to mention her. As in *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham,* the widow vanishes from the narrative and is never referred to again. The narrative's concern with the widow's predicament appears,

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[90] Mary C. Erler, 'Margery Kempe's White Clothes', *Medium Aevum* 62 (1993), pp. 78-83 (p. 81).
[91] Steuer, 'Identifying Chaste Widows', p. 96.

even in the couplet version, to run its course once the central question of commemoration has been settled, making way for a final dialogue on various abstract, theological, and divinatory concerns. These concerns, having little to do with Gy's identity as a living man, are ones to which the widow's presence is clearly viewed as superfluous.

Sir Amadace: The exemplary romance widow

Sir Amadace differs from the first two texts discussed in this chapter on the grounds of both genre and provenance. A mid-fifteenth-century Middle English romance with no apparent direct source, it is the first English-language representative of the folkloric tradition known as 'The Grateful Dead'. In this tradition, the protagonist settles the debts of a dead stranger, buries their corpse out of charity, and is rewarded by their ghost.[92] Its genre and apparent novelty distinguish it from the originally monastic, Latin-derived texts considered above. Its two manuscript witnesses, the Blackburn-Ireland Manuscript (Princeton University Library, MS Taylor 9) and the Heege Manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.3.1) both date from the fifteenth century. The booklet of the Blackburn-Ireland MS in which *Amadace* is found appears to have been conceived as a compilation of romances for the Irelands, a gentry family from Hale in southern Lancashire.[93] Michael Johnston has identified *Amadace* as a 'gentry

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[92] For a discussion of *Sir Amadace'*s position in the 'Grateful Dead' tradition see Elizabeth Williams, '*Sir Amadace* and the Undisenchanted Bride: the relation of the MIddle English romance to the folktale tradition of the grateful dead', in *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance* ed. By Rosalind Field (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 57-70.

[93] Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 222. Alongside *Sir Amadace,* the manuscript contains a copy of *The Awntyrs off Arthure* and *The Avowing of Arthur*, executed with the same three-fitt structure, suggesting a conscious editorial decision to make the three texts more homogenous. Sometime after 1465 the romances were bound with a second booklet comprising manorial records relating to the Irelands manor at Hale.

romance' based on the presence of a protagonist and several motifs associated with the economic position and concerns of the English gentry.[94] Although an undoubtedly pious romance, it evinces much less direct interest in the abstract theological concerns regarding purgatory in comparison with the preceding texts.

The plot of the poem runs thus: Sir Amadace, his estate near-ruined by his profligate spending, is forced to mortgage his lands. and leaves in hopes of repairing his fortunes. He meets a widow weeping over the corpse of her husband, a merchant whose creditor has barred him from burial. Amadace exhausts his remaining funds to arrange his funeral and dismisses his remaining servants. Destitute, he bemoans his situation before meeting a mysterious White Knight, who instructs him to repair his fortune by posing as a shipwreck survivor at the king's court and gaining the court's favour but asks for half of whatever he receives from the king. Amadace gains the king's favour, marries his daughter, and gains many lands. Years later, the knight returns, demanding half of Amadace's wife and son as payment. Amadace's wife consents to be killed by Amadace to honour the agreement, but the knight relents at the last second, revealing himself to be the merchant's ghost, who was testing Amadace's honour. His debts repaid, Amadace lives well and becomes king.

Sir Amadace is a multifaceted text which represents and explores a variety of commemorative relationships, such that discussion of this text will, like discussion of *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*, be split over multiple chapters. The present

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[94] Other texts identified as 'gentry romances' by Johnston include *Sir Isumbras* (which appears in the Heege MS) and *The Avowing of Arthur* (which appears in the Blackburn-Ireland MS), as well as *Sir Cleges, Sir Degrevant, Sir Eglamour of Artois, Sir Gawain and the Carl of Carlisle,* and *Sir Launfal*. Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England*, pp. 49, 53-7.

chapter will concern itself solely with the representation of the merchant's widow, who appears only in the incident which occurs in lines 61-204 of the poem as it survives.[95] The widow's role in the story, while limited, is thoroughly developed, and resonates strongly with the representation of widows in *Eynsham* and *Gast*. This widow-focused discussion will, perforce, pass over major elements of *Sir Amadace's* narrative and thematic content: the narrative's focus on Amadace's profligacy and charity in burying the merchant, on matters of money, debt, and contract, and the poem's concern with the mutability of class boundaries between the gentry and merchantry, most clearly represented by the merchant's ghost's transformation into a white knight. These aspects will be discussed as part of a more capacious discussion of *Sir Amadace* in full in the following chapter, focused principally on the commemorative relationship between Sir Amadace and the merchant's knightly ghost. That the poem furnishes such substantial material on both the commemorative role of widows and the commemorative relationship between male strangers demonstrates the utility of the ghost narrative for medieval writers in exploring a variety of different relationships and social positions in a commemorative context.

Sir Amadace's depiction of the widow departs markedly from the stories described above in that the ghost and widow never interact. Both post-mortem communication and the commemorative work which it underscores are displaced from the widow onto a knightly intermediary in the form of Amadace himself. Additionally, *Amadace*'s widow is

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[95] 'Sir Amadace' in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. by Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo: University of Rochester Press, 2007), pp. 116-140. All further quotations from this poem will reference this edition by line number unless otherwise specified. Both surviving copies of *Sir Amadace* are coincidentally acephalous.

not a sinful or negligent widow of the types depicted in *Gast* or *Eynsham*. Rather, her

actions demonstrate exemplary commitment to her role in commemorating her

husband, though her husband's earlier profligacy prevents her from settling his debts or

securing appropriate commemoration. Being a romance focused on a knightly

protagonist, *Sir Amadace* lacks the focus on clerical intermediaries seen in the more

didactic *Eynsham* and *Gast*.[96] Though representatives of the clergy do appear, they are

absent from the episode involving a widow, thereby sidelining the question of

subordinating the widow to a clerical hierarchy which so motivates the writers of the

earlier texts. In the intermediary position between widow and ghost *Sir Amadace*

instead substitutes its titular knightly protagonist – a representative, that is, of another

group from which women are excluded, albeit a secular one. Accordingly, the role of the

male commemorative intermediary shifts from one centred upon interpretative,

visionary, and liturgical powers accorded to the clergy to one centred upon the

eponymous knight's position of commemorative agency.

The widow is introduced sitting in a chapel permeated by an exceptionally powerful

stench, mourning her husband, whose decomposing corpse has been denied burial in

flagrant violation of canon law, which forbid the denial of burial on the basis of unpaid

debts.[97] The description of the stinking chapel is a classic example of the instigating

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[96] As mentioned above, Kristin Noone has advanced the unusual view that *The Gast of Gy* should be considered as a penitential romance. Noone, 'A King, A Ghost, Two Wives, and the Triumph of Love, n.p.

[97] See the statute to this effect issued by William Greenfield, Archbishop of York (1304-15): 'Ad haec firmiter inhibemus, ne cuiquam communio corporis Christi, vel morienti ecclesiastica sepultura, praetextu cjislibet debiti, denegetur' ('To this we firmly forbid, that to anyone in the communion of the body of Christ, ecclesiastical burial for the dying should be denied on the pretext of any debt') *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae, A Synodo Verolamiensi A.D. CCCXLVI ad Londinensem A.D. [MDCCXVII].: Accedunt constitutiones et alia ad historiam Ecclesiae Anglicanae spectantia*, Vol 3, ed. by David Wilkins (London: R. Gosling, 1737), p.772.

'marvel' common to romance: a mysterious or peculiar thing which attracts the protagonist's attention and presents a situation through which the usually-male protagonist can demonstrate their virtue. The initial approach to the chapel is drawn out, with Amadace's servant being sent twice to investigate but being repeatedly repulsed by the extremely powerful stench. On the first approach he calls it a "selcothe sighte" (86) that is nonetheless recounted as a bare inventory: "a bere and canduls toe;/Ther sittus a woman and no moe/Lord! carefull is hur rede." (88-90). On the second attempt, the servant provides a lengthier description of the widow's actions which prompts Amadace to investigate. This gradual provision of information focuses on two elements: the condition and sorrow of the widow, and the overwhelming stench produced by the rotting body. The 'stinke' (71) itself is constantly reiterated and clearly extremely difficult to endure; it is so strong that the servant describes it as 'Suche a stinke… had I nevyr are/Noquere in so stid' (91-3), as it 'in his nace smote' (103). James T. Bracher views the emphasis on the smell as deriving from an incident in the Book of Tobit, with which *Amadace* shares several affinities, in which the stench of burning fish organs is used to drive away the demon assailing a widow.[98] Since it is the Book of Tobit from which the concept of burial as an act of mercy derives, such an allusion recalls the vulnerable position of both widow and dead man, and thus their appropriateness as objects of charity.[99] Despite the focus on the stench, the corpse itself is barely described. Its presence is suggested only by reference to the bier and candles, and by the widow's actions: her 'grete soro that ho opon him se,/Stingcand opon his bere'. When Amadace

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[98] James T. Bracher, 'Strong Odour and Other Parallels in the Book of Tobit and the Romance *Sir Amadace*', *Notes and Queries* 54.4 (2007), pp. 371-2 (pp. 371-2).
[99] Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation,* p. 41.

finally enters the chapel, he mentions how the widow is "kepand this dede cors" but again no reference is made to the body outside the dialogue. It is as if the audience perceives the dead body only through the reactions of the grieving widow and the stench of decay. The stench alerts Amadace, and the audience, to the commemorative dysfunction that has occurred without focusing on the unburied body itself. It is the situation, as much as the body itself, which is wrong, rotten, and in need of commemorative redress.

The elision of the dead body of the merchant, moreover, replicates the dynamics we have seen with the invisible ghost of Gy. The descriptive focus of the scene is displaced onto the living body of the grieving widow, whose actions are scrutinised as a guide for explaining the incomprehensible disruption caused by the dead. As in *Gy,* the widow becomes a visual proxy for her husband whose appearance becomes a source of information for the observer about the dead man:

> "Lord! Carefull is hur chere.
>
> Sore ho sikes and hondus wringus,
>
> And evyr ho crius on hevyn kynges,
>
> How lung ho schall be thare.
>
> Ho says, Dere God, quat may that be,
>
> The grete soro that ho opon him se,
>
> Stingcand opon his bere,
>
> Ho says, ho will notte leve him allone
>
> Till ho fall dede downe to the stone,
>
> For his life was hur full dere." (111-120)

The widow, as sole mourner and apparent guardian of the merchant's corpse, becomes incorporated visually into the 'selcothe sight' through which the dead body is framed. The corpse laid upon a bier naturally bears a similarity to an effigy lying upon a tomb-chest. Furthermore, in her own pronouncements that she will herself fall dead 'to the stone' with her husband, the widow envisions a reunion with her husband in which she is incorporated into the mock-tomb of the chapel bier alongside him. This image encapsulates the 'collapse of the spatial and temporal boundaries between the deceased and living spouse' seen in the double-tomb, where the widow both gazes upon her husband's body and imagines herself, already dead, beside him.[100] As a result, the widow is depicted almost as one already dead, incorporated into the tableau of the chapel first as mourner but soon, inevitably, as corpse.

This logic is mirrored by the vicious creditor responsible for her predicament: he envisions a future where 'ho be ded as wele as he,/That howundus schall, that I may se,/On field thayre bonus tognaue' (262-4). However, the creditor's vision of the future differs from the widow's not just in its vicious immorality but in the collapse of the ordering framework provided by the tomb-like bier within the chapel. The widow imagines two distinct bodies whose plight, framed by the bier, might preserve their dignity and draw both pity and prayers from onlookers. The creditor envisions their bodies dismembered, intermingled, anonymized, and exposed to his own pitiless gaze in an inhumane, chaotic framework of his own design. The widow's vision of the future is one in which her exemplary commitment to her husband culminates in self-destruction. The cruel creditor's version of the future differs not in terms of the widow's

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[100] Barker, *Stone Fidelity*, p. 25.

death, but in terms of the erasure of any marker of their marriage. The distinction between the widow's exemplary commemoration and the creditor's corpse desecration could not be drawn more starkly.

Though presented as a visual substitute for her husband's dead body, the merchant's widow is still alive, and this allows her agency to describe her situation in a way that her dead husband cannot. As Hannah M. Christensen puts it, 'the wife's living body mediates the male dead and rotting one… as narrator of his death and circumstances'.[101] When Amadace finally enters the chapel and speaks to her, she explains that her husband was a merchant who overspent his income in acts of generosity to all he encountered, resulting in his estate being entirely consumed by his debts, and placing him £30 in debt to another merchant, who thus barred his burial. However, it is the fact of her marriage that she seeks first to impress upon him:

> He sayd "Dame, quy sittus here,
>
> Kepand this dede cors opon this bere,
>
> Thus onyli upon a nyghte?"
>
> Ho says, "Sir, nedelonges most I sitte him by,
>
> Hifath, ther will him non mon butte I,
>
> For he wasse my wedutte fere." (130-135)

Again, we see articulated the concept that close familial attachment is the last and surest source of commemoration for the dead. The widow's commemoration is at once

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[101] Christensen, 'Affect and the Limits of Form in *Sir Amadace*', *Exemplaria* 29.2 (2017), pp. 99-117 (p.107).

exemplary in her marital diligence and, when no-one else will commemorate him, a sign of his desperate position.

Despite her destitute state, the widow has kept her husband's body in the chapel 'With candles brennand bryghte' (195) for 'sixtene weke' (193).[102] Furthermore, the widow's role as narrator itself constitutes a commemorative apparatus by which the merchant's life might be judged. Her speech can itself be seen as an analogue to a commemorative inscription, a textual accompaniment that restores identity and context to a potentially anonymous effigy. Indeed, in emphasising her husband's generosity, and particularly his feeding of 'pore men, for Goddus sake… evyriche day' (152-3) the widow's narrative displays the 'sophisticated approach to the advertising of the deceased's good works' seen in tomb inscriptions like that which appears on the brass of John (d. 1453) and Cecily Stathum in Morley, Derbyshire, which recalls that the couple 'yaf to þis churche iii belles and ordeyned iiis iiiid yerely for brede to be done in almes among poure folk of ys parish'.[103] Such inscriptions served to convince viewers of the worthiness of the deceased to receive prayers, just as the widow's narrative helps convinces Amadace of the dead merchant's worthiness to receive his aid. Once again, the widow appears to be drawn into and subsumed within the commemorative apparatus that she is creating for her husband.

Whatever agency the widow is afforded in framing her husband's life and death, and however exemplary her actions as a devoted widow are towards her husband's

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[102] Sally Badham notes that candles and lights are among 'the most common religious provisions in wills, especially by people not sufficiently wealthy to make provision for prayers to be said in perpetuity'/ Badham, *Seeking Salvation,* p. 179.
[103] Badham, Seeking Salvation, p. 17; William Lack, H. Martin Stuchfield and Philip Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Derbyshire* (London: Monumental Brass Society, 1999), p. 146.

commemoration, they are both undercut by the extreme desperation of her situation.

Amadace's response recognizes this:

> Thenne Sir Amadace says, "Me likes full ill,
>
> Ye ar bothe in plyit to spille,
>
> He lise so lung on bere." (136-8)

Amadace fears that the widow's vigil next to a rotting corpse will kill her, at which point

her commemoration of her husband will also end. The pair will be reduced to

anonymized bodies, without hope of lasting commemoration, consigned to extensive

suffering in purgatory. Ultimately, however exemplary her diligence, love, and

endurance, they cannot be sufficient to produce a lasting solution except through

arousing Amadace's sympathy and charity. The widow's ultimate recourse is to the

widespread view that widows, and especially poor widows, are an essentially vulnerable

class, and one that knights in particular are obliged to defend. Barbara Hanawalt notes

that 'the need to guard and preserve the provisions made for widows' appears in

knightly vows; the most famous English literary example surely being the injunction

described in Malory that King Arthur's knights must 'always do… wydowes [socour:]

strengthe hem in hir ryghts, and never to enforce hem, uppon payne of dethe'.[104]

Beyond this viewpoint founded on the presumption of the widow as lacking in agency,

the principle emotional motivation for Amadace's actions is not directed at the widow at

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[104] Hanawalt, 'The Widow's Mite', p. 21; Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. by Eugene Vinaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 75.

all, but at Amadace's feeling of kinship towards the dead merchant who 'myghte full wele be of my kynne' (209).

Once Amadace determines to repay the merchant's debts and secure his funeral, the widow disappears entirely from the narrative. As well as marginalising the widow as soon as the economic aspects of the merchant's commemoration come into play, *Amadace* presents the widow as representing an economic mindset, transferable to commemorative strategy, that the narrative seeks to reject. Narrating her husband's financial largesse, the widow says that he 'didde as a fole' (157) and rejected her shrewder advice:

> "Giffe I says he did noghte wele
>
> He says, 'God sent hit everyche dele'
>
> And sette my wurdus atte lighte." (163-5)

The widow, more financially capable than her husband and more aware of the potential dangers of his largesse, has been undone due to her husband's unwillingness to heed her advice. This might initially appear to be a sign that the widow would be well equipped to handle his commemoration had he simply followed her instructions. However, Ad Putter has traced how a central theme of *Amadace* is the competition between a system of commodity exchange, and a system of gift-giving predicated on the creation of social bonds through largesse, modelled on the gift of Christ's sacrifice and undertaken in the knowledge of the impermanence of worldly wealth.[105] In such a

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[105] Ad Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities in *Sir Amadace*', *The Review of English Studies* 51 (2000), pp. 371-394, passim.

competition, the widow's financial advice ultimately lies on the side of commodity

exchange, a system which *Amadace* ultimately rejects. Amadace's largesse ultimately

pays back the merchant's largesse, and the merchant's ghost in turn rescues Amadace

from poverty, repudiating the widow's legitimate financial caution. Indeed, Amadace's

final deliberation before submitting to the 'test' of dividing his wife and son, for which

submission he is ultimately rewarded, is "Atte your wille, lord, all schall be,/And so I

hope hit is." (797-8), a fair approximation of the mindset with which the merchant

dismissed his wife's concerns. When Amadace handles money in a commemorative

context, it is an act of charitable largesse, but when the widow commemorates the

question of money is struck out due to her poverty, and when she engages with money

herself, she remains bound within the economics of commodity exchange.

As in both *Gast* and *Eynsham, Amadace'*s widow slips from the narrative entirely before

her husband's commemoration can be completed, but only here is the widow excluded

entirely from the ongoing commemoration. While Amadace makes himself destitute to

provide rich arrangements for the merchant's funeral, he appears to make no

arrangements whatsoever to support the destitute widow. His largesse is ultimately

homosocial, dependent on his sense of similarity to another generous man, rather than

concern for the widow. Likewise, when the merchant's ghost reveals himself at the

conclusion of the narrative and describes his gratitude at Amadace paying for his burial,

he makes no mention of his widow, even as he describes how he 'lay to howundus

mete' (811). Her vulnerability, deployed to evoke sympathy in her earlier appearance, is

apparently forgotten by her husband. Just as in *Gast* and *Eynsham*, the widow occupies

a position of narrative interest only in the context of commemorative dysfunction and is

ushered out of the narrative as soon as the question of her husband's commemoration is definitively settled. In the intermediary space of the widow's ceaseless vigil, the question of commemorative economics lies suspended in favour of a mode of spousal commemoration which is both predicated on a self-annihilating emotional fervour and presented as a temporary solution in need of final male intervention. As we will see in the next chapter, the text focuses on homosocial bonds at the expense of both the merchant's widow and Amadace's wife.

The widows of *Amadace, Eynsham,* and *Gast* differ in both their interactions with their husbands and their narrators' attitudes towards them. Where the goldsmith's widow is negligent, and the merchant's widow exemplary in her spousal devotion, Gy's widow occupies an ambiguous position. Her marital connection with her husband, though rendered suspect by their shared sin, receives divine validation and motivates positive commemorative and penitential development. Nonetheless, the overall position of the widows in these texts in relation to their dead husbands share crucial commonalities. All three view ideal widowhood as a penitential period that corresponds to that experienced by the dead spouse in purgatory. In *Gast* and *Sir Amadace*, this paralleled association between widowhood and purgatory extends into a framework in which widowhood is portrayed as analogous to death, a dilated interstitial period between married life and eventual reunion in death.

As for the role of widows in commemorative economics itself, it is presented as either insufficient or extremely heavily mediated. Widows may fail in their commemoration through negligence, as in *Eynsham*, but even the exemplary marital devotion of the widow in *Amadace* is temporary and sufficient in comparison with that undertaken by a

knightly mediator. Where widows do undertake substantial commemorative work, it occurs under the instruction and advisement of both their dead husband and the authoritative clerical mediator who interprets and advises on the commemorative needs of the spirit. There is no indication here of the sorts of pious enthusiasm whereby wealthy widows exceed and expand their husbands' commemorative instructions in the testamentary record. Nor is there any sense that these widows, like the Bristol widows discussed by Burgess, are achieving 'spiritual leadership by material means' in their communities.[106] The widow's commemoration of their husbands is instead either deficient (whether through negligence or lack of means) or scrupulously faithful to their husband's wishes, as mediated by the church. Such elision of the active, self-determined roles that widows of means could play in the commemoration of their husbands, and the effects which it could have on local churches, amounts to an ideological trend to minimise the potential ideological disruption created by the unusual legal prominence and agency afforded to widows. At the same time, the texts with a clear monastic and clerical provenance - *Gast* and *Eynsham* - seek to fully incorporate the private commemorative strategies of married lay-people under the auspices of church guidance and control through the interpolation of monastic figures into dysfunctional marital commemorative processes. The widow's role in commemoration is thus mediated and marginalised twice over - the private commemorative strategy with which she is tasked by the husband itself requires the intervention and oversight of representatives of the church. While these texts are willing to credit and legitimise marital love as a motivator for commemorative activity, such activity within a marital

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[106] Clive Burgess, *The Right Ordering of Souls*, p. 161.

context is ultimately presented as requiring the oversight of church authority to achieve

a suitable conclusion.

Chapter Three - Unkindred Spirits: Merchants, monetary exchange, and non-familial relationships in *Sir Amadace, The Childe of Bristow*, and *The Merchant and his Son*

While the previous two chapters have focused on familial relationships of parenthood and marriage, the ghost narratives of this chapter address bonds formed in non-familiar personal networks, in particular friendships and trade relationships.The poems under consideration, *Sir Amadace, The Childe of Bristow,* and its analogue *The Merchant and his Son*, are distinct in their genre and source. *Sir Amadace* is a romance deriving from the folkloric tradition of the 'Grateful Dead', while *Childe* and *Merchant* appear to derive from the *Trental of Gregory* tradition. However, they share an interest in both subordinating familial relationships to non-familial ones and foregrounding merchants as beneficiaries and benefactors of these non-familial bonds. In *Amadace,* the ghost of a merchant haunts a stranger knight who acted as a charitable benefactor, while in *Child of Bristowe* and *The Merchant and his Son* a usurious father's haunting of his merchant son serves to generate a relationship between the son and the merchant to whom he is apprenticed. In both, the central mercantile presence within the ghost story collocates with an emphasis on social bonds dependent on non-familial relationships.

Additionally, they both demonstrate an unusual level of interest in the material 'business' of commemoration, and particularly the role of money. Sir Amadace's narrative is propelled by debts, payments, and monetary agreements, and the precise expense of arranging a funeral; the action of *The Childe of Bristowe* mostly comprises the desperate attempts of a beleaguered executor to adequately execute his father's will

by disbursing the dead man's funds to his spiritual benefit. While the two texts ultimately resolve themselves positively through their protagonists' commemorative and monetary interactions with the ghosts, the position of merchants in the two narrative traditions differs substantially. Although all three texts refrain from anti-mercantile sentiment derived from the estates satire, where Jill Mann notes that 'an overwhelming number of satirists associate them with fraud and dishonesty', *Sir Amadace* retains a striking ambivalence and anxiety regarding the relationship between its protagonist and its merchant ghost.[1] *The Childe of Bristow* and *The Merchant and his Son*, on the other hand, are clearly more comfortable with valorising merchantry as a profession, and thus more resoundingly validate the spiritual and temporal fruitfulness of relationships based in monetary and professional interactions rather than in bonds of blood.

Sir Amadace: Merchant and knight

The previous chapter focused exclusively on *Sir Amadace*'s representation of the merchant's widow as an exemplary but ultimately ineffective commemorative agent, whose narrative purpose is to be supplanted as her husband's commemorator by a male stranger, Amadace, through an act of homosocial commemorative charity. It is this homosocial bond, between a living knight and a dead merchant (who is transfigured, in death, into a knight himself), with which this chapter is concerned. This commemorative relationship, compared with the other commemorative ghost narratives under discussion in this thesis, occurs essentially in reverse, with the ghost appearing to reward commemorative activity rather than warn of commemorative dysfunction. Rather than a

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[1] Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the 'General Prologue' to 'The Canterbury Tales'* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 99.

pre-existing relationship that is invoked by a ghost after death, Amadace and the

merchant are strangers in life. Instead, Amadace meets the merchant as a corpse, and

his act of commemorative charity towards the merchant *creates* a relationship between

the two which persists when the merchant returns in the form of the ghostly White

Knight. It shares an interest with *The Childe of Bristow* and *The Merchant and his Son*

in the power of commemorative charity as socially and spiritually productive, generating

and solidifying relationships outside of familial ties of blood and marriage. At the same

time, however, the poem's focus on monetary expenditure and verbal contracts, along

with the ordeal which the ghost subjects Amadace to in the story's climax, reveals a

pervasive anxiety regarding the nature of the cross-class relationship between the

gentry and the merchantry, and the class mutability which the merchant's ghost's

transformation represents.

