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The literature of the bedchamber in Late Medieval England

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The Literature of the Bedchamber in Late Medieval England

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
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Abstract

This thesis argues for an identifiable literature of the bedchamber in late medieval England. Arising from the socio-economic context in which the private bedchamber became more accessible to wealthy merchants, as well as the nobility, than it had previously been, the literature of the bedchamber comprises romance, fabliaux, dream poems and visionary literature. The cross-genre nature of such a body of literature has previously obscured the centrality of the bedchamber to the imaginative worlds of the texts that constitute it. Using a material cultural and socio-historical approach, I aim to examine the cultural signifiers attached to the bedchamber, to do with privacy, gender, the life-cycle, and its status as a literary phenomenon. The bedchamber is a creative space, from within which texts are structured, put into contact with each other, and created. This thesis is divided into four chapters, each one focusing on a text or set of texts that illustrates a specific feature of the literature of the bedchamber. In the first chapter of this thesis, I look at privacy in *Troilus and Criseyde*, both in terms of how it is performed and how it is experienced. Troilus and Criseyde are each operating within different generic concepts of privacy that are ultimately irreconcilable with each other. The second chapter turns to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, offering an analysis of the bedchamber textiles. I argue that these textiles generate an aesthetic of enclosure that structures the poem as a whole but that also destabilises Gawain's knightly identity, providing the means through which his 'trawpe' is tested. In the third chapter, I examine *The Book of Margery Kempe* and the centrality of the bedchamber to Margery's devotional behaviour. By drawing on different models of devotion, Margery uses the bedchamber to establish her spiritual identity and authority. Chapter four takes Chaucer's dream poems as its focus and looks at the portraits of the private reader that he creates in them. Using the bedchamber as a space for a secular version of meditative reading, Chaucer positions reading as a creative activity that decentres the authority of the author. The thread running through each chapter, and defining the literature of the bedchamber, is the use of the bedchamber as a space in which to generate narratives, whether through the tension between the private space of the bedchamber and the public world outside, or

through bringing different genres and the expectations arising from them into contact with each other. The literature of the bedchamber is about bedchambers and created within them.

The Literature of the Bedchamber in Late Medieval England

Everyone in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* wants to get into everyone else's bedchamber. Nicholas schemes to get into Alisoun's 'boure', and, in doing so, displace her husband John the Carpenter, while Absolon attempts to woo her from outside the window with 'swich a love-longynge'.¹ John wants to get into the bedchamber that Nicholas rents from him and find out 'what thyng myghte hym eyle' (3424), sending his servant Robin to spy 'at that hole' (3442) in the door to find out before finally breaking the door down himself (3470-71). The suspended troughs and tubs in which Nicholas tricks John into sleeping are set up as temporary bedchambers into which John is lured on the premise that they, too, are an exclusive space within which others would want to be if only they were allowed. These temporary bedchambers form part of the knowledge that Nicholas has of 'Goddess pryvetee' (3454) and access to them is strictly limited to Nicholas, the carpenter and his wife: 'But Robyn may nat wite of this, thy knave, | Ne eek thy mayde Gille I may nat save' (3555-56). While they serve as spaces in which to sleep and pray, the troughs and tubs are ultimately not adequate to function as bedchambers: rather than giving John his privacy and providing safe enclosure, they are part of the mechanism through which he is deprived of it. The bedchamber presents and defines the thing that it contains – Alisoun, secret knowledge, safety – as desirable and entrance into the bedchamber is therefore also desired and desirable.² When John is safely asleep in his barrel, Nicholas and Alisoun 'goon to bedde | Ther as the carpenter is wont to lye' (3650-51): to achieve sexual relations with Alisoun is also to achieve entrance into the privileged space of the bedchamber that she shares with her husband. There are easier ways for Nicholas and Alisoun to have an affair, but in the *Miller's*

¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Miller's Prologue and Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 3367, 3349. All further references to *The Canterbury Tales* are taken from this edition and given in text.

² William F. Woods argues that Alisoun is equated with the space of the bedchamber. 'Private and Public Space in the *Miller's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review* 29 (1994), 166-78.

Tale access to the bedchamber is privileged over sex.³ The marital bedchamber continues to be defined in relation to John, and Nicholas replaces him with his ‘revel and melodye’ (3652), which has previously characterised his own bedchamber: ‘he made a-nyghtes melodye | So swetely that all the chambre rong’ (3214-15).⁴ Absolon, meanwhile, expresses the desire to ‘at the leeste wey’ (3680) kiss Alisoun through the shot-window and that he might be able to do so is a result of John’s perceived absence: ‘For sikirly I saugh hym nat stirynge | Aboute his dore, syn day bigan to sprynge’ (3673-74). The window is re-inscribed by Absolon as a potential portal to the bedchamber and a way for him, too, to displace John within it. Kissing Alisoun is the bare minimum that he wishes to do, suggesting that it, like the window, is the entry point into further relations with her. Both men want to be intimate with Alisoun, but it is specifically in the marital bedchamber that she shares with John that they wish to do so.

The desire to enter the bedchamber drives the narrative of the *Miller’s Tale* and is also exploited by each of the characters within it, in particular Nicholas. The trick that he plays on John is based on his understanding that, by withdrawing to his bedchamber for ‘a day or tweye’ (3411), John will want to know what he is doing in there.⁵ The urgency of John’s desire is conveyed through the violence with which he instructs Robin, ‘Go up... Clepe at his dore, or knocke with a stoon, | Looke how it is, and tel me boldely’ (3431-33). John is so desperate to gain access to Nicholas’s secret knowledge and the secret knowledge of what he is doing, that he proposes breaking down the boundaries that contain it: a threat that is

³ This is in contrast to other texts, such as *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which Troilus’s entrance into Criseyde’s chamber is both a precursor to, and a metaphor for, the consummation of their courtship.

⁴ Gila Aloni, ‘Extimacy in the *Miller’s Tale*’, *The Chaucer Review* 41 (2006), 163-86 (pp. 170-71). Aloni argues that, as Nicholas uses his own bedchamber to bring it about, it is there that is the site of his sexual fulfilment and that Alisoun is already in his bedchamber from the start of his scheme to trick John. Chaucer is, however, explicit that it is John’s bedchamber that is the site of Nicholas’s sexual fulfilment and it is both he and Alisoun who are, as a couple, intruding on that space.

⁵ For a discussion of John’s desire to know what happens in Nicholas’s bedchamber see María Bullón-Fernández, ‘Private Practices in Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006), 141-74 (p. 156); Aloni, pp. 170-72.

realised when he breaks the door down (3470-71). Restricting and providing access to his bedchamber, and fulfilling, seemingly, John's desire, are ways for Nicholas to convince John of the validity of his secret knowledge. Before explaining the coming flood to him, Nicholas 'his dore faste shette, | And doun the carpenter by hym he sette' (3499-500), having assured John that he will only 'speke in pryvetee' (3493). Entrance into the bedchamber is equated with, and a precondition for, John's entrance into the secret and exclusive knowledge that Nicholas is purporting to have gained from his studies. To be in the bedchamber is to be in the know and in the *Miller's Tale*, sex, knowledge and the bedchamber are all equated with each other through the overlapping meanings of 'pryvetee'.⁶ The bedchamber is itself private and grants access to matters and things that are also private. The divine knowledge that John believes is being imparted, however, contrasts with the much more mundane activities for which Nicholas is using his bedchamber: he 'stille in his chambre lay, | And eet and sleep, or dide what hym leste' (3420-21). The closed door transforms these activities into desirable knowledge for John; the bedchamber boundary is central to Nicholas's conceit. The reader, Nicholas and Alisoun are all aware that it is ultimately sexual, rather than divine, knowledge that Nicholas is utilising his bedchamber to seek.⁷ The architectural detail that Chaucer includes in the *Miller's Tale* has been much discussed, often with a focus on the house as a whole and how the various parts of it work together across the *Tale*.⁸ At the heart of both John's house and the *Tale*, however, are the bedchambers, through which the relationships between the characters are formed and intersect with each other, and which drive forward Chaucer's tightly knitted plot. Understanding the bedchambers – both in terms of their

⁶ Louise M. Bishop, "'Of Goddes Pryvetee Nor Of His Wyf': Confusion of Orifices in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44 (2002), 231-46; Karma Lochrie, 'Women's "Pryvetees" and Fabliau Politics in the *Miller's Tale*', *Exemplaria* 6 (1994), 287-304.

⁷ Aloni, pp. 170-71.

⁸ See, for instance, Peter G. Beidler, *The Lives of the Miller's Tale: the Roots, Composition and Retellings of Chaucer's Bawdy Story* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2015), pp. 48-86; Peter Brown, 'Shot-Wyndow: An Open and Shut Case?', *Medium Aevum* 69 (2000), 96-103; Michael W. Twomey and Scott D. Stull, 'Architectural Satire in the Tales of the Miller and the Reeve', *The Chaucer Review* 51 (2016), 310-37. Twomey and Stull include useful diagrams of the likely layout of John's house; William F. Woods, *Chaucerian Spaces: Spatial Poetics in Chaucer's Opening Tales* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), pp. 37-48.

material reality and social significance – enables the reader better to understand how the multiple tricks of the *Miller's Tale* are set up and play out.

This thesis argues for an identifiable literature of the bedchamber in late medieval England. The private bedchamber is a productive one, within and through which the literature of the bedchamber is created. Encompassing romance, dream poems and visionary literature, as well as fabliaux such as the *Miller's Tale*, the cross-genre nature of such a body of literature has obscured the centrality of the bedchamber to the imaginative world of these texts. Works included in the literature of the bedchamber take the bedchamber as a key setting for their narratives: each of the texts that I discuss as part of this thesis includes a substantial episode (or episodes) that is specifically located in the bedchamber, from Gawain 'þe god mon in gay bed lygez', about to be ambushed by Lady Bertilak, to Margery Kempe as she 'lay in hir bedde wyth hir husbond' and 'herd a sownd of melodye so swet and delectable, hir thowt, as sche had ben in paradyse'.⁹ Each text that forms the focal point of a chapter of this thesis has been chosen both due to the centrality of the private bedchamber within it and due to its status in the canon of medieval English literature, emphasising both the importance of the private bedchamber and arguing for a literature of the bedchamber. Moreover, the texts discussed here are both about the private bedchamber and of the private bedchamber. Earlier medieval texts also use the bedchamber as an important setting. In *King Horn*, for example, the hero reveals himself to Rymenhild after 'hue fel adoun abedde/ Ant after knyves gredde'.¹⁰ In *Havelock the Dane*, the bedchamber provides a similar setting for a moment of recognition:

⁹ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. by J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon, rev. by Norman Davis, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), l. 1179; *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), p. 61. All further references to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Book of Margery Kempe* are taken from these editions and given in text.

¹⁰ 'The Geste of Kyng Horn', in *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, vol. II, ed. by Susanna Greer Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2014), ll. 1201-02.

it is ‘on the nith as Goldeboru lay’ that she sees the signs of her husband’s royal nature.¹¹ In both cases, however, the bedchamber is not privileged over other spaces, nor is it productive; the revelation of Horn’s presence to Athulf occurs explicitly outside the bedchamber when ‘Rymenild eode of boure’ and his response is no less emotional than hers.¹² That which occurs in the bedchamber is immediately translated into other spaces. In the later texts that comprise the subject of this thesis, the bedchamber is, crucially, private. The things that are revealed in them, such as Troilus’s love for Criseyde, are often themselves private and remain closely aligned with the bedchamber. Moreover, in the earlier texts, the things revealed in bedchambers are created outside of them, and it is also outside of the bedchamber that the importance of what has been revealed is focused. By the time of the later texts, there has been a transition to the bedchamber as a productive space and this productivity is formed in relation to the bedchamber’s status as private. In each of the text’s discussed in this thesis, the bedchamber plays an active role in shaping the narrative set within it. Due to the social and cultural signifiers attached to it the bedchamber matters and although the bedchamber is used in as many ways as there are texts included within the literature of the bedchamber, there are also common threads running through them and their bedchambers, linked by the concept of privacy.

Taking a socio-historical and material cultural approach, this thesis explores the recurrent ideas of privacy and enclosure within the bedchamber; the role of the bedchamber at different parts of the lifecycle (including birth and death); and the bedchamber as a literary phenomenon. While the bedchamber is not defined solely by the presence of a bed, it is a space that is formed through the things that it contains and the ways in which they are used. The materiality of the bedchamber and its contents render it an appropriate space for prayer,

¹¹ ‘Havelok the Dane’, in *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelstan*, eds. by Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), l. 1248.

¹² ‘The Geste of Kyng Horn’, l.1231.

illness, reading and sex. The bedchambers discussed in this thesis are created through attention to the details and texture of the objects within them, from the luxurious and captivating textiles with which Gawain is surrounded at Hautdesert to the cold stone floor on which Margery Kempe kneels in imitation of St Bridget of Sweden while on pilgrimage to her bedchamber-chapel in Rome. The images referred to throughout this thesis illustrate the materiality of bedchambers, replete as they are with swags of bed-hangings and mounds of cushions. These images also indicate the importance of the private bedchamber to the medieval imagination and, particularly in the case of the images of the Annunciation, also form part of its material culture. As an intimate space, the bedchamber is one that is full of touches, and this includes intertextual contact. It is a space in which texts are both read and produced. The literature of the bedchamber is concerned with, and a product of, the bedchamber.

Recent critical work on the bedchamber has commented on the ‘paucity of scholarship on beds and chambers and their cultural meanings in late medieval England’.¹³ Along with this recognition has come a small blossoming of interest to which this thesis seeks to contribute. Over the last few years, publications on the bedchamber have focussed on the cultural value of the bed and bedchamber as ‘both ubiquitous and ostensibly prosaic’.¹⁴ Hollie Morgan’s book on beds and chambers draws on references to beds, chambers and bedding in wills and inventories as well as in literature to examine their social and cultural meanings: ‘the semiotics and cultural associations of object and space’.¹⁵ French, Smith and Stanbury’s 2016 inter-disciplinary approach considers the bed as the space of life and death in the medieval

¹³ Hollie L. S. Morgan, *Beds and Chambers in Late Medieval England: Readings, Representations and Realities* (York: York Medieval Press, 2017), p. 4.

¹⁴ Katherine L. French, Kathryn A. Smith, and Sarah Stanbury, ‘An Honest Bed: The Scene of Life and Death in Late Medieval England’, *Fragments* 5 (2016), 61-95 (p. 62).

¹⁵ Morgan, p. 3.

world.¹⁶ Both Morgan and French, Smith and Stanbury seek to relocate the bed and chamber within the realms of the quotidian, rather than as the ‘symbol of power’ as they have previously been assessed.¹⁷ Michelle Perrot, taking a broader historical view of the bedchamber, recognises even the most ordinary bedchamber as a space ‘saturated with intrigue and memory’ due to its status as ‘the theatre of existence, or at least its dressing room’.¹⁸ This thesis continues building on the recent critical work, but with a focus on the literary rather than social importance of the private bedchamber. Although Morgan and French, Smith and Stanbury draw on literary examples as evidence for ‘the bed and chamber in the late medieval imagination’, their focus is on the bedchamber as a material object rather than a literary one and, while still considering the materiality of the space, this thesis seeks to address this gap.¹⁹ In addition to the recent and increasing work on the medieval bedchamber, this thesis engages with work on both medieval domesticity and medieval privacy, using both to read the bedchamber as a space of literary meaning and significance.²⁰ Cary Howie, in his work on the concept of enclosure, notes that ‘whatever enclosure seeks to encapsulate or evoke (and these moments will always be simultaneous in their respectively inward and outward reaching) it is never perfect, never self-contained’.²¹ As a domestic

¹⁶ French, Smith and Stanbury, pp. 61-95.

¹⁷ Morgan, pp. 6-7. Morgan also provides a useful summary of such research; see FNs 17-19.

¹⁸ Michelle Perrot, *The Bedroom: an Intimate History*, trans. by Lauren Elkin (Cambridge, Mass.: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 1.

¹⁹ Morgan, p. 3.

²⁰ See, for instance, *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. by Georges Duby, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1998); *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household*, ed. by P.J.P. Goldberg and Maryanne Kowaleski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sarah Rees-Jones, ‘Public and Private Space and Gender in Medieval Europe’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 246-61; Diane Shaw, ‘The Construction of the Private in Medieval London’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26 (1996), 447-66; C.M. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

²¹ Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: the Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

space, the bedchamber is not total in its enclosure and nor is the medieval concept of privacy absolute, but it is a result of this that the bedchamber is able to be a productive space.²²

The literature of the bedchamber arises out of a specific socio-economic moment in late medieval England.²³ While in the earlier part of the medieval period, private bedchambers had been limited to the nobility, by the time that Chaucer was writing the *Canterbury Tales* they were becoming increasingly common in the houses of wealthy merchants and craftsmen.²⁴ Both private space and the concept of privacy had become more accessible. As the daughter and wife of prosperous merchants, it befits Margery Kempe's social status and her view of herself to have a private bedchamber.²⁵ John the Carpenter's house, with its two private bedchambers, marks him very much as a man of the moment and the *Miller's Tale* as emblematic of this shift in domestic arrangements towards private bedchambers. The luxury of such space underpins Chaucer's description of John as a 'riche gnof' (3188); during the later medieval period, not everyone could afford a separate bedchamber, never mind two. The bedchamber was a status symbol denoting prosperity and, as an urban-dwelling carpenter, John is part of this trend. His role as a landlord also situates him within the socio-economic group of aspirational urban craftsmen and trades-people: the second bedchamber is a marker of his wealth but, as he rents it out, it is also part of how he generates his wealth

²² As well as being productive, the bedchamber is itself also produced by those who occupy it. Troilus, for instance, produces his bedchamber as a private space through his performance of privacy. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). For a discussion of Lefebvre's work in relation to the medieval, see Megan Cassidy-Welch, 'Space and Place in Medieval Contexts', *Parergon* 27 (2010), 1-12.