Sir Amadace's interest in the merchantry appears to be an innovation within the Grateful

Dead tradition, and no direct source for it has been found. Ad Putter views the poem as

bearing 'revealing family resemblances' with the thirteenth-century French romances

Richars li Baus and *Lion de Bourges*, neither of which feature a merchant, and Michael

Johnston identified a correspondence with a French-language exempla collection, *Ci

nous dit*, in which a knight sells his horse to pay for a shoemaker's funeral and is

rewarded by the man's ghost, the only other known version in which a knight buries a

tradesman.[2] *Sir Amadace*'s manuscript transmission does not provide evidence for a

mercantile readership of the poem, but does demonstrate that the text appealed to

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[2] Ad Putter, Gifts and Commodities in *Sir Amadace*', *The Review of English Studies* 51 (2000), pp. 371-394, (p. 374); Michael Johnston, 'Knights and Merchants Unite: *Sir Amadace*, the Grateful Dead, and the Moral Exemplum Tradition', *Neophilologus* 92.3 (2008), pp. 735-744 (pp. 737-9).

readers both inside and outside the gentry. Johnston identifies the text as a 'gentry romance' which 'mediated the ideological concerns of the landowning gentry', identifying the text's gentry protagonist and its interest in money matters as among the motifs that indicate its production for a gentry class anxious over the monetary demands of aristocratic display. Of the text's two manuscripts, the Blackburn-Ireland Manuscript was clearly compiled by a gentry family (the Irelands of Hale, Lancashire), while the Heege manuscript was compiled for the Sherbrookes, a yeomen family of Tibshelf, West Derbyshire.[3] *Sir Amadace*, a romance featuring a remarkable level of class fluidity, can therefore be shown to hold a cross-class appeal. This appeal may have lain in providing an aspirational model of aristocratic behaviour. Mary E. Shaner has argued that the three romances featured in the Heege Manuscript (*Sir Gowther, Sir Isumbras,* and *Sir Amadace*), each being paired within their booklets with an instructional text for children, may have also been intended for children, 'to teach boys, possibly boys of the merchant class whose fathers, like Chaucer's Franklin, were eager for their sons to learn the ways of gentlemen'.[4]

Moreover, the Heege manuscript's composition suggests the Sherbrooke family had a taste for narratives which engaged with aristocratic class markers through parody. The manuscript's first booklet includes two comic pieces, *The Hunttyng of the Hare* and *The Battle of Brakonwet*, which include parodic burlesques of aristocratic social rituals. In *The Hunttyng of the Hare* a group of peasants invited to hunt a hare by a boorish

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[3] For a general discussion of the Heege manuscript, see Philippa Hardman, 'A Medieval "Library In Parvo"', *Medium Aevum* 47 (1978), pp. 262-73.
[4] Mary E. Shaner, 'Instruction and Delight: Medieval Romances as Children's Literature', *Poetics Today* 13.1 (1992), 5-15, p. 14.

manorial official descend into a calamitous comic brawl; in *Brakonwet* a group of animals conduct a farcical tournament.[5] These comic poems subvert and render mutable symbolic markers of aristocratic identity, while presuming an understanding of aristocratic norms that allows the reader to distinguish themselves from the incongruous appropriations of the peasants and animals. David Scott-Macnab notes that the central joke of *The Hunttyng of the Hare* depends on understanding the antithesis between two forms of hunting - aristocratic 'coursing', figured as a genteel activity predicated on an aesthetic appreciation for the chase, and the peasant's understanding of the hunting as 'baiting', predicated on the spectacle of violence.[6] Johnston, moreover, points out that the yeoman protagonist of *Hunttyng* distinguishes himself from the peasant mob as the only individual who appears to understand the spirit of the aristocratic hunt.[7]

Sir Amadace's ghostly merchant-knight represents another ambiguous figure both distinguished from and identified with the gentry. Ad Putter has traced the numerous ways in which *Amadace*'s dead merchant appears to behave like an aristocrat even before his death.[8] His widow mentions that 'He cladde mo men agaynus a yole/Thenne did a nobull knyghte' (158-9) and gave gifts to 'gentilmen and officers,/On grete lordus,

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[5] A similarly farcical poem about a parodic tournament, *The Tournament of Tottenham*, appears in the third booklet of British Library MS Harley 5396, which appears to have been written by someone involved in the trades and contains a number of records of business transactions, some of which directly interrupt the poem. This manuscript also notably contains a number of texts, including *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire* and *How the Wise Man Taught His Son*, which appear alongside *The Merchant and his Son* in Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38, suggesting a shared audience for such poetry among the merchantry and trades. Erik Kooper, '*The Tournament of Tottenham* and *The Feast of Tottenham*: Introduction' in *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), pp. 181-7 (pp. 185-6).

[6] David Scott-Macnab, 'The Hunttyng of the Hare in the Heege Manuscript', *Anglia* 128.1 (2010), pp. 102-123, pp. 105-7.

[7] Michael Johnston, *Romance and the Gentry in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 151-3.

[8] Ad Putter, 'Gifts and Commmodities in *Sir Amadace*', pp. 375-7.

that was his perus' (149-50).[9] Putter views this as an extension of the poem's concern with the social and spiritual dimensions of the aristocratic gift economy, in which 'the gift creates enduring relationships of indebtedness and gratitude'.[10] The connection between knight and ghost is defined by two central elements: an intrinsic, cross-class similitude between the two figures, and the gifts and agreements which pass between them. The uncanny resemblances between Amadace and the merchant are many: they are both landowners with an annual income of three hundred pounds, they are both profligate spenders who delight in lavish gift-giving to rich and poor alike and have been forced from their communities over their serious debts (either to flee their creditors or by being denied burial). Ad Putter has noted that these resemblances between two total strangers inscribe this similarity with momentous, serendipitous importance, so that 'in the best tradition of the romance, in which aventure is always redescribed as fate, the syntagmatic connections have been left indeterminate to foreground an overdetermination on the metaphoric axis'.[11] Amadace's emotional response to hearing the story of the merchant's life, death, and debts is rooted in their essential likeness, a similitude he recognizes as quasi-familial:

> Unnethe he myghte forgoe to wepe,
>
> For his dedus him sore forthoghte;
>
> Sayd "Yondur mon that lise yondur chapel withinne,

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[9] As referred to in the previous chapter, all quotations from this text, unless otherwise noted, are from 'Sir Amadace' in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. by Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 116-140.

[10] Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities', p. 374.

[11] Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities', p. 375.

> He myghte full wele be of my kynne,
>
> For ryghte so have I wroghte."   (206-210)

This pronouncement of a quasi-kinship relationship is the only explicit rationale which Amadace gives for his decision to help the merchant, and its importance is underscored by the Blackburn-Ireland scribe's placement of a fit division immediately after it, in accordance with that manuscript's preference for fitting romances into three-fit structures. As much as Amadace's provision of aid to the dead merchant functions as both an act of Christian charity and a demonstration of his personal adherence to an ideology of courtly largesse, his actions spring just as much from an outpouring of sympathy for the dead as a specific mirror for himself and his own actions. Amadace's lament is not far from Gaynour proclaiming her woe at her mother's suffering in *Awntyrs*, predicated on a sympathy generated by essential likeness. However, where in *Awntyrs* this sympathetic similitude depends upon the commemorative obligations attendant upon a blood relationship, *Sir Amadace* presents a likeness built upon the romance device of fated coincidence, implying the two strangers, despite their class differences, are kindred spirits.

Critics have tended to stress the peculiarity of the cross-class relationship between Sir Amadace and the merchant, or indeed of a mercantile presence in a romance at all: Putter calls Amadace 'the only chivalric romance to suggest that a merchant and a knight might be kindred spirits' while Johnston views 'social interaction between a merchant and a knight' as 'a rarity within the Middle English romance tradition'.[12]

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[12] Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities', p. 376; Michael Johnston, 'Knights and Merchants Unite: *Sir Amadace,* the Grateful Dead, and the Moral Exemplum tradition', *Neophilologus* 92 (2008), pp. 735-44, p. 735.

However, this view is challenged by Megan Leitch's recent survey of merchants in Middle English romances, which identifies a shift in representations of merchants in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century romances (including *Emare*, *Sir Degare*, *Octavian*, and *Valentine and Orson*) away from functional and villainous roles seen in earlier and continental romances, towards positive portrayals as foster parents and defenders of distressed women, in some cases even being knighted (as in the southern version of *Octavian*).[13] These developments, through which Leitch and Victoria Flood argue that 'romance itself became a type of cultural authority to be appropriated and interrogated' by groups outside the aristocracy and gentry, would appear to chime with the incorporation of *Sir Amadace* into the Heege manuscript alongside conduct texts for a yeoman family. A story in which a merchant is transformed after death into a knight, in apparent recognition of the spiritual nobility of his conduct, would doubtless appeal as an aspirational tale for those who lay just outside the gentry.

 However, while Leitch describes these romances as 'celebrations of mercantile integrity' that 'renegotiate the politics of social mobility at a time when merchants had expanding opportunities to be, or to imagine themselves as, part of the knightly class', the ambivalent attitude of *Sir Amadace* to the ghostly merchant-knight reacts to and imaginatively explores these developments in mercantile social mobility without straightforwardly endorsing them. Merchants certainly could become gentry under the right circumstances in fifteenth-century England. Anyone acquiring rural property worth £40 a year would be compelled to take up knighthood or pay a fine, under a policy

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[13] Megan Leitch, 'Merchants in Shining Armour: Chivalrous Interventions and Social Mobility in Late Middle English Romance' in *Cultural Translations in Medieval Romance,* ed by Victoria Flood and Megan G. Leitch (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2022), pp. 245-262, (pp. 245, 257-8, and *passim*).

known as distraint of gentry. [14] Rosemary Horrox's examination of evidence for 'urban gentry' in fifteenth-century England notes that for the historian 'in practice it is almost impossible to separate a mercantile career from the other elements conducive to gentility' and that although merchants who fell among the urban gentry 'derived that gentility at least in part from their non-urban interests… they were at the same time indisputably urban figures fully integrated into urban society'.[15] Roger A. Ladd characterises the late medieval merchant estate as being formed from 'the interaction of a variety of social groups' comprising 'primarily the successes of the guild system and the failures of the gentry, individuals able to slip into and out of the gentry and the crafts with every success and failure' with individual merchants being drawn from a 'fairly large social spectrum'.[16] Such fluidity on the border between merchantry and gentry goes some way towards explaining the ambivalence which can be detected in *Sir Amadace*'s treatment of the merchant's transformation into a ghostly knight and his relationship with the knightly protagonist. The text at once provides an aspirational model of social mobility for the merchantry (and others), but it also gives voice to gentry anxieties over the mutability of the gentry identity which allowed for such aspirations.

The mutability of the dead merchant's class identity accompanies a general concern with death and commemoration which casts it thematically in terms of social exclusion and social reintegration. It is social exclusion that underpins the threat of financial ruin which Amadace faces. At what remains of the poem's opening, Amadace's steward

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[14] Michael Johnston, 'Romance, Distraint and the Gentry', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112.4 (2013), pp. 433-460, pp. 436-7.

[15] Rosemary Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century', in *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century,* ed. by John A.F. Thompson (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1988), pp. 22-44, pp. 33-4.

[16] Roger Ladd, *Antimercantilism in Late Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 10.

frames his financial difficulties in terms of the social dissolution of Amadace's court and community, rather than in monetary terms:

> Quoso may best, furste ye mun pray,
>
> Abyde yo till anothir day.
>
> And parte your cowrte in sere;
>
> And putte away full mony of your men;
>
> And hald butte on, quere ye hald ten,
>
> Thaghe thay be nevyr so dere." (7-12)

In addition to being deprived of his court, Amadace fears the enmity, scorn, and distrust which attends being publicly reputed to be a debtor. Amadace repeatedly avows an explicit desire to avoid being seen in his current distressed state, saying 'Bettur sayd soro thenne sene' (27). He explicitly fears being made to 'duell here,/quere I was borne/Bothe in hething and in scorne' (15-16) and is especially appalled at the thought that his creditors will believe he has cheated them:

> "And men full fast wold ware me,
>
> That of thayre godus hade bynne so fre,
>
> That I have hade in honde.
>
> Or I schuld hold men in awe or threte,
>
> That thay myghte noghte hor awne gud gete –
>
> Thenne made I a full fowle ende."   (19-24)

This fear of a 'full fowle ende' foreshadows the appearance of the dead merchant, who has suffered precisely the fate Amadace imagines for himself if he cannot restore his

fortune. When Amadace is later made entirely destitute, it is telling that he prays to God not to recover his fortune, but to avoid being embarrassed publicly:

> He sayd, "Jhesu, as Thu deet on the Rode,
>
> [....]
> Thu lette me nevyr come in that syghte,
>
> Ther I have bene knauen for a knyghte,
>
> Butte if I may avoue hit thanne. (412-414)

Amadace's fear is of being unable to prove his knightly identity, of the shame of being unable to keep up appearances and maintain a court due to his poverty. Fundamentally, what threatens Amadace is the prospect of losing control over how he is seen by others, and of being expelled from his community due to this failure. The dead body of the bankrupt merchant functions as an object realising these fears. It is at once cast out from the community, too physically repulsive to be endured, and at the same time grotesquely exposed to the sight of the merchant's enemies, lacking all dignity and agency over how it is perceived.

Amadace's encounter with the dead merchant places him in the position, familiar from texts like *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings*, of a living person confronted with a dead person, socially excluded in death, in whom their own specific situation appears to be reflected. Although the dead merchant is an inert corpse, Amadace likewise adopts the role which other purgatorial ghosts demand of their interlocutors, as the commemorator of last resort. Amadace's sympathy towards the merchant moves him to mend the commemorative dysfunction which endangers the dead man and reincorporate him into

his community. Given that plight of the dead merchant represents the extreme fulfilment of Amadace's fears of loss of agency and social exclusion, it is fitting that Amadace's response, the commission of a funeral, serves both as a performance of Amadace's class identity and a means of remedying the merchant's social exclusion. The unusually detailed funeral sequence which follows presents a generically and socially ambiguous picture of commemorative activity that incorporates both a peculiar fixation on the monetary cost of the funeral and a romantic focus on the funeral as an occasion for aristocratic class performance:

> "As further as ten pounde will take
>
> I schall lette do for his sake,
>
> Querthroghe he have his righte.
>
> I schall for him gere rede and singe,
>
> Bringe his bodi to Cristun berunge,
>
> That schall thu see wythe sighte.
>
> Go pray all the religius of this cite
>
> Tomorne that thay wold dyne with me,
>
> And loke thayre mete be dyghte."
>
> Howe erly quen day con spring,
>
> Then holli all the bellus con ring
>
> That in the cité was.
>
> Religius men evrichon
>
> Toward this dede cors are thay gone
>
> With mony a riche burias.

> Thritty prustus that day con sing,
>
> And thenne Sir Amadace offurt a ring
>
> Atte evyriche mas.
>
> Quen the servise was all done,
>
> He prayd hom to ete with him atte none,
>
> Holli more and lasse. (280-300)

This description presents the funeral as an ostentatious ceremonial reincorporation of the dead merchant into the community from which his creditor had excluded him. While the funeral prominently features prayers for the dead man's soul, the poem says little regarding their spiritual power (in accordance with its general disinterest in discussing purgatory), and when the merchant's ghost finally reveals his identity at the poem's conclusion, he thanks Amadace for the burial rather than for the masses. Emphasis instead lies on the displays of prestige that extend the influence of the funeral through the city. The schedule of masses – thirty masses in one day – itself appears to compress the scheme of the liturgical trental temporally while expanding it spatially and socially, involving as much of the city (and as much of its priesthood) as possible in the process. Moreover, Amadace's offering of 'a ring atte evyriche mas' (297) resembles both his earlier giving of 'ful riche giftus, bothe to squiers and to knyghtis' (52-3) before his departure from his court, and the upcoming sequence in which Amadace is gifted the hand of the king's daughter and half his lands after the feast at the king's tournament.

This opulent funeral amounts to a performance whose audience comprises both the people of the city, and particularly the villainous creditor, whom Amadace deputises to

make the funeral arrangements and whom he insists shall 'see wythe sighte' (285) his

enemy's triumphant funeral just as he had himself hoped to see him torn apart by dogs.

At the same time, however, elements of the funeral that directly relate to the body itself

– the procession, the shroud or coffin, hearse, pall, poor bedesmen bearing candles

around the body, the location of the tomb, and the nature of any tomb monument – are

all passed over, despite each being an occasion for prestigious display and being

frequent elements of concern in medieval wills.[17] Once again obscuring the body

emphasises Amadace's role while adapting the funeral description as far as possible to

align with the other communal ritual, much more typical of romance, which directly

follows it - the feast. A funeral dinner was a common but not ubiquitous element of

preparations for medieval funerals: the unusually elaborate will of wealthy clothier John

Baret (d. 1467) specified that a dinner should be held for the aldermen, burgesses,

gentlefolk and other 'folkes of worshippe' from the town.[18] The dinner which Amadace

arranges brings the community of the city together in the dead man's name, thus

cementing his posthumous position within the community and soliciting prayers from the

attendees. Derek Brewer notes that 'the feast in Europe seems always to be an

expression of hierarchy, and consequently of order in society' and 'confers social self-

esteem, as well as physical well-being, on an elite' through inclusion. The inclusive

atmosphere of the feast reflects the long-delayed reincorporation of the merchant into

the city's community, even as the central figure of the dead merchant is necessarily

excluded from the feast itself. Instead, the wake presents Amadace as its central figure,

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[17] For a discussion of these elements of late medieval English funerals, see Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 185-194.
[18] Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, pp. 194-5.

providing the opportunity to perform his aristocratic identity before the people of the city.

The cruel merchant, evidently happy with his losses being restored, is happy to praise

Amadace's restitution and gift-giving, presenting him as the central authority and

benefactor of the feast:

> "And hase comun a full riall knyghte,
>
> Of all the godes the cors me heghte
>
> Hase made me redi pay.
>
> Unto his cofurs he hase sente,
>
> And gevyn ten powunde to his termente,
>
> Wythe riche ringus today.
>
> Hit is on his nome that I say,
>
> He prays yo holly to mete today,
>
> All that ther bene here." (307-315)

At the same time, the creditor has little to say about the 'ded cors opon a bere' (305),

who remains nameless and whose predicament is passed over as unnecessary to

discuss – 'Ye wotte querfore hit lay' (306).

Since this performance comes at precisely the point at which Amadace has exhausted

his personal wealth, falling well below the symbolic £40 which Johnston views as

metonymic for gentry identity, Amadace's performance of largesse is undermined by the

knowledge of his financial ruin. The narrative acknowledges the insincerity of

Amadace's class performance, describing him as 'unsemand with full glad chere' (324)

as he leaves. At the same time, the gathering downplays his generosity, ignorantly

suggesting that he must be so wealthy that such expenditure on behalf of a stranger is meaningless to him, saying 'This gud full lighteli he wan/ That thusgate spendutte hit on this man' (340-1). This speculation signals that Amadace, however splendid his class performance, cannot fully shape his own reputation or affirm his identity. At the same time, however, this gossip protects charitable largesse from the accusation that it is merely an attempt to buy good opinion: if the sole purpose of Amadace's actions was to cement his own reputation, it would be regarded as a failure. Amadace's commemorative largesse and self-sacrifice, we are meant to understand, will not be rewarded through public acclaim. Instead, they await recognition and repayment from the dead merchant himself, through the relationship between them which his generosity has brought into being.

Having exhausted his funds, Amadace is reduced to his nadir. Again, his financial ruin is shown through the disruption of his relationships. Without funds, Amadace is forced to dismiss his remaining servants, since he 'may lede no mon in londe,/Butte I hade gold and silvyr to spend' (358-9). The poem treats this not as a purely practical matter but as a highly emotional moment, saying that 'the hardust hertut men that there ware/For to wepe thai myght notte spare' (361-2). The servant's sorrow is explicitly not at the loss of their employment, as Amadace reassures them they will quickly find employment and gifts them their horses and gear, the worst of which he values at £10. This does nothing to assuage their sorrow as they depart, suggesting that it is the severing of an emotional connection which motivates the tears. Putter has noted the poem's insistent use of requests to 'not spare' in relation to acts of largesse, and the servants who 'myght not spare' their tears appear to be repaying Amadace in a different, emotional currency,

returning the generosity Amadace has shown them in an outpouring of sorrow for

Amadace, a sorrow he cannot bring himself to express. As well as the loss of his

retinue, the fact that Amadace can no longer 'lede men in land' or sustain a community

around himself is a serious blow to his ability to perform a knightly identity. Amadace

keenly registers this loss, and it is at this point, alone in the woods, that Amadace prays

to God not to be seen until he can avow himself as a knight and laments what he sees

as his own foolishness:

> "For all for wonting of my witte,
>
> Fowle of the lond am I putte,
>
> Of my frindes I have made foes;
>
> For kyndenes of my gud wille,
>
> I am in poynte myselfe to spille." (421-5)

This lament echoes both his earlier fears of a 'full fowle end' (24), and his fear that the

dead merchant and his widow were 'in plyit to spille' (136), as well as repeating the fear

that his debts have alienated him from all friendship and community. Reduced to the

same financial ruin and isolation as the merchant he saved, he appears to regret his

unwise commitment to largesse, even when done in a charitable cause.

Fittingly, it is at this point that the merchant's ghost appears, demonstrating (to the

reader if not to Amadace himself) that his act of charity has not isolated him, but in fact

produced a new relationship with the dead man through which his act of 'kyndenes' will

be reciprocated. The ghost now takes on a direct physical resemblance to Amadace,

bearing the 'contiens of a knyghte' (441). The function of the ghost himself is, in the

context of the other Middle English ghost stories under discussion here, highly

anomalous. He makes no reference to purgatory, nor to the efficacy of prayers, never

mentioning the masses Amadace had said on his part. When the ghost speaks at the

poem's conclusion of his suffering after death, it is his experience as an unburied

corpse 'In a chapel quere I lay to howundus mete' (811) of which he speaks. This

framing locates post-mortem suffering exclusively within the corpse, eliding the

metaphysical space of purgatory entirely. Nor does the ghost provide any spiritual

warning, advice, or guidance to Amadace. There is no reminder of the need to prepare

spiritually for death, nor is sin and penance prominent as a theme. While a destitute

Amadace does briefly 'forthonke' his actions in the Heege text, Philippa Hardman

argues that this is an editorial intervention unconvincingly aligning *Amadace* with the

'penitential' romances of *Sir Ysumbras* and *Sir Gowther* which it is copied alongside.[19]

For the most part, when Amadace laments his former conduct in prayer, he is not so

much repenting a sin as regretting (what he currently sees as) a mistake, and the

consequences he dreads for himself are physical and social rather than spiritual. If there

is a suggestion of spiritual consequences to Amadace, it is the peril of being denied

burial from which he has just delivered the merchant. In spiritual terms, there is little in

Amadace's exemplary charitable conduct which the ghost needs to correct.

Instead, the ghost's role is to offer Amadace a reward, supernatural access to wealth

and a cover story to spare him from the shame of his poverty, attendant upon a

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[19] Philippa Hardman, 'A Medieval "Library *In Parvo*"', *Medium Aevum* 47 (1978), 262-73, pp. 267-270. Hardman notes that both *Gowther* and *Sir Ysumbras* provide similar evidence of editing to consolidate the three romances thematically; the text of *Ysumbras*, in particular, is highly idiosyncratic compared to the five other available witnesses. For a further discussion of *Gowther* and *Ysumbras* as penitential romances, see Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

condition, the equal division of winnings. This ghost then goes on to apply this condition

unreasonably and arbitrarily to test the knight's ability to honour his word. In this regard,

the ghostly White Knight seems to have less in common with contemporaneous

depictions of ghosts in other Middle English texts than with another form of supernatural

character common to Middle English romances: fairies.[20] By having the ghost assume

such a form, the poet attempts to distance the actions and agreements which pass

between Amadace and the White Knight from simple monetary agreements (even if that

is what they are) by placing them in the rarefied context of supernatural romance. *Sir

Amadace* shifts, from this point on, into a form of wish fulfilment where a knight who has

spent beyond his means is rewarded for his virtue and largesse by having his fortunes

restored by supernatural intervention.

The White Knight appears to combine two different modes within which fairies tend to

appear in romance. In the first case, he acts as a source of supernatural wealth for an

impoverished knight, as does the fairy-mistress Tryamour in *Sir Launfal* or King Oberon

in the French *Huon of Bordeaux.*[21] The condition that Amadace and the knight must

divide up the winnings from the tournament itself resembles the conditions which fairies

frequently place upon such boons, as when Tryamour demands Lanfaul not boast of

their love*.* In his second appearance, the merchant's ghost functions as an otherworldly

knight who challenges the protagonist with a mortal threat that is revealed, in retrospect,

to be a test of the knight's moral integrity, similar to the titular challenger in *Sir Gawain*

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[20] In making this point, I follow the critical trend of interpreting fairies loosely as supernatural entities whose exact status is generally left ambiguous and indistinct but who are explicitly not demonic. See Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford; Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 178-9.
[21] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, pp. 181-3, 198.

and the Green Knight, or the fairy knight of the unrelated twelfth-century French romance *Amadas et Ydoine*. The white colour of the ghost knight and his steed is relevant here. While it might indicate spiritual purity, showing that the knight has passed beyond purgatorial suffering and joined the Church Triumphant, white horses are also frequently associated with fairies. *Sir Launfal*'s fairy mistress and her retinue ride them and gift one to Launfal, and the fairy hunting party in *Sir Orfeo* is even described with a very similar formula to the merchant's ghost:[22]

Milke quyte was his stede,	Al on snowe-white stedes;
And so was all his othir wede	As white as milke were her wedes.
(*Sir Amadace,* 439-440)	(*Sir Orfeo*, 145-6)[23]

Further similarities to fairy narratives can be seen in the White Knight's agreement with Amadace, which depends on Amadace's presumption of a supernatural connection between the knight and the shipwreck he scavenges shortly afterwards. Although the knight promises that he will pay the retinue Amadace amasses at the tournament, and "schall pay for thi costage/Ten thowsand gif thu adde" (494-5), the knight provides him no money, nor does he even direct him to the bountiful shipwreck from which Amadace equips himself for the tournament. The premise that the White Knight has honoured his word depends entirely upon the recognition of a supernatural connection between

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[22] 'Sir Launfal' in *The Middle English Breton Lays,* ed. By Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 210-239, line 326.

[23] 'Sir Orfeo' in *The Middle English Breton Lays,* ed. by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 26-41, lines 145-6.

knight and shipwreck, that he has somehow conjured it into existence to supply
Amadace.