²³ The texts that form the focal points of each of the chapters of this thesis were all written in England during the period c.1350 – c.1450, coinciding with the increasing accessibility of the private bedchamber to those other than the nobility. It is this interest in the private bedchamber (as opposed to beds of state or other communal or public sleeping arrangements) that lies behind the temporal and linguistic focus of this thesis, although some earlier French examples are drawn on throughout as points of comparison and, potential, influence for the literature of the bedchamber in medieval England.

²⁴ Michael Thompson, *The Medieval Hall: The Basis of Secular Domestic Life, 600-1600* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 117; Woolgar, pp. 78-80.

²⁵ W.A. Pantin, 'The Merchants' Houses and Warehouses of King's Lynn', *Medieval Archaeology* 6 (1962), 173-81.

and so is intimately tied up with his identity and place in society.²⁶ Comparing John the Carpenter to Simkin the Miller from the *Reeve's Tale* further locates him within this specific socio-economic group and cultural development. Unlike John's household, Simkin and his family sleep in the same bedchamber. Along with Simkin and his wife, 'his doghter hadde a bed, al by hirselve, | Right in the same chambre, by and by' (4142-43) while the baby occupies a 'cradel at hir beddes feet' (4156). Into this small and already crowded chamber are added the makeshift beds for John and Aleyn to sleep in: Simkin 'in his owene chambre hem made a bed | With sheetes and with chalons faire yspred, | Noght from his owene bed ten foot or twelve' (4139-41).²⁷ The lack of windows in the bedchamber further emphasises the limitations of Simkin's bedchamber, while the hole in the wall (4298) suggests that it is not kept in good repair. This cramped and crowded space is Chaucer's invention: in the source story 'The Miller and the Two Clerics', the daughter sleeps in 'a cupboard every night' in which her father locks her 'to protect her against her own warmth'.²⁸ The clerics, meanwhile, are offered the floor in the hall.²⁹ Chaucer's modification of the miller's house from his source locates Simkin as precisely as his description of John's house does the carpenter. Both characters are craftsmen living in, or near to, university cities. The difference in their economic circumstances is marked by their access to the private bedchamber as a social signifier. It is out of this moment – when more people had access to bedchambers and, as such, they had more significance and cultural meaning – that the literature of the bedchamber arises.

²⁶ Twomey and Stull discuss John's role as a landlord and the capitalist context in which Chaucer places him, pp. 316-20.

²⁷ Simkin characterises his whole house as 'streit' (4122).

²⁸ Peter G. Beidler, 'The Reeve's Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales: volume I*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 23-74; Peter G. Beidler, 'Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, IX, 6 and Two 'Soft' German Analogues', *The Chaucer Review* 28 (1994), 237-51.

²⁹ 'The Miller and the Two Clerics', trans. by Robert Hellman and Richard O'Gorman, in *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*, ed. by V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Norton, 2005) pp. 344-47 (p.346).

The medieval literature most associated already with the bedchamber is romance.³⁰ Chaucer himself was aware of this: Pandarus demonstrates that the bedchamber is both a suitable setting for a romance and for reading romance when he withdraws from Troilus and Criseyde's bed 'as for to looke upon an old romaunce'.³¹ Dream poems frequently use romance tropes when portraying beds and chambers, as in *The Book of the Duchess* when the narrator, often assumed to be lovesick, turns to 'a romaunce... | To rede and drive the night away'.³² As the inverse form of romance, fabliau, too, is associated critically with the bedchamber.³³ The central contention of this thesis is that the bedchamber is not limited to a single form of literature, nor is it used for a single purpose. Rather, enabled by the privacy offered by the bedchamber, the multiple cultural signifiers attached to the bedchamber are used creatively, often in tension with one another, within the literature of the bedchamber to form its narratives and the characters who populate them. Even within the fabliau of the *Miller's Tale*, the bedchamber is multi-faceted. In addition to the adultery and trickery that typify the genre, there is a sense of the everyday domesticity inherent in Alisoun and John's marital bedchamber during the surprisingly intimate scene in which they are awoken by Absolon's attempts at serenading:³⁴

This capenter awook, and herde him synge,
And spak unto his wyf, and seyde anon,

³⁰ Morgan, pp. 8-9. See also Megan G. Leitch, 'Enter the Bedroom: Managing Space for the Erotic in Middle English Romance', in *Sexual Culture in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. by Amanda Hopkins, Robert Allen Rouse and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), pp. 39-54; Danielle Régner-Bohler, 'Imagining the Self', in *A History of Private Life*, pp. 323-31.

³¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by Stephen A. Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3.980. All further references taken from this edition and given in text.

³² Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Book of the Duchess', ed. by Colin Wilcockson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ll. 48-9. All further references taken from this edition and given in text. On the narrator's illness see John M. Hill, 'The *Book of the Duchess*, Melancholy, and That Eight-Year Sickness', *The Chaucer Review* 9 (1974), 35-50; Susan Schibanoff, *Chaucer's Queer Poetics: Rereading the Dream Trio* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 76-79.

³³ On the relationship between romance and fabliau see Corinne Saunders, 'Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*', in *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, ed. by Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 452-75 (pp. 462-63). On fabliau and the bedchamber see Aloni, p. 166; Thomas J. Farrell, 'Privacy and the Boundaries of Fabliau in The Miller's Tale', *ELH* 56 (1989), 17-33.

³⁴ For Aloni, this episode epitomises the idea of 'extimacy' – the invasion of private and intimate space by something external, p. 167.

“What! Alisoun! Herestow nat Absolon
 That chaunteth thus under oure boures wal?”
 And she answerde hir housbonde therwithal,
 “Yis, God woot, John, I heere it every deel”. (3364-69)

Additionally, Nicholas’s bedchamber functions as a study and storage space for his ‘Almageste, and bookes grete and smale, | His astrelabie, longynge for his art, | His augrym stones layen faire apart’ (3208-10). It is also where he spends his leisure time playing his ‘gay sautrie, | On which he made a-nyghtes melodye’ (3213-14). It is because Nicholas’s bedchamber has multiple uses, and therefore multiple meanings within the household, that he is able to use it to trick John: the carpenter is aware that it is a space in which Nicholas attempts to uncover divine mysteries. Similarly, Margery Kempe’s marital bedchamber is a devotional space, the space in which she is ill, and where she has her many children. In different types of household, the bedchamber was a multifunctional space: as well as being used for sleep and sex, the bedchamber was a space used for reading (including for study), for leisure and social activities, to nurse the sick and dying, and in which children were born.³⁵ The bedchamber is not a space for any one type of behaviour or text.

Identifying bedchambers in medieval houses or in the stories that are set in them is not always straightforward, even with the shift towards single-use rooms. The presence of a bed does not necessarily indicate a bedchamber. Although private bedchambers started to become more common, beds still popped up in other spaces. In Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, for instance, Criseyde’s women are hosted in Pandarus’s hall when she finds herself unexpectedly staying the night (3.666-67). There were also many different forms of bed, some of which, such as pallet beds or truckle beds, could be easily moved around as needed. Beds could be in the hall, side chambers, garrets or even cellar.³⁶ In her survey of

³⁵ Rees-Jones, p. 251. See also French, Smith and Stanbury, pp. 61-95.

³⁶ French, Smith and Stanbury, pp. 66-67. See also Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 128-29; Lawrence Wright, *Warm and Snug: The History of the Bed* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), pp. 59-61.

inventories, however, Morgan has identified ‘beds’ and ‘bedding’ as the articles most likely to be found in the chamber.³⁷ While not all spaces that contained beds constituted bedchambers, most, if not all bedchambers contained some form of bed: the chamber was increasingly becoming the bedchamber. The term ‘closet’ is often synonymous with bedchamber, and closets were private spaces that sometimes contained a bed. Not every closet, though, was a bedchamber and as a space it provides a useful site of comparison that helps to better define the bedchamber and its function. Although I am not solely concerned with the bed in medieval literature, I am using it as one of the defining characteristics of the spaces under discussion. Moreover, I am interested in the relationship between the bed and the space that it occupies, specifically when that space is a chamber set aside for the purpose of containing the bed and the activities associated with it, rather than all beds throughout the household or all private spaces. To emphasise this distinction, I have chosen to use the term ‘bedchamber’, rather than ‘chamber’ or ‘closet’, throughout.

The Private Bedchamber

The idea of privacy, in the sense that it might have been understood in late medieval England, is recurrent throughout this thesis. It might be more accurate to say that it is about the literature of the *private* bedchamber. The difference in John and Simkin’s sleeping arrangements matters not only because of the social status that they impart: the narrative of the *Miller’s Tale* is driven as much by the fact that the characters have access to private bedchambers as that of the *Reeve’s Tale* is by the fact that they do not. Nicholas relies on his private bedchamber, and the idea that, through it, he has access to private knowledge, to trick John, while both Nicholas and Absolon seek entry into Alisoun’s private bedchamber in order to commit adultery with her. Privacy is, however, as ambiguous a concept in the *Miller’s Tale* as it would have been more broadly in the medieval period. Medieval privacy is

³⁷ Morgan, pp. 15-20.

contingent and relative rather than the more absolute and defined expectations that today's readers might bring to Chaucer's texts. Megan Leitch describes private space as being 'not concrete, but rather produced, delimited or forestalled by negotiations of power'.³⁸ As is still the case today, privacy is a function of personal relationships rather than space, but the contested nature of privacy during the later medieval period renders those negotiations of power more visible, mapped on to the material structure of the bedchamber and the enclosure that it offers. In the *Miller's Tale*, the various negotiations of power between the characters are played out through specific architectural details of the bedchambers. John's ignorance of what Nicholas is up to when he shuts himself in his room points to Nicholas's enclosure within the space: he is unobservable and unknowable. This is highlighted by the discrepancy between the feeling that something is 'nat aright with Nicholas' (3426) that John has, and the pleasant time that Nicholas is actually having while he waits for John to crack: he 'eet and sleep, or dide what hym leste' (3421). The privacy of his bedchamber is produced through the explicit exclusion of John from both the space and the knowledge that it contains and symbolises.³⁹ When John does finally give in to his curiosity he is able to send Robin on his behalf to spy on Nicholas through 'an hole he foond, ful lowe upon a bord, | Ther as the cat was wont in for to crepe' (3440-41). The enclosure and privacy of Nicholas's bedchamber are not as absolute as they have initially been presented. While John believes that his spying on Nicholas redresses the power dynamic between them, the porousness of the bedchamber boundaries is what Nicholas has been relying on to progress his trick. He knows that he is being observed: 'This Nicholas sat evere capyng upright, | As he had kiked on the newe moone' (3444-45). The knowledge that John believes he has gained through his sleuthing is partial and controlled by Nicholas, even as John polices the material boundaries

³⁸ Leitch, p. 43.

³⁹ Twomey and Stull argue that the very fact of Nicholas having access to a private bedchamber, and one that is on the upper level of the house alongside that of John and Alisoun, diminishes the social and physical distance between landlord and tenant and, as such, breaks down the hierarchy within which they exist, p. 321. See also Woods, 'Private and Public Space in the *Miller's Tale*', p. 168.

of the space.⁴⁰ The ever-shifting power dynamic between the two men is mediated through the bedchamber, its door and the cat-hole in it, and it is through the bedchamber and its architectural features that both Nicholas and John attempt to reshape that dynamic.

The *Miller's Tale* provides an example of the instability and negotiability of privacy within a domestic setting. Concerned with the private lives, and private body parts, of its characters, it is only at the very end of the tale that there is a sense of the public sphere when 'the neighebores, bothe smale and grete, | In ronnen for to gauren on this man' (3826-27). Coming in to laugh at John and expose his foolishness, the neighbours render the private public so that the two spheres collide and the private is ultimately consumed by the public. The medieval concept of privacy is often defined against the public sphere. Farrell and Shaw both argue for the centrality of the Roman concept of *privatus* to the medieval idea of privacy, defined as being withdrawn from public life.⁴¹ The bedchamber developed as a space of withdrawal and was often the only private space to which people had ready access and to which they could withdraw from the public realm. In great houses, private doorways enabled the lord and his family to leave the hall for their chamber via the dais, often without having to cross any part of the hall at all.⁴² Not only did the bedchamber itself enable a level of seclusion away from the rest of the household and other guests gathered in the hall, but entrance into it also happened unobserved. Privacy is both defined against and produced in tension with the public and the communal. As Diana Webb notes, 'there was surely never a time when individuals, families or groups did not sometimes claim the right to withdraw

⁴⁰ Bishop, pp. 231-246. See also Woods, 'Private and Public Space in the *Miller's Tale*', pp. 171-72.

⁴¹ Farrell, p. 773; Shaw, 'The Construction of the Private in Medieval London', p. 454. See also Georges Duby, 'Private Power, Public Power', in *A History of Private Life*, pp. 3-31 (pp. 3-6).

⁴² Margaret Wood, *The English Medieval House* (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981), pp. 129-36.

from public scrutiny into a space of their own', and the medieval bedchamber provided just that space.⁴³

Throughout this thesis, I will be considering the bedchamber and the privacy that it offers in the context of the domestic, as well as the public. The bedchamber does not just exist in opposition to the public and neither privacy nor the divide between public and private were absolute. In noble households, the bedchamber was used for business and Danielle Régnier-Bohler warns against the temptation of 'describing the hall as being reserved for collective purposes, for the more gregarious aspects of private life, while the chamber was for more secret and intimate uses'.⁴⁴ In addition to the use of the bedchamber for business or social purposes, the modern concept of 'privacy' in the sense of unobserved solitude does not reflect the reality of medieval life, either in great houses or more modest ones; servants and other members of the household would have been attendant in the bedchamber. The medieval household was inherently communal in nature, including as it did 'members outside the immediate family: apprentices, put-out children, teachers, associates, distant relatives, boarders'.⁴⁵ In addition to his wife, John the Carpenter's household hosts at least two servants and a lodger; it was not only noble households that included members beyond the nuclear family. In Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* the narrator paints a picture of his melancholic solitude as he finds that he 'might nat slepe | Til now late this other night' (44-45). When he wants distraction, however, he is able to 'bad oon reche me a book, | A romaunce, and he it me tok' (47-48). The narrator is alone, but not unaccompanied. The presence of truckle beds, which were stored away under the main bed, for servants to sleep on further suggests that their continued presence was an expected part of being in the

⁴³ Diana Webb, *Privacy and Solitude in the Middle Ages: the Medieval Discovery of Personal Space* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. ix. See also David Vincent, *Privacy: A Short History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), pp. 1-12.

⁴⁴ Régnier-Bohler, p. 323.

⁴⁵ Shaw, 'The Construction of the Private in Medieval London', p. 449.

bedchamber.⁴⁶ Access to the bedchamber was, though, privileged and controlled. Even when being used for business, access to the bedchamber is restricted to only those who have been selected and invited, as opposed to the more general crowd in the hall. In *Troilus and Criseyde* Pandarus is able to come and go from Troilus's bedchamber as he pleases, but access for others is restricted by 'certeyn knyght that for the tyme kepte | The chambre door' (4.351-52). The question of privacy is one of privilege, modulated by class, power, and gender, both in terms of who is allowed to access the space and who matters when they are present within it.

Privacy was desirable because it was hard to come by. Diane Shaw draws a parallel between the increasing desire for privacy and the decreasing lack of personal space in medieval towns and cities, describing the 'physical aggravation of this urban confusion of human activity and spatial complexity' that Londoners would have had to tolerate.⁴⁷ Space, particularly private space, could be difficult to demarcate and protect. Chaucer, living at the bustling Aldgate for twelve years, would have had first-hand experience of the crowded and jostling city.⁴⁸ Although he was fortunate to have private rooms over the gate, the ground-floor was reserved for use by the city's troops and wardens, while the noise from the passing flow of traffic and surrounding parish churches would have encroached on his space throughout the day.⁴⁹ Chaucer was no stranger to the fraught, fragile privacy that was on offer in the city. Nearly all of the texts under discussion in this thesis have an urban setting. Troy is as much a character in *Troilus and Criseyde* as either of the titular characters or Pandarus.⁵⁰ Margery

⁴⁶ Wright, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁷ Shaw, 'The Construction of the Private in Medieval London', p. 448.

⁴⁸ Paul Strohm, *The Poet's Tale: Chaucer and the Year That Made the Canterbury Tales* (London: Profile Books, 2014), pp. 49-89.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 56-58. See also Christopher Cannon, 'Chaucer and the Language of London', in *Chaucer and the City*, ed. by Ardis Butterfield, Chaucer Studies XXXVII (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 79-94.

⁵⁰ John P. McCall, 'The Trojan Scene in Chaucer's *Troilus*', *ELH* 29 (1962), 263-75; Barbara Nolan, 'Chaucer's Poetics of Dwelling in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Chaucer and the City*, pp. 57-78.

Kempe lives in the busy merchant town of Bishop's Lynn and travels to a number of cities both in England and further afield. Where she is going to sleep on her travels is source of anxiety throughout her life. The first thing that we know about John the Carpenter is that he is 'dwellynge at Oxenford' (3187). In terms of its setting, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is an outlier but both Gawain and the text are also concerned with privacy, and specifically with understanding the type of privacy afforded him by his bedchamber at the court of Hautdesert. Away from the public realm, privacy is sought and defined against other types of space, both courtly and domestic. Equally, while Criseyde and Margery are urban dwellers, the privacy that they seek is not primarily from their neighbours, unlike John the Carpenter: they seek privacy within the household. I am not arguing that women are symbolic of the bedchamber; however, the experience of privacy is modulated through gender. As most women did not have access to the public realm, privacy for figures such as Margery and Criseyde cannot be defined against it. Rather, for Criseyde in particular, privacy is more contingent than it is for Troilus. The bedchamber is not public, but exposed to the views of others. Across the literature of the bedchamber are multiple different types and experiences of privacy, formed through and articulated by the bedchamber.

The Productive Bedchamber

The privacy of the bedchamber renders it a productive space. It is the space of sex and childbirth, and is frequently used as the setting for the Annunciation in medieval

iconography.⁵¹ The bedchamber is also productive in other ways: from his solitary room, Nicholas produces further, pseudo bedchambers in the form of the tubs and troughs that he



persuades John to hang from the rafters. Dreams, too, are portrayed as the products of the bedchamber, issuing forth from the dreamer and thus quasi-independent of them, as in the illumination of the dream of Pharaoh (left) and in Chaucer's dream

poems.⁵² In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the lady's gift of her green girdle is a product of the bedchamber that acts beyond its boundaries. As a literary phenomenon, the private bedchamber also produces the texts that feature it. Its status as a productive space places the bedchamber in constant tension with the enclosure that defines it. The texts, dreams, visions, objects and people that are produced by the bedchamber and the enclosure that it offers resonate and act outside its walls. It might be an enclosing space, but the bedchamber is not an isolated one. Dreams, babies and other things that did not previously exist in the world come to be in the bedchamber, including texts.

As a domestic space, the bedchamber produces expectations of certain types of behaviour in those who inhabit it, and conduct and conduct literature is a further recurrent trope throughout this thesis. Privacy is built on the expectation that others will not disturb you without authorisation or good reason. The bedchamber was fraught with expected codes of

⁵¹ For a discussion of birth and the bedchamber see Morgan, pp. 193-200.

⁵² London, British Library, MS Additional 15268, fol. 56^v.

conduct for men and women and the interpersonal relationships between them.⁵³ The didactic ‘Arise Early’ poem suggests that by conducting oneself properly in how one sleeps and rises, one might lead a good, Christian life.⁵⁴ The conduct of those invited into the enclosed and personal space of the bedchamber is a source of tension: in the *Reeve’s Tale* Simkin fails to show his guests the hospitality that was required of him, and they in turn do not behave as guests ought. Nicholas, too, does not follow the conduct proper to him as a lodger in John’s house as he sets out to woo his landlord’s wife. Gawain is uncertain of the code of conduct expected of him: should he be a good guest and refrain from sleeping with his host’s wife, or should he be the Gawain of romance that the court expects him to be and woo the Lady in turn? Different expectations produce different bedchambers and different narratives that operate within any one text and give rise to such moments of conflict. How to act in the bedchamber is a key characteristic of the literature of the bedchamber. Characters want to gain entry to the bedchamber, but it is not always clear how they should act, or how they want to act, once they do.

Following on from my discussion of the bedchamber in the *Miller’s Tale* in the introduction, this thesis is divided into four chapters. The first, on *Troilus and Criseyde*, looks at the medieval idea of privacy in more detail, examining how it is performed within and through the bedchamber. Privacy is something that is desperately sought by both Troilus and Criseyde, individually and together, but their differing performances of privacy generate multiple understandings of the bedchamber that are ultimately irreconcilable with one another. The second chapter turns to *Gawain* and the formation of enclosure through the materiality of the bedchamber. While Troilus uses the privacy of the bedchamber that its enclosure offers as part of the role of courtly lover that he performs and his wooing of Criseyde, Lady Bertilak and her husband use the aesthetic of enclosure generated by the

⁵³ Glenn Burger, *Conduct Becoming: Good Wives and Husbands in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), pp. 105-40.

⁵⁴ Quoted in full in Morgan, p. 10.

bedchamber at Hautdesert to seduce Gawain, ensnaring him within the various games at court. The aesthetic of enclosure structures the poem as a whole and governs how signs and symbols operate throughout it, producing a slippery and deceptive relationship between signifiers and what they signify. The multiplicity of the bedchamber can be both creative and perilous. Like Troilus, Margery Kempe, the subject of chapter three, uses her bedchamber as a performance space: it is here that she performs her devotions in a manner comparable to the church. Margery's use of the bedchamber as a devotional space is modelled on that of the Virgin Mary and St Bridget, and also places her in a community of other holy women. It is in the bedchamber that they pray, encounter Christ, and contemplate the divine. By drawing on these multiple models, and the secular significance of the bedchamber, Margery establishes her spiritual authority. The narrators in Chaucer's dream poems use the bedchamber as a space for a more secular form of the contemplative practices demonstrated by Margery. The bedchamber is used as a space for reading and, resulting from this, dreaming and writing. The literature of the bedchamber is concerned with that space.

I Just Want to be Alone: Performing Privacy in *Troilus and Criseyde*

Whenever Troilus is particularly overcome by his feelings for Criseyde, he takes to his bed ‘allone’ (1.358).¹ His performances of lovesickness and courtly love are grounded in his performance of privacy. He establishes himself in the role of lovesick young gentleman not through his interactions with the object of his affection but by withdrawing into his bedchamber. Following his first encounter with Criseyde in the temple, he goes into his ‘chambre... allone’ and

doun upon his beddes feet hym sette,
And first he gan to sike, and eft to grone,
And thought ay on hire so, withouten lette,
That, as he sat and wook, his spirit mette
That he hire saugh a-temple, and al the wise
Right of hire look, and gan it newe avise. (1.358-64)

Troilus’s privacy is signalled by his outward expression of emotion – his sighs and groans – and his inward contemplation of Criseyde, both of which necessitate him leaving the public space of the temple. The requirement for Troilus to withdraw from public into the private space of the bedchamber characterises his expression of lovesickness as his relationship with Criseyde develops. On returning from Criseyde’s palace to deliver Troilus the letter that she has written him, Pandarus finds Troilus ‘allone abedde, | That lay, as do thise lovers, in a traunce | Bitwixen hope and derk disesperaunce’ (2.1305-07). Pandarus is correct in his assessment of his friend: by taking to his bed, Troilus is behaving ‘as do thise lovers’ and so becoming one of their number. Privacy is a necessary precondition for him to do so and the performance of privacy underpins that of lovesickness and courtly love. The somatic markers of his lovesickness require privacy for Troilus to express them, but it is Pandarus, as the audience to Troilus’s performance, who recognises their significance. Troilus is performing privacy so that he might perform lovesickness for his friend.

¹ Troilus is also described as ‘allone’ or wishing to be ‘allone’ at 1.547, 1.806, 2.1305, 3.413, 3.540, 4.220, 4.947, 5.222, 5.249 and 5.471.

This chapter is concerned with privacy and the bedchamber, and how that privacy is experienced and constructed by those within and without it. The need for an audience complicates Troilus's performance of privacy. As with many of the texts discussed in this thesis, privacy in the bedchamber is not always synonymous with solitude. The space of the bedchamber is itself no guarantee of privacy for Troilus. Pandarus, as a courtier and Troilus's confidant, is able to come and go without Troilus's permission or prior knowledge: he enters 'unwar' on the first occasion, implying that Troilus was not expecting anyone to hear 'hym groone' (1.549). The physical space of the bedchamber, and the seclusion that it offers away from both the rest of the household and the public spaces of Troy, is just one of the ways in which privacy is experienced in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Privacy is also constituted by how Troilus, or Criseyde, or Pandarus, performs within that space, and how the audience to that performance responds. In the Trojan surveillance state within which Chaucer sets his poem, privacy is much sought after and difficult to achieve. Pandarus might be able to enter



Troilus's bedchamber 'unwar', but in doing so he disrupts the privacy that Troilus seeks there. The image of the bedchamber from Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (left) demonstrates the potential for observation even within it.² Troilus's use of the bedchamber as a stage for his lovesickness mirrors that of the narrator in *The Book of the Duchess*: both are melancholic and alone in their bedchambers. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, Chaucer

situates the enclosed space of the bedchamber within the broader socio-economic context of

² Guido delle Colonne, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, London, British Library, Additional 15477, fol. 35^v.

Troy and the Trojan War. Both the bedchamber and Troilus's experiences of privacy within it are shaped by events and social pressures beyond its boundaries. Steven R. Guthrie characterises *Troilus* as appearing to 'struggle towards a concept for which the modern word *privacy* is apt': rather than a fixed state, privacy is an ongoing process.³ The bedchamber offers the possibility of privacy against both the public world of Troy and the domestic one of the household within which the bedchamber, Troilus, and Criseyde are situated. Chaucer uses the bedchamber to articulate a privacy that goes beyond the conceptual binary of public/private and instead he examines how privacy was experienced within social and historical contexts. As a result, there are multiple different types of bedchamber with multiple different performances of privacy to multiple different audiences operating throughout *Troilus*. By reading the poem through its bedchambers as loci of potential privacy, I will argue that the bedchambers produce a plurality of privacies that render any single performance of privacy unsustainable. The poem is not struggling towards 'a concept' of privacy, but multiple different ones. Troilus attempts to incorporate Criseyde within his courtly, romantic privacy but it proves incompatible with her social understanding of privacy, and so breaks down under pressure.⁴ While critics such as Guthrie and Barry Windeatt read the struggle for privacy as the central tension in the poem, I suggest that it is instead the tension between different concepts of privacy, as performed in and through the

³ Steven R. Guthrie, 'Chivalry and Privacy in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *La Chastelaine de Vergy*', *The Chaucer Review* 34 (1999), 150-73 (p. 150).

⁴ Jennifer Garrison argues that privacy in *Troilus and Criseyde* is 'largely an aristocratic fantasy'. I propose that Troilus's version of privacy can be defined as such, whereas Criseyde's is grounded much more in the social realities of being an aristocratic widow. 'Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and the Dangers of Masculine Interiority', *The Chaucer Review* 49 (2015), 320-43 (p. 332). A.C. Spearing also offers a class-based reading of the importance of the bedchamber in *Troilus and Criseyde*: 'One reason why so much of the poem's action – and not only its sexual action – takes place in bed must be that only there could privacy be obtained. The medieval aristocracy had the leisure to cultivate their emotions, and they were also more likely to possess the physical arrangements, such as private chambers, trapdoors, and curtains, which made secret relationships possible.' *Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1976), p. 33.

bedchamber.⁵ The tragedy of *Troilus and Criseyde* is one of shifting versions and experiences of privacy that cannot be reconciled with each other.

To be private, Troilus has to both first go into his bedchamber and then perform privacy within it. In the first section of this chapter, I will examine the ways in which privacy is performed in the bedchamber and in relation to other spaces, both public and in the rest of the household. Mary E. Trull, in her work on early modern literature, provides a useful definition of performing privacy:

A privacy performed would, it seems, be a facsimile of true privacy. However, the phrase prompts us to think about performance as constitutive of privacy and therefore pries open the apparently natural opposition between “private” and “public”... The phrase “performing privacy” designates the transition from privacy to publicity as a performance that defines both poles of the binary at the same time that it reveals them as mutually constitutive.⁶

Trull’s work foregrounds how privacy is not an external state into which one can enter – for instance, by stepping into a room – but a concept that the individual must construct as an ongoing process in relation to the public. While the early modern writers and characters with whom Trull is concerned are performing privacy in order to access the public realm, in *Troilus*, written at a time when privacy was even more at a premium, privacy is performed in order to access the private and escape the public. Chaucer declares his interest in the private over the public at the very start of the poem when he tells of his intention to avoid recounting ‘how this town com to destruccion’ as it is ‘a long digression | Fro my matere’ (1.141-44). From the very first lines, the public is the background against which Chaucer’s ‘matere’ of the private lives of Troilus, Criseyde and Pandarus is formed and defined. The story of the Trojan War is not only public in its content matter, it is public in the sense of

⁵ Barry Windeatt, “‘Love That Oughte Ben Secree’ in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*”, *The Chaucer Review* 14 (1979), 116-31.

⁶ Mary E. Trull, *Performing Privacy and Gender in Early Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 1.

being well-known by virtue of the ‘Troian gestes’ (1.145) that precede Chaucer’s poem.⁷ The privileging of the private over the public in *Troilus* has received substantial critical attention. Sarah Stanbury argues that the metaphor of the city under siege is deployed to map private sexual desire through the gazes that the characters exchange and turn inward to themselves.⁸ Privacy is itself also desired in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and by analysing the different bedchambers that make up Troy, I will map how and where privacy is performed across the public space of the city.

Unlike the ‘Troian gestes’ to which Chaucer gestures, the Troy that he sketches out is populated by domestic spaces: not only bedchambers, but gardens, halls, stairways and gutters. The city is seen through a domestic lens rather than public one, with the war confined both literally and figuratively to outside its walls. In his careful mapping of the townhouses through which his characters move, Chaucer creates a taxonomy of space within which the public, the domestic, and the private are all demarcated against each other. This demarcation is both between physical spaces and between the ways in which they are understood and experienced, as ‘the development of private rooms in addition to hall and chamber in the fifteenth century are suggestive of an increasingly materialised demarcation of the domestic, and hence, of the private and secret’.⁹ The development of private spaces, chief among them the bedchamber, enabled individuals to experience privacy and act accordingly in a private way.¹⁰ Chaucer’s close attention to the division of domestic space has been much discussed. Barbara Nolan looks at why some parts of Troy,

⁷ For a useful overview of the critical history of Chaucer and Troy, see C. David Benson, *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 60-83.

⁸ Sarah Stanbury, ‘The Voyeur and the Private Life in *Troilus and Criseyde*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 13 (1991), 141-58. John H. Pratte, however, argues that the context of the Trojan War is far more present in *Troilus and Criseyde* than even Chaucer would have us believe. *Chaucer and War* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), pp. 50-71.

⁹ Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 164.

¹⁰ Burger, pp. 115-16.

notably the wealthy neighbourhoods in which Troilus, Pandarus and Criseyde reside, are so ‘insistently present’ while others are not.¹¹ Windeatt considers the ‘carefully observed domestic context’ and the relationships between the different houses.¹² Meanwhile Stanbury sees the ‘creation of delineated private space’ as one of the text’s ‘most remarkable and insistent features’.¹³ Chaucer uses the delineation of space to define how the private functions in relation to the domestic, as well as to the public. *Troilus and Criseyde* is literature of the bedchamber in the sense that its narrative is structured around movements between bedchambers. Moreover, the careful division of space drives the proliferation of private spaces and experiences of them. As I will argue in the second part of this chapter, privacy is experienced differently by different characters. By examining Criseyde’s performances of privacy, I will suggest that there is a gendered aspect to her performance of privacy that renders it incompatible with the versions performed by Troilus and Pandarus. For Troilus, the bedchamber functions as a private space because he believes there to be a clear distinction between the role of soldier-prince that he plays in public and that of lovesick courtly gentleman that he takes on in private. His performance of privacy is therefore divorced from the public realm. Chaucer positions Criseyde’s role as a chaste and pious widow as being as performative as Troilus’s lovesickness: she is playing a role and is very aware of its boundaries. When Pandarus entreats her to ‘do wey youre barbe, and shew youre face bare; | Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce’ (2.110-11), she chides him ‘is that a widewes lif’ (2.114), acknowledging that such behaviours as her uncle suggests would break with her role. In addition to being aware of the actions that do or do not

¹¹ Nolan, pp. 57-58.

¹² Barry Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 191. See also H.M. Smyser, ‘The Domestic Background of *Troilus and Criseyde*’, *Speculum* 31 (1956), 297-315. Smyser considers the houses, particularly that of Pandarus, in relation to the mansions and townhouses that populated medieval London. Paul Strohm identifies features around Chaucer’s residence in Aldgate that influenced his conception of Troy and the neighbourhood in which the poem is set. *The Poet’s Tale*, pp. 48-49.

¹³ Stanbury, ‘The Voyeur and the Private Life’, p. 141.

constitute a performance of widowhood, she displays a constant concern over how her actions could be or will be interpreted by an audience.¹⁴ The awareness of a potential audience is part of Criseyde's performance of privacy and helps her to define private space. Unlike for Troilus, however, there is no clear delineation between the public and the private for Criseyde. Lochrie has identified a

domain of the secret and the private that women were made to inhabit and that came to be identified with the feminine and domestic spheres of daily life in opposition to the masculine domain of publicity.¹⁵

The domestic realm provides no respite for women and thus no space for privacy. Women face a double bind of having to perform the same roles consistently across different spaces. Criseyde performs privacy not to transition into the public, as per Trull's formulation, or to gain access to the private, as Troilus does, but to maintain her position within the domestic and private in opposition to the public realm. Privacy and private space are privileged in terms of who gets to experience them and in what ways, but they are not disconnected from the broader social context around them. For Troilus and Criseyde, this relationship to the social context is different for each of them, modulated by gender.

The final part of this chapter brings together the various performances of privacy discussed throughout and looks at what happens when they start to break down. Each of the three main characters is performing a different type of privacy, in response to a different context and awareness of audience. While women were not able to take on public functions and their sphere of influence was confined to the household, they were not free from the public scrutiny of which Criseyde is so very aware.¹⁶ Her performance of privacy is enacted under

¹⁴ For a discussion of Criseyde's awareness of her audience, see Alcuin Blamires, 'I Nolde Sette at That Noys a Grote': Repudiating Infamy in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The House of Fame*', in *Chaucer and Fame: Reputation and Reception*, ed. by Isabel Davis and Catherine Nall (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 75-86. See also Marion Turner, 'Troilus and Criseyde and the "Treasonous Aldermen" of 1382: Tales of the City in Late Fourteenth Century London', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25 (2003), 225-57 (pp. 242-43).

¹⁵ Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, p. 164.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 148-49.

that public gaze. The way in which Criseyde is perceived to be in her house directly correlates to the public opinion of her:

And in hire hous she abood with swich meyne
 As til hire honour nede was to holde;
 And whil she was dwellynge in that cite,
 Kepte hire estat. (1.127-30)

Her chaste widowhood, which is part of her performance of privacy, is in constant production and under constant observation.¹⁷ Criseyde's experience of privacy is therefore not the same as Troilus's and the way in which she performs privacy and uses the bedchamber for that performance also differs, as does her relationship to her audience. While Pandarus is able to adapt himself to the different bedchambers and forms of privacy performed by Troilus and Criseyde, the lovers are not able to reconcile their versions of privacy and their experiences of the bedchamber to each other's. When Troilus's performance of privacy, and his performance of courtly love, breaks down during the consummation scene, it is because he is in the wrong type of bedchamber for those performances.