> Now als Sir Amadace welke bi the se sonde,
>
> The broken schippus he ther fonde —
>
> Hit were mervayl to say.
>
> He fond wrekun amung the stones
>
> Knyghtes in menevere for the nones,
>
> Stedes quite and gray,
>
> With all kynne maner of richas
>
> That any mon myghte devise
>
> Castun uppe with waturs lay;
>
> Kistes and cofurs bothe ther stode,
>
> Was fulle of gold precius and gode,
>
> No mon bare noghte away.   (517-528)

The marvellous nature of the shipwrecked finery hints at a supernatural origin, as does
the uncanny nature of its arrangement, which appears to exist purely for Amadace's
benefit. All the knights (there are no sailors mentioned) are slain, but the otherworldly
white horses, 'the best that evyr mon hade' (533) are inexplicably in perfect riding
condition, and none of the finery appears to have suffered from the shipwreck. It is as if
the splendid, wealth-granting fairy retinue attendant on, say, *Sir Launfal*'s Triamour,
have become transmuted into corpses themselves by their association with a ghost who

was very recently an unburied corpse himself.[24] That Amadace equips himself from such a marvellous shipwreck is not so much an example of a 'contemporary sense of cut-throat opportunism' that 'chillingly reflects contemporary beach-combing practice', as Andrew Murry Richmond has argued.[25] It instead appears necessary to the poem's internal logic that we understand the shipwreck as a supernatural gift from the White Knight, as a version of motif of the providential ship common to many romances - both because it is necessary for the White Knight's pledge to make sense, and since otherwise Amadace's scavenging would seem profoundly at odds with his burial of the merchant.[26] This supernatural gloss does not completely eliminate the resemblance of Amadace's actions with the self-interest of a medieval wreck-salvager, but reveals the extent to which the narrative seeks to deploy supernatural romance motifs - combining the shipwreck with the marvellous fairy troupe - to distance itself from mercantile economic concerns which the inclusion of the merchant threatened to introduce into the narrative.

Likewise, identifying the White Knight as a fairy, or rather a ghost who has assumed the generic trappings of a fairy knight, also helps to understand the peculiar and gruesome test with which the story concludes. The knight demands Amadace kill his wife and son in order to divide his tournament winnings. If we accept Ad Putter's proposed solution to this quandary, that the test 'is nothing less than the ultimate test of the hero's

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[24] Fairies also come accompanied by uncanny, false or illusory corpses in several romances: the prisoners of fairy-land in *Sir Orfeo* include a litany of people with apparently fatal injuries who 'thought dede, and nare nought'; the fairy knight of *Amadas et Ydoine* makes Ydoine appear dead via an enchanted ring.

[25] A.M. Richmond, "The broken schippus he ther fonde": Shipwrecks and the Human Costs of Investment Capital in *Sir Amadace*', *Neophilologus* 99.2 (2015), pp. 315-333, p. 324.

[26] For more on the providential ship as a romance motif, see Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, pp. 106-136.

willingness to give', we are still burdened by the arbitrary nature with which the White

Knight demands his covenant be enforced.[27] This arbitrariness is demonstrated by the

fact that the White Knight insists on the violent division of Amadace's wife and son while

pre-emptively quitting his much more reasonable claim to Amadace's properties, saying

'Othir of thi thinge then kepe I noghte,/Off all thi wordes gode!' (743-4). He is demanding

only those things Amadace did not know he was giving away, while dispensing with the

whole substance of the covenant as Amadace himself understood it, enforcing the

covenant in the manner that is most surprising and disruptive to Amadace. Furthermore,

he rejects Amadace's plea that the knight slay him instead, or 'take all that evyr I

have/Wyth thi, that ye hur life save' (739-40), both of which would suggest the knight's

concern is not with the extent of Amadace's giving. Amadace is, in fact, barred from

giving more than the White Knight demands.

Many of the negative critical responses to the finale of Sir Amadace hinge on the

pitilessness and arbitrariness of the White Knight's ultimatum. Maldwyn Mills described

it as 'curious' that the ghost should behave in this fashion to a man to whom he is

deeply indebted, and notes that other critics have viewed it as 'little short of

despicable'.[28] But if such cruel arbitrariness appears peculiar and ungrateful from a

ghost in Amadace's debt, it fits remarkably well with the figure of the fairy knight. Helen

Cooper describes the single defining quality of the romance fairy monarch as 'power

that may well be exercised in the cause of justice, but which is primarily characterised

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[27] Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities in *Sir Amadace*', p. 384.
[28] Maldwyn Mills, 'Introduction', in *Six Middle English Romances,* ed. by Maldwyn Mills (London: Dent, 1973), pp. vii-xxxi, (p.xxi).

by its arbitrariness.'[29] Likewise, J. Wade's characterisation of fairies as 'adoxic' figures, existing outside traditional power structures and thus prompting reflection on them without directly opposing them, might well apply to Sir Amadace's ghost, as might his description of 'dangerous' fairies as 'embodied devices who, through their strange and arbitrary violence, work to challenge knights on physical, psychological, and moral levels, and who in turn become integral to the central ideological concerns of their texts.'[30] Recasting the merchant's ghost in the trappings of the fairy knight produces a generic expectation that the ordeal he subjects Amadace to should, like the scavenging of the shipwreck, not be held to usual causal or moral logic, further contributing to the narrative's attempt to dissociate the White Knight's covenant with Amadace from a simple monetary loan.

The final third of *Sir Amadace* is dedicated to making these events more comfortable to the chivalric romance, and thus more flattering and cathartic to an anxious gentry audience. The dead merchant, a socially excluded victim of the moneyed economy, is transformed into an otherworldly White Knight whose existence speaks of his exceptional and supernatural nature. The money paid down by Amadace to cover the merchant's funeral is repaid in the riches of a marvellous and otherworldly shipwreck. And the contract between Amadace and the White Knight is transformed from a financial agreement into a chivalric vow. In the Heege manuscript the swearing of this agreement itself forms the climax of the poem's second fitt, and it serves as a ritual

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[29] Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 179.
[30] J. Wade, *Fairies in Medieval Romance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 15, 74. For Wade's full discussion of 'dangerous' fairies acting as opponents and providers of tests for knights in romance, see pp. 73-107.

formalisation of the relationship between the two men which has already been developed, though Amadace (and, potentially, an unprepared reader) are unaware of it. Though the White Knight expounds upon his plan – to cover Amadace's costs so that he can win the tournament and the hand of the king's daughter, restoring his fortunes – the agreement sworn between the two is ultimately very simple:

> "Butte a forwart make I with the or that thu goe,
>
> That evyn to part betwene us toe
>
> The godus thus hase wonun and spedde."

This agreement is ambiguous in its apparent simplicity: just as the ghost is somehow both knight and merchant, the division of winnings fits within both a chivalric and a mercantile worldview. 'Forwart', the word chosen by the knight to describe the agreement, had wide currency as a general term for any agreement or contract. It makes appearances in several romances for interpersonal chivalric oaths and commitments which propel the plot, being used for the 'exchange of winnings' between Gawain and Bertilak in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as Gawain's agreement to marry the loathly lady Dame Ragnelle to save Arthur's life in The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle.[31] Here, though, the agreement appears essentially fiscal in nature: the White Knight extends an advance on Amadace's venture in exchange for a cut of the proceeds. The agreement itself occupies an intermediate

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[31] 'The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle', in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), pp. 40-81, l. 536.

position between a chivalric vow and a monetary agreement of the sort which produced

Amadace's position in the first place.

To counteract the impression that this agreement is an essentially monetary agreement

within an exchange economy, the poet repeatedly emphasises the power of the

agreement both to generate and limit social relationships. Indeed, immediately before

describing his plan the White Knight draws attention to this generative aspect of the

agreement:

> Quod the quite knyghte, "Wold thu luffe him avre all thing
>
> That wold the owte of thi mournyng bringe,
>
> And kevyr the owte of kare?"   (469-471)

Introducing his plan in this fashion indicates that, however centred on material 'godus'

the agreement might be, it underwrites a nascent homosocial bond between Sir

Amadace and the White Knight. As a result, the monetary agreement between them

becomes interpretable as a bond of sworn friendship, a motif which, like the fairy

benefactor and the providential shipwreck, had wide currency as a motif in medieval

romance.[32] Such phrasing, immediately following on from the White Knight's pious

assertion that 'He that schope bothe sunne and mone,/Full well may pay for all' (469-

71), also makes it unclear whether the knight is asking about Amadace's prospective

gratitude to a benefactor, or to God. This ambiguity implicitly invests their relationship

with spiritual significance and casts benefactors as agents of divine charity. A clear

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[32] For an overview of bonds of sworn brotherhood in Middle English romance, including a discussion of the trope in *Sir Amadace* see Robert Stretter, 'Engendering Obligation: Sworn Brotherhood and Love Rivalry in Medieval English Romance', in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* ed. by Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 501-524.

effort is being made to invest the 'division of winnings', a component element of the

Grateful Dead motif, with resonances reflecting both piety and systems of homosocial

obligation seen elsewhere in the romance genre.

Despite this, the agreement struck between Amadace and the White Knight is rendered

anomalous, both within the folktale and romance genres, by the conversion of the

division of winnings into a gruesome ordeal in which Amadace is asked to divide his

wife and son with a sword. Among surviving Grateful Dead narratives, only *Sir Amadace*

applies the 'division of winnings' to a living person. The French romance *Lion de*

Bourges, which also features a ghostly White Knight who aids the protagonist in winning

a lady's hand in a tournament, comes closest by explicitly exempting the lady from the

agreement.[33] The application of the 'division of winnings' to human beings is understood

by Putter as introducing 'a religious understanding' of human life as a gift from God and

of people as 'goods on loan' that 'do[es] away with the notion of human possession…

[and] also instantly abolishes the distinction between commodities and the people who

acquire them'.[34] However, the application of the 'division of winnings' to Amadace's wife

and child, combined with the White Knight's avowed disinterest in Amadace's property

and moveables, also recontextualises the meaning of the 'forwart' itself. The principal

concern of the agreement shifts away from money to focus on people and relationships

dear to Amadace's heart, investing these relationships with meaning at the same time

they are subordinated to the bond between knight and ghost. By threatening Amadace's

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[33] For a broad survey of the resemblances between *Sir Amadace* and other Grateful Dead narratives involving knights, see Christopher Brookhouse, 'Introduction' in *Sir Amadace and the Avowing of Arthur: Two Romances from the Ireland MS*, ed. by Christopher Brookhouse (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1968), pp. 1-31, (pp. 16-24).
[34] Putter, 'Gifts and Commodities', pp. 386-7.

relationships, the White Knight is also highlighting the generative capacity of the original agreement: not only has it instigated a relationship between Amadace and the knight, but it also produced Amadace's marriage and the birth of his son. Leah Haught has argued that a similar ordeal in the romance *Amis and Amiloun*, in which a knight kills his own children to honour a pledge of chivalric friendship by curing his sworn friend of leprosy 'evokes many of the familiar trappings of a domestically-oriented romance only to dismiss them as auxiliary to a very specific fantasy of male solidarity that supersedes domesticity through divine intervention.'[35] Such a description could well be adapted for *Sir Amadace,* with the 'division of winnings' having been transformed into an analogous chivalric pledge to honour the relationship between Amadace and the White Knight above his domestic relationships of marriage and parenthood.

Although Amadace's child has essentially no role in the story beyond an object to be threatened and spared (Amadace even rather bluntly admits to loving him less than his wife), his wife actively propels the ordeal to its climax. The text is replete with praise for Amadace's wife, and positive commentary upon their marriage, but this inheres overwhelmingly on her willingness to lay down her life without complaint or hesitation to maintain her husband's agreement with the White Knight. Much is made of her lack of reaction to her fate:

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[35] Leah Haught, 'In Pursuit of *Trewth*: Ambiguity and Meaning in *Amis and Amiloun*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 114.2 (2015), pp. 240-260 (p. 244). For the text, see *'*Amis and Amiloun', in *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. by Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007) pp. 10-79.

> Still ho stode, withoutun lette,
>
> Nawthir changet chere ne grette,
>
> That lady mylde and dere.   (769-71)

As she awaits her apparent death she lies 'mekely enughe' (790) and we are told again that 'That lady was myld of mode' (791) even as Amadace 'ferd as ho were wode' (783), an example of conventional medieval characterisations of female virtue as being associated with emotional restraint. After sparing her, the White Knight himself praises her conduct to Amadace in his final line before he departs for the hereafter:

> "Butte loke thu lufe this lady as thi lyve,
>
> That thus mekely, withouten stryve,
>
> Thi forwardus wold fulfille."   (820-22)

In her apparently praiseworthy self-sacrifice Amadace's wife mirror the merchant's own wife from the poem's opening fit (discussed in the previous chapter), who, though not 'mylde of mode', engaged in desperate commemorative activity in defence of her husband's honour with an extreme level of potentially self-destructive fervour. Indeed, if the ordeal itself benefits Amadace in any way, it is that it proves his wife's exemplary character, as if the White Knight is impressing on Amadace the love and gratitude he should show his wife. *Sir Amadace's* position on the relative importance of the marital relationship vis-à-vis a relationship of sworn brotherhood is thus ultimately ambivalent. While, with the White Knight's disappearance the poem finally endorses an image of marital 'joy and blis' (830), its image of an ideal marriage is predicated on an

understanding of marriage as falling below a sworn homosocial bond in order of precedence.

The attempt to cast the division of winnings along the lines of an oath of sworn brotherhood remains fraught, not only because of the grotesquely inappropriate nature of the knight's demands, but because the White Knight absolutely refuses to engage with any of Amadace's attempts to affirm their friendship outside the materialistic terms of the 'division of winnings'. Amadace immediately affirms his friendship to the White Knight when he appears, saying he is 'To me… bothe lefe and dere,/So aght him wele to be' (686-7), and he attempts to expanding his bond of amity with the knight through his social network, instructing his men to 'serve him wele to fote and honed/Ryghte as ye wold do me' (689-690), while his wife adopts Amadace's attitude towards the White Knight unprompted since 'All that hur lord lufd wurschipput ho' (695). The White Knight, on the other hand, remains emphatically solitary, and the narrator pauses to rhetorically question his lack of attendants:

> Quo schuld his stede to stabulle have?
>
> Knyght, squire, yoman ne knave,
>
> Nauthir with him he broghte.   (697-9)

Amadace seeks to demonstrate his friendship with the White Knight outside of the specific terms of the agreement, which he rebuffs – first when Amadace attempts to lead the knight's horse himself (700-2) and then when he offers to host him 'together here,/Righte as we brethir were,/As all thin one hit ware' (715-7) while the precise terms of the division are drawn up. Amadace clearly acknowledges a quasi-kinship

relationship with the knight beyond the terms of their agreement, but the knight's

demand that Amadace 'Gif me my parte, and lette me goe,/If I be wurthi oghte' (707-9)

instead threatens to collapse the agreement's generative potential, and Amadace and

the White Knight's relationship, back to conditions of monetary exchange. Furthermore,

while the peculiarity of the knight's demand for half of Amadace's wife and son moves

the agreement away from a financial framework of monetary goods, it renders the

ordeal purposeless: since the White Knight gains nothing from the transaction,

Amadace's submission to it cannot evince a positive, productive love towards the White

Knight.

The final justification for Amadace's submission to the White Knight's ordeal comes not

from Amadace, but from his lady, who insists that her husband uphold what he has

vowed:

> Then ladi sayd, "For his luffe the deut on tre,
>
> Loke your covandus holdun be,
>
> Goddes forbotte ye me spare!" (754-6)

In another example of the *Amadace*-poet's habit of repetition, she repeats this couplet

on lines 760-1, along with entreating her husband that "Ye schall him hold that ye have

highte" (758) and her judgement that "Yore forward was full fine." (762). The wife's

justification of, and consent to, her own sacrifice is thus asserted entirely along the lines

of Amadace bearing a legitimate, sacred duty to fulfil his agreements to the letter, a

matter ultimately unrelated to the relationship that that agreement purports to generate

between the two knights. Amadace, compelled to fulfill the agreement or destroy his

'wurschip in londe' (768), is ultimately motivated not by his relationship with the White

Knight at all, but rather the shame of dishonourably reneging on his 'forwart'; precisely

the concern that led Amadace to depart from his country in the poem's opening. Despite

the deployment of the romance motifs which flood the poem's final third, the essential

tension of creating a romance centred around a sequence of monetary exchanges

remains, and the fantastical apparatus cannot completely distinguish the White Knight

from the nameless creditors whom Amadace flees without consequence in the poem's

opening.

For a romance centred around a relationship produced between strangers, generated

by the protagonist's act of exemplary commemorative charity for which he is richly

rewarded, *Sir Amadace*'s stance towards the commemorative relationship thus

generated remains strikingly, even bizarrely, ambivalent. While Amadace's

commemoration of the merchant proves profoundly generative, the 'forwart' which

codifies their relationship remains suspect, trapped in an ambiguous space between two

different class-bound models of social behaviour. In insistently reframing the White

Knight's actions in terms of romance motifs, the poem casts the agreement as a

chivalric oath of sworn brotherhood. This, however, evinces a profound anxiety about

the possibility that such an agreement may, on closer inspection, collapse into a purely

monetary transaction. The poem's avowal of an essential, positive spiritual likeness

between its gentry and mercantile characters, through which the merchantry may

emerge as spiritually noble, is dogged by the fear that such an association undermines

the gentry identity. The quotidian focus on gentry money troubles in the opening

sections, and the keen interest in the actual costs of commemoration, ultimately cast a

long, troubling shadow over the fantasy of escape from the money economy with which the White Knight rewards Amadace. In its attempt to navigate and validate the complexities of gentry and mercantile friendships and business relationships while maintaining confidence in the spiritual and social position of the gentry in the context of a burgeoning money economy, *Sir Amadace* is ultimately forced, like Amadace before his creditors, into retreat.

The Childe of Bristow and *The Merchant and his Son*: The merchant and his fathers

Where the merchant's ghost in *Sir Amadace* serves as an index of anxieties regarding the compromising role of money in interpersonal relationships, the analogous fifteenth-century poems *The Child of Bristow* and *The Merchant and his Son* use the ghost narrative as a vehicle to examine many of the same issues but in a more confident and self-assured way. While *Amadace*, circulated within an audience of gentry and aspiring gentry, *The Childe of Bristow* and *The Merchant and his Son* are written for the edification of a mercantile readership. All three texts respond to the late medieval consolidation of the money economy and the rising position of the urban bourgeoisie, but where *Sir Amadace's* gentry romance reacts with anxiety, the mercantile narratives seek to use the ghost narrative for self-affirmation. *Childe* and *Merchant* present money exchanges in a manner that defends mercantile professional reality from accusations of immorality, and the ultimate purpose of both poems is to inculcate moral ideals appropriate to the merchantry and to valorise mercantile commemoration and relationships.

That both poems, like *Sir Amadace* emphasise the productive role of non-kinship

relations founded on monetary exchange suggests that a perceived association may

have existed between non-familial commemoration and merchantry. After all, a

successful merchant depended on a wide array of personal and business relationships.

Such priorities might reflect the apparent fragility of male lines of inheritance in English

merchant families: Jenny Kermode notes that among northern merchants, 'the failure of

male heirs had a profound impact on the merchant group in each town… prevent[ing]

the formation of a dynastic oligarchy based on inherited wealth' where 'on average

mercantile businesses survived two generations at most and the wealth of individuals

was continually redistributed amongst other members of the merchant group in

bequests and through marriages.'[36] Given the importance of children as

commemorators, a lack of heirs might endanger a person's future commemoration, and

some merchants invested liberally in alternative means of securing commemoration as

a result. The extremely successful wool merchant William Browne (d.1489), who had

only one daughter survive to adulthood, expended perhaps half his estate in building

and endowing what was known as Browne's Hospital for the local poor of Stamford, in a

building which also provided a guildhall for the parish guild of All Saints, of which

Browne was Alderman, and as a family chantry decorated throughout with reminders of

Browne's munificence and requests to pray for his soul.[37] Alan Rogers has suggested

that this may have been sparked by the death of Browne's young grand-daughter in

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[36] Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp.78-80.
[37] Alan Rogers, *Noble Merchant: William Browne (c1410-1489) and Stamford in the Fifteenth Century* (Bury St Edmunds: Abramis Academic Publishing, 2012), pp. 242-253.

1471 and fears about his legacy without a son to carry on his family name.[38] Whatever the case, Browne sought successfully to intertwine his commemorative legacy with both the guild and the hospital in the absence of future dynastic commemoration.

Though difficulties securing heirs affected all classes due to high infant mortality rates, the authors of *Childe* and *Merchant* respond to the particular dynastic instability of the merchant class by recasting this apparent weakness as a moral strength, valorising the merchant community's capacity to extend networks of commemoration and inheritance beyond blood relationships while also denigrating patrilineal inheritance as a potential spiritual danger. Both poems focus on issues of disrupted inheritance, and argue that mercantile business relationships can, at least in some cases, prove more spiritually generative than blood relationships. Where *Sir Amadace* attempts to (and only partly succeeds in) transforming a monetary relationship into the preferred chivalric homosocial bond of sworn brotherhood, *Childe* makes the case that a class-bound, codified mercantile relationship – the apprenticeship – has an equal and sometimes greater positive social and spiritual capacity to parenthood.

Both *Childe* and *Merchant* survive uniquely in manuscripts about whose early histories little can be said with certainty. *The Childe of Bristow* is found in British Library, MS Harley 2382, a largely devotional fifteenth-century manuscript in English which also contains Chaucer's Prioress' Tale and several devotional poems by Lydgate. *The Childe of Bristow* is copied in the final booklet of three, though the scribal hand, layout and decoration is consistent throughout the manuscript. *Merchant* appears uniquely in

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[38] Rogers, *Noble Merchant*, p.246.

Cambridge University Library, MS FF.2.38, a late-fifteenth- or early-sixteenth-century anthology of religious verse and prose, didactic narratives, and romances in Middle English. Michael Johnston has argued on the basis of the quality and consistency of the layout and organisation that it was produced by a professional scribe in Leicestershire, possibly on commission.[39] The manuscript's literary content appears to reflect a bourgeois readership, leading Frances McSparran and P.R. Robinson to describe it as 'a good index to the religious and literary tastes and preoccupations of the bourgeoisie in the late fifteenth century', likely intended as 'family reading in a pious middle-class household'.[40] *The Merchant and his Son* occurs amidst a group of exemplary tales focusing on contemporary settings and advice (both secular and spiritual) focused upon a bourgeois reader. More specifically for our purposes, it appears among a number of other poems centred on familial relationships, including another ghost narrative, *The Adulterous Falmouth Squire*, in which the damned spirit of a lecherous man asks his son not to pray for him because the prayers only heighten his pain. *How the Merchant did his Wife Betray* shares *Merchant*'s mercantile setting and *Squire*'s concern with adultery (though it concludes with the merchant reconciling with his wife) and *How the Good Man Taught his Son* focuses on a positive paternal relationship. This thematic concern with family bonds reflects other evidence in the compilation – the mix of instructional and entertainment texts, and the group of instructional texts on foundational elements of doctrine appropriate for young children - suggesting it was, like

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[39] Michael Johnstone, 'Two Leicestershire Romance Codices: Cambridge University Library MS FF.2.38 and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 61' in *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 15 (2012), pp. 85-100 (pp. 85-6, 89).

[40] Frances McSparran and P.R. Robinson, 'Introduction' in *Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38.* (London: Scolar Press 1979), pp. vii, xvii.

the Heege manuscript, probably intended for reading to a family audience, and Barbara Hanawalt has characterised many of the poems it contains as didactic stories aimed at bourgeois youth, 'adventure tales in which an aspiring lad overcomes the obstacles set in his way to achieve good fame and fortune.'[41]

The narratives of the two poems are essentially the same. A sinful, wealthy lawyer (referred to as a squire in *Childe* and as a franklin in *Merchant*) accrues great wealth by fraud and usury.[42] His virtuous son refuses his father's request to study law out of fear for his soul, and instead apprentices with a merchant. The father falls ill but cannot find an executor due to his evil reputation, and compels his son to execute his will, pledging to return as a ghost to tell him of his fate. The father dies and the son faithfully executes the will, including commemorative masses. His fathers ghost appears, lamenting that prayers cannot aid him unless his son makes restitution to those he wronged in life. The son sells his inheritance to his master, concealing his purpose, and repays his father's victims. The ghost appears again, saying his neglected church-tithes must also be paid. The son sells himself to his incredulous master as a bond-slave, pays the tithes, and gives his clothes to his father's last creditor, freeing him from purgatory. Having heard the truth, the son's master returns his inheritance, makes the son his own heir, and arranges a marriage to his daughter.

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[41] Barbara Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)*, p. 178.
[42] *Childe* appears to be using 'Squire' to refer to 'A member of the landowning class next below the rank of knight', as listed by the Middle English Dictionary's definition 2. (a) for the word 'squier'. 'Squier', Middle English Dictionary. Ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001. Online edition in Middle English Compendium. ed. Frances McSparran, et al. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>. Accessed 30 April 2024.

The two narratives differ chiefly on grounds of style and emphasis, though *Merchant* streamlines the sequence of commemoration and restitution found in *Childe* by having the ghost appear before the execution of the will. Both poems reinterpret the parental spectre narrative seen in *The Trental of Gregory* within a bourgeois setting wherein the poem's central concern has shifted away from the efficacy and purpose of commemorative prayer towards the question of inheritance and the role of money within the system of commemoration. Both texts expect audiences to be familiar with the outline of a ghost narrative in the *Trental*-tradition, as characters repeatedly anticipate events or express surprise when events deviate from the 'typical' *Trental*-esque narrative.[43] The protagonist, named William in *The Merchant and His Son* and referred to here as 'Childe-William' after Barbara Hanawalt's shorthand, is a son whose filial piety is principally embodied in his role as an exemplary heir and executor.[44] The emotional elements of the filial bond, however, are downplayed in service of drawing a sharper moral and economic distinction between sinful father and virtuous son. And while Childe-William successfully fulfils his father's commemorative needs in a manner akin to other narratives of parental ghosts, the timbre of this activity is very different. The activity of the plot is circumscribed not so much by the commemoration and redemption of the ghost, but by the trials which Childe-William must overcome due to his father's sins.

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[43] As when Childe-William demands of his living father that he returns as a ghost or expresses shock at the slow progress his father's soul has made through purgatory. *The Childe of Bristow's* author may have been directly familiar with the A-version of *The Trental of Gregory*, since the ghost's first line "Y am thi fader that þe be gate" (CoB 250) appears to be re-gendered version of the ghost's first line in the *Trental*, "I am þi Modur þat þe beer" (*Trental* A, 76).
[44] Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute*, p. 180.

Childe-William's father is a picture of avarice, pride, and cruelty towards the poor, a negative example of the types of vices which merchants and lawyers were both credited with in the estates satire. *Childe* briefly encapsulates his use of legal knowledge to accrue wealth through exploiting the poor:

> To lawe he went a gret while,
>
> Pore men he lerned to begile
>
> All agayns the right;
>
> Mykel good he gadred togedir,
>
> All w*ith* treson and dedis lether;
>
> he drad not god almyght.   (CoB 19-24)[45]

We are told that 'ever he used usery' (CoB 91) and refused to pay tithes, treating 'parsons and vicares' with 'cares colde' (94-6). *Merchant* describes his disdain for charity to the extent that he would allow a poor man to starve to death rather than give them food (21), his punitive actions towards debtors whom he 'prison[s] full sore, and do[es[them mekyl care' (21) and those whose livestock trespass onto his property (22), as well as his litigiousness, tithe-dodging, persecution of the clergy, and debt evasion (24).[46] The father's sins combine avarice, wrathful cruelty, pride, and an impious rejection of his obligations to the church. This depiction falls firmly within the medieval

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[45] 'The Childe of Bristow, a Poem by John Lydgate', *Camden Old Series,* 73 (1859), pp. 3-28, lines 19-24. All further references will be to this edition. In quoting from this edition, for the sake of readability I have provided my own expansions for abbreviations, substituting 'y' for 'th' when expanding abbreviations such as 'yt' for 'that'. Such expansions are italicized.

[46] The Merchant and his Son' in *Nugae Poeticae: Select Pieces of Old English Popular Poetry Illustrating the Manners and Arts of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by James Orchard Halliwell (London: John Russell Smith, 1844), pp. 21-36. All further references will be to this edition, which will cited by page number, as it is unlineated.

estates satire's view, both of lawyers as haughty, avaricious, uncharitable, and scheming against their neighbours, and of merchants as greedy, dishonest, and usurious.[47] That this combination of usury, cruelty, and impiety resembles contemporary antisemitic depictions of Jews suggests a possible motivation for *Childe*'s appearance alongside the antisemitic miracle narrative of *The Prioress's Tale*, with both narratives seeking to contrast a young Christian's instinctive piety against an antagonistic force – the Jewish community in one, and the immoral father in the other.[48] Within the text itself, the father fulfils a similar role to the cruel merchant in Sir Amadace, consolidating the negative traits customarily associated with wealthy bourgeois professionals within a single character against which the virtuous members of that class, such as Childe-William and Amadace's generous merchant, can be set.

Childe-William's father, however, is not solely self-interested, as both texts emphasise that he accrues wealth principally to provide his son with a rich inheritance. Indeed, the father's wealth accumulation is paralleled with the son's birth:

> The good he gadred togeder than
>
> He had it of many a pore man,
>
> The most partye w*ith* wrong:
>
> he had a sone shuld be his heyre,
>
> of shap he was seemly and feyre,

---

[47] Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*, pp. 86-91, 99-100.

[48] MS Harley 2382's excerpted copy of *The Prioress' Tale* is interpolated into a copy of Lydgate's *Testament*, being recontextualised as a text composed by the *Testament*'s narrator after a spiritual conversion away from the misdemeanours of his youth. Anthony Paul Bale notes that this copy is 'probably the most orthodox retelling' of *The Prioress' Tale* in excerpted form. He notes the collocation with *Childe* only in that *Childe* is 'yet another text about parents and children.' Anthony Paul Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 96-7.

of lymes large and long.

So moche his mynde was on *that* chylde

he rought not whom begiled,

worldly good to fong;

and al to make his sone so riche

that non other might hym be liche,

so ment he ever among.   (CoB 31-6)

From birth, Childe-William is described principally in relation to the question of his

eventual inheritance: a 'seemly and fair' child growing in parallel with the wrongful

accumulation of his father's property. The father's avarice is presented as parental

instinct, in a form both monstrously exaggerated and spiritually bankrupt. His

monomaniacal fixation on his son eclipses any consideration of others so that the father

'rought not whom' he exploits. The father, having 'thoght hymselfe richest of all' and

disdaining all others, views wealth as the only tangible metric of exceptionality and

accordingly seeks to make real his own perception of his son's exceptionality through

inheritance, a way to extend his obsession with his son's status beyond death.

Merchant intensifies the father's obsessive concern with inheritance, since he explicitly

desires that William train in law specifically so he can defend his inheritance from

lawsuit:

"I wolde thou were a man of lawe, to holde togedur my londe,

Thou schalt be pletyd with, when y am gon, full we y undurstonde."

 (TMahS, p.23)

The father's view is that his wealth, dishonestly gained, must be dishonestly protected by his heir. This is a literalisation of the spiritual burden inherent in the ill-gotten inheritance, a burden of which the father is himself entirely oblivious. The obsessive fixation on his son is, of course, repaid by his isolation on his deathbed. Other than his son, he appears to have no family, and his only other social connections are with those he wrongs and exploits to amass his wealth. *Merchant* briefly mentions his wife, 'a seemly woman and a feyre' (TMahS, p. 22) but she appears simply to give birth to William. Accordingly, on his deathbed he finds himself totally socially isolated:

> Ther was no man in *that* contre
>
> That his executor wold be,
>
> Nor for no good ne ill:
>
> They seid his good was geten so
>
> They wold not have *there with* to do,
>
> For drede of god in heuen. (CoB. 181-6)

This picture, of a community unwilling to associate itself with the lawyer's tainted money, distinguishes the poems from the conventional attitude regarding inheritance in much medieval English literature, which Eamon Duffy has characterised as 'a literature of cynicism, which dwelt on the rapacity of executors or the fickleness of spouses and children'.[49] Here, the father is so irremediably wicked that other executors, by their nature presumed to be unscrupulous, refuse to engage with him. In *Merchant* his search gradually descends the social scale, beginning with 'gentylmen, the beste in that cuntre'

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[49] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 8.

(24), before turning to 'other gode yomen' (24) and finally 'his neyghburs alsoo' (24). While these neighbour's class positions are not explained, they are the principal subject of the father's abuses, suggesting an ignominious reversal in which the father is now petitioning those he has victimised.

As his father's heir, Childe-William should make a particularly poor executor according to the conventional wisdom of the period due to the obvious conflict of interest. Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* exhorts the reader 'Ne be þou neuere yn swych errour/To make þyn eyr þy secutour' because he will act in his own interests.[50] Fears that heirs appointed as executors might neglect their parents' spiritual provisions for their own benefit appear to underwrite the threatened parental curses that occasionally appear in wills. John Heyron (d. 1501) of Langport, Somerset willed that his son John 'perform this my will in all things upon pain of my curse', while Lady Joan Gilbert (d. 1502), also of Somerset, asked that Robert, her 'son and heir' pay her debts and fulfil her bequests 'under pain of my maternal malediction'.[51] Childe-William protests that he is a poor choice, though his own misgivings relate to his youth and unworldliness – he is 'but a childe', lacks 'discrecion', and 'can no skyle ther on' (CoB, 134-8). Such filial reluctance to act as an executor is sometimes addressed directly in surviving wills. The 1395 will of the widowed Lady Alice West of Hinton Marcel, Hampshire names her son Thomas and his wife Joan as her chief executors, and charges Thomas to execute the will 'vpon my blessyng'; a codicil threatens to revoke her bequests to the couple should they refuse to

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[50] Robert Mannyng, *Roberd of Brunnè's Handlyng Synne (written A.D. 1303) with the French treatise on which it is founded, Le Manuel des Pechiez by William of Waddington*, ed. By Frederick J. Furnivall, Vol. 1 (London: Asher & Co; Paul, Trench and Trubner for The Early English Text Society, 1901), ll. 1180-1.
[51] *Somerset Medieval Wills, Second Series (1501-1530)*, ed. by Frederic William Weaver, *Somerset Record Society* Vol. 19 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1887), pp. 4, 24-5.

act as executors, a strategy that successfully compelled Thomas to take on this responsibility.[52]

Childe-William's father ultimately compels him to act as executor by relying on the threat of spiritual punishment for filial impiety. Reiterating that he did evil on his son's behalf, he reproaches Childe-William that 'thu so sone failest me/at my most nedeful day' (CoB 157-8) and threatens to withdraw his blessing.

> "Sone (he seid), thu scapest not so;
>
> that shalt y*ou* weten or thu go;
>
> he then charge y the
>
> to fore god thu mothe answer,
>
> and as thu wilt my blessing bere
>
> myn atto*r*ney that thu be." (CoB 157-162)

Merchant's treatment of the same scene is less severe, though it still depends on the father's blessing: on being summoned, William 'knelyd, as he schulde done/Upon the grownde before hys fadur, and askyd hys benysone' (24-5), which the father, addressing his 'dere sone', offers to give 'fro the fote up to the crowne' (25) provided he act as executor. While a much greater emphasis is placed here on William's obedience and his father's responses are more affectionate, the exchange still ends in William's refusal until the father demands "I charge the, sone, in Crystys name, thou take on thys dede!" (25). In both versions, the invocation of the parental bond in this scene underwrites Childe-William's legal obligation to his father, with little concern for filial or

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[52] *The Fiftiest Earliest English Wills in the Court of Probate*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall*, pp. 8-9.

parental sentimentality. It is thus unsurprising that the narrowing of parenthood to a legal responsibility, already suggested by the father's obsession with inheritance, continues through the exchanges that follow. Childe-William, accepting his father's charge, demands in return that the father appear as a ghost after his death:

> "A fader, ye bynde me w*ith* a charge
>
> and y shal bynde yow w*ith* as large
>
> as ye bynde now me:
>
> the same day fortenyght þ*at* ye passe,
>
> y charge yow appere in this place,
>
> yo*ur* spiret lat me se.
>
> For ye haue bound me so sare,
>
> now y most nedis, how ever y fare,
>
> do your comaundement;
>
> ther for y charge yow þ*at* ye appere,
>
> that y may se yo*ur* soule here,
>
> whether it be saued or shent!"   (CoB 163-174)

The son characterises these agreements not as pious, generative codifications of an emotional familial bond, but rather as onerous, coercive, and restrictive. Where *The Trental of Gregory* showed how Gregory 'halse[d]' his mother's spirit, an implicitly pious term for beseeching in God's name or supplicating oneself in prayer, *Childe* has the son reverse the legalistic language used for his own duty as executor. The references to 'charges' and 'bynding', moreover, presents the son's demand as a tit-for-tat reversal of his father's demand that he serve as executor. His further stipulation that his father "do

no scathe to me,/Ne none that shal come w*ith* me" (CoB 175-6) reinforces the sense of the relationship as negative and potentially threatening. As with *Sir Amadace*, the legalistic formulation of a relationship along the terms of contract and legal obligation threatens to vacate the relationship of its generative and emotionally positive elements.

Yet where the reduction of a chivalric friendship to contractual obligations in *Sir Amadace* manifests the narrative's anxieties regarding friendships 'contaminated' by the money economy, *Childe* and *Merchant*'s collapsing parent-child relationships provide a negative example against which Childe-William's moral quality can be contrasted. Childe-William's virtuous behaviour as his father's executor goes against the grain of much popular medieval commentary on executors, which typically emphasises their unreliability and avarice. The view that 'The secators be right onkynd', as one poem's refrain puts it, is a frequent motif in Middle English advice on the subject.[53] Such sentiments also appear in commemorative inscriptions, such as a lost brass at Blakesley, Northamptonshire, which included:

> Man whyle the wynde bloweth looke that thow grynde
>
> And on thy owne sowle alwey have in mynde
>
> Trust not to thine Executors for they be false[54]

Such concerns were hardly baseless. Jenny Kermode notes that 'Complaints by heirs dispossessed of their inheritance by dishonest executors flooded the royal Chancery

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[53] 'Man be war the way ys slender', in The Early English Carols, ed. by R.L. Greene (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), pp. 255-6. A fuller discussion and survey of Middle English literature upon this theme is provided in Thomas L. Kinney, "Too secuturs and an overseere make thre theves": Popular attitudes towards false executors of Wills and Testaments', Fifteenth-Century Studies 3 (1980), pp. 93-105.

[54] Griffith, 'English Commemorative Inscriptions', p. 139.

and merchant testators were keenly aware of the temptation for executors to abuse their trust'.[55] In one case, York merchants William Holbeck and William Stockton allegedly systematically preyed on the relatives of fellow merchant John Aldestonemore while acting as executors of his will, seizing £1,600 of a £1,700 estate from his heirs and subsequently dispossessing his niece while executing another will.[56] Thomas L. Kinney, surveying Middle English literary treatments of false executors, notes that 'the particular attitude towards executors of wills is that "of course they are corrupt" and "of course the system will protect them"', and that the motif is used to demonstrate the impossibility of controlling what happens in the world after one's death, and thus the futility of accumulating wealth.[57] This conventional figure of the false executor, who defrauds both dead and living and gets away with it (in this world, at least) would appear to operate within a moral perspective closely aligned with Childe-William's father. As a result, Childe-William's subsequent exemplary conduct serves, again, to contrast his pious mercantile fidelity with his lawyerly father's avarice.

Only *Childe* provides an extensive account of the commemorative works that the Childe commissions before hearing his father's spirit returns. He first pays over one hundred religious to say the Office of the Dead for his father's funeral, and after dispensing a dole at the funeral seeks other opportunities to exhaust his inheritance in commemoration and almsgiving:

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[55] Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 108.
[56] Kermode, *Medieval Merchants*, pp. 109.
[57] Thomas L. Kinney, "Too securus and an overseere make thre theves": Popular attitudes towards False Executors of Wills and Testaments', Fifteenth-Century Studies 3 (1980), pp. 93-105, (pp. 101-2).

He sought about in that contre tho,

Where any almes myght be do,

And largely he dyd hem yeue,

Wayes and brugges for to make,

And pore men for goddess sake

He yeaf hem gret releve.

Who so axed aght, he made her pay

And xxx^{ti} trental of masses he let say

For his fadres sake;

He let never til he had bewared

All the tresor his fader spared

A seth to god for to make.   (CoB 211-224)

Compared to *Sir Amadace*'s account of the merchant's funeral, the son's commemoration emphasises acts of charity and prayer rather than focusing on the funeral as a social occasion. That the Childe funds road- and bridge-building reflects a type of charity based more on the general common good than the schema of the Seven Works of Mercy. Another Bristol merchant, Geoffrey Barbour (d. 1417), gave 1000 marks to construct a bridge at Abingdon, and his generosity was so well-remembered that it was recorded in a 1458 poem on the bridge's construction by Richard Formande, which bids all travellers across the bridge to pray 'for the Barbor, ientil Ieffray, That clothed many a pore man'.[58] Badham notes that this type of bequest was most common

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[58] This poem appears to have been written for the Holy Cross guild at Abingdon, making it an example of institutional commemoration by guilds of specific benefactors. It survives on a table which still hangs in Christ's Hospital of Abingdon, a successor to the guild. Ralph Hanna, '*The Bridges of Abingdon*: An

among tradesmen, who like merchants 'saw the greatest need for such works, because they travelled a lot and thus benefitted from them in a practical sense as well as spiritually'.[59] Within the fortnight, 'his gold was gon all and some' (CoB 226) and 'al thynges that wer meuable' (CoB 228) have been dispersed to the poor - the son having effectively executed the will by using the estate as he saw fit, though not in the manner his father had expected. This commemorative spending represents a sort of pious rebellion against his father's wishes, using his position as executor to give, rather than take, from others.

Given the exemplary nature of the son's commemorative efforts, it has strikingly little effect. When the father's ghost appears, he is 'brennynge as glede' (COB 244), led by a devil with a 'brennyng cheyne' (COB 146), his son's commemoration having failed to expiate the father's numerous sins. As expected, the father now understands his foolishness and sinfulness, admitting his 'falshed' (CoB 157), and anticipates a century of punishment for his misdeeds:

> "Mi good was getyn wrongfully;
>
> But it myght restord be,
>
> And a seth be made therefore;
>
> An C yer thus shal y do,
>
> Gef me my trouthe I wer ago,
>
> For till than my soule is lore." (CoB 159-164)

Unnoticed Alliterative Poem' in *Yee? Baw For Bokes: Essays on Medieval Manuscripts and Poetics: In Honor of Hoyt N. Duggan* (Los Angeles: Marymount Institute Press, 2013), pp. 31-44 (ll. 88-9).
[59] Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, p. 56.

The father's ghost appears to have given up any further hope of his punishment being ameliorated by further prayers. The ghost in *Merchant* fares even worse, as he apparently believes that he will be certainly damned at doomsday and thus that any commemoration is pointless, telling William 'at the day of jugement y schall have doubull peyne,/And cast into the pytt of hell' (TMahS 26).[60] William nonetheless commemorates his father by 'hyr[yng] bothe preste and frere' (TMahS 28) to sing masses and 'delyd and dydd grete almesdede' (TMaHS 28), and when the ghost reappears he is no longer aflame, appearing 'all in derkenes…black as any pyche…' (TMaHS 28). William seems shocked at the lack of progress, asking "be ye not amendyd ȝyt?/To see yow come in thys degre nere-hande y lese my wytt" (TMaHS 28). The apparent ineffectiveness of Childe-William's commemoration highlights an anxiety peculiar to these texts: the fear that the purchase of prayers may be critically undermined if the money used in the transaction is ill-gotten.

Such concerns, which tease out the actual monetary transaction that underlies commemorative activity, are seldom seen in narratives intended for an aristocratic audience. In *Awntyrs* Gaynour sees no contradiction in paying for her mother's prayers with wealth accumulated by her husband's regime, despite her mother fulminating against Arthur's avarice and oppressiveness. In *Childe* and *Merchant*, the ssinfulness of Childe-William's father cannot be resolved through the purchase of prayers but only through an act of 'exemplary restitution' that Ladd identifies as 'the real heart of the

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[60] Purgatory narratives vary on whether souls in purgatory know that they are not damned: see for example the lawyer in *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* being punished for sodomy, who laments the uncertainty of his fate (ll. 1407-1410) while others, like the goldsmith, are certain of their eventual salvation.

poems' normalization of merchandise'.[61] A perspective which is not morally embarrassed by an association with trade is thus reflected in a willingness to consider the monetary transaction inherent in the late medieval spiritual economy as bearing spiritual dimensions worthy of consideration..

The remainder of the poems focus on finding a solution to this problem, as Childe-William attempts to relieve his father's purgatorial suffering not through commemorative prayer, but by making restitution to those whom his father had wronged. *Childe*, in particular, emphasises this by means of a tripartite scheme of payments: first Child commissions commemorative prayer and charity work sourced from his father's estate; secondly he makes personal restitution of wrongs done to individuals by selling his father's land (which was not covered in the will but transferred directly to the son); and thirdly he pays his father's neglected church tithes with money acquired by selling himself to his merchant master as a bondslave. Anxieties over restitution are common in the testamentary evidence. Many wills contain payments intended to make restitution for wrongs committed against others, either direct payments to individuals, payments to organisations (as in the case of Nicholas Talbot, d.1501, who made numerous bequests 'towards the charge of the taxe' in various towns and villages over trespassing with his cattle), or by adding the souls of those they had wronged to the list of prayers they requested. Such anxieties could be very generalised, particularly where misconduct was professionally habitual. Thomas Tremayll's 1508 will, for example, asks the executors to pay at least 5 marks 'to the most needy poor' to make amends for professional misconduct 'wherefor I am bound to make satisfaction but am uncertain to whom it

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ought to be made'.[62] They could likewise be highly specific: while John Baret (d.1467)

requests a year of masses for those 'personys, man, woman, or child generally that

ever I medlyd with', he appears peculiarly fixated on making commemorative restitution

to Edmund Tabour (d.1447), from whose estate he apparently misappropriated silver

while acting as executor and whom he mentions six times.[63] One particularly extreme

example, the 1438 codicil to the will of Richard Edy, arranges restitution after 'sore

ransakyng of my consciens' of a huge variety of money and goods that he stole,

cheated, diverted from wills, or withheld payment for from their rightful owners (mostly

his friends and family) to a degree comparable to Childe-William's father. Despite

invoking the language of conscience throughout it is hard to view this restitution as

sincere, since Edy specifies that he is doing so to spite his wife Margaret, whom he calls

'nowgthe lovynge to me', by reducing the goods she stands to inherit, and also notes

that if he survives another four years the codicil will be invalidated.[64] Taken as a whole

the corpus of late medieval English wills shows ample evidence of anxieties and

expectations over the use of wills to enact restitution for wrongdoing.

It is a further mark against Childe-William's father that in framing his will he 'wolde… no

man restore for no crafte that myght byn' (TMahS 25); just the course that habitual

swindler Richard Edy would have taken had he not fallen out with his wife. Even in

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[62] *Somerset Medieval Wills, Second Series (1501-1530)*, pp. 117.

[63] *Wills and Inventories from the Registers of the Commissary of Bury St. Edmunds and the Archdeacon of Sudbury,* ed. by Samuel Tymms (London: Printed for the Camden Society, 1850), pp. 38, 41. A full account of the evidence regarding Baret's misappropriation of Tabour's silver, and its possible influence on the design of Baret's personal monument, is given in Michael Rimmer, 'Silver and Guilt: The Cadaver Tomb of John Baret of Bury St. Edmunds', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 172.1 (2019), pp. 131-154.

[64] Henry Harrod, 'Extracts from Early Wills in the Norwich Registries', *Norfolk Archaeology 4* (1849), pp. 329-331.

purgatory, it is unclear if the father understands the value of restitution. Although he claims 'Mi good was getyn wrongfully;/but it might restord be,/And a seth be made ther fore' (259-61) he does not appears not to expect his son to do this and expects the 'seth' to come through purgatorial punishment. Childe-William rejects his father's resignation to his fate, responding 'Nay fader, that shal not be' (CoB 265) before he departs to 'labore… to bring your soule in better way' (CoB 271-2). In *Childe*'s more specific account of his attempts at restitution, he prioritises the direct restitution of stolen money over the commission of prayers for the wronged:

> His sone lete crie al aboute
>
> In churches and markettes, w*ith* oute doute
>
> Where his fader dud wone;
>
> Where his fader dud destriccion
>
> To man or woman in any toun
>
> They shuld come to his sone.
>
> And he shal make a seth ther fore,
>
> And his good ayen restore
>
> Eche man his porcion
>
> Ever as they come, he made her pay,
>
> And charged hem for his fader pray
>
> In blisse that he might wone. (CoB, 325-336)

Making the announcement through 'churches and markettes' highlights the intertwining of the spiritual and professional aspects of the father's sins, while presenting the son's mercantile efficiency and comfort in both venues as spiritually worthy. The restitution,

however, remains only partly effective, as the father appears blackened but, as in *Merchant,* no longer chained or aflame. The father makes abundantly clear that the cause is his hatred of paying tithes:

> "Tethynges and offrynges, sone, [he sayd],
>
> For y them neuer truly payd
>
> Wherfor my peynes may not cesse:
>
> But it be restored again
>
> To as many churches in certain,
>
> And also Mykel encresse,
>
> All that for me thu dos pray,
>
> Helpeth me not, to the uttermost day,
>
> The value of a pese."   (CoB 601-612)

The suggestion that a particular sin (non-payment of tithes) might nullify the effectiveness of intercessory prayer is peculiar within the tradition of purgatorial ghost narratives, which as we have seen tend to stress the power of prayer to aid souls regardless of their personal sins, even (as in the A-*Trental*) when they have rejected confession. The father's predicament appears to be a purgatorial extension of the practice of excommunicating those who fail to pay tithes. Several other stories, involving revenants rather than ghosts, attest to a connection between tithe disputes and post-mortem punishment. Both Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* (1181-92) and John Lydgate's *St. Austin at Compton* feature revenants who are being punished for

withholding tithes.[65] In the testamentary record, payments to churches for missed tithes are so common as to be a standard clause, although the language used tends to present these tithes as 'forgotten' rather than withheld. A characteristic example would be the will of the London vintner John Toker (d. 1428), which after bequeathing his soul to God and his body to St. Mildred's Church, London, bequeathes 'to the hygh auter of the same Chirche for my tythes and offrynges forgȝeten and withdrauien, xl s'.[66] There is no such ambiguity in *Childe* or *Merchant*. The father's avarice and, in *Merchant*, his hatred of the clergy, make it clear that he simply 'lovyd never to paye [his] tythe, nor any offryng in Holy Churche' (TMahS, 29). The tithe dispute is another marker of the father's avaricious nature, and Childe-William repaying the tithes finally reincorporates his father's soul into the Christian community. The repayment follows the earlier pattern, once again exhausting Childe-William's money; he then demonstrates his humility by giving a late-coming poor claimant his clothes and shoes, going home 'in his sherte and breche allon' (CoB 491). This done, his father returns, like Gregory's mother, amidst heavenly light and announces his deliverance from Purgatory.

What can be easily overlooked, in this sequence of restitutions and repayments, is that Childe-William has by this point entirely abandoned the logic of strictly completing his duties as executor and is no longer operating under his father's 'charge'. Where *Sir Amadace*'s climax evinces the fear of social bonds collapsing into contractual transactions where monetary exchange is involved, *Childe* and *Merchant* chart Childe-

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[65] Walter Map, *De nugis curialium,* ed. by M.R. James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 101-2; John Lydgate, '*Saint Austin at Compton*' in *Saints' Lives in Middle English Collections* ed. by E. Gordon Whatley, Anne B. Thompson, and Robert K. Upchurch (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004). The editors of *Saint Austin* suggest that the Latin *Narratio* upon which *St. Austin at Compton* is based may have used the episode from Map as a source.
[66] *The Fifty Earliest English Wills*, ed. by Furnivall, p. 77.