How is Privacy Performed?

Troilus's performances of lovesickness and of privacy are inter-dependent on each other. The bedchamber provides a space for him to express his nascent love for Criseyde, and for him to examine the nature of that love. Troilus presents both his current emotional state and his former self as objects for examination, chiding himself, 'O fool, now artow in the snare, | That whilom japedest at loves peyne' (1.507-08). While the many parlours, gardens and halls are an important part of *Troilus*, Chaucer privileges the bedchamber as a setting by locating

¹⁷ David Aers discusses the construction of Criseyde as a woman in a medieval romance society in 'Criseyde: Woman in Medieval Society', *The Chaucer Review* 13 (1979), 177-200. Laura F. Hodges, meanwhile, analyses how Criseyde uses clothing to construct her role of chaste widow in 'Sartorial Signs in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *The Chaucer Review* 35 (2001), 223-59.

most of the poem's moments of emotional intensity or narrative importance within one.¹⁸ It is here that Troilus explores his feelings for Criseyde, his fear at her leaving Troy, and his anger at her betrayal. The bedchamber is the only space in which Troilus and Criseyde have any meaningful and extended contact, as is also the case for Troilus and Pandarus.¹⁹ The opening of the poem establishes the bedchamber, and Troilus's performance within it, in direct opposition to the temple and Troilus's role there among his 'yonge knyghtes' (1.184): there he is both in public and part of the public. In generic terms, the bedchamber is the setting for the Troilus of romance rather than the Troilus of epic.²⁰ Troilus could not have stayed in the temple and still been lovesick: the bedchamber is the space in which he has 'the leisure to cultivate [his] emotions'.²¹ The expression of emotion is one of the markers of privacy and so one of the ways in which Troilus performs it, even as he requires that privacy to do so. Troilus's performances of lovesickness and privacy are in a state of constant, co-dependent production. By performing lovesickness, Troilus generates the privacy that he in turn requires to express his feelings of love for Criseyde and examine them in turn.

The bedchamber provides a framework within which Troilus's performance of lovesickness is rendered legible for those who witness it. Pandarus's entrance into the bedchamber and his pronouncement that Troilus is acting 'as do thise lovers' (2.1306) clarifies and defines Troilus's performance: he is behaving in a manner that is recognisable as lovesickness to those observing him in the context of the bedchamber. Pandarus also provides the audience

¹⁸ Burger notes that areas of the house, such as the parlour or garden, while more private than the hall, would still have been used for entertaining guests and so offer less privacy than the bedchamber, p.116.

¹⁹ In total, Troilus spends some 3529 lines identifiably in a bedchamber, out of a total of 8240 lines, representing 42% of the entire poem. See Appendix 1 for further details.

²⁰ Morgan discusses the link between the bedchamber and the expression of emotion, pp. 132-34.

²¹ Spearing, *Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 33.

that recognises and validates Troilus's performance as performance.²² Through Pandarus, the reader gains confirmation that Troilus's actions are consistent with the emotional state to which they have previously been given access in the first *Canticus Troili*. The narrator's presentation of the *Canticus* as a moment of formalism originating not with Troilus but 'myn auctor called Lollius' (1.394) emphasises its performativity.²³ In addition to his desire to hide under the duvet, Troilus conforms to a standard set of somatic characteristics that announce him as lovesick: he is feverish, melancholic, and alternately insomniac and full of sleep. In her comprehensive discussion of medieval lovesickness, Mary F. Wack defines it as a psychosomatic condition rooted primarily in the brain, the symptoms of which include 'sighing, sleeplessness, and wasting from refusal to eat'.²⁴ Moreover, Wack defines lovesickness as being caused by sight. It occurs when a gentleman's rational faculties are 'misled by an excessively pleasing sense perception', just as Troilus is struck by love when 'his eye percede, and so depe it wente, | Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stente' (1.272-73).²⁵ In line with medieval theories of lovesickness, Chaucer presents Troilus as having a medical condition: he 'hadde a fevere' (1.491) and feels that he 'mot nedes deye' (1.573).²⁶ Alongside the medical model of lovesickness in *Troilus and Criseyde* is a performative one centred on the privacy that the bedchamber offers. Taking to his bed is a means for Troilus

²² Marvin Colson, *Performance: a Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 5. See also Caroline Heim, *Audience as Performer: the Changing Role of Theatre Audiences in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 1-16.

²³ Chaucer's use of the Petrarchan sonnet for the *Canticus* has been much puzzled over by critics. See, for instance, Bruce Holsinger, 'Lyrics and Short Poems', in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Seth Lerer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 179-212; William T. Rossiter, *Chaucer and Petrarch* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), pp. 109-31; Patricia Thomson, 'The "Canticus Troili": Chaucer and Petrarch', *Comparative Literature* 11 (1959), 313-28.

²⁴ Mary F. Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 5. Along with Troilus's sleeplessness and sighing, love 'made his mete his foo' (1.485).

²⁵ Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, p. 56. The gendered nature of lovesickness, in that it is a condition that afflicts courtly gentlemen, is one reason why Criseyde's performance and experience of privacy is different from that of Troilus.

²⁶ For a fuller discussion of Chaucer's use of the medical model of lovesickness, see Mary F. Wack, 'Lovesickness in Troilus', *Pacific Coast Philology* 19 (1984), 55-61.

to enact lovesickness, including some of those psychosomatic symptoms outlined by Wack but not limited to them. In doing so he produces lovesickness while defining the bedchamber as a performance space for the condition and part of the pathology for it.

Privacy and the bedchamber provide a unifying factor for each of the different performances of lovesickness across the poem. In turn, each episode of lovesickness marks a performance of privacy and defines a private space. Pandarus's lovesickness is signalled to the reader solely by his retreat into the privacy of his bedchamber.²⁷ His taking to his bed is also the inception of his lovesickness: 'So shop it that hym fil that day a teene | In love, for which in wo to bedde he wente, | And made, er it was day, ful many a wente' (2.61-63). Unlike Troilus's case, the object of Pandarus's affections remains unidentified throughout the poem and neither he nor the narrator dwells on her. In contrast to Troilus's extended focus on Criseyde from the moment that he sees her at the start of Book I, Pandarus's performance of lovesickness at the start of Book II is centred on his actions rather than his emotions: he is lovesick because he retreats to the privacy of his bed and not as the result of any particular lady. As I will go on to discuss in relation to *The Book of the Duchess* in the final chapter of this thesis, the absence of any object for Pandarus's affection renders the experience of lovesickness an entirely private one, devoid of any social aspect. The echoing of Troilus's performance by Pandarus demonstrates the performative nature of lovesickness by detaching the actions from their source. Troilus's performances of lovesickness are also not solely the result of his unrequited longing for Criseyde but a means of continually generating privacy, albeit one that allows and is for the performance of that lovesickness. For Troilus, privacy and lovesickness are mutually inclusive of one another. Following the consummation scene, however, he displays the same lovesick behaviours:

he may wel ligge and wynke,
But slep ne may ther in his herte synke,
Thynkyng how she for whom desir hym brende
A thousand fold was worth more than he wende. (3.1537-40)

²⁷ Pandarus foregrounds lovesickness as a privilege of class: he not only has a bedchamber to which to withdraw, but is able to spend time doing so.

Midway through the poem, Chaucer returns to the image of his hero lying in bed, feverish and unable to sleep as per Wack's definition of lovesickness, but as a direct result of having his love requited. Gregory Sadlek reads this episode as demonstrating sloth as Troilus's defining characteristic, noting that 'Troilus goes to bed even when he is happy' in reference to the morning after.²⁸ Chaucer, however, stresses not only Troilus's somatic response to the night before but his withdrawal into the privacy of the bedchamber: he 'retorned to his real paleys soone' (3.1534). Once there, he is able to resume the labour of performing lovesickness. For both Troilus and Pandarus, privacy is necessary for the expression of emotion and so repeatedly performing lovesickness becomes a means for them to continually generate that privacy through its constant performance. Privacy is the overarching mode for Troilus that governs all his other actions and emotions and, following on from the consummation scene, lovesickness is a means to beget that privacy.

As a space, the bedchamber does not offer absolute privacy. The performance of privacy within it establishes the bedchamber as private, but its boundaries are easily and repeatedly transgressed, particularly by Pandarus. Those transgressions both intrude on the privacy that Troilus is performing and provide him with an audience for that performance. Chaucer presents Troilus's bedchamber as a space that is set up to be occupied by more than one person. The solitude that Troilus is able to find there is not predicated on the materiality of the space. In addition to Pandarus's frequent intrusions, on one occasion the two friends are depicted as sharing a bed when 'they spedde hem fro the soper unto bedde' (2.947) and Pandarus is obliged to tell Troilus to 'ly style and lat me slepe' (2.953), suggesting that they are spending the night in very close proximity and that Troilus is not an ideal bed-fellow. On another night, Pandarus sleeps 'on a paillet... By Troilus he lay' (3.229-30). Pallet or truckle beds were frequently found in bedchambers for the use of guests, visitors or servants

²⁸ Gregory M. Sadlek, 'Love, Labor, and Sloth in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *The Chaucer Review* 26 (1992), 350-68 (p. 356). While Troilus does spend a lot of the poem in bed, he makes being in love look like a lot of hard work.

who did not have chambers of their own.²⁹ The presence of one in Troilus's bedchamber suggests that he expected to share the space with others and not to be 'allone' in the way that a modern reader might expect: Smyser advises that readers should 'approach the text on the assumption that, unless it is otherwise stated, everyone is in company'.³⁰ The private bedchamber includes space for the audience that Troilus's performances within it require. Like Pandarus's recognition of Troilus performing 'as do thise lovers' (2.1306), so too does he affirm his friend's performance of privacy. Lochrie describes privacy as containing its own potential subversion as it 'invite[s] violation'.³¹ In the way that privacy is performed in the bedchamber in *Troilus and Criseyde*, that violation is part of the performance that constitutes the bedchamber as a private space. Through its enclosure, the bedchamber suggests the possibility of its boundaries being transgressed and its occupants being observed. Pandarus is able to come and go without Troilus's permission or prior knowledge: he enters 'unwar' and Troilus was not expecting an audience to hear 'hym grone' (1.549). The emotion conveyed by Troilus's groaning and his unwariness at Pandarus's entering interact to establish the bedchamber as private even as Pandarus intrudes on it. The reader is made aware of the privacy that Troilus is seeking through Pandarus's violation of it.

The bedchamber offers the potential for privacy through its enclosed nature. It is not a space that can be passed through, but one into which characters have to enter deliberately, as Chaucer demonstrates through Pandarus's comings and goings. The enclosure of the bedchamber sets it apart from other domestic spaces and so differentiates the private from the domestic. The hall in Criseyde's house is a transitory space: from the garden Criseyde 'was comen into halle' (2.1170) and from there 'streght into hire chambre gan she gon'

²⁹ Morgan, p. 36. See also Smyser, p. 300; Woolgar, pp. 78-80; Lucy Worsley, *If Walls Could Talk: an Intimate History of the Home* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), pp. 7-8.

³⁰ Smyser, p. 311. Even when 'allone', the character could still be in the presence of servants, who might not necessarily count as 'company'.

³¹ Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, p. 164. See also Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Object of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 37.

(2.1173). Nolan describes the way in which the reader ‘moves familiarly’ with Pandarus between the different houses in Troy, but the reader also ‘moves familiarly’ with Criseyde within the house and marks the boundaries between different types of domestic space with her.³² Private space is produced in collaboration with the reader and through the crossing of thresholds the narrative of the poem is produced.³³ Through the materiality of the bedchamber and Pandarus’s entrances and exits, Chaucer constructs multiple thresholds that reinforce the narrative significance of moving from one space to another, and of what happens within those spaces in contrast to what happens outside of them. The ‘certyn knyght that for the tyme kepte | The chambre door’ (4.351-52) both guards the door itself and forms a second boundary through which access to the bedchamber is controlled: when Pandarus enters the knight ‘undide it hym anon’ (4.352). Pandarus is able to enter the bedchamber but for others, including the guard himself, such a movement would be prohibited. Although Sarah Stanbury characterises the narrative of *Troilus* as being governed ‘by Pandarus as an uninvited guest at the privy chamber’, his status as such is not consistent throughout the text as he is at times invited, and even when not he is still permitted, as in the first bedchamber scene.³⁴ Although there is clearly a difference in status between Lady Bertilak and the ‘certyn knyght’ at Troilus’s door, her entrance into Gawain’s bedchamber in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is not sanctioned in the way that Pandarus’s is, although Gawain too could be described as ‘unwar’. Pandarus’s permitted transgressions of the bedchamber boundaries illustrate the significance of the threshold that is being crossed and the space within it, as only a permitted few can do so and enter the bedchamber. The question of who is allowed to go into the bedchamber, and into the performance of privacy, is an ethical one.

³² Nolan, p. 36.

³³ A.C. Spearing notes that ‘crossing the threshold is an act of special importance, as the common use of this idea as a metaphor serves to demonstrate’. *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 106.

³⁴ Stanbury, ‘The Voyeur and the Private Life’, p. 143.

Privacy is both a privilege and privileging. Those who are able to perform privacy are privileged through their presence within the bedchamber and their ability to access it, while knowledge of what occurs within it is also privileged. The physical boundaries of the bedchamber mark the space within as private, but that privacy is also a socio-economic construction comprised of both the right to restrict access and the agreement that access is restricted. The social boundaries that the bedchamber creates position Troilus's lovesickness – and his subsequent relationship with Criseyde – at the intersection of privacy and secrecy.³⁵ It is not just a manifestation of his private life, but something that he desires to keep hidden. When Troilus first withdraws to his bedchamber, he does so as 'he wolde werken pryvely, | First to hiden his desir in muwe | From every wight yborn' (1.380-82). The enclosure of the bedchamber is echoed by and enables the emotional enclosure that Troilus desires, based on an understanding of privacy as the respect of personal boundaries.³⁶ The bedchamber renders those boundaries, and their transgressions, literal within the text. Chaucer clearly demarcates the boundaries of the bedchamber through Pandarus's movements. His initial entrance into Troilus's bedchamber is repeated in his retelling of the same scene: he recounts that he 'com romyng al allone | Into his chaumbre, and fond how that he lay | Upon his bed' (2.555-57). The repetition of this transgression reinforces the boundaries of the bedchamber from without: Pandarus is in Criseyde's house when he gives his account of finding the lovesick Troilus in bed. He further demarcates the space around Troilus as private and performs privacy to Criseyde on his behalf. Within the close, domestic world of Troy, the performance of privacy necessarily involves other people.

Throughout the poem, both Troilus and Criseyde perform not only for a literal audience made up of Pandarus, their households, and the rest of Troy, but an imagined one to which

³⁵ For a fuller discussion of secrecy in *Troilus*, see Windeatt, 'Love That Oughte Ben Secree', pp. 116-31.

³⁶ Guthrie, p. 156.

they constantly perform privacy and so construct private space. In addition to the awareness of being observed by their peers, Troilus and Criseyde imagine themselves as their own audience and as audience for each other. When Pandarus enters Troilus's bedchamber, he becomes the audience for his friend, but prior to this the identity of the audience that Troilus imagines is ambiguous. While Pandarus provides an interactive and responsive audience within the bedchamber, Troilus creates other, virtual audiences to which he also performs. He addresses himself when 'to hymself ful ofte he gan to pleyne' (1.506), suggesting that he is his own audience at this moment. Similarly, he 'gan... make a mirour of his mynde' (1.356) which reflects both 'al holly hire figure' (1.366) and Troilus back at himself.³⁷ The mirror also echoes the 'muwe' (1.381) in which he seeks to enclose his desire so that he might examine it. Through the internal spaces of the mirror and the 'muwe', Troilus creates an objective distance between himself and his emotions so that he might study them and in doing so act as his own audience. Forming a parallel with the way in which the dream functions in Chaucer's dream poems, and discussed at greater length in chapter four of this thesis, these internal spaces also enable the reader to act as audience to Troilus's inner feelings, through the access and exposure that they provide. At the same time, Criseyde is also positioned as a potential audience for Troilus as the object and recipient of his lovesickness. Commenting that 'of his wo ne dorste he nat bygygne | To tellen hir' (1.503-04) and 'thise wordes, and ful many another to, | He spak... for to tellen hire his wo' (1.540-42), the narrator introduces the idea that Criseyde would be Troilus's intended audience, were it not for his nerves and desire for privacy. Troilus addresses her while acknowledging her absence. His performance of privacy is one that is performed to an audience that is not there, and so is one which also enacts his desire for Criseyde.

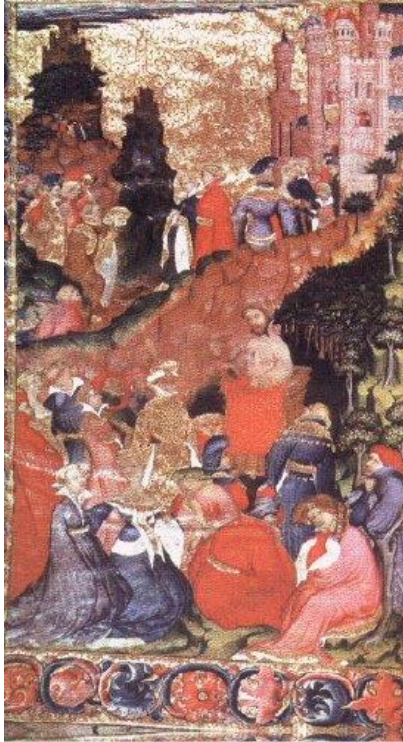
The third audience that the narrator evokes for Troilus is the reader. He introduces the first *Canticus*,

³⁷ M.C. Borthwick considers the use of mirrors throughout *Troilus* in 'Antigone's Song as 'Mirour' in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 22 (1961), 227-35.