William gradually transcending the contractual basis of his filial obligations. This is demonstrated firstly by the changing source of his funds from his father's movables to the sale of his father's land, to finally selling himself as a servant. Each action moves him further from the terms of the will he was charged to execute. Childe-William's fiscal sacrifice is a climactic demonstration of his virtue, but also proves that, as the father admits, "All my gode hyt was to lytyll to make amendys for mee." (TMahS 28). Indeed, the father notes that this act, untainted as it was by any connection to the father's criminality, was drastically more effective than any earlier restitution:

> "Sone all the gode thou dalte for me, hyt vaylyd me nevyr a dele;
>
> For all that was falsely getyn, and that fonde y full wele:
>
> Tyll that thou thy selfe solde, y was nevyr lowsyd of peyne,
>
> For a ferthyng of that dydd me more gode then dyd all myne certeyne…
>
> […]
>
> For thou hade no more gode but thy body, hyt was a gracious sale!"
>
> (TMahS 34)

The unnerving parallel set up between the growth of Childe-William and the growth of his tainted inheritance pays off thematically at this point. Despite his monomaniacal obsession with accumulating wealth for his son, the father has only now come to realise his son's value and divorced it from monetary accumulation. The father's soul cannot be released purely through monetary restitution, since money acquired sinfully cannot pay off the spiritual debt which it incurs. Instead, it must be supplemented by his son's self-sacrificing generosity. It is thus critically important that this generosity is free, and not obligated by the father's charge of duty onto the son. Indeed, in *Childe* the father twice

asks his son to dissolve their obligations to one another, asking on his first ghostly

visitation that his son '"gef me my trouthe I wer ago" (CoB 263), and then on his second

visitation to "gef me my trouthe y left with the/And let me wynde my way" (CoB 373-4) –

both of which the son proactively refuses. It is worth noting that in both these

exchanges the word 'charge', with its implication of burden, is exchanged for the more

positive 'trouthe', signifying the positive shift in their paternal relationship. This logic of

generosity rather than strict restitution is expanded on in *Merchant* when the final poor

claimant accepts William's clothes:

> "Y am sory," seyde Wyllyam, "that y have noght to paye,
>
> But yf ye wyll have my clothing ye schall have hyt today;
>
> But my clothys are not worthe, that y am sory therefore;
>
> The remnaunt y pray yow to forgyf for now and evyrmore."
>
> […]
>
> "God he thanke yow," seyde Wyllyam, "for youre gode herty chere." (TMahS 33)

The father's debt is unpayable without both his son's sacrifice and the forgiveness and

generosity of his victims: a generosity William recognizes and gives thanks for in the

poor claimant who takes his clothes. The mercantile virtue which Childe-William

exemplifies is not the strict fulfilment of restitution and obligation, but the greater

spiritual virtue of freely given generosity.

The capacity of mercantile virtue to exist within a framework of contract and monetary

exchange is manifested in the relationship of Childe-William with his merchant master, a

'juste trew man' (CoB 68) who in many ways provides an alternative quasi-paternal

figure. As Ladd notes, the manuscript title *The Merchant and his Son* testifies to the confusion between these two father figures, and suggests the scribe 'wanted to stress the filial relationship between the Bristol merchant who was a better role model to him than his actual father.'[67] The master's role as surrogate father is suggested by the poem's structure, which juxtaposes each encounter with the father's ghost with a subsequent encounter with the master. The contrasting emotional valences of Childe-William's relationship with his father and with his master are displayed when he sells his lands to the master:

> His mayster loued hym so wele
>
> He sette hym golde euery dele;
>
> Than was þe child ful fayn:
>
> He toke his good, and gan to go;
>
> And for his fader his hert was woo,
>
> That bode in so Mykel payn.   (CoB 319-324)

The stanza contrasts the joy that the master's love and generosity produces in Childe-William with the woe and heaviness his father's misdeeds and suffering cause him. This relationship is presented as unambiguously positively even though, up to the poems' conclusions, the interactions between Childe-William and the master are almost solely monetary. The master accepts Childe-William's seven-year apprenticeship 'cownant' in exchange for which the boy's father 'gaf hym gold gret plente/the child his prentys shuld be' (CoB 74-7), a level of expense which Hanawalt notes would have been standard

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[67] Ladd, *Antimercantilism*, p. 125.

from the late fourteenth-century.[68] The master then disappears from the narrative until the point at which Childe-William needs to sell his land. Although these exchanges are sales rather than gifts, the master deals generously with Childe-William. He first offers a favourable loan to stop Childe-William selling his land, apparently believing he has suffered a business setback while trading on his own account, and emphasises that the loan should not prove burdensome, saying 'An C mark… this vij. yer y wil neuer crave' (CoB 295-6). Then, when Childe-William insists on selling, the master first attempts to dissuade him (outright refusing in *Merchant*) and then pays more than the asking price, each time substituting pounds for marks in what Ladd notes is a 'peculiarly mercantile form of largesse' which 'relies on some knowledge of accounting on the reader's part'.[69] In *Childe* the master repeats this overpayment when Childe-William sells him his service (CoB 418-424), telling him "sone, her is more than thyn askyng" (CoB 425). Since Childe-William exhausts his funds after each of these exchanges, the mercantile generosity in purchasing which the master models becomes an integral part of the restitution Childe-William offers for his father's crimes.

The codification of a mercantile model of generosity also allows for a model of virtuous behaviour compatible with a concern for financial good sense, wherein moral virtue and mercantile skill can be presented as complementary. In *Sir Amadace* the figures (chiefly the merchant's widow and Amadace's steward) who advocate financial 'skill' and thrift are benignly ignored, since their concerns are incompatible with the poem's valorisation of largesse as spiritual generosity. *Childe* and *Merchant* resolve this incompatibility by

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[68] Hanawalt, *Of Good and Ill Repute,* 182.
[69] Ladd, *Antimercantilism,* 123.

exempting generosity from the charge of financial incompetence. When the master

expresses exasperated shock at Childe-William's second request for money, he berates

his apprentice as a 'fole' (CoB 397) with 'governaunce... bad' (CoB 404), and telling him

'Hyt were almes... on galowes the to honge/Thou wylt nevyr thryve' (TMahS 30), but

this is simply dramatic irony, as the master believes he has lost the money gambling

(CoB 400, TMahS 30). Upon hearing of Childe-William's true use of the money at the

poems' conclusions, the master immediately blesses, praises, and rewards him. These

rewards amount to the formal transition of the relationship between the two men from

one of apprenticeship to one of family. The master releases him from the

apprenticeship, makes him 'myn owne fellow in al wise/of worldly good and

merchandise' (538-9), gives him the lands he had purchased, and makes him his heir:

> "Al so, sone, y haue no childe
>
> Myn heritage for to wilde,
>
> Goten of my body;
>
> Here y make the now myn heyr
>
> Of alle my lands good and faire,
>
> And myn attorney that þu be."　　　　　(CoB 541-6)

Of the numerous times that the master refers to Childe-William as 'sone' this is by far

the most resonant, as Childe-William is adopted as heir and executor in a poem that

has essentially equated these functions with filial status. *Merchant* makes this

comparison explicit, since it recounts William's ultimate fulfilment of the master's will,

rather redundantly telling us he 'was a trewe executor' (TMahS 36):

He savydd hys fadurs soule and broght hyt unto blys,

Hys maystyrs soule also, wyth hys trewe marchandys! (TMahS 36)

This change has the additional effect of ensuring the return of the father's lands to Childe-William (in *Merchant* the lands are returned immediately), so that he ultimately retains part of his patrimony. Ladd notes how the sale of the lands to the master in the first place valorises merchantry by stressing 'the dangers of ill-gotten gains to the soul of the owner or inheritor, but not for the purchaser' in what he calls 'divine money-laundering' that 'adequately cleans the taint of finance from the land itself'.[70] What is also noteworthy is the difference between patrilineal inheritance, tainted in this case by sin, and 'clean' inheritance operating through the social network of the merchant community, which is earned by a demonstration of worthiness rather than bloodline. If Childe-William were the vilest, most sinful individual imaginable he should still have inherited the lands from his father, but only by his exemplary conduct is he able to inherit them from his master. This focus on non-kinship inheritance also reflects the importance of commemoration within mercantile guilds, whose ordinances frequently included stipulations regarding the burial of their members. The Merchant Guild of Coventry, for example, stipulated that when a member died the guild chaplains were to 'chaunt for his souls, by his name… for a whole year next following', and that members buried outside the city should receive a proxy funeral – with 'watch, *dirige*, mass, and oblations as if the body were present', and that members too poor to pay for their own burial should be buried at the guild's expense.[71] Childe-William's exemplary

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[70] Ladd, *Antimercantilism*, p. 124.
[71] Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds: The Original ordinances of more than one hundred early English gilds*, Early English Text Society, Original Series 40 (London: Trübner, 1870), pp. 230-1.

commemorative work on his father's behalf demonstrates his trustworthiness within the communal commemorative framework of the guild as well as personally executing the master's will.

The arrangement also reflects the aforementioned fragility of hereditary lineages in mercantile communities in the childless master of *Childe* but validates instead the capacity of a mercantile 'family' to extend outside of bloodline. In both poems the master establishes further family connections for Childe-William by arranging his marriage: in *Merchant* to his own 'doghtyr feyre', and in *Childe* to 'a worthy manis doghter of þat contre/with ioye and grete solace' (CoB 547-8). The result is similar to *Sir Amadace*: the protagonist is rewarded with marriage and the prospect of establishing a family on the basis of his capacity to truly fulfil his 'trouthe' in a narrow and contractual sense and of his productive engagement in a friendship centred around money. The differing social perspectives of the two texts are apparent in the role of the protagonist's friend once the central crises of the narratives have been positively resolved. Unable to resolve the anxiety attendant on a knight interacting with a merchant in this fashion, *Sir Amadace* allows the merchant's ghost to elegantly evaporate leaving the aristocratic marital couple as the sole remaining interpersonal framework – 'he glode away as dew in towne/And that abode ther stille' (823-4). Such an anxiety is absent in harmoniously mercantile relationship between master and former apprentice in *Childe* and *Merchant*, and as a result the merchant master not only lives a long life, but positively supplants Childe-William's wicked father in the familial framework, as the ghost of Childe-William's redeemed father fades from view.

Sir Amadace, The Childe of Bristow, and *The Merchant and his Son* all seize on pre-existing ghostly narrative traditions (the Grateful Dead in one, the *Trental* tradition in the others) in order to question where bonds based on monetary and professional connections fit within the emotional and commemorative frameworks of medieval social relationships. While the concerns that animate these texts are similar – regarding the social and spiritual weight of contracts, monetary exchange, merchandise, and non-kinship relations – the distance between the gentry audience of *Sir Amadace* and the mercantile audience of *Childe* and *Merchant* result in texts with highly divergent perspectives. Unable to frame a worldview in which gentry contact with the money economy can be fully endorsed or fully rejected, *Sir Amadace* remains riven by anxieties. The first half of the poem expresses authentic and topical concerns with debt, spending, and fiscal distress among the gentry, while the second half attempts to distance itself from these concerns by overlaying romance imagery of sworn bonds, shipwrecked treasure and fairy knights onto its monetary exchanges. *Childe* and *Merchant* are more self-assured, and present professional relationships and monetary exchanges as spiritually valid, contrasting an idealised apprentice-master relationship with a corrupted paternal relationship exemplifies the spiritual dangers typically associated with merchantry as a profession. Taken together, the three texts testify to changes in the state of the gentry, merchantry, and their economic and commemorative networks in the fifteenth century, and the effect that these changes had in widening the types of relationships which narratives of moral entertainment sought to invest with meaning.

Chapter Four - Spectral Brothers and Spiritual Sisters: Relationships among the religious in *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* and *The Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman*

In the previous chapters, we have seen the motif of the purgatorial ghost in stories focusing on secular ties - parenthood, marriage, apprenticeship, chivalric sworn brotherhood. While the religious appear as learned interpreters of spirits in narratives like *The Gast of Gy*, they are outsiders to the relationships which underpin and motivate the return of the dead from purgatory. The current chapter examines two fifteenth-century otherworld visions, *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* and *A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman*, where monks and anchoresses encounter the spirits of their fellow professed religious. Both are visionary prose texts of the 'otherworld vision' genre identified by Robert Easting, where a visionary recounts their experience of the afterlife after a period of sleep, rapture, or coma. This genre, which was well-established in Latin by the fifteenth-century and was principally derived from the extreme popularity of the Latin *Visio Pauli*, typically featured monastic protagonists.[1] While the otherworld vision genre predated the doctrine of purgatory, both *Eynsham* and *Purgatory* utilize the genre to discuss purgatory and commemorative concerns closely aligned with the English ghost narrative tradition (indeed, *Purgatory* appears to have been directly influenced by that tradition). *Eynsham* and *Purgatory* engage with

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[1] Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Woodbridge: DS Brewer, 1997), pp. 8-10.

the same concerns and tropes as the lay-focused tales of ghostly visitations but evince a distinctly religious viewpoint that seeks to diminish the spiritual role of the kinship bonds in favour of spiritual friendship and charity towards the souls of the dead. Such relationships are predicated not on subjective sympathy and personal affection, but upon adherence to a broader model of spiritual charity where commemorative charity towards the dead is a spiritual obligation. As a result, the distribution of such texts among lay audiences in the fifteenth century forms an ideological rejoinder to kinship-focused ghost narratives. These vernacular texts work to refocus their audiences' attention on the underlying Christian obligation of charity towards the dead over narrow conceptions of commemoration focused upon the family, while also promoting the efficacy of the religious as commemorative intercessors.

In keeping with this religious perspective on commemoration, *Eynsham* and *Purgatory* are, compared to lay-focused texts, less direct in their discussion of the actual social bonds between spirits and visionaries, to the extent that it is frequently unclear how the visionary knows the spirits whom they encounter. *Eynsham* occasionally furnishes information about these relationships, but places greater emphasis on the spirits' relationship among the living, and often says little beyond acknowledging that the visionary knew the spirit. *Purgatory*, is even more restrained, providing essentially no information about the relationship between the anchoritic visionary and the ghostly nun Margaret who serves as the principal focus of the vision. This is not to say that such relationships are unimportant to the narrative, but their importance is legible principally through their role in structuring the text. In *Eynsham*, the narrative is almost entirely composed of encounters between the visionary Edmund and individuals known to him,

such encounters forming the text's foundational structure. In *Purgatory*, the generic framework of the otherworld vision is self-admittedly distorted to focus on the relationship between the visionary and the ghostly nun Margaret, thereby aligning the text with *The Trental of Gregory* as a haunting driven by a relationship held in life.

The relationships between spirit and visionary in these two texts are predicated on joint membership of a monastic community (identified as a form of siblinghood) or looser relationships that could be described variously as friendship or acquaintance. Personal friendship among the religious, and identification with a monastic community, was treated variously within religious communities and by religious writers, and the two texts under consideration in this chapter are no exception. As Julian P. Haseldine puts it, 'The defining paradox of medieval monasticism is its apparent embodiment of precisely those human involvements which the convert to religious life undertook to renounce: personal affections, family, and ties to the world.'[2] Albrecht Classen, surveying medieval religious writers on the subject of friendship, finds a contrast between the positive attitudes of, for example, twelfth-century abbot Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Spirituali Amicitia,* which sought to recast classical discourse on friendship inherited from Cicero to present friendship as 'a springboard for man to find God' and 'the worldly manifestation of spirituality', and more sceptical, negative views of friendship expounded in texts influenced by *devotio moderna*, such as Thomas à Kempis' 1418 *De Imitatio Christi*, which 'both idealises friendship as a preliminary approach to God and... rejects it as an unreliable,

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[2] Julian P. Haseldine, 'Friendship, Family and Community' in *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Monasticism* (Oxford; University of Oxford Press, 2020), pp. 387-402 (p. 387).

untrustworthy concept in the face of human frailties.'[3] Coenobitic monasticism, however, inherently involves social relationships within the cloister, and on a practical level these relationships were sometimes defined as friendships. The Middle English instructions for the profession for Benedictine nuns found in the early fifteenth-century, MS Cotton Vespasian A. 25 refers to the community (represented ritually by the choir) as the novice's 'next frendes' and uses the same term to describe them when they lead the novice back to the altar before returning her to the Prioress.[4]

Both *Eynsham* and *Purgatory* replicate this ambiguous stance towards worldly relationships in religious life, in part by the aforementioned reduction in focus but also by a greater emphasis on regulating such relationships. Both texts are sharply critical of how personal relationships could foment and spread misconduct through the religious community. In particular, breaches of chastity, unjust favouritism in monastic office, misappropriation of funds, and negligence in chastising the conduct of other religious are all represented as 'transmissible' through poorly regulated relationships between the religious.

In this sense, both texts - *Purgatory* written in 1422 and *Eynsham* apparently newly translated from Latin in 1483 - can be seen as responding to a growing appetite among fifteenth-century readers for monastic materials in the vernacular that both spoke to commemorative concerns and demonstrated the need for spiritual discipline by

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[3] Albrecht Classen, 'Introduction' in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. by Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), pp. 1-182 (pp. 37, 70).
[4] *Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet and Two Contemporary Rituals for the Ordination of Nuns,* ed. by Ernst A Kock (London: Paul, Trench and Trübner for the Early English Text Society, 1902), pp. 145-150 (p. 145).

revealing how selfish and uncharitable behaviour, based on personal desires, favour, and reputation undermine commemoration and present spiritual danger.

Just as *The Trental of Gregory* and *The Gast of Gy* developed in a religious environment where the English church sought to assert orthodox positions, in the vernacular, in response to intellectual challenges to purgatorial doctrine from radical and heterodox thought, Middle English monastic purgatory visions can be seen as a response to the fifteenth-century political situation of the English church. *Purgatory* in particular has been connected by Mary C. Erler to Henry V's campaign of orthodox reform, intended to re-establish the English church's standing after it had been undermined by the Lollard controversy, due to the author and principal characters' connections to Henry's uncle Richard Beaufort, the Bishop of Winchester.[5] Jeremy Catto describes Henry V's reign as marked by 'a confident, coherent religious leadership… consistent in the forms of public cult it wished to impose and systematic in its attempt to control opinion and establish a measure of orthodoxy.'[6] Vincent Gillespie has similarly charted changes in the English church under Henry V and Archbishop Henry Chichele, catalysed through England's participation in the 1414-1418 ecumenical Council of Constanz.[7] This shift produced an English church 'passionately interested in orthodox reform, and in the exploitation of the vernacular as a medium of orthodox but still imaginative and inventive texts suitable for the growing lay audience for vernacular

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[5] Mary C. Erler, '"A Revelation of Purgatory" (1422): Reform and the Politics of Female Visions', *Viator* 38.1 (2007).

[6] Jeremy Catto, 'Religious Change Under Henry V' in *Henry V: The Practice of Kingship*, ed. G. L. Harriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 97-116 (p. 98).

[7] Vincent Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church' in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in England in the Fifteenth Century,* ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 3-42, passim.

books of religion.'[8] Purgatory visions, which bolstered doctrine that had come under attack from Lollards and affirmed the power of religious commemoration seem a clear-cut example of such 'orthodox but imaginative' texts. Henry V was particularly keen to reinvigorate the English monastic landscape, especially through his foundation of the Brigittine dual monastery at Syon Abbey and the Carthusian Charterhouse of Jesus of Bethlehem (along with an intended but never completed Celestine foundation), orders that as Gillespie notes provided a 'fresh start' for the English church, as neither were 'tainted by the in-fighting, self-preservation, and name-calling' with which other orders had responded to the Wycliffite controversy.[9]

The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham, translated in 1483, cannot be so neatly connected to a specific reformist campaign. However, its Latin source, the *Visio Monachi de Eynsham*, composed in 1196-7 by Adam of Eynsham and recounting the visionary experience of his brother Edmund had already enjoyed wide distribution, and its interest in addressing monastic misconduct may have rendered it amenable for vernacularisation in a late-fifteenth-century orthodox environment. Erler has suggested that late-fifteenth-century Syon monks like Thomas Betson and Richard Whitford were influenced in their writing, and their use of printing, by the continental monastic Observant Reform movement, and it seems probable that the translation of the *Visio Monachi* into the English *Eynsham* was part of the mission to vernacularise reformist monastic texts.[10]

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[8] Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church', pp. 41-2.
[9] Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church', pp. 5-6.
[10] Mary C. Erler, 'Syon at 1500: Observant Reform?', *Viator* 51.1 (2020), pp. 407-435, passim.

Eynsham's translation and *Purgatory*'s apparent circulation through to the end of the fifteenth century accord with the increasing prevalence of writing about monasticism in the vernacular and in print. Nicole Rice charted how through the fourteenth and fifteenth century writers increasingly 'translated monastic models of regulation, stability and enclosure' for a lay readership in response to an absence of adequate guidance for the pious laity.[11] Religious otherworld visions like *Eynsham* and *Purgatory* no doubt fulfilled a similar function, providing the pious laity with a model of commemoration just as the authors of spiritual guides drew on monastic models of contemplation and discipline. These texts articulate a religious view of commemoration for an audience of religious and lay readers: a view which emphasises the spiritual obligation between Christians rather than specific bonds of kinship and the necessity of regulating the relationships around which the late medieval commemorative apparatus functioned.

The monastic family in *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*

While the *Visio Monachi de Eynsham* depicts relationships within a twelfth-century monastic milieu, its translation in print as *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* in 1483, demonstrates that the text was considered relevant to the concerns of the fifteenth-century urban laity. An appreciation of this incipient lay audience appears to have motivated the translator to interpolate various passages explaining monastic terminology with which non-religious would be unfamiliar.[12] *Eynsham* recounts numerous encounters between Edmund and the spirits of monks, nuns, priests and

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[11] Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 17.

[12] For a discussion of the transmission history of *Eynsham* and the *Visio Monachi,* see pages 155-7 of this thesis; see also Easting, 'Introduction', *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham,* p. lxvii.

laypeople known to him in life. The vision is structured according to these encounters, but the individual encounters also demonstrate the ambiguous spiritual value of social relationships, which can be either productive or inducements to sin. As a result, while *Eynsham* mirrors other texts under discussion in this thesis in presenting purgatory as a space in which human relationships are invested with spiritual meaning, this is positive only when the relationship is adequately regulated and founded upon charity rather than kinship.

As Easting points out, the narrative scheme recapitulates a sequence of disclosures of information by the visionary (and other witnesses) to the writer. The plot can be summarised as follows:

> Edmund, a Benedictine monk of Eynsham Abbey, experiences a fifteenth-month serious illness, culminating when he is drawn by a voice to enter the chapterhouse, where he sees the crucifix bleeding, takes disciplines from two angels disguised as senior monks, and collapses early on the morning of Good Friday. He lies insensate for nearly two days, during which he experiences a vision in which he is led through Purgatory by St. Nicholas. He meets and either speaks with or observes many sinners (mostly religious), most of whom he knew in life, of which twenty-three are discussed.[13] He then enters the earthly paradise, meeting four further souls, before passing further in, where he sees Christ on the cross, then passes through a gate within a crystal wall, where he sees Christ

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[13] While no names are given in either *Eynsham* or the *Visio Monachi*, many of these individuals, mostly monastic officials and bishops, have been identified with varying degrees of certainty by critics. All identifications referred to are those endorsed by Robert Easting.

enthroned, and watches souls ascending to heaven. St. Nicholas tells him he must return to the living world, and he is woken by peal of bells. He recounts his vision to the other monks over the following days and months, the text ending with an affirmation of the miraculous nature of the illness as proof of the veracity of the vision.

In keeping with the visionary's enmeshment in the social network of Eynsham Abbey, twenty of the twenty-seven spirits he encounters are priests or religious. Edmund's encounters with these spirits mostly follow a strict pattern: he meets an individual, identifies their relationship to himself, observes their state and the severity of their pains, and learns what actions in life led to their present state. This knowledge is learned either by dialogue or via Edmund's miraculous understanding of 'what synnys they were ponysht [for] and the kynde of the synne, and the mesure and qualite of ther satisfaccion' (645-51) of anyone he sees in purgatory.[14] This sequence, of the introduction of a new spirit and an examination of their spiritual status, is the most regular structural unit within the visionary sections of *Eynsham*. The author of the *Visio* demonstrates a remarkable command of this structure, organising individual encounters to occur in sequences that draw attention to specific concerns or themes common to several encounters, sometimes consciously distorting the chronology of the narrative to do so. The translators of *Eynsham* reinforce the importance of this structure by dividing the text into chapters which map neatly onto individual encounters. This chapter structure, which appears to derive from a tradition of rubricated *tituli* seen in the MS

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[14] See mentioned in chapter 2, all references to this text are taken from *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*, ed. by Robert Easting (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 2002) and will be cited by line number in-text.

Selden 66 copy of the *Visio Monachi*, demonstrates that the texts' redactors and translators understood these encounters are key to the texts' structure.[15]

Structuring the vision around Edmund's encounters with people known to him in life effectively makes *Eynsham* a visionary journey through Edmund's social circle. This marks a departure from much of the Latin otherworld tradition that preceded the *Visio Monachi*, which as Kim Diane Gainer points out tended to focus on the topography of the otherworld and catalogues of punishments, towards a focus on the penitential progress of individuals.[16] Gainer identifies the *Visio*'s focus on the interiority and psychology of the penitent spirits as a response to the increasing prominence of confession in the twelfth century, but its structural innovations also prioritise interpersonal interactions.[17] *Eynsham* repeatedly emphasises Edmund's personal acquaintance with the spirits he meets as a major organising principle for the vision. The prologue, one of few substantial additions made in the process of translating the *Visio* into *Eynsham*, describes how Edmund 'sawe and knewe many person… the which he knewe welle before when he lyuyd in thys world, and spake with hem there mowthe to mowthe' (6-10). The generic statement that follows, that the 'reuelacion was not shewed to hym only for hym, butte also for the conforte and profettyng of all Cristyn

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[15] See Easting, 'Introduction', xxxii. From chapter xviii, where Edmund first describes an individual spirit (that of a sinful woman saved by Saint Margaret's intercession), to chapter liv, where Edmund passes beyond the gate of paradise and ceases to describe individual encounters, all the chapters follow this pattern and comprises a single encounter with a spirit, save for chapters comprising short descriptions of catalogues of sinners (chapters xxiv-v, xxxi, xxxvii-xl) or occasionally when a single lengthy encounter has been broken into multiple chapters, usually for the purpose of incorporating subsidiary narratives (as with the goldsmith, chapters xix-xxiii, or the abbess of Godstow, chapters xliv-xlv).