I dar wel seyn, in al, that Troilus
 Seyde in his song, loo, every word right thus
 As I shal seyn; and whoso list it here,
 Loo, next this vers he may it fynden here. (1.396-99)

In addition to those audiences imagined by Troilus, the narrator imagines one in perpetuity that is simultaneously an audience for Troilus's *Canticus* and for the narrator's own text.

The narrator adds an additional layer of performativity to Troilus's actions by calling the reader's attention to the performance of the text itself, as later imagined in the *Troilus*



Frontispiece (left).³⁸ The image pictures a public audience rather than a private one, relocating Troilus's performance outside of the bedchamber and into the court. The narrator's repeated urge to the reader to 'loo' (1.397, 1.399) collapses the boundaries of the bedchamber through the intrusion of the public audience formed by the reader. Moreover, while Pandarus and the virtual audiences of Criseyde and Troilus himself are specific and known to Troilus, the reader is an unknown and plural 'whoso list' (1.398), whose response as an audience to Troilus's performance is also thus unknowable. The evocation of the

reader as audience reveals the tension inherent in the idea of performing privacy. As Trull notes, the public and private are mutually constitutive, however they are also mutually destructive. The reader as audience renders Troilus's performance of privacy a public one through the text of *Troilus and Criseyde*. The reader is audience for both Troilus's performance of privacy and the narrator's public performance of Troilus.

³⁸ *Troilus Frontispiece*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 61, fol. 1^v. For a discussion of the *Frontispiece* and its audience, see Mary Carruthers, 'The Sociable Text of the *Troilus Frontispiece*: A Different Mode of Textuality', *ELH* 81 (2014), 423-41; Derek Pearsall, 'The *Troilus* Frontispiece and Chaucer's Audience', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 7 (1977), 68-74.

The bedchamber is a performance space for privacy because of its dual ability to enclose inwards and to signify outwards to a public audience beyond its boundaries. Privacy is performed in part by those outside of the bedchamber recognising the inside/outside divide that the bedchamber creates. Troilus is reliant both on others respecting the boundaries of personal space, as outlined by Guthrie, and the material boundaries of the bedchamber. Pandarus manipulates the multivalent potential of the bedchamber to signify outside of its boundaries in his performance of privacy on behalf of Troilus, using its relation to the rest of the household to perform privacy himself and to direct others in their performances. In contrast to both Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer presents Pandarus as explicitly aware of the symbolism of the bedchamber and how to leverage it. His assurance to Troilus that, as he is already lovesick, ‘thow shalt the bettre pleyne, | And hast the lasse need to countrefete, | For hym men demen hoot that men seen swete’ (2.1531-33), presents the malleability of the bedchamber as a performance space as a product of the relationship between the performance within the bedchamber and the audience outside of it. The performance of illness in which Pandarus instructs Troilus is as reliant on how ‘men demen’ as it is the degree to which the performer is able ‘to countrefete’, suggesting that Troilus’s other performances of lovesickness and privacy are similarly contingent on the judgement of others. Pandarus’s assessment of performance is a cynical one; his use of the word ‘countrefete’ implies an act of deception even though Troilus is actually ill.³⁹ Moreover, the implications of mechanisation and copying in ‘countrefete’ allude to the status of performance as a process rather than a singular event. The privacy that sickness and the bedchamber engender is elided with secrecy by Pandarus to create multiple levels of private space: Troilus’s performance of lovesickness is hidden within his performance of illness,

³⁹ The potential menace of Pandarus’s encouragement of deceit is discussed by Charles Muscatine in his comparison of the episode at Deiphebus’s house and the Biblical story of the rape of Tamar. ‘The Feigned Illness in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*’, *Modern Language Notes* 63 (1948), 372-77. See also Lawrence Besserman, *Biblical Paradigms in Medieval English Literature: from Caedmon to Malory* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 84-112. Rosanne Gasse examines the implications of deceiving Deiphebus. ‘Deiphebus, Hector, and Troilus in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*’, *The Chaucer Review* 32 (1998), 423-39.

both of which contribute to his performance of privacy. The privacy created by his illness, meanwhile, produces further privacy for both his lovesickness and for the anticipated meeting with Criseyde. As a multivalent space the bedchamber enables not just the performance of privacy, but multiple performances of multiple privacies. Pandarus's view of performance indicates not only that privacy and publicity are mutually constitutive binaries, but that there is a spectrum of privacy within that which can be used to create further types of privacy.

Pandarus uses the interplay between public and private to seduce Criseyde on behalf of Troilus. Her visit to Troilus's sick-bed is predicated on the belief that she will not be in his bedchamber alone with him, following Pandarus's assurance that 'my lady queene Eleyne | Abideth yow, and eke my lordes tweyne' (2.1714-15). He presents the bedchamber as more public than it is in order to entreat Criseyde to use it as a private space in which to meet Troilus.⁴⁰ In contrast, Pandarus presents the closet at his own house as being more private than it actually is, with Criseyde's women sleeping between her and the entrance, and Pandarus acting as 'wardein of youre wommen' (3.665). The labelling of the space as a closet is itself deceptive on the part of Pandarus. That it has enough space to contain a bed, a fireplace and for Pandarus to draw back suggests that it is roomier than most: including the one to which Criseyde retires in her own house to write to Troilus (2.599).⁴¹ Although 'closet' and 'bedchamber' are generally held to be interchangeable, and beds in medieval houses were not limited to the bedchamber, the closet in Pandarus's house is the only example given by the Middle English Dictionary that seems so substantial, suggesting it is

⁴⁰ For a detailed mapping of the movements in and out of Troilus's bedchamber at Deiphebus's house, see McKay Sundwall, 'Deiphebus and Helen: a Tantalizing Hint', *Modern Philology* 73 (1975), 151-56. See also Laurie Maguire, *Helen of Troy: from Homer to Hollywood* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), pp. 88-97.

⁴¹ Diane Wolfthal defines a closet, as used by women, as being a 'small private room that could be locked' and that was used for dressing. *In and Out of the Marital Bed: Seeing Sex in Renaissance Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 51.

something of an outlier.⁴² To Criseyde, the room initially appears to be a closet in that it is both lockable and accessible only from the neighbouring antechamber but, crucially and unknown to her, there is also access via the trapdoor. The entrance of Troilus and Pandarus into the closet through that trapdoor later in the night establishes it as more public than Criseyde had been led to believe, while the privacy that it does offer (for instance, the rain that prevents those outside from hearing the events within) works for Troilus's and Pandarus's purposes rather than her own.⁴³ There are two performances of privacy operating across the closet, that of Criseyde and that of the men, and it is the latter that wins out.

Criseyde's performance of privacy in the closet at Pandarus's house, linked to her role as a chaste widow, does not align with those of Troilus and Pandarus, and this schism is used by Pandarus to manipulate her both at his own house and at Deiphebus's. The gendered implications of the spaces that Pandarus uses to woo Criseyde are noted by Jan Shaw: at Deiphebus's house, Pandarus uses the 'openness of male bedchambers to lure Criseyde away from the company into apparently 'safe' semi-public spaces'.⁴⁴ At his house, he does the opposite, using the feminine space of the closet that appears to be strictly private to convince her to stay.⁴⁵ In both cases, it is the relation between public and private that enables Pandarus to seduce Criseyde. He varies his performance of privacy to match the space in question. While Troilus's performance of privacy through his lovesickness aligns with the level of privacy that the bedchamber offers, Pandarus's performance of privacy casts the bedchamber as more public and the closet as more private than they are in reality

⁴² Middle English Dictionary, 'closet', definition 1. Accessed online. Date of last access 23/08/2019. On the terms 'bedchamber' and 'chamber' see Morgan, p. 8.

⁴³ Smyser, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Jan Shaw, *Space, Gender and Memory in Middle English Romance: Architectures of Wonder in Melusine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 107.

⁴⁵ The closet is a feminine space in that it is presented by Pandarus as being controlled by Criseyde and her women.

or that Criseyde needs them to be. He is able to present the public as private and vice versa and to manipulate Criseyde's fear of how might 'men demen' (2.1533) her if she herself is seen to be incorrectly performing privacy by entering a space that is either too public or too private to align with that performance.

Pandarus creates an audience for Troilus's performance of lovesickness by dictating who can enter the bedchamber and under what circumstances through the controls that he exercises over its boundaries. Troilus's authority over his bedchamber is compromised by Pandarus's movements in and out of it and he is dependent on Pandarus to maintain his performance of privacy. Pandarus's own performance of privacy and that which he encourages Troilus to undertake form multiple different versions of the bedchamber within the space of a single one. For Helen and Deiphebus, the bedchamber is the private space of illness.⁴⁶ Pandarus's encouragement of Troilus to 'gon over nyght, and that bylyve, | Unto Deiphebus hous as the to pleye, | Thi maladie away the bet to dryve' (2.1513-15) establishes the bedchamber at Deiphebus's house as a private space, one in which Troilus can perform privacy differently to Deiphebus and Helen and to Criseyde. Pandarus further performs privacy by creating a second boundary around the bed itself through his interactions with Criseyde: 'Pandarus, that ledde hire by the lappe, | Com ner, and gan in at the curtyn pike' (3.59-60). Demonstrating his control over the space and the performances that occur within it, Pandarus compels Criseyde to transgress the second boundary that he has made by pushing her through the curtain and in doing so causes her to perform privacy to enable Troilus's lovesickness. The entrance of Criseyde into the area between the curtains also marks the formation of a second bedchamber: one of courtly love and supplication. Like the hangings around Gawain's bed at Hautdesert (*SGGK*, 1181) which I will examine in the next chapter, the curtains around Troilus regulate access to a further level of enclosure within

⁴⁶ As with lovesickness, the bedchamber was also commonly associated with more prosaic forms of illness. Morgan, pp. 106-16. French, Smith and Stanbury also discuss the bed as a site of palliative care and fatal illness, pp. 75-84.

the bedchamber. In both texts, it is not the person within the curtains – Troilus or Gawain – who controls the boundary that they form, but a character outside: Pandarus and Lady Bertilak. This scene in Deiphebus’s house foreshadows the consummation scene in the authority that Pandarus exercises over it, which I will go on to discuss in the third section of this chapter. In both cases, Pandarus embodies the tension between space inside and outside the bedchamber that, as Trull outlines, generates the privacy within it. As the most mobile character in the poem, Pandarus performs privacy for his friend by creating the same boundaries that he himself breaks.

Privacy is constructed in relation to the audience within the bedchamber as a means of engaging with, and ultimately controlling, it. At Deiphebus’s house, Pandarus’s performance of privacy is both more active than that of Troilus, either here or in his own bedchamber, and undertaken on Troilus’s behalf. He constructs privacy around his friend through his manipulation of the space and others within it. Pandarus controls that way in which Criseyde experiences Troilus’s performance of lovesickness through his manipulation of both her and the bed-hangings. His comment ‘God do boot on alle syke’ (3.61) provides her with the context in which to view Troilus and the privacy in which it is necessary for her



to visit him. In line with the iconography of the period, the curtains act as a further frame around Troilus. In the example from BL Royal 15 E VI (left) the focal point of the crib with its seven babies is placed inside the enclosure of the bed-

hangings as a means of foregrounding them.⁴⁷ The hangings turn the bed into a stage for the action depicted while also drawing the viewer’s attention away from the rest of the chamber. This is also a feature of the bedchamber illumination in the *Gawain* manuscript, which I look at in detail in the next chapter. An additional layer of privacy is created by the

⁴⁷ London, British Library, MS Royal 15 E VI, fol. 273^r.

curtains, which is in turn subverted by them as they invite the viewer to look within them, as Pandarus does somewhat forcefully to Criseyde when he 'ledde hire by the lappe' (3.59) between the hangings. Stanbury notes that 'in many texts the gaze itself, the very privilege of vision, is not only a solitary desire but a carefully orchestrated act mediated by others who tell the viewer how and what to see'.⁴⁸ In Chaucer's bedchambers, both Pandarus and the curtains take on this mediating function to create Troilus as the subject of the gaze and Criseyde's response to it. The gaze is rendered not a solitary desire but a private one with Troilus and his lovesickness as the object of it. Criseyde, equally, must keep private her gaze on him to maintain her status as a chaste widow. The orchestration of that gaze by Pandarus does not disrupt that privacy but constructs and maintains it.

The potential audiences for their performances are a source of anxiety for Troilus and Criseyde. The audience enables the performance of privacy and the establishment of the bedchamber as a private space, but it also threatens to disrupt Troilus and Criseyde's performances by breaching that privacy. While the bedchamber affords Troilus and Criseyde greater control over both the audiences who observe them and the perceptions of that audience, that which is located outside of its boundaries poses a greater concern. Criseyde's famous lament that about her 'unto the worldes ende, | Shal neyther ben ywritten nor ysonge | No good word, for this bokes wol me shende' (5.1058-60) suggests an awareness of an audience in perpetuity to which she will be overexposed. The audience as reader is, as discussed above, ambiguous in its relation to Troilus, but poses a greater threat to Criseyde and her reputation. Accordingly, she is more aware of it and her acknowledgement of that audience is direct and not mediated through the narrator as it is for Troilus. Troilus and Criseyde inhabit an enclosed world. Mirroring the structure of the spaces that they inhabit, the narrative gives little sense of the Troy outside of the aristocratic

⁴⁸ Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 6.

palaces and buildings of government.⁴⁹ Rather than afford the lovers privacy, however, Chaucer creates a social bubble in which everyone knows everyone. Troy is, in effect, a small village. A sense of the incestuous nature of such a society is present in the way women are circulated among a small group of noble men, as when Troilus offers Pandarus ‘my faire suster Polixene, | Cassandre, Eleyne, or any of the frape’ (3.409-10) in return for his helping Troilus seduce his niece.⁵⁰ The claustrophobic setting holds the potential for an audience that is constantly observing while also creating the need for privacy and it is this tension that Troilus and Criseyde must negotiate through their performances, constantly producing a privacy for themselves. The end of their relationship, and the end of the poem, suggest that this is ultimately impossible.

Pandarus actively seeks to involve the audience in the privacy that he performs. In doing so, he re-establishes the boundaries of the bedchamber while also problematising them through the inclusion of the audience during his performances of privacy on Troilus’s behalf. On his first visit to Criseyde, the reader re-experiences Pandarus finding Troilus lovesick in his bedchamber, but this time from Pandarus’s perspective: ‘It fel that I com romyng al allone | Into his chaumbre, and fond how that he lay | Upon his bed’ (2.555-57). The retelling, not long after the initial episode in the poem, reinforces the centrality of the bedchamber both to the poem and to Troilus’s performance of lovesickness. This is, however, a second version of Troilus’s bedchamber, one governed by Pandarus. On his quest to woo Criseyde on his friend’s behalf, Pandarus recreates the bedchamber from his perspective, with Troilus at its centre. Separated from the preceding narrative of the temple, the bedchamber becomes emblematic of Troilus’s feelings for Criseyde. Here, in Criseyde’s ‘paved parlour’ (2.82), Pandarus returns the reader to Troilus’s bedchamber, and Criseyde along with them as Pandarus’s audience who in turn becomes Troilus’s audience. Through the retelling, Criseyde

⁴⁹ Spearing, *Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 56-64.

is realised as Troilus's intended audience. Moreover, Pandarus tells the story of Troilus's bedchamber having come straight from his own, to which he went immediately after leaving Troilus's (2.56-75), creating a concatenation of bedchambers through which the action of the text is structured. For Criseyde, this is the first time that she has heard the story and so she experiences it from Pandarus's perspective. The way in which he tells the story reinforces its status as being from a single and subjective viewpoint; he comments that Troilus's groans are such that 'ne herde I nevere' (2.558) and that 'ne wist I nought' (2.559) what the problem is. Troilus's performance of lovesickness is presented as a puzzle that needs to be solved, as it was initially for Pandarus and now is for Criseyde. His lovesickness and the narrative of it can only be understood and the performance parsed in the context of the bedchamber and the privacy that it provides. As a puzzle, Troilus's lovesickness is not open and accessible, but is itself private to those who are able to understand it, such as Pandarus in his role as storyteller. Through Pandarus's retelling, Troilus's performance of privacy is extended out of his bedchamber into Criseyde's house. He recreates the bedchamber for Criseyde and transports her within it. Just as the reader does, so too must Criseyde 'move familiarly with him' through his performance of privacy.

Pandarus extends Troilus's performance of privacy beyond the boundaries of the bedchamber by taking on the role of storyteller. By emphasising his subjective experience of discovering Troilus's lovesickness, and in structuring the narrative of it to create suspense, Pandarus presents himself in the role of the storyteller in which he performs his account. In so doing, he both aligns himself with *Troilus's* narrator and recalls the tradition of the 'lecteur'. As befitting someone of her class, Criseyde is familiar with this type of performance; when Pandarus arrives at her house to tell her about Troilus, Criseyde and her companions are listening to 'a mayden reden hem the geste | Of the siege of Thebes' (2.83-84).⁵¹ Pandarus is thus one of a series of storytelling performers that appear throughout the poem

⁵¹ Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 109.

while it is also a mode of performance of which Criseyde understands the conventions. The narrative that he constructs is one for which she is the ideal audience and critical reader.⁵² A further layer of performance is created through the ambiguity surrounding Pandarus's story of frolicking in the garden with Troilus: the reader is given no way of knowing whether this episode happened or whether it is purely of Pandarus's own invention.⁵³ His telling of the story in such a way as to include the garden, however, works to further embed Troilus in the role of the courtly lover, drawing on an 'archetypally romantic image'.⁵⁴ The placement of Troilus in a garden provides an image that Criseyde, as a known reader of romance, would have been able to parse. It also parallels the private space of the bedchamber to create a sense of continuity around Pandarus's narrative.⁵⁵ The garden story extends Troilus's performance beyond the confines of the bedchamber and forms part of the strategy of seduction that he and Pandarus agreed upon for Pandarus to 'do yow this servyse; | For bothe yow to plesse' (1.989-90). Moreover, Pandarus's storytelling answers Troilus's question of 'how wiltow seyn of me and my destresse?' (1.1018) – he will do so by turning it into a romance narrative. Pandarus's performance of storytelling both recreates the bedchamber outside of its bounds, and with it Troilus's performance of lovesickness, and is a product of the bedchamber sent outwards beyond its threshold to a new audience. By extending

⁵² Amy N. Vines, *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 28-31. See also David Salter, "'Born to Thralldom and Penance": Wives and Mothers in Middle English Romance', in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts*, ed. by Elaine Treharne (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 41-60 (pp. 41-42).

⁵³ Gretchen Mieszkowski, for instance, considers the garden story 'a weapon' with which Pandarus is attempting to manipulate Criseyde. *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 146-48. Paul Strohm, however, places it alongside Criseyde's own garden in his catalogue of spaces in which the characters in the poem attempt to seek privacy. 'The Space of Desire in Chaucer's and Shakespeare's Troy', *Love, History and Emotion in Chaucer and Shakespeare: Troilus and Criseyde and Troilus and Cressida*, ed. by Andrew James Johnston, Russell West-Pavlov and Elisabeth Kempf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 46-60 (pp. 51-54).

⁵⁴ Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, p. 146. Mieszkowski also provides examples of other young knights in gardens.

⁵⁵ The extent to which the medieval garden could be considered a private space in relation to romance literature is discussed by Arlyn Diamond, 'Meeting Grounds: Gardens in Middle English Romance', in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, ed. by Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević and Judith Weiss (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 125-38.

Troilus's performance outside the bedchamber, Pandarus also extends the private space available to him, turning both the garden in his story and Criseyde's paved parlour into a bedchamber.

The involvement of Pandarus in his performance of privacy, and the multiplication of the bedchamber with it, is a source of anxiety for Troilus. His beseeching of Pandarus to 'telle me this: | How wiltow seyn of me and my destresse' (1.1017-18) demonstrates a concern not just for how Pandarus is intending to act on his mission to Criseyde, but also how he shall be represented and received. Within the space of the bedchamber, Troilus's 'destresse' is legible as lovesickness and Pandarus, as his audience, understands it as such. Outside the space of the bedchamber and detached from Troilus's body, that same performance is at risk of being incorrectly interpreted. First, by Pandarus in the way that he performs it, and second by Criseyde, once the performance is translated into a different space. Troilus's anxiety about performance outside of the confines of the bedchamber is an anxiety about audience that is also present when he sets about writing to Criseyde for the first time. He confesses to Pandarus that,

I am ashamed for to write, ywys,
Lest of myn innocence I seyde amys,
Or that she nolde it for despit receyve;
Than were I ded: ther myght it nothyng weyve. (2.1047-50)

The fear that he might misrepresent himself or that Criseyde might not receive the letter as he wishes her to presents the same mortal peril to Troilus as his lovesickness does. In his encouragement to Troilus to write to Criseyde, Pandarus insists upon the equation of the letter with Troilus's body: Troilus is to write in his 'owen hond' (2.1005) and 'biblotte it with thi teris ek a lite' (2.1027).⁵⁶ The exposure that Troilus risks is therefore a physical one as through the letter not only his performance but his performing body is transferred outside of

⁵⁶ Martin Camargo remarks on the 'erotic implication' of the use of bodily fluids in the writing of the letter. *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1991), p. 56.

the bedchamber and into the more public open and observed space of Criseyde's palace.⁵⁷ In the next section, I will look at the intersection of different types of space in Criseyde's palace with her gender in more detail. Although Troilus is anxious about his performance of privacy, the bedchamber is a privileged space for him. As a woman, and as a noble one, Criseyde's performance of privacy is necessarily more dependent on others than that of Troilus. As a result, privacy for her is also more relative and contingent within the bedchamber.

Privacy and Criseyde

Criseyde's performance of privacy is mitigated by her gender as a result of the prohibition on women in the public sphere. In Chaucer's portrayal of Troy, Criseyde sits firmly in the sphere of the private: Georges Duby lists women along with 'males too young to bear arms, take part in military expeditions, or sit in assemblies of justice' as belonging to the '*res privitae* or *res familiares*'.⁵⁸ Although there has been a reassessment of the extent to which women could participate in public life, Chaucer's depiction of Criseyde places her in direct contrast to Troilus as he appears in his public roles in the military and government.⁵⁹ As a widow and the daughter of a traitor, Criseyde has lost the two men who might speak and act for her in public, cutting off her access to that realm other than through Pandarus in the role of her guardian. She belongs very much to the interior and domestic spaces of the poem.⁶⁰ I do not wish to propose that Criseyde is associated with the bedchamber or symbolic of it, especially given that Troilus spends more time identifiably within one, but her relationship to the

⁵⁷ Sarah Stanbury, 'Women's Letters and Private Space in Chaucer', *Exemplaria* 6 (1994), 271-85 (p. 274).

⁵⁸ Duby, 'Private Power, Public Power', p. 13.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, the discussions of different facets of power and public life in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1988); Rees-Jones, pp. 246-61.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the association between women and the bedchamber, see Morgan, pp. 171-214.

bedchamber and to privacy is different from that of Troilus due to her isolation from the public realm occasioned by her gender. For Criseyde, there is no public from which she needs to escape into the privacy of her bedchamber and the private, as she experiences it, is therefore not formed in contrast to the public. Lochrie traces the alignment between women, specifically noble women, and the private through the semantic fields of the term *femme couverte*, arguing that 'to be a married woman is to be a secret belonging to a husband and to society'.⁶¹ Criseyde fits uneasily into Lochrie's discussion of the *femme couverte*: as a widow, her period of coverture has ended and Chaucer depicts her as demonstrating some of the authority that would have been afforded her as a widow within her household.⁶² When the reader first encounters her within a domestic setting, Criseyde is shown as the head of her quite large household: 'And in hire hous she abood with swich meyne | As til hire honour nede was to holde' (1.127-28).⁶³ Outside of her household, Criseyde seeks protection from Troilus, Deiphebus, Hector and, finally, Diomedes through a process of re-coverture that would enable her to have some access to the public realm and so protect her from it. Criseyde's performance of privacy grants her agency in the domestic realm but highlights her lack of authority in the public.

As a woman, Criseyde is compelled to perform privacy, and through her Chaucer exposes the central tension in the association of women with privacy. One of the ways in which she performs privacy is through her relationship with Troilus. Within it, she is 'covered' in the

⁶¹ Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, p. 143.

⁶² Ibid., p. 140. See also Caroline M. Barron, 'The Widow's World in Later Medieval London', in *Medieval London Widows 1300-1500*, ed. by Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton (London: Hambledon, 1994), pp. xiii-xxxiv; Derek Brewer, 'Troilus's "Gentil" Manhood', in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by Peter G. Beidler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), pp. 237-52 (pp. 247-48); Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Widows', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. by Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 58-69. We might also question how effective a guardian Pandarus is for Criseyde in terms of providing coverture.

⁶³ For a discussion of the social and cultural influence that Criseyde is able to wield, see Vines, pp. 17-51.

sexual sense of the term.⁶⁴ As the relationship must also be kept a secret, she is doubly covered.⁶⁵ At the same time, the fact that it remains wholly in the private realm as a secret means that Criseyde's relationship with Troilus does not offer her sufficient coverture; he cannot act for her in the public realm.⁶⁶ The irony of the position in which Criseyde finds herself is that the relationship that she subsequently forges with Diomedes is not secret enough to offer her sufficient coverture either. The details of it are too well known for her to be a *femme couverte* and the damage that she sustains to her reputation as a result is public and absolute: the poem ends with the narrator's assurance that 'Criseyde was untrewed | ... Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se' (5.1774-76), foreshadowing both Henryson and Shakespeare. Criseyde occupies an ambiguous space between public and private. As a woman, she is private, but that privacy is simultaneously both too public and too private for it to be effective at protecting her. She is unable to occupy a single role, instead shifting uncomfortably between widow, lover and fickle lover. For the association between women and privacy to be effective, it has to be public in the sense of being known about and therefore respected by others; but not too public. A woman's status as a *femme couverte* needs to be in the public sphere for it to usefully signify, but the details of that covering and the woman herself need to remain private.

Occupying an uneasy space between public and private, Criseyde is more aware of the potential to be observed than Troilus, even within the space of the bedchamber. Her consistent performance of privacy creates a consistent potential audience. Even when alone,

⁶⁴ Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, p. 141.

⁶⁵ Spearing, *Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 32. See also Windeatt, 'Love that Oughte Ben Secree', pp. 116-31.

⁶⁶ Carl Grey Martin discusses Pandarus's seduction technique of implying that Troilus will be able to protect Criseyde politically and martially during the siege of Troy. 'Bitraised Through False Folk: Criseyde, the Siege, and the Threat of Treason', *The Chaucer Review* 37 (2013), 219-33. Angela Jane Weisl assesses the extent to which it is Criseyde who acts, albeit unsuccessfully, to save herself from the Greek camp, while Troilus ultimately does nothing. 'A Mannes Game: Criseyde's Masculinity in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 115-31.

such as when watching Troilus from her window in Book II, Criseyde displays an awareness of how she might be perceived by others and in doing so creates an audience for her performance of privacy. Her hypothetical audience's response shapes her performance as she states that 'thise wikked tonges ben so prest | To speke us harm' (2.785-86). She also responds physically to her potential audience when she 'wex al reed' (2.652). Like Troilus's blush, Criseyde's is the result of being the subject of a public gaze.⁶⁷ Both are subject to the social constructs in which they find themselves, but Troilus's presence in the public gaze at this moment is placed in direct contrast to Criseyde's privacy. He is in public and performing a public role. Although the window suggests the possibility of others looking in as she looks out, she is enclosed, having gone 'streght into hire closet' (2.559), and 'sat allone' (2.610).⁶⁸ Rather, Criseyde's blush suggests that she is also echoing the cause of Troilus's: he 'wex a litel reed for shame' (2.645) under the gaze of those watching him process through the city. Anne McTaggart suggests that shame in Chaucer is 'an experience of self-objectification and lack' which 'provokes an internal, psychic division, in which one's self is perceived as an object, distinct or displaced from the object position'.⁶⁹ The self-objectification that McTaggart identifies as a key component of shame is demonstrated by both Troilus in the parade and Criseyde in her closet. Criseyde assesses her own appearance as if from an outside position, noting that 'I am myn owene womman, wel at ese- | I thank it God – as after myn estat' (2.750-51). Criseyde has internalised, and so acts out, the public gaze of Troy and the constraints that it places on her. In performing privacy, Criseyde maintains her enclosure and acts as her own, assessing audience that is equivalent to the public audience

⁶⁷ Stanbury, 'The Voyeur and the Private Life', pp. 149-50.

⁶⁸ Wolfthal discusses the liminality of windows and the risks that they pose to women, pp. 75-79. See also Elizabeth A. Dobbs, 'Seeing Through Windows in Chaucer's *Troilus*', *The Chaucer Review* 32 (1998), 400-22.

⁶⁹ Anne McTaggart, *Shame and Guilt in Chaucer* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 7. See also A.C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 10-15.

that Troilus faces on the thronged streets of Troy, at once subject to the public gaze and hidden from it.

Despite her seclusion from the public realm, Criseyde's performance of privacy necessarily involves other people. Unlike Troilus, privacy does not involve a degree of solitude for her. Criseyde is watched both inside the bedchamber and out, and her performance of chaste widowhood is reliant on the presence and surveillance of others. When she goes into her bedchamber to read Troilus's letter to her, she does so having 'gan some of hire wommen to hire calle' (2.1172) so that she can read it 'ful pryvely' (2.1176). The women are both audience to her performance of chastity and a fundamental part of it. For Criseyde, reading 'ful pryvely' and being in company is not a contradiction. Moreover, the act of reading is not just private, but secret; an additional performance that requires a further layer of seclusion within the enclosure of the bedchamber. Criseyde's performance of chaste widowhood parallels Troilus's performance of lovesickness in that it is part of her performance of privacy and enabled by it. Her two performances are mutually constitutive of each other. In contrast to Troilus, however, Criseyde utilises her companions and, as a result of the letter and the secrecy that it requires, performs directly for them.

As she requires an audience to maintain her performance of chaste widowhood while in private, Criseyde is less able to control access to her bedchamber than Troilus or Pandarus. The transgressions of her boundaries, associated with the bedchamber, are often shocking in the manner in which they occur – such as when Pandarus thrusts the letter from Troilus down the front of her dress – but the fact of the transgression is not.⁷⁰ When discussing the different bedchambers of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Jennifer Summit notes 'Criseyde inhabits

⁷⁰ Josephine A. Koster suggests that Criseyde is prevented from crying out at Pandarus's intrusion due to the size of her garden: everyone would have been alerted to what was going on. To maintain her privacy, therefore, Criseyde is obliged to acquiesce to the breaching of it by Pandarus. 'Privitee, Habitus, and Proximity: Conduct and Domestic Space in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 24 (2007), 79-91 (p. 84).

one whose privacy is illusory, whose boundaries are all too easily violated'.⁷¹ As with Troilus in his bedchamber, Criseyde experiences the boundaries of the space as permeable and as not always under her control: she is repeatedly intruded upon by the masculine presences of Troilus and Pandarus. Unlike Pandarus's entrances into Troilus's bedchamber, there is less of a sense of their intrusions into Criseyde's space as being sanctioned, such as in the clandestine manner in which they enter her closet at Pandarus's house. At Deiphebus's house the bedchamber becomes a shared performance space for the two would-be lovers as a result of Pandarus's machinations, but the ways in which Troilus and Criseyde use that space and react to other characters intruding on it are different due to the level of Criseyde's concern for her reputation. Deiphebus and Helen 'comen upward, right at the steires ende' (3.205), a location that puts them within earshot of the bedchamber as 'so thanne gan gronen Troilus, | His brother and his suster for to blende' (3.206-07). Their potential entrance into the bedchamber places Deiphebus and Helen in the role of audience for Troilus's performance of illness; a performance that he must therefore resume and that is necessitated by their presence. Criseyde, too, has to change her performance from the courtly lady who 'hym in armes took, and gan hym kisse' (3.182) to the chaste and suppliant widow who 'took hire leve at hem ful thriftily, | As she wel koude' (3.211-12). The bedchamber diverges with the entrance of Deiphebus and Helen, splitting from the shared space of courtly love into Troilus's sick-bed and a space in which Criseyde cannot stay. Although both Troilus and Criseyde respond to the potential intrusion of Deiphebus and Helen by altering the roles that they are performing, the possible consequences for Criseyde for not doing so are much higher. Her visit to Deiphebus's house is made in the context of her fragile position in Troy and, following her departure from the house, her performance of chaste widowhood is critiqued by those who remain:

they hire reverence
Unto the fulle diden, hardyly,
And wonder wel speken, in hire absence,
Of hire in preysing of hire excellence –

⁷¹ Jennifer Summit, 'Troilus and Criseyde', in *The Yale Companion to Chaucer*, pp. 213-42 (p. 228).

Hire governaunce, hire wit, and hire manere
Comendedden, it joie was to here. (3.212-17)

As she herself is all too aware, Criseyde's reputation in Troy is entirely bound up with her successful performance of chaste widowhood and privacy, and the perception of those performances by others. The private roles that she takes on within it continue to resonate once she has left the bedchamber and have significance in the public sphere of the court as her protection in Troy is dependent on how the men judge her.⁷² For Criseyde, the bedchamber is not just permeable when she occupies it; the audience continues to observe and critique her once she has exited as well.

The type of privacy enabled by Criseyde's closet is different to that experienced by Troilus in his bedchamber, as is the nature of the enclosure that the two spaces offer. As mentioned above, the terms 'bedchamber' and 'closet' can be interchangeable in medieval literature, however in *Troilus and Criseyde*, the term 'closet' is only ever used to refer to a space inhabited by Criseyde, suggesting that, even if it functions as a bedchamber, it is also quantifiably different to that occupied by Troilus.⁷³ Comparing the bedchamber and Criseyde's closet exposes how the bedchamber functions as a performance space for privacy and how the experience of that performance and of privacy is modulated by gender. For Troilus, the clear delineation between the bedchamber and the other spaces that he inhabits is echoed in the equally clear delineation between roles that he performs within it and those that he performs outside the bedchamber. Following Pandarus's commitment to help him, and the hope that it represents, Troilus 'lay tho no lenger down' (1.1072) and goes cheerily off to battle like a man that is 'somdeel of akyngge of his wownde | Ylissed wel, but heeled no deel more' (1.1088-89). Similarly, when his betrayal has turned to anger and his anger to hate, 'from his bed al sodeynly he sterte, | As though al hool hym hadde ymad a leche'

⁷² Angela Jane Weisl, *Conquering the Reign of Femeny: Gender and Genre in Chaucer's Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 67-86.

⁷³ Smyser, p. 301. See also Koster, p. 82.

(5.1536-37). A change in both his mood and his performance is signalled through his departure from the bedchamber; as he moves out of the bedchamber and into more public spaces, he becomes a man of action and the soldier-prince of Troy once more. In both senses, he is only lovesick in the bedchamber. By performing chaste widowhood, Criseyde moves from one enclosed space to the next and has been critically aligned with the concept of enclosure across multiple spaces: 'within the enclosed space of Troy we see Criseyde further enclosed in smaller spaces. Her access to news is limited and she relies on others to provide her with the news'.⁷⁴ Her enclosure is both spatial and socio-political, but it is also asymmetrical. As per Lochrie's description of women's performance in domestic spaces, Criseyde might be confined, but she is also exposed to the view of those around her. In her closet, however, she finds the possibility of privacy in a manner comparable to Troilus in his bedchamber.⁷⁵ Following Pandarus's initial revelation of Troilus's love for her, she 'streght into hire closet wente anon' (2.599) where she 'sat allone' (2.610). Similarly, in order to reply to Troilus's letter, 'into a closet... | She wente allone' (2.1215-16). In contrast, when she retires to her bedchamber, Criseyde is accompanied by her women. Within a household, there are different forms of privacy accessible to different inhabitants. For Troilus, privacy can be found in the bedchamber. For Criseyde, the closet, and the enclosure and privacy that it offers is, unlike the bedchamber, her space and her space alone.