[16] Kim Diane Gainer, 'Prolegomenon to *Piers Plowman*: Medieval Latin Visions of the Otherworld', PhD Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1987, pp. 30-32.

[17] Gainer, pp. 177-80. Not all the individuals Edmund meets are known to him: he also describes encounters with six bishops, King Henry II, and a sinful woman, none of whom he avows any knowledge of, as well as a monk who died before he joined the monastery and whom he never met, discussed below.

pepulle' (12-13), reads as an attempt to mitigate the text's focus on the visionary's relationships by emphasising its broader relevance to a lay audience reading in the vernacular. However, St. Nicholas, in his role as Edmund's guide, explicitly affirms and authorises personal acquaintance as a structural principle within the vision when Edmund encounters the goldsmith: .

> Trewly, thanne my leder [St. Nicholas] lokyd on me, howe stidfastly Y behylde hym, and askyd me and Y knew hym. And Y seyde, "Ful wele."
>
> Than he seyde, "And þow knowe hym, speke to hym." (972-974)

St. Nicholas's affirmation here prioritises Edmund's temporal relationships. This amounts to an acknowledgement of the spiritual validity of these relationships: St. Nicholas affirms that Edmund's (unstated) concern for those known to him is spiritually licit. Indeed, on one occasion the vision expands Edmund's social circle by allowing a spirit to make introductions between Edmund and another spirit. This occurs when Edmund encounters a devout prior whom he knows in paradise (chapter 52), who introduces him to a 'certen yonge monke there of his' (2680). Edmund notes that 'Trewly, Y neuer saw hym in body' (2687) because he died before Edmund's time. This postmortem introduction testifies that *Eynsham* credits the relationship between the prior and the young monk with enough spiritual value for the association to be worth inclusion within the vision even though Edmund knows only one of the pair.

More generally, Edmund's temporal relationships provide a means to winnow out the 'infenyte nombre of men and women' (635-6) whose sins he learns of, "a company innumerabulle of men and women of euery condicion, of euery profession, and of euery

ordyr' (637-9), into form that can be conveyed in writing. This is particularly apparent in the section of *Eynsham* devoted to Edmund's experience of paradise. This is partitioned into an initial section (chapters 49- 53) which takes place in a 'fylde… full of all maner of feyre and plesaunte flowers' (2545-7) and comprises encounters with four spirits, and a section in which Edmund 'wente forthe farthir in-to the same place' (2740-1), where he speaks to no spirits save his guide St. Nicholas. Instead, in this second section Edmund witnesses two major spectacles - of Christ on the cross and enthroned in majesty - alongside an undifferentiated mass of other spectators. The souls in paradise shift from distinct individuals to 'infy[ni]te thousandys' (2745), a 'grete multytude of soulys' (2788), a 'iofyl company' (2843). The narrator asks 'Ho may now conceue in mynde how thoo holy soulys ranne their on euery syde gladly and lightly to see and behold þat blessed sight?' (2759-61). Here, the topos of inexpressibility that suffuses this section of the text, conventional in depictions of the wonders of heaven in otherworld narratives, applies not only to the subject of the spectacle (Christ) but to the unnumbered souls' actions as spectators. Such inexpressibility forecloses the possibility that the souls here might be individuated enough for Edmund to describe relationships with them. In this way, a dichotomy is developed not between purgatory and paradise but between purgatory and the 'outer' paradise on the one hand, where temporal relationships between individuals provide a vital structural role, and the 'inner' area of paradise where such relationships are supplanted entirely by the Church Triumphant's communal relationship with Christ.

The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham differs both from the *Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman*, and from the texts treated in previous chapters, in that commemorative activity is not the text's principal concern. While ghosts in the other

texts under consideration use spectral and visionary encounters to address their commemorative concerns, no spirits make such appeals to Edmund.[18] This is not to say that there is no concern for commemoration within the vision, but it is limited to specific episodes and spirits. In one such episode, Edmund encounters the spirit of Henry II, who is notably a great patron of the monasteries. The chapter departs in several ways from the norm which has been established for the visions' episodic encounters: Edmund has never met Henry, and rather than engage him in dialogue, instead watches him lamenting his condition to no-one in particular. Henry complains bitterly about the inconstancy of his sons who – like the sons of *Three Dead Kings* – have neglected to repay their worldly inheritance by rendering their father spiritual aid:

> "No-thing… my sonnys and frendys haue done for me in these peynys… Y haue done ydylly to make myne heiers riche and mighty… And now what haue they brought or done for me vnhappy… for home so gretly Y offendyd God while Y leuyd, and now Y am dedde non of hem doyth any-thing for me?"   (2134-2145)

Given *Eynsham's* narration tends towards vagueness in its description of individual torments, the unusual detail of Henry's punishments – he sits on a saddle of nails atop a hellish steed, wearing burning armour (2105-2126) – emphasises the suffering which Henry's children and friends have condemned him to through neglect, and thus the conventional folly of trusting commemoration to one's friends. This is then contrasted

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[18] The only spirit that directly attempts to amend his commemoration is the drunken goldsmith discussed in chapter two, but this is an exception that proves the rule: the goldsmith makes no comment on his commemoration to Edmund within the vision proper, but appears as a ghost to his wife instead, outside the main visionary narrative.

with the effective commemoration and prayers offered by the monks: Henry, though forgotten by family and friends, is 'sumwhat… releuyd of his peynys only by the prayers of religious men' (2146-7), and his generosity to the monasteries is 'specyally' the reason that Henry 'hopyd to be saved' (2148-9). The juxtaposition could not be clearer. The monastic community is inherently superior as a commemorative agent than one's friends or relatives.

This lesson foreshadows *The Gast of Gy*, where the Prior acts as a superior commemorative agent to Gy's widow. It is worth noting that Gy, too benefits from the prayers of his cousin, a friar whom he generously supported, which 'gudenes he forgets night…. Tharfor I sall be helped in haste' (Couplet, 988-990). Both this aside in *Gast* and the Henry II episode in *Eynsham* fit into the conventional model for asserting the superiority of monastic commemoration: one should give to monasteries in life rather than assume one's family and friends will remember you. In both cases, however, the emphasis is on the power of the religious as commemorative agents on behalf of laypeople.

This is borne out by the positive depiction of intra-monastic commemoration demonstrated in three consecutive encounters in chapters 43-45: an abbot who died ten years before the vision (probably Roger of Abingdon, d.1185), a young monk punished alongside him, and an abbess, possibly Agnes of Godstow. Roger and this unnamed monk are the only individuals who are punished together as a result of their relationship in life, and most particularly their commemorative relationship. We are told that Roger 'be-quethyd… to one of hys bretheren mekyl mony for to dele to the power folke for the helpe of his sowle' (2188-90) who 'wysyly and deuotely fulfylled the abottys wille and

gaue alle that money to t[h]e pore and nedy' in a scheme of commemorative almsgiving that is carefully elaborated:

> And where he knewe any þat were colde and hungry or smytte with sekenes, and were bore of honest folke and wele condicyonde and were fallyn to pouerte, whereby they had not to bye her leuyng, and to begge they wer aschamyd to seche, he wulde opyn hys hand [a]fter his power and releue hem with mete and drynke, schoys and clothes. Also to ancrys and to wedowys, to wolde folke and to power scholar, he gaue mekyl, commaunding hem al to praye deuoutely for the soule of him for whom that money was gyuen. (2192-2200)

This monk's exemplary execution of his abbot's bequest is not so far from the action of *The Childe of Bristowe*, albeit in a monastic context and with a far less sinful testator. The scheme inherits some elements from the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy, namely feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and caring for the sick, but more generally provides an index of numerous conventional recipients of commemorative almsgiving. The monk, in several respects, appears to be an aspirational figure for Edmund. Not only does he apparently resemble Edmund in being 'feruent with zele of ryghtwysnes' (2251-2) against misconduct, but he also suffered a lengthy, debilitating illness between completing the bequest and his death six years later. The monk is 'ful lyghtly peynde in comparyson' (2238-9) to his abbot, and the abbot 'bowde himselfe oftyn-tymes to the same monke, and thanked hym with bothe handys for the grete charyte that he scheweyd for hym in the distrybucyon and delaying of the forseyde money' (2239-2241). The model *Eynsham* presents for spiritually positive relationships is, again, one based upon the fulfilment of charitable obligation. It

is the monk's act of charity for his abbot that has brought them both relief and placed them together in purgatory, rather than any specific sentiment between them.

The abbess (probably Agnes of Godstow) exemplifies productive monastic social enmeshment even while in her purgatorial pains. She tells Edmund many things which he 'schulde telle to her naturale sisters, that were vnder de tytyl of virgynyte… yn the same monasterye' (2318-20) but to no-one else, thereby continuing her relationship with the abbey and her sisters after her death. She and Roger are among the few characters satisfied with their commemoration:

> Sche seyde also that sche hathe resceuyd mekyl releuyng and helpe of her
> peynys by the deuowte prayers and psalmys of her systers, the seruantis of God
> to whom she was a spiritual modere. And sche commawndyd me to thanke hem
> for mony good deys the whyche they haue done for her, and for the sofragys of
> messys and othyr holy prayers that they haue gotyn for her… And more-ouer
> they haue made and ordende to be offered to oure Lord daily without any cesyng
> for me messys and other deuowte prayers. And therefore lete h[e]m, know
> without doute that they schalle haue therefore ful grete mede and Y also haue
> scapyd ful scarpe peynys. And yf they persevere as they haue begunne, sone Y
> hope to scape the remnande of my peynys. (2323-2335)

This is perhaps the most unambiguously productive commemorative relationship seen anywhere in a Middle English ghost narrative, bucking the trend whereby spirits principally appear and comment upon instances of commemorative dysfunction. It is paralleled by Agnes' subsequent story of her own exemplary charity towards her

monastic sisters. She explains how she voluntarily acted as a caretaker for two nuns

with leprosy. While her systers 'lothyd alle-moste to see or vysyte hem or to toche hem'

(2348-9), Agnes thought it 'full swete to haue and opteyne hem yn my lappe or holde

hem in my harmys… to wesse hem in bathys, and also to wype her sores wyth my

sleues' (2349-52), and Agnes' 'pety and charyte' (2358) towards them has granted her

'a swyfte refreschyng and releuyng of helpe' (2360) in her purgatorial sufferings. The

kissing of lepers was seen as a major act of devotional charity - the mystic Margery

Kempe, for example, describes her 'gret desyre sche had for to kyssyn lazerys' and,

having been instructed by her confessor that she may only kiss female lepers, 'kyssyd…

two seke women with many an holy thowt and many a devout teer'.[19] The comparison

between Agnes' charity towards her leper sisters and her sisters' charity towards her in

purgatory is made more salient by the cadaverous imagery in the description of the

lepers, whose 'flesche was falle downe to the bonus' (2345-6). Agnes' testimony

synthesises charity towards the dead and charity towards the living, presenting charity

as an essential driving force of positive monastic community relationships, wherein

charity within the cloister forms a loop of positive self-reinforcement in which both donor

and recipient benefit spiritually. The exemplary nature of Agnes' leadership is such that

Edmund notes that the other nuns of Agnes' monastery whom he encounters were also

suffering light pains, her influence apparently having borne spiritual fruit in her

community. Taken together, the episodes of Agnes and Roger represent a discrete

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[19] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* ed. by Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), pp. 326-7.

narrative segment which associates productive commemorative activity with exemplary monastic conduct.

However, much of the attention paid to relationships between the religious in *Eynsham* focuses on the potential spiritual detriment that such relationships pose to both individuals and the monastic community. The potential for relationships between cloistered individuals to disrupt the monastic community is recognised by the Benedictine Rule, which requires that 'Care must be taken that no monk venture on any ground to defend another monk in the monastery, even though they be connected by some tie of friendship'.[20] The Middle English Northern Prose version of the rule specifies that no monk 'defende ne warne oþir… ne for sibredin [consanguinity] ne for na oþir aquaintance'.[21] The regulation of relationships in this fashion was one of numerous elements of surveillance established by the Rule and in subsequent monastic rules. Sylvia Tomasch cites the Rule as one of the most obvious examples of medieval surveillance, and Wojtek Jezierski notes that 'If surveillance was of some concern for St. Benedict, it became paramount for the monastic legislators who came after him' due to the increasing size of Benedictine monasteries in subsequent centuries.[22] Further, Nira Gradowicz-Pancer has argued that the regulation of behaviour within monasteries depended on a 'tri-dimensional' model of surveillance, where hierarchical 'vertical'

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[20] Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict,* ed. and trans. by Justin McCann (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976), p. 157.

[21] 'The Northern Prose Version of the Rule of St. Benet', in *Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet and Two Contemporary Rituals for the Ordination of Nuns,* ed. by Ernst A Kock (London: Paul, Trench and Trubner for the Early English Text Society, 1902), pp. 1-47 (p.45).

[22] Sylvia Tomasch, 'Surveillance/History' in *Secrecy and Surveillance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Annette Kern-Stahler and Nicole Nyffenegger (Tübinge: Narr Francke Attempto, 2019), pp. 21-42 (p. 24); Wojtek Jezierski, 'Monasterium Panopticum: On Surveillance in a Medieval Cloister – the Case of St. Gall', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 40 (2006), pp. 167-182 (p.171).

surveillance and 'horizontal' surveillance between monastic brothers was combined with a 'divine ubiquity' of surveillance afforded by God's omnipresence which compensated for flaws within the first two systems.[23] Since they concern the revelation of undetected faults and sins among monastics with clean reputations, these ghostly warnings comprise an element of 'divine ubiquity'. Their stories attest both to God's infallible knowledge of all secret sins and at the same time the inability of the monastery's earthly systems of surveillance from properly regulating these relationships.

That the Benedictine Rule was specifically concerned to prevent familial kinship from subverting the order and rigour of the monastic community is reflected, in *Eynsham*, by the palpable anxiety regarding the relation between monastic friendship and blood relation. The use of the imagery of siblinghood for monastic relationships is, of course, idiomatic in both Latin and English, being inculcated within the Rule of St. Benedict itself in the requirement that all monks address their juniors as 'Brother' and their seniors as 'Father'. Similar terms were commonly but not exclusively used for nuns. The Middle English Northern Metrical Version of the Rule refers to juniors as 'Damisel', and elders as 'madaum' and 'mastres', while the Northern Prose Version uses 'sistirs' as the term of address for all save the Abbess, and the Lansdowne ritual for ordaining nuns has the novice addressed by the prioress as 'daughter' throughout.[24] The familial metaphor for the monastic community served to present the monastic community as (at least

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[23] Nira Gradowicz-Pancer, 'Le "*panoptisme*" monastique. Structures de surveillance et de contrôle dans le cénobitisme occidental ancien (V^e-VIe siècles)', *Revue de l'histoires des religions*, 216.2 (1999), pp. 167-192 (pp. 176-7), translation my own.

[24] 'The Northern Metrical Version of the Rule of St. Benet', in *Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet and Two Contemporary Rituals for the Ordination of Nuns,* ed. by Ernst A Kock (London: Paul, Trench and Trübner for the Early English Text Society, 1902), pp. 48-118, ll. 2209-10. 'The Northern Landsdowne Ritual (The Form How A Novice Shall Be Received)' in *Three Middle English Versions of the Rule of St. Benet and Two Contemporary Rituals for the Ordination of Nuns,* pp. 141-5 (pp. 141-2).

nominally) supplanting blood family in the monk's life. Such metaphors, however, still treat the monastic community in terms of a familial model which *Eynsham* treats as fraught with impure associations. This concern resonates in the remarks that several of the purgatorial spirits make regarding their blood relationships.

The failing of the familial network in commemorative aspects is only one of the ways in which *Eynsham* presents the family as a moral danger, as is shown by the depiction of monastic souls suffering on account of various forms of familial favouritism. Two individuals, an abbess and an abbot, are depicted as having advanced the interests of their families unjustly and at the expense of their monastic 'family'. One woman whom Edmund encounters in paradise, an abbess that he 'knewe whenne Y was a chylde' (2561), has only recently completed her purgatorial pains despite having been dead for thirteen years. The implication is that Edmund or the author found this long punishment surprising. She was, after all, 'wyse and warre and deuowte in kepyng her sisters, to whome sche was commytted' (2563-4), but her 'clene clothyng' is 'not verey whyte schynyng' (2567) and 'sche semyd… as sche had be longe tyme sicke or dissesyd and had cumme late fro bathys' (2568-9), as if her recent punishment diminishes her even after its completion. The abbess, identified by Easting as Edith II of Godstow, lists the various sins responsible for her extensive stay in purgatory, which Edmund somewhat permissively describes as 'summe lyghte thyngys', including vainglory, susceptibility to flattery, and innumerable other sins 'in the whyche the febull ignoraunce of good pepul often-tymes offendythe' (2573-4). Among these sins she is, however, specially punished for familial favouritism:

>…sche louyd her kynnys-folke ouermekyl carnaly, and to hem gaue mekyl
>
>goodys of the place that sche had rule of, whenne some of her systers to home
>
>sche was a spyrytuall moder lackyd sum-tymes suche thyngys as longe to her
>
>leuyng and clothing. And whenne I harde thys of her, gretely Y merueylde. For Y
>
>knowe not onethe any prelate… that vsyd so grete scarnes to her kynnys-folke
>
>as sche, me semyd, dydde to her cosynis. (2575-2583)

A parallel is clearly drawn here between the abbess' 'carnal' family and the 'spyrytuall'

family of the convent over which the abbess is positioned as mother, and the abbess'

long punishment and temporary diminishment testifies to the seriousness of her error in

privileging the former over the latter, even in an apparently unnoticeably minor form. Nor

is Abbess Edith the only monastic punished for this sin. In the second place of purgatory

Edmund encounters an abbot (possibly Roger, abbot of Abingdon, d. 1185), whose

punishment, like Edith's, appears surprisingly severe to the visionary. It is noted that

'Trewely, the abbot was holdyn ȝette in scharpe peynys' (2205-6). His sin is identical to

Edith's: he 'ful carnaly and ouer-mekyl he louyd hys kynne-folke, and also was to hem

ouer-large in ȝeftes of the goodys of hys monasterye, and spende on hem mekyl more

than was couenyent' (2206-9). This prompts the narrator to lament that such habitual

sin from 'carnalle loue to kynred' (2210) is almost ubiquitous among monastics,

affecting 'almoste alle maner of people… profeste to holy relygyon… and also al them

that were dyspensours of Holy Chirche goodys, as bysshopys byn' (2211-4).

Acknowledging the impracticality of a complete severance of familial ties, Edmund

proposes a divinely sanctioned regulation, which 'in purgatorye Y knewe first', to first

give 'more largely to the pore pepulle of her parishonse, and afterward by discrecyon

helpe her fader and moders as they need, alle superfluyte putte aside, and also releue

other pore folke, and so deserve mede of God without any offense' (2222-5). *Revelation*

does not, therefore, tip over entirely into the denigration of 'carnal' family, but positions it

as a temptation subject to such stringent regulations that even an apparently exemplary

abbess like Edith of Godstow can easily fall foul of it.

The punishment of a third individual, likely Abbot Godfrey of Eynsham (d. 1195), not

only expands the text's concern for the corruptive influence of the 'family' to encompass

friends but presents the monastery's community itself as a network through which sin,

and thus spiritual danger, can propagate.[25] Godfrey appears early in the text,

chronologically the second and narratively the fourth spirit whom Edmund encounters.

He suffers 'ful grete and sore tormentys and sofyrd ful greuys peynys' (1516-7), which

Edmund initially believes are related to faults of Godfrey's youth. Godfrey, however,

rebuffs this claim:

> 'Y sofre here not onely for myne owne synnys and excessys, the which Y dyd in
>
> myne own person, howe-be-yt that Y offendyd in many thinges, but also for the
>
> wekydnes and mysgouernance of tho personys the which a lytyl before Y had
>
> charge and cure of.' (1527-30)

Godfrey's most harshly punished personal sins, like that of Edith of Godstow and Roger

of Abingdon, are 'the carnal affecyon and love that Y had to my frendys, as fadyr and

mother and other of my kynne' (1535-6), bestowing benefices out of nepotism (1536-7)

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[25] This individual is described as a prior in the text, but the description of his death within a year of the vision and his close acquaintance with Edmund make Godfrey the most likely candidate and the translator of *Eynsham* treats the titles of monastic offices loosely in other parts of the text. For a fuller discussion see Easting, *The Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*, p. 197.

and making gifts from the monastery's goods (1539-40). As in Henry II's case, those who benefited from his carnal affection now 'ful lytyl remembre me or doo anythynge for me in my nede' (1540-1). His misgovernance, however, is clearly the principal cause of his punishment, which he describes at length. Godfrey's 'couetyse ambycyon… to kepe my worschippe' led him to avoid reproving and correcting misconduct (in particular 'lewde gamys… tryfullys, iapys' and associating with secular individuals) out of fear it would create enemies who might act against him. Godfrey's failure to reprove his subordinates has dire spiritual consequences:

> …some of hem, by thys cruel lyghtnes of me and that they sawe in me, presumyd and sayde to do many full cursyd thyngys wherefore here Y am ponysshte without hope, howe-be-yt that Y approuyd not her wykyd dedys… And some of hem contynued in euyll vnto her dethe whyle Y leuyd in the worlde, and now they be everlasting dampde. Also some other of hem ȝet hethir-to leuyn contynualy wars and wars in grete synnys, wherefore to em and to me, as Y am agaste, succedyth inextynguyble fyre. (1562-72)

Godfrey's circumstances illustrate the spiritual danger attendant on the relationships within the monastic community when the governance of these relationships is without rigour. He has been made answerable for the sins of others within his community whom he failed to correct. Godfrey is in fact subject to a dark inversion of the practice of commemorative prayer: whereas the prayers of the living for his soul might reduce his sufferings,with each new sin 'whiche they be seyne to haue take by my neglygens, my peynys be evermore encresyd' (1578-9). He fears that he will be damned, saying that without God's mercy 'as Y am nowe in peynys oute of mesure, so schalle I be withoute

ende'. In particular, he fears that, as some of the individuals he failed to correct have committed the 'synne that ought not to be named' (sodomy), he will be subject to the punishment due in purgatory for sodomy, earlier described as 'more hatfull, peynful, and schameful' (1303-4) than any other punishment.

The encounter with Godfrey is presented immediately after the description of the punishment for sodomy (chapter 25) and an encounter with a doctor of law punished for that sin (chapter 26). The chronology of the vision is contorted to place them together despite Godfrey being one of the first spirits Edmund speaks to in purgatory, and the doctor one of the last. The doctor's experience mirrors Godfrey's in that he is also being punished for unsatisfactory confession, that his pains increase daily (1409-10), and that he is in doubt as to whether he will be saved (1407-9). The textual and structural association made here between sodomy, shame-driven failure to give complete confession, and Godfrey's misgovernance emphasises the extremity of the spiritual danger attendant on monastic officials who engage their community without rigour. The abbey is conceived as a community through which sin, as much as virtue, can circulate, to the spiritual ruination of all.

Indeed, Godfrey's encounter with Edmund itself constitutes an instrument of correction through which such spiritual danger is to be prevented. Uniquely within the manuscript, Godfrey reveals to Edmund sins committed by other living persons so that Edmund might urge their correction. These are 'foure persons' (1624), named by Godfrey but withheld by the author, whose 'cursyd dedys and consels' (1626) have led others towards damnation through similar misgovernance and who 'with her wyckydnes they haue al-moste enfecte and cumbrid alle the howse' (1633-4). Edmund's vision in this

regard functions as an infallible form of supernatural surveillance whereby the 'divine ubiquity' of God's knowledge of sins not only informs Edmund of malfeasance within the monastery, but permits Godfrey, belatedly, to finally assume his responsibility of surveillance and correction over his monastery beyond the veil of death. While an interest in the specific misconduct undertaken at Eynsham monastery (if it was Eynsham) in 1196 would be of little direct relevance to a fifteenth-century audience, the necessity of monastic rigour and concerns regarding monastic misconduct remained a perennial concern up till the dissolution of the monasteries.

The sheer number of Edmund's acquaintances and friends appearing within *Eynsham*'s vision allows the text to express a plurality of stances and concerns regarding the role of interpersonal relationships within the cloister. However, certain themes repeat themselves: the foolhardiness of trusting commemoration to one's family and friends; the efficacy of commemoration by the religious and the reflexive spiritual benefits the religious gain from this spiritual charity; the fraught impossibility of a monastic divorcing themselves entirely from the concerns of their blood family; the danger of nepotism and giving gifts from monastic goods; and, extensively, the spiritual responsibility of religious officials for sins committed under their negligent supervision. This cautious and ambiguous attitude towards personal relationships, and particularly the negative spiritual consequences of kinship bonds, originated in twelfth-century monastic self-criticism. By the fifteenth century, this attitude also provided a rejoinder to models of commemoration that prioritised the validation of such personal ties over the spiritual purpose of such commemoration.

Taken together, a complex understanding of the spiritual benefits and drawbacks of investment in such monastic relationships is laid out, whereby they may be spiritually generative (especially in commemorative contexts) but require constant vigilance and surveillance lest they endanger the souls within the monastery. Despite this admittedly ambivalent perspective, the structure of the visionary narrative militates in favour of the spiritual value of temporal relationships. Purgatory, and the 'outer' areas of paradise, are presented as a space and phase within the afterlife in which temporal relationships retain emotional and spiritual currency, distinct from the infinite and incommensurate Christian community in perfect communion with God that lies beyond heaven's crystal wall. In this regard, despite its monastic milieu, *Eynsham* closely corresponds with the concerns of those ghost narratives focused on lay spirits and lay protagonists. It seems likely that part of the appeal of translating the *Visio Monachi* lay in its focus on commemoration, penitence, and social bonds, which was peculiar and innovative in the twelfth century. By the later medieval period, however, this focus would have been understood as participating in discourses about the spiritual role of social bonds in commemoration that had already circulated widely through the Middle English ghost narrative tradition. In the vernacular, the text would have provided a rigorous model of monastic commemorative piety for lay emulation, one which structurally validated personal relationships while also subjecting such relationships to strict and rigorous standards of conduct, pulling no punches as to the potential spiritual harms which unregulated relationships, and particularly family relationships, might produce. It was not the only purgatory text with a religious perspective that offers a rigorous challenge to family-centric models of commemorative piety. And while *Eynsham* was a twelfth-

century text appropriated for fifteenth-century purgatorial discourses, the *Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman* appears to have been consciously written in response to the ghost narrative tradition and its focus on familial commemoration.