The act of letter writing occurs in both Troilus's bedchamber and Criseyde's closet and illustrates the differences between how they each perform privacy in those spaces while also equating the two. Such is the privacy of the closet that it appears to negate any potential observation of Criseyde. Even the access that the narrator has to her within it is partial.

When she writes her response to Troilus's letter, the narrator summarises it thus: 'Of which

⁷⁴ Weisl, *Conquering the Reign of Femeny*, p. 28. See also Nolan, who examines the feminine 'safe haven' of Criseyde's garden (pp. 66-67), while Hodges analyses Criseyde's widow's 'barbe' as an allusion to the enclosed life, as well as commenting on the constant enclosure that it provides for Criseyde as she moves around Troy, 'Sartorial Signs', pp. 224-28.

⁷⁵ With the same caveat that applies to Troilus being alone: there may still be servants present.

to telle in short is myn entente | Th'effect, as fer as I kan understonde' (2.1219-20). The précis of the letter that is then provided is itself enclosed within and limited to a single stanza (2.1219-25), sandwiched by Criseyde starting to 'a lettre write' (2.1218) and, after the summary, when 'she shette it' (2.1226). The description of Criseyde's letter and her writing process stands in stark contrast to that of Troilus. The narrator describes the letter that Troilus has written to Criseyde 'right in this wyse' (2.1064), indicating a specificity of detail and precision against the more subjective gist that the narrator reports for Criseyde's response. The contents of Troilus's letter are then set out in order: 'First he gan', 'he gan hym recomaunde', 'and after this...', 'and after that...' (2.1065-78). The tone of Troilus's writing is also reported – 'in ful humble wise' and 'pitousli' (2.1069, 1076) – along with the narrator's commentary on it: Troilus's claim that he is 'litel worth' is judged to be a lie 'ful loude' (2.1077-78). The reading of Troilus's letter that the narrator provides turns the production of it into a performance through which the audience sees the rhetorical construction of Troilus's role of courtly lover broken down and glossed into its constituent parts.⁷⁶ His claim to be of 'litel worth, and lasse he koude' (2.1078) evokes the trope of the unworthy lover that was common to medieval romance and so positions him in that role.⁷⁷ Seth Lerer characterises Criseyde's letter as one which 'demands a level of enchamberment that borders – at least rhetorically – on imprisonment'.⁷⁸ The imprisonment is enacted by Criseyde herself: the privacy of the closet from even the narrator offers her the freedom to write the letter unobserved and without extensive critique. Criseyde, the closet and the letter are all equally enclosed in a manner that denies access: she is without audience for either herself or

⁷⁶ Norman Davis, 'The Litera Troili and English Letters', *The Review of English Studies* 16 (1965), 233-44.

⁷⁷ Jill Mann defines the second main characteristic of courtly love as: 'the male lover is always in an inferior position, fearful of losing her love, while the lady is distant, haughty and capricious'. 'Falling in Love in the Middle Ages', in *Traditions and Innovations in the Study of Medieval English Literature: The Influence of Derek Brewer*, ed. by Charlotte Brewer and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), pp. 88-110 (pp. 89-90). See also J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 27-46 for a discussion of this trope in relation to *Troilus*.

⁷⁸ Seth Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 8.

her letter. Unlike Troilus's letter, which works to extend his performance of lovesickness outside of the confines of his bedchamber, Criseyde's letter, at least in its production, does not. The act of writing the letter, however, places Criseyde in the role of the courtly lady in direct response to Troilus's own performance of courtly love, and while the content of the letter is opaque, it is intended by her to be read by Troilus: he, and only he, is her intended audience.⁷⁹ The closet provides Criseyde with a performance space in which she has the privacy to choose her own audience. It is here, in this imprisoned space, that she finds a degree of agency. Any agency that she finds in the bedchamber is circumscribed by the actions of Pandarus, as her guardian and as Troilus's proxy, and in the next section I will discuss how the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde is mediated through multiple bedchambers and through Pandarus's performance of privacy, generating a conception of the bedchamber that, in the end, neither Troilus nor Criseyde can fully inhabit.

Privacy in the Bedchambers

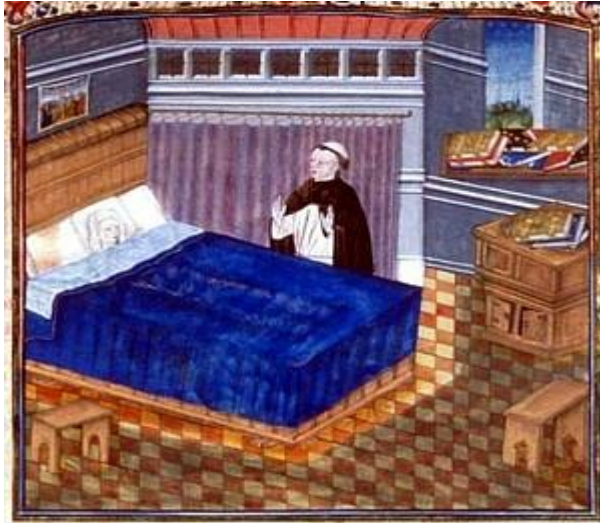
The letters sent between Troilus and Criseyde engender a proliferation of bedchambers. Troilus's performance of privacy through and within them creates intimacy between himself and Criseyde that is both bodily and spatial. The letters between them are part of how they each perform privacy separately and start to create a space in which they can perform it



together. Before the closet in Pandarus's house, the letters are a private space in which they can have physical and intimate contact. Troilus 'with his salte teris gan he bathe' (2.1086) and 'a thousand tymes... kiste' (2.1089-90) the letter before he sends it. The availability of the bedchambers and

⁷⁹ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, pp. 52-56.

closets to Troilus and Criseyde in which they are able to read and write predicates the use of letters as a narrative function and a means of performing privacy. Lerer describes the poem



as one that ‘operates inside a world of rooms, of chambers, closets, and beds... Its scenes of love and voyeurism, letter-writing and public reading all transpire in spaces specially constructed for their operation’.⁸⁰

Letter writing is one more mode of performing courtly love and lovesickness that is enabled by the bedchamber and also

relies on it. As demonstrated by both Troilus and Criseyde, letter-writing as an activity was frequently associated with the bedchamber as it provided one of the few private spaces within the house to do so.⁸¹ The two images of Christine de Pizan above, for example, clearly show the writer’s study space occupying the same space as her bed and this is an image and function of the bedchamber to which I will return in the final chapter of this thesis.⁸²

Moreover, Chaucer presents Troilus’s composition of his letter to Criseyde as part of a continuous action that begins with him going ‘unto bedde’ (2.947) and ends with him declaring that ‘I wil arise and write’ (2.1059). The letter is a product of the bedchamber. Criseyde’s receipt of the letters is similarly positioned: reading Troilus’s letter is one of the few activities that prompts her to go ‘streght into hire chambre’ (2.1173). The confines of the bedchambers are transgressed by the products of the performances that take place within it. Neither the letters that Troilus and Criseyde write, nor the relationship that forms between

⁸⁰ Lerer, p. 23.

⁸¹ Anthony Emery identifies specific areas within the bedchamber that may have been used as studies. *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales 1300-1500, Volume III: Southern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 631.

⁸² *Le Livre des fais d’armes*, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 9009-11, fol. 181^v (top) and fol. 118^r (bottom).

them as a result, stay within the boundaries of the bedchamber or the relative privacy that it bestows.

The letters construct the private bedchamber even as they are produced within it. As products of the bedchamber, the letters create further, virtual bedchambers through the way in which they enable the sender to extend the performances that they construct within the bedchamber beyond its bounds. The letters in *Troilus* are characterised by the privacy that they demand. Even the exact wording of Troilus's letter is kept from both the narrator and the audience, while Criseyde's response is even more opaque, as discussed above. Lisa Jardine, however, notes that there is something 'inherently theatrical' about the practice of epistolary writing, describing it as a 'performance for an audience of one, acted out not on the stages of the theatre but in the corner of the chamber'.⁸³ Jardine's formulation suggests that the acts of reading and writing letters are part of how the bedchamber is constituted as a performance space, an idea that is present in Chaucer's poem through Troilus's use of the letter to restage his earlier performance of lovesickness, using the same language of illness in both. In the letter Criseyde is positioned as 'his sorwes leche' (2.1066) and there is the risk that 'elles most he die' (2.1075).⁸⁴ The narrator also notes that he writes 'as in his speche' (2.1069) and, once finished, 'with his salte teris gan he bathe | The ruby in his signet, and it sette | Upon the wex deliverliche and rathe' (2.1086-88): the letter reproduces both his speaking voice and his body and in doing so is both part of his performance of lovesickness and extends it outside of the bedchamber and into Criseyde's. When she retires to read the letter, her bedchamber becomes a second site of performance for Troilus's lovesickness while also creating a further virtual bedchamber that encompasses them both, anticipating the bedchamber that they will jointly occupy in the future.

⁸³ Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus Man of Letters: the Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 151.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of Criseyde's curative function, see Sealy Gilles, 'Love and Disease in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25 (2003), 157-97; Wack, 'Lovesickness in *Troilus*', pp. 58-59.

Once Troilus and Criseyde are in the same bedchamber, Troilus's performance of privacy starts to break down as he struggles to incorporate the reality of Criseyde within it. This is partly a result of his existing relationship with Pandarus in their own performance of privacy. Pandarus is explicit that he is acting on behalf of Troilus, assuring him, 'I have thi werk bigonne' (2.960). The actions that he undertakes are those of Troilus and Evan Carton points out that Pandarus's directing of the narrative is not overt as 'he will not exercise control until he has received at least tacit agreement that he speaks the desires of the lovers and acts out their intentions'.⁸⁵ As a go-between, he acts as a conduit for the intentions of the lovers, and in particular Troilus, and only with their authorisation. Pandarus accordingly takes great care to insist upon his own passivity when acting as a go between for Troilus and Criseyde. When ferrying their letters, he protests to Criseyde 'Wolde I a lettre unto yow brynge or take | To harm of yow!' (2.1147-48). He also echoes the language of lovesickness that Troilus has used both in speaking to him of Criseyde and in his missive to her: 'he that most desireth yow to serve, | Of hym ye recche leest wher he bycome, | And whethir that he lyve or elles sterve' (2.1150-52). Similarly, when he first visits Criseyde he laments that 'my lord mot nedes dye' (2.439). On this occasion, however, Pandarus includes himself in the rhetoric that he has borrowed from Troilus, continuing 'And I with hym, here I me shryve, and seye | That wikkedly ye don us bothe deye' (2.440-41). By positioning himself as Criseyde's second victim, Pandarus elides himself with Troilus: he is not merely speaking Troilus's desires, as Carton asserts, but speaking as Troilus. He gives no reason for why he too is imperilled other than the fact that his friend is, suggesting that he is also a victim of lovesickness, not because

⁸⁵ Evan Carton, 'Complicity and Responsibility in Pandarus's Bed and Chaucer's Art', *PMLA* 94 (1979), 47-61 (p. 50).

of any particular feelings for Criseyde but because that is the case for Troilus.⁸⁶ Mieszkowski argues that, by promising to help his friend, Pandarus instead ‘reinforces Troilus’s paralysis and reserves the courting of Criseyde for himself’.⁸⁷ The reader, however, has a very limited sense of how Pandarus would, in practice, woo Criseyde on his own terms.⁸⁸ Rather, Pandarus conducts the courtship of Criseyde through the words and feelings of Troilus that the two men have refined and turned into a plan of action together. In doing so he elides himself with Troilus rendering it unclear whose performance of lovesickness is being enacted. On his missions to woo Criseyde, Pandarus is not only performing privacy for Troilus; he is performing Troilus.

Pandarus remains part of Troilus’s performance of privacy in a way that Criseyde is not and which actively prevents her from becoming so. Troilus’s lovesickness is one of the means by which he starts to establish himself as a courtly lover, as opposed to a martial knight. Courtly love requires the potential for privacy and the seclusion of the romantic couple away from the chivalric code of the hall.⁸⁹ Courtly love also requires an audience to maintain its codifications and conventions. The participants need to be recognised as performing ‘as do these lovers’ (2.1306). As I will go on to discuss in the next chapter, Gawain is able to perform courtly love in the hall, but struggles to do so when alone in his bedchamber with the Lady. In the bedchamber at Pandarus’s house, Troilus’s performance of privacy is brought into direct conflict with his attempt to perform courtly love, breaking down the tension between

⁸⁶ The possibility of incest in *Troilus and Criseyde* has been much debated by critics. See Carton, 47-61; Richard W. Fehrenbacher, “Al That Which Chargeth Nought to Seye”: the Theme of Incest in *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Exemplaria* 9 (1997), 341-69; Richard S  v  re, ‘Pandarus’s and Troilus’s Bromance: Male Bonding, Sodomy and Incest in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 60 (2018), 423-40; T.A. Stroud, ‘The Palinode, the Narrator, and Pandarus’s Alleged Incest’, *The Chaucer Review* 27 (1992), 16-30.

⁸⁷ Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, p. 143.

⁸⁸ Laila Gross argues that the way in which Pandarus woos Criseyde on behalf of Troilus is identical to the manner in which Diomedes goes on to woo Criseyde for himself. ‘The Two Wooings of Criseyde’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973), 113-25.

⁸⁹ Guthrie, pp. 157-59.

the two performances. His lovesickness has created an emotional intimacy between himself and Pandarus as it is he, and not Criseyde, who has been established as the audience for Troilus's emotional outpourings and the respondent to them. Lovesickness and courtly love, as a performance by men and for men, is also a performance of homosociality.⁹⁰ Their conversation in Book I is characterised by the repeated use of questions, both rhetorical and actual, that draw the other party into continuing talking. When Pandarus asks 'How hastow thus unkyndely and longe | Hid this fro me, thow fol?' (1.617-18), Troilus challenges him back 'How devel maistow brynge me to blisse?' (1.623). In her discussion of Pandarus as an 'idealized friend', Mieszkowski characterises the relationship between the two men thus: 'Traditionally, the confidant listens to intimate secrets and has privileged access to the soul of the lover, which is masked for everyone else. Sharing of this kind is the loving core of Pandarus's relationship with Troilus'.⁹¹ The religious language that Mieszkowski uses to describe the relationship echoes that which Pandarus uses to address Troilus. Recalling the language of confession, he instructs his friend 'now bet thi brest, and sey to God of Love, | "Thy gace, lord, for now I me repente..."' (1.932-33), a register that Troilus adopts: 'A, lord! I me consente, | And preye to the my japes thow foryive' (1.936-37). The use of such language places Pandarus in the role of the priest for Troilus's repentance, furthering the intimacy between the two men through the implication that Troilus is baring his soul to his friend.⁹² The access that Pandarus has to Troilus's soul is enabled by, and is a direct correlate of, the access that Pandarus has to his bedchamber, including his authority over it. The bedchamber creates physical intimacy as a proxy for emotional intimacy, and an intimacy that is governed by Pandarus rather than Criseyde or Troilus in the consummation scene. The language of

⁹⁰ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 139-41. See also Tison Pugh, 'Queer Pandarus? Silence and Sexual Ambiguity in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Philological Quarterly* 80 (2001), 17-35; Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages*, pp. 114-15.

⁹¹ Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, p. 140.

⁹² David Aers sees Pandarus's use of such language as mocking. 'Re-reading Troilus in Response to Tony Spearing', in *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A.C. Spearing*, ed. by Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2016), pp. 85-96 (p. 90).

confession does, however, create an implicit hierarchy between the two men; if Pandarus is in the role of the priest, then Troilus is below him in that of the penitent, while the soul-baring identified by Mieszkowski only goes in one direction, rendering Troilus vulnerable to his friend.⁹³ Pandarus's intentions remain ambiguous throughout the text.⁹⁴ The power-imbalance that arises as a result of the intimacy between the two men is ultimately a product of the bedchamber and Troilus's need for privacy. His desire to keep his love for Criseyde a secret places him in Pandarus's power even as Pandarus promises to help him realise his feelings.