A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman: An anchoritic response to the *Trental* tradition

A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman was written in 1422, fifty years before *Eynsham* appeared in print in 1483, but it too represents a mature reappropriation of the developments that had occurred in the vernacular ghost narrative tradition since the twelfth-century composition of the *Visio Monachi*. The text seamlessly positions a narrative of ghostly visitation derived from the *Trental of Gregory* tradition within the framework of the purgatorial otherworld vision. In doing so, the anonymous visionary responsible for *Purgatory* produced a generic hybrid. *Revelation* uses the framework of the otherworld vision, associated closely with the religious, to align a *Trental*-esque narrative away from the familial concerns of the laity and towards the aspects of commemorative culture most relevant to female religious who were often, themselves, involved with handling the type of commemoration depicted in the text. The result is a gynocentric text deeply focused on religious networks of clerical, religious, and anchoritic individuals, rather than the familial relations emphasized by its forebears.

Over the last forty years *Purgatory* has been reassessed by feminist critics, such as Marta Powell Harley, Mary C. Erler, and Liz Herbert McAvoy as a major example of a visionary text by an anchoress. Their work, amongst others, has illuminated *Purgatory*'s position in its historical setting, the reformist movement within the English church associated with Henry V, the tradition of anchoritic writings, and within late medieval

visionary spirituality.[26] The present chapter seeks to situate *Purgatory* within another

tradition, that of the English ghost narratives descended from *The Trental of Gregory*, by

reading *Purgatory* against the *Trental*. This reading demonstrates both that the

underlying tropes of the *Trental* were broadly established in the fifteenth century and

that the author of *Purgatory* was redeploying those tropes to produce a version more

aligned with the perspective of the female religious. On the basis of close similarities in

the liturgy references, McAvoy has demonstrated that *Purgatory*'s author was

influenced by *The Gast of Gy*, but its close structural similarity to *The Trental of Gregory*

has gone unremarked.[27] Nonetheless, *Purgatory* inherits from *Trental* both its treatment

of commemorative masses (while intensifying the attention to precise and complex

mass schedules) and its use of personal relationships as a structuring principle (which it

transfers from a familial/maternal relationship to the religious friendship between an

anchoress and a nun). *Purgatory,* like *Trental,* uses a narrative of ghostly visitation as a

framework to contextualise and explain a complex schedule of commemorative masses,

which the text promotes as a scheme of commemoration to be replicated. *Purgatory*

takes this framework and synthesises it with an explication, in the tradition of the

otherworld vision, both of the 'geography' of purgatory, and of the nature of

punishments for various sins.[28] It is the text's attitude to commemorative prayer and

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[26] For these editions, see Marta Powell Harley, *A Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown Fifteenth-Century Woman Visionary* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1985); Liz Herbert McAvoy, *A Revelation of Purgatory* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017). For criticism, see Mary C. Erler, '"A Revelation of Purgatory" (1422): Reform and the Politics of Female Visions', *Viator* 38.1 (2007), pp. 321-383; Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"O der lady, be my help": Women's Visionary Writing and the Devotional Literary Canon', *The Chaucer Review* 51.1 (2016), pp. 68-87; Liz Herbert McAvoy, '"Flourish like a Garden: Pain, Purgatory, and Salvation in the Writing of Medieval Religious Women', *Medieval Feminist Forum,* 50.1 (2014), pp. 33-60.
[27] Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Introduction', in *A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman,* ed. and trans. by Liz Herbert McAvoy, pp. 53-4.
[28] Matsuda describes *Purgatory*'s treatment of purgatorial geography as 'the most systematic form' of the divisions within purgatory seen in other texts, *Death and Purgatory in Middle English Didactic Poetry,* p. 67.

commemorative relationships, the aspects which it shares most fully with the *Trental*, which will be under consideration here.

Purgatory is, like *Trental*, centred around an act of commemoration requested by a spirit, who provides an extensive description of a complex mass schedule which is then successfully implemented through the rest of the narrative. *Purgatory* departs from *Trental* by presenting this commemorative schedule outside the context of familial commemoration and filial love by strictly emphasising the schedule's liturgical nature and focusing exclusively on the community of religious and clergy involved directly in the commemorative process. It is a text that refocuses the audience's attention upon the exact practicalities of commemorative prayer, the pains of purgatory which such prayer remedies, and the precisely defined social networks through which it is carried out. Like *Eynsham,* these commemorative exchanges take place within a putatively contemporary religious network which can be precisely located in Winchester and Westminster, lending *Purgatory*'s narrative an immediacy and authority not present in *Trental*'s abstracted narrative. At the same time, in synthesizing the ghost's social and commemorative communities, *Purgatory* reappropriates a ghost narrative tradition used elsewhere to chart commemorative relationships among the laity for use within the religious networks that carried out liturgical commemorations.

A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman takes the form of a letter composed in 1422 by an anonymous woman visionary, recounting a series of purgatorial encounters with the soul of Margaret, a nun known to the visionary. To summarise:

On 10th August 1422, the sleeping visionary receives a vision of purgatory in which she recognizes the spirit of a nun, Margaret. She wakes and prays with a child servant before seeing a second vision in her sleep, where Margaret demands her help. The narrator conjures Margaret's spirit, demanding that she identify if she is a demon or a petitioning human spirit. Margaret affirms her humanity and demands a scheme of thirteen masses and prayers from six specific priests. The anchoress wakes and arranges the masses. That night, she sees Margaret graphically tortured by a troupe of demons in ways that reflect the Seven Deadly Sins Margaret practised in life. When Margaret is thrown into a brass vessel and lost from view, the visionary sees the pains of unchaste priests and their women, of nuns and monks, of the married, and then of the single. Margaret returns and explains the symbolism of the torture before the visionary wakes. In a fourth vision Margaret is cast into two remaining purgatorial fires, confirms the efficacy of the masses. A fair lady and a young man weigh Margaret's soul, while the devil recounts her sins, particularly that her heart is gnawed by a 'worm of conscience' after failing to complete a pilgrimage vow in life. The lady declares that the visionary completed the vow for Margaret and leads Margaret to a chapel where she attends a mass, before the lady offers Margaret to the priest. She receives a crown and sceptre and is led into paradise, when the visionary wakes.

The structural commonalities with *The Trental of Gregory* are striking. Each text is dominated by a single female soul who demands a system of masses, appearing first to demonstrate and explicate her torments, and finally in a purified form. It is as if a ghost narrative from the *Trental* tradition has been directly inserted into a visionary otherworld narrative. The visionary has been identified by Mary C. Erler as the Winchester

anchoress who was consulted on two occasions in 1421 by Richard Beauchamp (1382-1439), thirteenth Earl of Warwick, whose patronage of anchoresses is well established.[29] This anonymous anchoress, like the narrator, had a visionary reputation and had dispensation to travel from her anchorhold on occasion. It is highly likely, given this combination of circumstances, that Margaret was a nun of St. Mary's Abbey, Winchester, also known as Nunnaminster, a tenth-century Benedictine foundation and one of the largest and richest convents in England. It is not possible to determine whether the visionary was also a nun since, as Ann K. Warren notes, when nuns became anchoresses they tended to be referred to solely as anchoresses in later references, obscuring their monastic identity.[30]

The identification of the visionary relies partly on Mary C. Erler's identification of the six priests named in the text as providing commemorative prayers for Margaret's soul, all of whom were influential churchmen in Winchester and Westminster, which the visionary visited in 1421 during her second consultation for Beauchamp. Three of these, John Forest, Sir Richard Bone, and Don John Pery/Perey were priests in Winchester, and had connections to Nunnaminster, to Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester and uncle to Henry V, or to both. Another, John Wynbourne, was an Augustinian canon of Christchurch in nearby Twynham. The remaining two are associated with Westminster: Don Petrus Combe, a monk and administrator of Westminster Abbey, and the 'recluse of Westminster' to whom the letter was sent. This is probably John London, a priest and

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[29] Mary C. Erler, '"A Revelation of Purgatory" (1422): Reform and the Politics of Female Visions', *Viator* 38.1 (2007), pp. 321-383. For further information on Beauchamp's consultation with the Winchester anchoress and others, see Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 203-4.
[30] Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*, p. 25.

anchorite who was once Henry V's confessor and acted as confessor-general to the nuns of Henry's foundation at Syon Abbey from 1415 to 1419.[31] These individuals were all experienced and influential priests operating within circles of ecclesiastical power in Winchester and Westminster and with connections to Henry Beaufort. In John London's case he is connected both to Henry V personally and to Henry's Brigittine foundation at Syon, a cornerstone of Henry's reforming agenda within the English Church. Erler has noted that the presence of these senior churchmen within the text, and the visionary's social circle, 'illustrate[s] the acceptability of her revelation in this particular urban milieu and beyond' and helped establish *Purgatory* as an authorised revelation despite its heavy criticism of sexual misconduct by priests, thereby 'demonstrat[ing] the latitude allowed to criticism when filtered through the unimpeachably orthodox screen provided by the bishop's staff.'[32]

Purgatory evidently circulated substantially outside this influential ecclesiastical circle. None of the three surviving manuscripts has a clear link to Winchester or Westminster. MS Longleat 29, a mid-fifteenth-century English-Latin devotional religious miscellany containing the sole complete copy of *Purgatory*, bears a signature of John Goldewell, of a family closely associated with Christ Church priory, Canterbury, which John M. Manley and Edith Rickert suggest as the site of composition.[33] A second, almost complete copy of *Purgatory* is found in Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91, also known as the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript after its scribe, Yorkshire gentryman Robert Thornton.

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[31] For a fuller description of what is known about each of these individuals, see Mary C. Erler, '"A Revelation of Purgatory"(1422): Reform and the Politics of Female Visions', *Viator* 38.1 (2007), pp. 321-383.

[32] Erler, '"A Revelation of Purgatory" (1422): Reform and the Politics of Female Visions', pp. 328-330.

[33] John M. Manley and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols, vol 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), pp. 347-8.

This manuscript is a broad miscellany of English religious and secular works, compiled

between 1430 and 1450. The Thornton copy of *Purgatory* is missing a single leaf which

appears to have been removed intentionally, presumably because the descriptions of

purgatorial punishments for lecherous priests displeased one of the manuscript's

readers.[34] The text appears in the manuscript's third booklet (f-f), which comprises

principally religious material, alongside several pieces by Richard Rolle which are also

found in Longleat, including two otherwise unattested fragments. Although *Purgatory* is

not adjacent to the Rolle material, their inclusion in both manuscripts suggests that the

texts circulated together.[35] A number of the texts copied in this booklet, such as Walter

Hilton's *Epistle on the Mixed Life*, also present monastic models for lay piety, and it is

possible that Thornton copied some texts, *Purgatory* perhaps among them, from

manuscripts belonging to a nunnery. George R. Keiser notes that several texts appear

to have been modified to refer to an audience of female religious, and hypothesises that

Thornton may have accessed these texts through Joan Pykering, a nun at St. Mary's

Abbey of Nun Monkton, whose brother Richard named Thornton as his executor.[36] The

third copy, highly fragmentary, is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. th.c.58, a

compilation of four discontinuous and fragmentary quires completed by the same scribe

and decorator probably in the late fifteenth century, containing a fragment of

Purgatory.[37] The quire containing *Purgatory* is signed by William Squyer, who joined All

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[34] Hope Emily Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 36.
[35] Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle*, p. 36, fn. 1.
[36] George R. Keiser, 'More Light on the Life and Milieu of Robert Thornton', *Studies in Bibliography,* 36 (1983), pp. 111-119 (115-8).
[37] The first two quires (folios 1-5 and 6-12) contain an extract from Nicholas Love's *Mirrour of the Blessed Life of Christ*; *Purgatory* begins on fol. 10r and runs until f.12v, the subsequent quire of *Purgatory* is missing, and the next two quires contain fragments of *The Three Kings of Cologne*.

Souls College, Oxford in 1470 and was highly active in the Diocese of Bath and Wells

from the 1490s into the early sixteenth century.[38]

Two further texts connected to *Purgatory* have been identified by Clarck Drieshen. The

first, a brief Latin summary of *Purgatory,* is found in Manchester, John Rylands Library,

MS Lat. 228, a fifteenth-century English-Latin religious miscellany from Richmond,

Yorkshire, with a probable history of gentry ownership.[39] The second, a text Drieshen

entitles *Instruction for Masses*, is found on a flyleaf in London British Library, MS Harley

6718, and concerns another vision by the same anchoress involving the spirit of a friar,

showing that the author of *Revelation* pronounced similar visions with a commemorative

bent on a number of occasions.[40] The Rylands summary of *Purgatory* broadens the

text's utility by removing all specific names and references to Winchester in order to

more easily apply it to other communities where, as Drieshen points out, such

references would be opaque and irrelevant.[41] The Rylands mass schedule appears to

have been left in Middle English, where the rest of the text was Latinized, so that it

could be more easily explained to non-Latinate lay people as a model for

commemoration. In any case, *Purgatory*'s manuscript tradition demonstrates that the

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[38] Liz Herbert McAvoy, 'Introduction', in *A Revelation of Purgatory*, ed. and trans. by Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), p. 68.

[39] Clarck Drieshen, 'English Nuns as Anchoritic Intercessors for Souls in Purgatory: The Employment of *A Revelation of Purgatory* by Late Medieval English Nunneries for Their Lay Communities' in *Medieval Anchorites in Their Communities*, ed. by Cate Gunn and Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), pp. 85-100.

[40] Clarck Drieshen, 'The Influence of Birgitta of Sweden on a Previously Unknown Work by the Author of *A Revelation of Purgatory',* unpublished paper presented at the *International Medieval Congress*, Leeds, 5th July 2023. As this text has only recently been identified and Drieshen's edition of the text is forthcoming I have not been able to consult it.

[41] Drieshen, 'English Nuns', p. 89. Dreishen's contention, published therein, that the references to Winchester were added to *Purgatory* after by a later scribe, has been invalidated by his subsequent identification of *Instructions for Masses* as being composed by the same author.

text appealed to a variety of reading communities both ecclesiastical and lay and circulated far outside the Winchester context in which it was written.

Like the *Trental of Gregory*, the visionary narrative of *Purgatory* provides a framework to authorise, disseminate, and explicate the purpose of a specific system of prayers and masses. Margaret herself highlights the extreme specificity of her instructions, telling the narrator 'þou sall make to be saide for me thirttene messis in the manere als I sall telle the' (82-3).[42] Each of the priests celebrates a distinct mass. In the Thornton MS copy of *Purgatory*, Forest celebrates one Requiem, Wynbourne three Masses of the Trinity, the 'Westminster recluse' two of Masses St. Peter, Combe two Masses of the Holy Ghost, Bone three Masses of Our Lady, and Perey two Masses of All Saints; Perey is also told to hold three commemorations of the Trinity. All six priests are told to also recite Psalm 51, identified by its opening line *Miserere mei Deus*, reciting the fifth and final verse five times, followed by the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*: Bone and Perey are to do so daily for three days, while the rest are to do so for five days.Margaret further insists that the prayers be said 'with castynge up herte and eghne to Godwarde, for þe more deuotly he sayd hit, þe more relesede suld hir paynes be and the gretter suld be his mede' (87-90). Though shorter than the thirty-mass, year-long observance depicted in *Trental*, this schedule is more socially and spatially complex, spreading as it does the commemorative task across an entire community of priests and a variety of church spaces across various locations. Indeed it is so complicated and textually repetitive that scribes struggled to accurately replicate it. None of the surviving versions agree on the

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[42] *A Revelation of Purgatory*, ed. and trans. by Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), ll. 82-3. All quotations from this text will be taken from this edition unless otherwise noted.

exact numbers of each mass, and, despite the text repeatedly specifying that thirteen masses are requested, the masses described in the Longleat and Bodleian copies incorrectly add up to fourteen masses.

The type of thirteen-mass schedule seen in *Purgatory* appears to have been relatively popular, and Drieshen has identified a variety of examples. While many of these are brief and lacking in detail, a schedule in the 1500 will of William Millet of Dartford, closely matches that seen in *Purgatory*, even including the instruction to 'casten vp hart and eyen to Almighty God' during the recitation of *Misere mei Deus,* which suggests Millet, or whoever assisted him in making his will, knew *Purgatory*.[43] *Purgatory* does not appear to have been the only visionary legend used to authorise this type of schedules, as several testators requesting thirteen masses refer to Pope Innocent, with the masses being shown to him in 'revelation by an aungell' (as per the 1534 will of Agnes Wilton of Northampton) and sung 'for his mother' (in the 1526 will of Hugh Starkey de Olton of Chester).[44] The latter suggests a possible cross-pollination with the *Trental of Gregory* tradition.

While the provision of multiple different types of mass is a common component of mass schedules, the association of specific priests with specific types of mass is distinct to *Purgatory*. This specificity implies that certain priests are particularly effective in, or particularly suited to, specific types of commemorative prayer. Consequently, *Purgatory* privileges Margaret and the anchoress' social knowledge of the priests as spiritually

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[43] Drieshen, 'English Nuns', pp. 91-2, 95-6.

[44] R.M. Sergeantson and H. Isham Longden; 'The Parish Churches and Religious Houses of Northamptonshire: Their Dedication, Altars, Images and Lights', *The Archaeological Journal* 70, 2nd Series (1913), pp. 217-452 (p. 376); G. Piccope; *Lancaster and Cheshire Wills and Inventories from the Ecclesiastical Court, Chester,* Chetham Society 33 (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1857), p. 11.

beneficial to the commemorative process. The overall effect of this specificity is to centre the priests and religious organising and conducting commemorative masses as individuals whose conduct, character, and social connections are relevant to the act of commemoration, in spite of the orthodox teaching that the mass's power was independent of the quality of the priest celebrating it.[45] This is a far cry from texts like *Awntyrs, Amadace*, or *Childe of Bristowe*, where the priests conducting masses are reduced to essentially fungible ciphers, pliant tools for commemorative activities of lay protagonists commemorating their relations and friends.

Paratextual apparatuses within the manuscripts demonstrate that these masses and prayers were understood by copyists and compilers as central components, critical to the purpose and function of *Purgatory*. All three texts are annotated where Margaret asks for the 'thirtene masses' (82): in Longleat the annotation is 'Nota missas' (note the masses), Thornton's note reads 'here askede scho helpe in þe name of God', and Bodleian reads 'Nota xiije Misse' (note 13 masses). Similar annotations occur where prayers are named throughout the text, and the Bodleian copy reserves the use of rubrication exclusively for these named prayers. The summary text in the Rylands manuscript further testifies to the mass schedule's position at the 'core' of the narrative. It is the only section of text given in Middle English, suggesting that the compiler switched away from Latin so that the schedule could be easily presented for non-Latinate readers, or because the exact excerption of the schedule was considered important. The Thornton manuscript further evidences a concern for the prayers and

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[45] Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 29.

masses given in the schedule. The text of *Purgatory* is followed immediately by the texts of *Miserere mei deus* and *Veni creator spiritus*, the two prayers referred to in the schedule, allowing *Purgatory* to function not just as a contextual framework for the mass schedule, but to provide a commemorative context for the prayers that follow it. Although *Purgatory* is presented in epistolary form, all three witnesses include a short introductory preamble that reorientates the text for the consumption of 'brethir and systers and all oþer trew cristyne ffrendis þat redis this tretyce' (7-8), reaching out beyond an envisioned community of male and female religious towards the laity. In doing so, the preface to *Purgatory* imagines the text as engaging in the same network of communications through which Margaret's masses are arranged. The letter circulated through the social connection between the visionary and the priests from whom she requests masses is now reformulated into a 'tretyce', to be further distributed through the broader Christian community of mid-fifteenth-century England.

Outside of the commemorative network outlined above, *Purgatory* is structurally dominated by the relationship between the anonymous anchoress and the ghostly nun Margaret. As with *Eynsham*, the text's concern with interpersonal relationships is principally demonstrated through structure rather than content. We learn surprisingly little about Margaret's relationship with the visionary: she describes her merely as 'þe spiryte of a woman þat I knew, the whilke womane was in hyr lyfe a syster of ane house of relygyoune, þe whilke… was called Margarete' (40-2). The remainder of the narrative provides little further information beyond the fact that the visionary completed a pilgrimage to Southwick on Margaret's behalf at some point before her death. This paucity of information is in keeping with the text's concern to refocus the energy of the

ghost narrative tradition upon the liturgical commemoration itself, eliding the tangle of emotional and social drivers for commemoration in favour of abstraction. What the author is unable to do, however much she obscures the nature of the two women's relationship, is to eliminate the *structural* importance of that relationship to the text. In fact, this relationship remains the critical means by which the vision becomes interpretable to the visionary, and the sole evident principle behind the action of the narrative: why the visionary has *this* vision in precisely *this* way.

Not only does *Purgatory* appear to blur the otherworld vision genre and the ghost narrative genre exemplified by the *Trental*, but the author notes specifically that the vision recounted in *Purgatory* is generically aberrant, breaking the rules which governed all her previous visions. We are told that the visionary has extensive experience of visions of purgatory, but that this vision was different because there was no guiding spirit to provide a comforting structure and commentary upon the experience:

> I sawe all the paynnes whilke was schewed me many tyms by-fore – als ȝe, ffadir, knowe wele be my confessyone and tellynge. Bot, dere syre, I was night schewede by no spirite the syghte of þame on þis nyghte of saynt Lowrence. Bot, sodanely, dere ffadir, me thoghte I sawe þame; and for sothe, dere ffadir, I was neuer so euylle afferde when I woke for scheweynge of þe paynnes als I was þane, and þe cause was þat I was noghte ledde by no spyrite þat I knewe be-fore þat myghte hafe comforthed me. (16-23)

It is telling that the narrator repeatedly addresses her 'ffadir' (probably John London) in this section, as if attempting to substitute her spiritual mentor for the comforting spiritual

guide whose absence she feels so keenly. Liz Herbert McAvoy interprets the guide's absence as a reference to the isolated nature of anchoritism, but this leaves aside the fact that the visionary thoroughly establishes that the absence of such guides lies well outside the norm of her anchoritic visionary experiences.[46] Rather, the absence of a spiritual guide here serves a structural and generic function, bringing the text closer to the *Trental*-tradition and centring Margaret's ghost as the single central figure of the vision. Without an interpretative guide, Margaret fulfils the roles of both spectacularly demonstrating her purgatorial torment and also interpreting and explaining the meaning of this suffering.Although the visionary is able to determine the 'degre' (34) of people with purgatory – distinguishing priests, monks, and nuns – she depicts this first vision as an overwhelming and undifferentiated parade of suffering: 'alle manere' (33) of burning smells, of pains witness, of 'crystene mene and womene' (34).

This incomprehensible, unstructured, and noxious vision resolves itself at the same moment that the visionary distinguishes Margaret from the crowd of bodies surrounding her:

> And in þat grete ffyre me thoghte I sawe þe spiryte of a woman þat I knewe, the whilke womane was in hyr lyfe a syster of ane house of relygyone, ilke womane þe while scho lyffede was called Margaret, whilke me thoghte I sawe in this horrible fyre and had so grete paynes þat for drede I myght nott discryue þame at þat tyme. And in a dredefull fere I wokke' (39-45)

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[46] Herbert McAvoy, *Revelation of Purgatory*, p. 74, fn 6.

The description of the inexpressibility of Margaret's sufferings is conventional but, given that the pains seen in the second vision are described at great length, its purpose here appears more structural than the conventional, and 'highlights the speaker's inability to express the transcendent', in Alicia McCartney's terms.[47] Delaying any description of the torments Margaret suffers allows for the climax of the first vision to centre upon the recognition of Margaret as an individual within the nameless throngs of Purgatory, and thus of the recognition of the relationship between the visionary and Margaret, even if stated vaguely, and the attendant commemorative obligations between them. The central focus of the first vision, then, is the gradual resolution of a single, named individual with a social connection to the narrator out of chaotic, frighteningly unstructured purgatorial morass.

The second vision, in which Margaret approaches the visionary and makes her demands for intercessory prayer, is the section of the narrative closest to a condensed ghost narrative of the *Trental* tradition. Margaret appears in horrific guise, much like the ghosts of *The Trental of Gregory*, *Awntyrs*, or *Three Dead Kings*, but this horror is not predicated on the illegibility of Margaret's identity. The narrator immediately recognizes the figure as the 'speryte of þis womane Mergarete þe whilke I sawe by-fore in paynes' (53-4). She is neither demonic in form nor a decaying 'ghost-corpse' rendered anonymous by decay. Instead, the horror of Margaret's appearance derives from the marks of horrific violence inflicted on her: she is 'full of strong wondes als scho hade been drawene with kames' (54-5), 'wondede and rent, bot specially at hir herte' (56) by

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[47] Alicia McCartney,'No Mowthe Can Speke Hit': Silence and Inexpressibility in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, *Arthuriana* 29.3 (2019), pp. 3-24 (p. 11).

'a greuous and ane orybille wounde' out of which 'come flawme of fyre' (57-8). This last wound, Margaret later explains, is punishment for habitually blaspheming 'by Oure Lordes hert' (502). Rather than render her identity illegible, the tortuous distortions of Margaret's appearance are a legible index of her misdeeds in life. Rather than obscuring her identity, the wounds add to the information which her appearance presents to the reader. Again, this accords with *Purgatory*'s overall aim of reorienting the ghost narrative away from a direct celebration of personal commemoration. The horror attendant on the decay or erasure of bonds with the dead is replaced instead with a horror based upon purgatorial punishment itself, and the consequences of sin.

That Margaret's horrific appearance is due to her legible suffering rather than illegible otherness focuses the text upon the urgent need for the reader to seek to curtail their own purgatorial suffering, but it also alleviates the misogynistic aspects of the *Trental*-narrative in a way that would surely have rendered *Purgatory* more appealing to female readers, by obscuring the direct connection between femininity and monstrosity suggested by the demonic appearance of Gregory's mother. This alleviation of the tradition's misogyny is further evidenced in the litany of sins for which Margaret is punished in the third vision. Rather than the singular act of highly gendered, monstrous sinfulness (infanticide) around which *Trental* is structured, *Purgatory* presents an extensive but largely generalised account of Margaret's sins, structured according to the highly popular schema of the Seven Deadly Sins. The sins, and their punishments, are predicated more on this schema than upon any specific sinful actions committing by Margaret, and *Purgatory* lacks the interest shown by *Trental* (as well as both *Eynsham* and *The Gast of Gy*) in the surveillance and revelation of Margaret's actions while alive.

This comparatively egalitarian attitude towards Margaret's sins is not absolute. The focus on her sins of speech, such as 'false forswerynge… bakbyttyng and sclandirynge' (228-9), is both conventional and gendered: Martha Himmelfarb notes that in hell-visions 'the two most common kinds of sins are sexual sins and sins of the tongue', while Sandy Bardsley notes that 'women were cautioned about speech both more often and more vehemently' than men and 'constructed more often as potentially disruptive speakers who ought to limit the quantity and tone of their words', a double standard that persisted in the anchoritic literature.[48] Other sins appear to relate to Margaret's status as a nun - like Edith of Godstow, she is punished for her 'myspendyng' (261) and 'mysgouernance' (264). More idiosyncratically, she is pursued by demons in the form of a 'litill hound and a litill catte' (67) for having doted irreligiously on her pets in life - a characterisation that has been repeatedly compared to Chaucer's description of the Prioress Eglentyne's similar fondness for her dogs.[49] Taken together, it appears that even the more idiosyncratic elements of Margaret's sins are a conventional portrait of the sort of sins which the average female religious might commit. The litany of sins appears to be structured more to provide a legible framework for the reader (whether female, religious, or otherwise), to consider their own sins. Margaret herself warns 'Euery-body bewar with me and do har penance ar þay dey and leve þe lust of har wiked synes' (270-1) during this sequence. Scribal evidence shows that this sequence of punishments appealed as a penitential tool for readers: the Bodleian copy of

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[48] Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 69; Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 46-7.

[49] For comparisons with Chaucer's Prioress, see McAvoy, *A Revelation of Purgatory Shown To A Holy Woman,* p. 82 (footnote); and E.L. Risden, '*A Revelation of Purgatory* and Chaucer's Prioress', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 35 (2009), pp. 105-111, passim.

Purgatory is titled at the top of each bifolium with the words 'Rede undyrstand what is to drede/The better lyf thow myght lede', and *Purgatory* is the only text the scribe gave such a title to. That the reader is expected to project their own sins onto Margaret's sufferings is, itself, a distinct change from the *Trental*-tradition, where the sins committed by ghosts tend to be either largely opaque (as in *Awntyrs*) or so extreme as to make it difficult for most readers to identify themselves with the ghost (as in *Trental* or *Childe*). *Purgatory*, however, expects the reader to be drawn into the gynocentric web of identifications between Margaret and the visionary.

This is not to say that Margaret is not a threatening figure: in the second vision, she clearly occupies the same role as the intrusive spirits of the *Trental*-tradition. When she sees Margaret, the visionary is 'so ferde I myghte noghte speke' (60-1) and 'thoghte scho wolde hafe castene fyre appone me and styrte to me to hafe slayne me' (63-4). This fear is transitory, because the visionary knows Margaret 'hade no powere, for þe passyone of God comforthed me' (64-5), and she is able, much like the Prior in *Gast*, to immediately present Margaret with a *discretio spirituum* that resolves the question of Margaret's nature and confirms she is not a demon. That she does so herself, without any of the various male interlocutors who appear to 'decrypt' ghosts on behalf of haunted women elsewhere in the tradition, testifies again to *Purgatory*'s promotion of religious women as capable and skilled commemorative agents. However, the identification of Margaret and the knowledge she cannot cause physical harm do nothing to blunt the force of the threat which Margaret pronounces: "Cursede mote þou be and wo worthe the bot if þou haste the to be my helpe" (58-9). The nature of this warning, to the visionary's soul and not her body, is however entirely congruent with

Margaret's subsequent, softer request 'in þe name of God I aske helpe of þe' (79-80). Should the visionary fail to honour Margaret's commemorative requests, she will have failed in her Christian duty of charity and endangered her soul.

The fact that their commemorative relationship is formulated here around an obligation rather than a bond of sympathy is not, however, an impediment to the spiritual power of that relationship. Indeed, the spiritually positive and duty-based relationship between the two women is contrasted strongly with the emotion-centred relationships which are depicted within the landscape of purgatory. Of these we might number Margaret's relationship with her pets, which are criticised as an inappropriate vessel for her affection akin to idolatry. They were her 'mawemetts' (505), and 'foulle wormes' (506) on which she 'sett hir herte to mekill' (506), a criticism which chimes with well-attested warnings, traced by Karl Steel, regarding the spiritual dangers of anchorites keeping pets.[50] The other major criticism of emotional relationships comes in the depiction of the suffering of lecherous priests:

> …amonge al Cristen peple me þoȝt lechery was sorest chastised, and specialy of men and women[e]n of Holy Chirch… Me þoȝt, fadyr, þat prestes and har wommen I saw in   peynes, and þay wer bounden to-giffyr with yren cheynes as for þe most partie. (283-8)

Again, the relationship between lecherous priests and their women is transmuted into a form of punishment analogous to the cat and dog demons who chase Margaret. These

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[50] Karl Steel, *How Not To Make A Human Being* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2019), pp.17-20.

relationships form a dark inversion of the relationship between Margaret and the visionary, in which the sinful lure of a relationship based on pleasure has driven those involved away from their religious duties. The priests' maleness also contrasts with the friendship between Margaret and the visionary. It is in keeping with the work's gynocentric perspective that the priests are punished more severely than their women, as they have 'broȝt many women[e]n to þat syn and out of har goode lyvynge… þat neuer wold haue done þat syn' (324-8). This attitude stands in stark contrast to the typical attitude of church courts,where clerical concubines 'faced significant disadvantages in the church courts and were punished more severely and more often than their partners'.[51] The austere focus on obligation and threat in Margaret's relationship with the visionary is intentionally emptied of overtly emotional aspects in order to contrast it with the emotional relationships that lead to the dereliction of religious duty and thus into sin.

The spiritual power of the obligations shared between Margaret and the visionary is demonstrated most clearly in the final vision. Margaret again presents her sufferings, though they are markedly less graphic. She no longer appears wounded (524-6) and the three fires she is thrown into cause her to change colour from black to red to white as a visual shorthand for the purgation of her sins, until she 'wexe wondir whitte and fayre' (544-5). This is, again, a structural alteration from preceding ghost narratives that is driven by *Purgatory*'s concern with fully explicating the mechanics of the commemorative masses it depicts. Instead of simply jumping forward to present

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[51] Janelle Werner, 'Promiscuous Priests and Vicarage Children: Clerical Sexuality and Masculinity in Late Medieval England' in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 159-181, (p.172).

Margaret purified (as occurs in *Trental*), we are shown how the masses effect her rapid

purification within purgatory, as well as demonstrating that the suffering actively purifies,

and thus is a function of God's mercy as much as God's justice. Margaret, once purified,

appears in a similar fashion to Gregory's mother in her final apparition, though again

there is no confusion over her identity. In her purified form, Margaret explains various

elements of purgatorial doctrine (partly derived from *The Gast of Gy*) before proceeding

to be judged. This judgement sequence has no precedent in the *Trental*-tradition and

emphasises Margaret's relationship with the visionary as the motivating rationale for the

vision as a whole. It is the sole moment in which the visionary performs a role within

purgatory beyond being a witness and interlocutor. Margaret reminds the visionary of an

oath of pilgrimage to St. Mary's Church, Southwick (about 27 miles from Winchester)

that Margaret failed to complete, but which the visionary conducted on her behalf:

> if þou had noghte gone to Sowthwyke one pilgremage for me in þe wyrchipe of
>
> God and of Oure Lady – ffor I had vowede it and myght noghte do it and þou
>
> hase done it for me – and ells I sulde full foule hafe bene lettide of my passage
>
> whene I solde hafe bene weyhede oute of þise paynnes, and þat sall þou sone
>
> see   (658-663)

We are told nothing of the circumstances in which Margaret made this vow nor why she

failed to complete it herself. Yet this sort of 'proxy pilgrimage' is seen elsewhere in a

commemorative context. Evidence from wills show that testators frequently requested

that a person be paid to go on a pilgrimage on their behalf for the sake of their souls,

and potentially those of their kin, and it is entirely possible that the visionary's pilgrimage

was also undertaken after Margaret's death. Diana Webb notes it was 'far from

uncommon for money to be left to carry out pilgrimages which [the testator] had promised and failed to perform'.[52] Nicholas Culpeper (d. 1435), for example, asked his wife Elizabeth to complete his 'promised' pilgrimages to Walsingham and Canterbury; Webb notes that Nicholas was himself obliged to go on pilgrimage to Norwich and Canterbury by his father Thomas (d.1429), and appears to have passed this latter pilgrimage on to his wife.[53] Such proxy pilgrimages were often assigned to priests (who could celebrate masses for the deceased at the destination or at churches en route) or family members. That the visionary completed a pilgrimage on Margaret's behalf might, therefore, indicate a closer friendship or even potentially kinship between the two women than the text otherwise indicates, or that the anchoress had undertaken the pilgrimage as a commemorative agent on Margaret's behalf, thereby aligning with the text's position regarding the efficacy of the female religious as commemorators.

The visionary's completion of the vow on Margaret's behalf is immediately tested as the final hurdle to be surmounted before Margaret can leave purgatory. They are approached by a young man with a set of scales and a lady 'cled al in white clothe of golde… and a royale crowne… and a septre in hir hande' (667-9). She is clearly intended to be the Virgin Mary, and commands Margaret to be weighed, at which point the Devil appears and attempts to weigh down the scale with the 'worm of conscience', causing the scales to tip in the Devil's favour while he lists her sins. The scene is immediately reminiscent of the popular motif of The Weighing of Souls found on

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[52] Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 196.
[53] Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p.196.

Fig. 15. Late fifteenth-century wall painting depicting the Weighing of Souls at the Commandery, Worcester. St. Michael (centre) holds the scales in which a soul is weighed, while Mary (right) and the devil (bottom left) intercede to shift the scales.

numerous medieval church walls, which commonly depicts both the devil and Mary interceding as St. Michael weighs souls (See Figure 15).[54] The gynocentric perspective of *Purgatory* is demonstrated again the drastic magnification of Mary's role in this scene compared to St. Michael, who goes unnamed and is barely referenced.[55] Mary, on the other hand, avows her identification as 'þe welle of mercy' (677) and 'empryce of helle and of purgatorye' (678) and declares that Margaret is 'gyffene to hir' (679), becoming a

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[54] For other examples, see Anne Marshall, 'The Doom, or Last Judgement and the Weighing of Souls' https://reeddesign.co.uk/paintedchurch/doom-paintings.htm [Accessed 29th May 2024].

[55] As Mary refers to the man accompanying her as 'son', this might also be interpreted as Jesus, save that a man who appears to be Jesus is introduced separately some 50 lines later and, after conducting a mass, leads Margaret into paradise.

central authority over purgatory in a way that is not seen in *Trental* or any of its successors.

After Mary pronounces that Margaret's sins have been forgiven, the Devil broaches the subject of the pilgrimage vow:

> And þan me thoghte þe deuele tuke owte þat grete worme and saide, 'Here es
>
> þe worme of conscyence þat ȝit sall trauelle hir for a thynge þat es by-hynd, and
>
> þat es, scho made a vowe to pilgremage and fulfilled it noghte.' And þane me
>
> thoghte that þat faire lady said, 'Here es one þat hase done it for hir, and my
>
> sone and I hase gyffene þis womane mercy. And fy one the, foule Sathanas! Þou
>
> and þe worme of conscience sall neuer dere hir more.'   (681-687)

This sequence, in which the Virgin Mary presents the visionary as if she were legal evidence to counter the Devil's presentation of the 'worm of conscience', dramatically breaks from the convention which has governed the rest of vision: the visionary is no longer a passive witness within the vision, but an active participant in events. The situation is much more complex than the one-to-one specular encounter characterises *Trental,* and particularly its descendants *Awntyrs* and *Three Dead Kings,* in which the ghost is presented as a mirror to the living. Nonetheless, the weighing scene suggests a series of binary oppositions through the central image of the scales (familiar as it would be from religious art to the contemporary audience). Mary is contrasted against the Devil, and both Margaret and the visionary are quite literally weighed against the 'worm of conscience'.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, the *Trental*-tradition uses the specular encounter to inculcate sympathy for the dead and an awareness of one's own sins and the need for repentance to avoid the ghost's present fate. We are shown the living and the dead reflecting each other in order to draw moral meaning from the comparison between their sinfulness and repentance. But in this sequence, the visionary and Margaret are not presented as purely analogous or reflective of one another. Instead, the visionary has become a proxy for Margaret. The likeness between the two is not dependent upon kinship, as in other *Trental*-derived narratives, but upon their shared position as religious women, and more importantly the spiritual obligation that has passed between them and the act of spiritual charity which the visionary has done in accepting it. The focus on this interpersonal shifting of spiritual duties between the two women, reinforced here in the text's climax, provides a model of religious friendship based purely on spiritual obligation and charity, in which worldly kinship and emotionality - the key principles underlying commemorative relationships in the *Trental*-tradition - are minimised. The effect of the pilgrimage, moreover, has imbued the visionary's soul with a spiritual quality which is instantly legible within the framework of the judgement, explaining why the visionary's presence is necessary at the judgement despite her making no testimony before Mary or the Devil. The charitable execution of the visionary's duty towards Margaret has accrued to her spiritual benefit as well as Margaret's, even if the text does not dwell on the visionary's own spiritual gains. Accordingly, it can be understood that participating in the commemoration of the dead, whether as a priest, a member of the female religious, or as a patron, is an act that

forms a more spiritually perfect bond of charity between commemorator and commemorated than potentially sinful emotionality.

A Revelation of Purgatory Shown to a Holy Woman does not then simply reappropriate the *Trental* tradition to promote a particular system of mass schedules, or to promote the role of female religious in the commemorative process. It promotes a distinctive perspective upon the process of commemoration itself, which recentres and emphasises the act of commemoration itself as the key spiritual focus of the commemorative process. In doing so, the anchoress who composed it skilfully turned the underlying concerns of the *Trental*-tradition on its head. Where *The Trental of Gregory* provides a narrative framework for honouring and prioritising the familial emotions of grief, love, and anxiety for the dead within the commemorative process, *Purgatory* asks the reader to view the commemorative process as a spiritual obligation principally based on a spiritual charity estranged from familial and emotional concerns. It defends the autonomous power of commemorative masses to affect both commemorator and commemorated when conducted with the correct technical knowledge and spiritual understanding exemplified by monastic, clerical and anchoritic piety. By fusing the monastic vision genre with the ghost narrative of the *Trental* tradition, *Revelation* reincorporates a narrative tradition that had trended towards emphasising the emotional concerns and spiritual independence of the laity towards a more orthodox position based on the primary importance of the masses themselves. Such a narrative clearly chimed with the reformist agenda being pursued by the Church hierarchy in Winchester and Westminster in the 1420s. It validates the commemorative apparatus while insisting upon a high standard within the ranks of the clergy and

religious and steering a popular purgatory narrative tradition back towards the concerns of the religious. That the text succeeded so well outside of the Winchester area is a testament to the author's skill at combining a variety of discourses - the nature and geography of purgatory, the most effective forms of commemoration, and the need to do penance for one's sins or suffer in death - from a female monastic perspective that provided insights appealing to both lay and religious.

<u>Conclusion - Beyond the Grave</u>

It is rare that one can say with certainty why a given literary genre died out, but in the case of English purgatorial ghost narratives, the cause of death is obvious. With the English Reformation came the repudiation of the doctrine of purgatory in England and the dismantling of the liturgical arm of the late medieval commemorative complex. Between the dissolution of the monasteries through the 1530s and the abolition of chantries through the Dissolution of Colleges Acts of 1545 and 1547, the Reformation eliminated the main loci of individualised commemorative prayer in England. The purgatorial ghost narrative, which had always tended towards being a form of narrative apologetics for the practices of commemorative prayer, could not survive the destruction of those practices. Stories about the dangers of commemorative dysfunction were anathema to Protestants who had rejected purgatorial doctrine, and redundant to Catholics for whom the whole nation had been plunged into a state of collective commemorative dysfunction.

Thomas More's *Supplication of Souls,* written in 1529 to rebut Simon Fish's anti-purgatory tract *A Supplication for the Beggars,* is framed as a kind of purgatorial ghost narrative, being written in the voice of spirits who plead with the living not to abandon their commemoration by accepting Fish's assault on purgatorial doctrine. It closes with the souls begging the reader to remember their social ties with the dead and envisioning their communal reunion in purgatory:

> Remember what kin ye and we be together, what familiar friendship hath ere this been between us, and what promise ye have made us. Let now your words

appear and your fair promise be kept. Now, dear friends, remember how nature

and Christendom bindeth you to remember us. If any point of your old favor, any

piece of your old love, any kindness of kindred, any care of acquaintance, any

favor of old friendship, any spark of charity, any tender point of pity, any regard of

nature, any respect of Christendom… let never malice of a few fond fellows…

erase out of your hearts the care of your kindred, all force of your old friends, and

all remembrance of all Christian souls. Remember… our hot-burning fire while ye

be in pleasure and sporting. So mote God make your offspring after remember

you.[1]

That More relies so heavily on feelings of social sympathy and obligation, of kinship and

friendship, of the living's hopes for lineal commemoration by their own children,

indicates the strength and centrality of social obligation both to commemorative activity

and to popular understandings of purgatory. Like John Fisher, More understood that

however much purgatorial doctrine encouraged prayer for all souls, his audience would

be more keenly moved by the purgatorial suffering of friends and family, and that

commemoration was especially important as a means to demonstrate their fidelity to the

same. It was precisely these impulses of interpersonal sympathy and obligation to which

ghost narratives appealed. Accordingly, the *Supplication*'s speakers describe

themselves as 'kindred, spouses, companions, playfellows, and friends' – an index of

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[1] Thomas More, 'The Supplication of Souls' in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965) p. 228, ll. 7-25.

the types of relationships with which ghost narratives, and hence this study, were so heavily concerned.[2]

This study has drawn together the subset of Middle English ghost narratives that focus on this social aspect of commemoration in late medieval England. Previous studies have generally focused on specific genres or theological stances on purgatory. By focusing on the thematic importance of social commemoration, it recognizes the dangers of applying a consistent theoretical model of purgatory onto a variety of heterogenous, creative responses to purgatorial belief. These texts are concerned more with the relationship between living and dead than with defining the exact nature of purgatorial suffering and purgatorial space. It seems that neither their readership nor the ecclesiastical authorities demanded that they provide any rigorous theological model beyond a broad conformation with the outline of purgatorial doctrine. Reading these texts in this light illuminates their connection with the practical processes of late medieval commemoration rather than the theoretical doctrinal positions they take in relation to purgatory, a connection that is of interest to historians of late medieval English commemorative culture beyond literary scholarship.

Reading these ghost narratives in the context of the late medieval commemorative complex – masses, funerals, chantries, obits, almsgiving, monuments, bequests of church fabric, fittings, and artwork – illuminates the variety of ways that people conceived of and engaged with commemoration. The appeal of these texts was, by and large, their capacity to assert the efficacy of commemorative practices. Many of these

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[2] Thomas More, 'The Supplication of Souls', p.111, ll. 4-5.

narratives, like *The Trental of Gregory,* specifically respond to a lay appetite for mass

schedules and other ritual instruments of commemoration which promised increased

efficacy and security in the spiritual benefits they provided to the souls of the deceased.

These texts functioned as narrative apparatuses to teach and reassure readers as to

how they might most effectively organise masses and prayers for the souls of

themselves and their loved ones. The saying of soul masses necessarily required a

cooperative exchange, between the laity as patrons and the clergy and religious as

agents, within a model of mutuality. Ghost narratives reflect the desires and anxieties of

both parties for assurance regarding the spiritual efficacy of these exchanges and the

place of each group within the complex, mutual network of private and public

relationships in which commemorative activity occurred. More secular narratives like

Awntyrs and *The Childe of Bristow* view commemoration through an essentially familial

and social lens, centering lay patrons and their emotional proximity to the dead. Texts

with a more clerical or religious outlook, like *Gast*, *Eynsham*, and *Revelation of*

Purgatory instead view commemoration chiefly through the prayers and actions of

priests and religious as central intercessory agents regulating commemorative activity to

ensure its spiritual productivity.

Middle English ghost narratives validated the desire, strongest among the laity but still

apparent in monastic texts, for commemoration to invest social bonds with spiritual

power. These narratives do not focus on the 'post-mortem fire insurance' (to use

Takami Matsuda's phrase) of self-commemoration, despite its ubiquity in late medieval

society.[3] After all, if the deceased had the means and foresight to arrange appropriate

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[3] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 302.

masses for themselves, no commemorative dysfunction would occur. Instead, commemoration is always interpersonal, an act of sympathy, love, and charity, from the living to the dead, along the lines of kinship and friendship. Purgatory is framed as an intermediate stage not just between earth and heaven, but between the social life of the living, bound up in a complex web of kinship, friendship, and acquaintance, and the dissolution of these networks in favour of the ineffable, all-encompassing community of the saved. Ghosts in purgatory continue to participate in their social networks, pleading for and receiving prayers. As such, purgatory becomes an intermediary space where these social ties, vested with such emotional importance, were still operational and, through commemorative prayer, spiritually productive.

Since ghosts could not leave purgatory without God's leave, the appearance of literary ghosts to friends and relatives amounted to divine acknowledgement and approval of the living's emotional investment in these relationships. In a religious context which viewed marriage and parenthood as spiritually inferior to celibacy, these narratives also gave the laity access to a spiritual model where these relationships produced spiritual benefits. Those who married and had children were reassured that, though they may have lost their virginity, the remembrance and prayers of their spouses and children might speed them through purgatory and towards God. These ghost narratives presented familial commemoration as a means to assuage lay anxiety over the spiritual pitfalls of marital life and to pay off the spiritual debt incurred through marital sexuality through the loving prayers and commemoration of one's widow and children. They thus constituted an assertion of the validity of married spirituality within a mutualistic model

where marriage and parenthood served a valued spiritual purpose within the Church alongside the priesthood and religious.

Examining these texts together shows that ghost narratives were tailored to the commemorative needs and concerns of specific social groups, focusing on types of social relationship which had especial value or prominence to each group. The peasantry excepted, the literary ghosts of purgatory came from every branch of society – lay, clerical and monastic; from the upper echelons of nobility through the gentry, merchantry, and artisan classes -- and their audience was similarly broad. Narratives featuring aristocratic ghosts focused on parental commemoration, reflecting importance of lineal commemoration to aristocratic identity, while narratives about merchants emphasise the spiritual productivity of mercantile professional relationships and precariousness of mercantile dynasties and wealth across generations. Gender, too, played a large role in why and how different relationships were discussed, with texts both reflecting the perspectives of mothers, daughters and the female religious in distinctive ways, and seeking to control and downplay the role of women, especially widows, as commemorative agents in order to confirm entrenched notions of patriarchal control. As a motif, the ghost who returned from purgatory to beg for prayers tapped into profound medieval concerns about how the living could best aid and honour their beloved dead, and in this role, it proved endlessly adaptable to the social needs of its writers and readers.

By identifying this prolific sub-genre of ghost narrative, and its clear focus on how social ties might be honoured or neglected in death, this study opens up questions as to how such themes might be have influenced and been reflected in other narratives. Other

texts, both in Middle English and in the Early Modern period, are informed by the long tradition of purgatorial ghost narratives, and while this study is contained to that tradition specifically it can inform readings of other, more canonical literature. The impact of this tradition on depictions of the spirits of the dead, and of representations of death, grief, and commemoration in other medieval genres - including hagiography, romance, and religious writing conceived broadly - remains to be explored. *Pearl*, excluded from this thesis due to its highly idiosyncratic nature and disinterest in commemoration, appears in this light to represent an inversion of the purgatorial ghost narrative, in which the positions of parent and child are reversed and grief-stricken father struggles to receive spiritual aid and advice from his deceased daughter, who has passed into a paradise far removed from her father's suffering. Likewise, while the purgatorial ghost narrative *per se* 'died' with the collapse of the medieval commemorative complex in England, ghosts persisted in the popular literary imagination post-Reformation. Echoes of these texts can be clearly heard in the early modern period - particularly in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as Stephen Greenblatt has discussed.[4] The manner in which elements of the motif, shorn of the theological underpinning that validated their social focus, persisted in other supernatural narratives after the Reformation bears further investigation.

In particular, as the above examples from More and Fisher show, the ghost narrative tradition informed the theological debates that raged in England during the advent of the Reformation. The role of this widespread, popular, but understudied imaginative literature of purgatory in the development of both Catholic and Reformation theology in England in the 1520s and 1530s remains largely unexplored. The legitimacy of

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[4] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

purgatory was absolutely central to these debates, and ghost narratives provide a remarkable body of texts asserting an authorized response to purgatory centered on concerns of familial commemoration. Such concerns possessed great and enduring lay appeal and formed a central pillar of More and Fisher's defences of purgatory. The broad appeal of ghost narratives made them a useful component of the rhetorical arsenal which the English Church mustered in defence of purgatory against religious dissenters from both the Lollards and from later distinctly Protestant writers, appealing to the central commemorative desires and anxieties of the medieval laity even if their heterogeneity sometimes aroused theological complaints even from the orthodox. In framing the genre according to its social concerns, this study hopes to provide a starting point for any attempt to trace this genre and its after-images through the tumultuous period of the English Reformation and beyond.

Ghosts are a near universal feature of the human imagination and narratives about them served, in late medieval England as elsewhere, a huge array of rhetorical, emotional, and religious purposes. However, by isolating those Middle English ghost narratives which focus on social commemoration and commemorative dysfunction, a specific and highly popular literary subgenre can be identified. In its discussion of commemoration, kinship, friendship, love and obligation, this genre provides remarkable insight into how late medieval English people sought to understand and frame the commemorative acts, objects, and liturgy that they were participants in and surrounded by throughout their lives. Ghost narratives show us how purgatorial doctrine allowed its believers to preserve the multifaceted social ties of kinship and friendship, that mattered so greatly to them, beyond death, and to recast them in the light of spiritual charity.

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