The material space of the bedchamber forges a different type of privacy and intimacy between Troilus and Criseyde than between Troilus and Pandarus. These intimacies are not compatible with each other and disrupt Troilus's performance of privacy. The shenanigans involved in getting Troilus into Criseyde's closet for the consummation scene have been much rehearsed by critics, starting with Pandarus himself.⁹⁵ His retelling to Criseyde of Troilus's entrance 'thorough a goter, by a pryve wente' (3.787) emphasises both the clandestine nature of the lover's burgeoning relationship and the illicitness of Troilus's presence within the bedchamber. Troilus's entrance must not only be affected by stealth (through his hiding 'in a stewe' [3.601] and entering via the 'trappe' [3.741]), but Pandarus's version of it places Troilus in parts of the architecture that are themselves private and concealed. There is little enough reason for him to be hiding in Pandarus's 'stewe', never

⁹³ This is in contrast to the other pairings that Mieszkowski identifies as fulfilling the trope of the would-be lover and the idealised friend, in which the idealised friend role is placed as subordinate to those for whom they act as a shoulder to cry on.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Archibald, 'Declarations of "Entente" in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *The Chaucer Review* 25 (1991), 190-213.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Saul N. Brody, 'Making a Play for Criseyde: the Staging of Pandarus's House in *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Speculum* 73 (1998), 115-40; Smyser, pp. 297-315; William Robins, 'Troilus in the Gutter', in *Sacred and Profane in Chaucer and Late Medieval Literature: essays in honour of John V. Fleming*, ed. by Robert Epstein and William Robins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 91-112.

mind climbing through gutters.⁹⁶ Rather than being sanctioned by the gatekeepers of the space (in this instance, Criseyde's women asleep outside her door), Troilus must go to convoluted means to circumvent them altogether. While Troilus and Pandarus's conversations in the bedchamber were private, the fact of their relationship was not; Criseyde is Troilus's secret and so the existence of their relationship necessitates a higher degree of privacy. Through his telling of Troilus's struggle to enter the closet, that privacy is re-performed by Pandarus for Criseyde. The privacy that their relationship requires is the product of a performance by a third party that highlights the contingent nature of that privacy and the discomfort caused by Pandarus's presence within it.⁹⁷

Troilus's entrance into Criseyde's chamber forms part of Pandarus's plan for their love affair to play out according to romance conventions.⁹⁸ Through his retelling of the many obstacles that Troilus faced to enter Criseyde's bedchamber, Pandarus presents his friend as an urban alternative to a romance hero questing through peril-laden countryside to find his beloved. In Chrétien de Troyes' 'The Knight of the Cart', for instance, Lancelot is faced with crossing 'treacherous water, black and roaring, swift and swirling' by means of a bridge that is 'a sharp and gleaming sword' so that he might reach the queen 'in her curtained room'.⁹⁹ Gawain, meanwhile, is faced with the 'Underwater Bridge'.¹⁰⁰ Like his tale of Troilus asleep in the garden, Pandarus's narrative of how Troilus came to be in Criseyde's room places him in the role of the romance hero in a manner that is familiar to Criseyde from stories. Criseyde herself is aligned with the figure of the lady in romance, for whom the breach of privacy is

⁹⁶ Robins' discussion of Troilus's entrance, as told by Pandarus, emphasises how unsanitary and clandestine such a route would have been.

⁹⁷ Guthrie, p. 154.

⁹⁸ Corinne Saunders, 'Chaucer's Romances', in *A Companion to Romance from Classical to Contemporary*, ed. by Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 85-103.

⁹⁹ Chrétien de Troyes, 'The Knight of the Cart', *Arthurian Romances*, trans. by William W. Kibler (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 244-65.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 270.

heroic rather than a violation. Additionally, Pandarus casts himself in the role of the narrator of a romance. Following convention, 'The Knight of the Cart' ends with the narrator addressing his audience directly: 'My lords, if I were to tell you any more, I would be going beyond my matter'.¹⁰¹ Such addresses alert the audience to the role of the narrator in shaping the story that they have just heard and are also made by the narrator of *Troilus*, such as when he declines to provide the intimate details of the consummation scene: 'But sooth is, though I kan nat tellen al, | As kan myn auctor, of his excellence...' (3.1324-25).¹⁰² Aligning himself with both the figure of the romance narrator and the narrator of *Troilus*, Pandarus reminds the reader of his role in shaping the narrative of Troilus and Criseyde's romance.¹⁰³ He has bought the lovers together and positioned them within the performances that he believes that they should occupy.¹⁰⁴ Crucially, though, Troilus is not a questing knight and Criseyde is in the closet of a townhouse, not locked in a castle against her will. As her bedchamber, it is a space that protects her reputation in the social reality of Troy. The architectural details that Pandarus so strongly evokes to install Troilus and Criseyde in a romance scene cannot fully support such a performance. While romance is performed, and as a genre is associated with the bedchamber, this bedchamber is the wrong context for performing romance and exposes the fault-lines in trying to do so.

Once within Criseyde's closet in Pandarus's house, Troilus cannot simultaneously perform privacy and courtly love. Pandarus's arrangement of the scene on the bed, as well as his own

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 294. On the narrator in romance, see Dennis Howard Green, *Irony in the Medieval Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 213-49; Karl Reichl, 'Orality and Performance', in *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. by Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 132-49; Andrew Taylor, 'Fragmentation, Corruption, and Minstrel Narration: the Question of the Middle English Romances', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992), 38-62.

¹⁰² Dinshaw examines the narrator's 'literary intentions' in detail. *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, pp. 39-47.

¹⁰³ The parallels and overlaps between the narrator and Pandarus have been much discussed. See, for example, Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, pp. 49-51; T.A. Stroud, 'The Palinode, the Narrator, and Pandarus's Alleged Incest', *The Chaucer Review* 27 (1992), 16-30; Richard Waswo, 'The Narrator of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *ELH* 50 (1983), 1-25.

¹⁰⁴ Windeatt 'Love That Oughte Ben Secree', p. 116.

presence in it, establishes the bedchamber as communal rather than private. He creates a perspective for Criseyde to gaze upon Troilus while presenting it as objectively ‘trouthe’ (3.963) and so establishes his own viewpoint from which the scene is created as also being ‘trouthe’. Carton reads Pandarus’s creation of a monolithic viewpoint, in which not only Criseyde but the audience must share, as paradigmatic for all participants in the narrative, in that it translates the private into the communal.¹⁰⁵ Pandarus brings the public gaze to which Troilus was subject as he paraded through the streets of Troy into the space of the bedchamber. Yet even as Pandarus is arranging the scene of courtly love that he has created, Troilus’s performance disrupts both it and the shared experience of it.¹⁰⁶ Troilus’s performance of courtly love breaks down and ‘down he fel al sodeynly a-swowne’ (3.1092); he cannot perform as he intended to, or in the way that his audiences in the form of Pandarus, Criseyde and the reader expect of him. His failure is acknowledged by both Pandarus and Criseyde, the former questioning ‘is this a mannes herte?’ (3.1098) and the latter echoing the same sentiment: ‘Is this a mannes game? | What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?’ (3.1126-27). Troilus is not only not acting as a courtly lover should, but he is failing to act as a man, with the threat of failed sexual performance implicit in both questions. In querying Troilus’s ability to act as a man, Pandarus and Criseyde both imply a more profound failure of performance than that of the romance scene that Pandarus is trying to arrange. Fainting or swooning is not outside the types of behaviour that constitute courtly love, but Troilus’s swoon demonstrates the disruptive, somatic reality of swooning to the performance of courtly love.¹⁰⁷ His breakdown in performance requires Pandarus to intervene as director, ‘and Pandare up as faste |... for this or that, he into bed hym caste’

¹⁰⁵ Carton, p. 50.

¹⁰⁶ Jill Mann argues that Troilus’s faint is prompted by his recognition, unlike Pandarus, of the potentially destructive implications of the situation that Pandarus has arranged for him. ‘Troilus’s Swoon’, *The Chaucer Review* 14 (1980), 319-35.

¹⁰⁷ E. Jane Burns, ‘Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition’, *Signs* 27 (2001), 23-57 (pp. 33-34); Gretchen Mieszkowski, ‘Revisiting Troilus’s Faint’, in *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde*, pp. 43-57.

(3.1094-97), the sudden violence of which highlights its incongruity within the scene.¹⁰⁸ The physicality of Pandarus's actions recalls his previous treatment of Criseyde: both when he pushes her into the space around the bed at Deiphebus's house and when he thrusts the letter down her dress. In all three cases, Pandarus is not performing privacy as a respect for personal boundaries, but through their violation. Here, however, it is Troilus's personal space that is being violated rather than Criseyde's, casting him in a less authoritative, more feminine role that underscores his failure to perform both as a man and as a romance hero. As his faint makes clear, Troilus is performing the wrong role for the text that Pandarus is trying to create around him.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Privacy is much sought-after in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the lovers display a near constant anxiety over whether they are being observed, how they are being observed, and by whom they are observed. Against this backdrop, privacy is something that must constantly be performed in order to be produced and maintained. Troilus's performance of lovesickness is both dependent on his performance of privacy – he needs to be in private in order to be lovesick – and is one of the ways through which he performs privacy: as he is lovesick, he is therefore in private. The bedchamber is not a guarantee of privacy, but a tool through which it is performed and in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer foregrounds privacy as a social construct: it requires other people as either audience or co-performers. Troilus's performance of privacy relies on others – both inside the bedchamber and without – recognising that he is using it as a private space. That Troilus is able to use the bedchamber as such is a privilege. He is able to withdraw into it, clearly demarcating his public and

¹⁰⁸ Mieszkowski notes that 'of all the go-betweens in medieval literature, only Pandarus literally throws a lover into bed', *Medieval Go-Betweens*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁹ Spearing suggests that Troilus is a 'peculiar hero' for romance and would be more suited to the lyric. *Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde*, p. 41.

private lives as well as the roles that he plays within them, and to control who enters, thereby controlling the audience to and the co-performers within his performance of privacy.

Changing the audience at Deiphebus's house from Deiphebus and Helen to Criseyde, for example, changes his performance of privacy from one of bodily illness to one of courtly lovesickness. Criseyde herself is coded as entirely private, as a result of which her experience of privacy and the bedchamber is more fraught than that of Troilus. The bedchamber is a space of withdrawal for her, but it is also still a space in which she is observed and her actions within it moulded by societal pressures and expectations external to the bedchamber. Where Troilus's performance of privacy uses those external forces, they hinder Criseyde's. *Troilus and Criseyde* rejects the straightforward binary of public and private, with the bedchamber standing for and symbolising the latter. Rather, privacy is modulated across different spaces within the household and in relation to the public and the roles that an individual might perform within it.

Criseyde's tent in the Greek Camp stands in for the modulations of privacy across the text as a whole. She treats it like a bedchamber, as a space for both rest and reflection:

Criseyde unto hire bedde wente
Inwith hire fadres faire brighte tente,

Retornyng in hire soule ay up and down
The wordes of this sodeyn Diomedes. (5.1021-24)

The image of her 'retornyng in hire soule ay up and down' echoes both the mirror that Troilus makes of his mind (1.665-66) and the contemplation that Criseyde undertook of Troilus's letter (2.1177-78), further suggesting that the tent will function like either of these two bedchambers. Criseyde, however, is radically exposed within it and in her relationship with Diomedes. The tent is too porous to provide even the modicum of privacy that Criseyde might expect from her bedchamber. Moreover, her own performance of privacy is lacking. Where her relationship with Troilus was both private and secret, that which she forges with Diomedes is legible in public through the tokens that she gives him of 'a broche... | And ek, the bet from sorwe hym to releve, | She made hym were a pencil of hire sleve' (5.1040-43).

So public is their relationship that the narrator notes that ‘I fynde ek in stories elleswhere’ (5.1044) further details about it. The giving of tokens refers back to the exchange of rings scene between Troilus and Criseyde (3.1366-68). Occurring in the closet at Pandarus’s house, this exchange of tokens is entirely private and the rings do not signify publicly.¹¹⁰ Both the rings and the brooch, when Criseyde initially gives it to Troilus, belong in a romance and help to establish the bedchamber at Pandarus’s house as a romance bedchamber. Outside of its four walls, however, the brooch takes on a more transactional symbolism as both it and Criseyde are exchanged between men. Even in the Greek camp, Troilus believes that the romance bedchamber is sustainable and Criseyde’s tent is equivalent to the closet at Pandarus’s house. Both he and the bedchamber that he wishes to occupy are in the wrong genre and in the next chapter I will go on to examine the romance bedchamber in more detail through *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. As with Criseyde’s brooch, the symbols of the bedchamber are mutable as they shift from context to context. Troilus, whose natural genre is the lyric, should have spent more time with Pandarus reading old romances to understand how the bedchamber works.

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the jewellery in *Troilus and Criseyde* see Laura Fulkerson Hodges, *Chaucer and Array: Patterns of Costume and Fabric Rhetoric in the Canterbury Tales, Troilus and Criseyde and Other Works* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), pp. 54-90.

Living in a Material World: the Bedchamber and its Textiles in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

The textiles in Gawain's bedchamber at Hautdesert form a series of enclosures around the knight. Each textile is luxurious and tactile in its materiality. Constructing and surrounding the intimate space of the bed in the centre, there are 'couertorez ful curious', then the 'rudelez rennande on ropez', and then, surrounding everything, 'tapitez tyzt to the woze of tuly and tars, | And vnder fete, on þe flet, of folzande sute' (855-59). The textiles are both the decoration in the bedchamber and its physical construct: even the walls and floors are made of tapestries. Individual details on each of the textiles repeat the motif of enclosure. The curtains are edged 'wyth cler golde hemmez' (854) while the bedcovers have 'comlych panez | Of bryzt blaunner aboue, enbrawdedy bisydez' (855-56) and the hangings are suspended from 'red golde rynges' (857). For both the reader and Gawain, the depth of detail is itself enclosing. With its cosy interior, the sanctuary that the bedchamber offers stands in stark contrast to the conditions in which Gawain spent the night previous to his arrival at Hautdesert.¹ Sleeping on 'naked rokkez' and 'ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his yrnys' (729-30), Gawain suffers cold, hard exposure to the landscape and elements. Each of the textile barriers placed between him and the 'hard iisse-ikkles' (732) that had been hanging so precariously over his head re-affirms the apparent safety and civilization of both the bedchamber and Hautdesert as a whole.² Who, especially at Christmas, could resist the offer of such a bedchamber?

¹ Morgan, pp. 1-2.

² A.C. Spearing argues that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* uses the opposition between the wilderness and the court, frequently found in medieval romance, to ultimately complicate the way in which space functions at Hautdesert. 'Public and Private Spaces in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Arthuriana* 4 (1994), 138-45. See also Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). In his documentary on *Gawain*, Simon Armitage evokes and maps the harshness of the landscape through which Gawain would have travelled. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, BBC4, 4th April 2009.

The bedchamber forms an aesthetic of enclosure through which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is structured. The circular, and cyclical, structure of the text has been much commented upon by critics, with parallels drawn between the poem and both the girdle and the never-ending shape of the pentangle.³ Helen Cooper argues that the structure is not only circular, returning Gawain to Camelot, but symmetrical: ‘the meticulous mirror-symmetry of the poem’s structure – the Troy references at the beginning and end framing the scenes at Camelot, the arming and blows inside those, and the three hunts and bedroom scenes at the centre’.⁴ In this chapter, I will build on Cooper’s analysis of the structure to argue that it is not just symmetrical but enclosing; each layer turning inwards from Troy on the outer edges to the bedchamber right at the centre.⁵ The bedchamber is the point to which the first half of the narrative is aiming and to which the second half returns. From the centre the bedchamber also refers out; it establishes an aesthetic of enclosure that operates across the poem as a whole. The bedchamber that is at once at the heart of this aesthetic of enclosure and the template for it is, however, a deceptive one. Constructed from multiple, shifting layers of textiles, both it and the bed it contains belongs to the category of illusory romance beds:

the bed could be a symbol of guilt, a shadowy place, a scene of crime, the truth of what went on here could never be revealed. The bed lent itself to all sorts of manoeuvres and substitutions, particularly in the case of women accused of giving birth to monsters or bastards.⁶

³ See, for example, Nick Davis, ‘Narrative Form and Insight’ in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer and Johnathan Gibson (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), pp. 329-50; Thomas J. Farrell, ‘Life and Art, Chivalry and Geometry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Arthurian Interpretations* 2 (1988), 17-33; D.R. Howard, ‘Structure and Symmetry in *Sir Gawain*’, *Speculum* 39 (1964), 425-33; Dieter Mehl, *English Literature in the Age of Chaucer* (London and New York: Longman, 2013), pp. 120-22; Paul F. Reichardt, ‘A Note on Structural Symmetry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 72 (1971), 276-82; Piotr Sadowski, *The Knight on his Quest: Symbolic Patterns of Transition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).

⁴ Helen Cooper, ‘The Supernatural’, in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, pp. 277-97 (p. 289).

⁵ Of the poem’s 2530 lines, the literal centre, line 1265, comes in the first bedchamber scene at Hautdesert.

⁶ Régnier-Bohler, ‘Imagining the Self’, p. 329.

The aesthetic of enclosure renders signifiers and that which they signify unstable in the way in which they relate to each other. As a motif, the beheading game that opens the poem, for instance, starts as a challenge to Arthur, then becomes a test of Gawain's 'trawþe' before ending as a means 'for to haf greued Gaynour and gart hir to dyȝe' (2460). The instability of signifier and signified in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is defining feature of the poem, driving both Gawain's uncertainty as to the nature of his quest and the critical history of attempting to fit the text into one category or the other. Cooper draws attention to the 'irreconcilable variety of the signs concerning the Green Knight, and their contradictory meanings' that populate the poem, and that have been interpreted variously as Christian, pagan and supernatural.⁷ Gawain, with his pentangle shield, believes in the power and stability of signifiers and his struggle to correctly read the signs around him at any one moment both traps him and drives the narrative forward. He initially believes that the bed and the textiles that surround him form a place of greater safety than either the court or the wilderness outside, within which he is protected from Lady Bertilak's advances. The bed-hangings form a defensive architecture around him as 'a corner of þe cortyn he caȝt vp a lyttel, | And waytez warly þiderwarde quat hit be myȝt' (1185-86). The textiles force his gaze around them in a moment of apprehension in which the structure of the castle as a whole is evoked with its enclosing 'abataylment in þe best lawe' (790) and the wall from which the porter hails him (809). Gawain also uses the bedcovers to mount his defence against the Lady, as he 'let as he slepte' (1190), snuggling back down under the blankets. With the entrance of Lady Bertilak, however, the significance of the bed shifts and the enclosing textiles that Gawain has read as barriers to her become barriers to him instead. During his stay at Hautdesert, Gawain consistently reads the bedchamber as more private than it actually is, and its enclosure as more consistently protective. The luxuriousness of its textiles, a common trope in medieval romance, appear to render it legible, signifying prestige and wealth in a way that makes Hautdesert seem comparable to Camelot and therefore

⁷ Cooper, p. 288.

understandable to Gawain.⁸ The meanings of the bedchamber textiles, though, are not fixed or absolute: both textiles and text are difficult to pin down.⁹

The aesthetic of enclosure provides a framework within which Bertilak and his wife operate and the slipperiness of the symbols at Hautdesert. Gawain's failure to recognise them as such ensnares him within the two games by radically destabilising his own knightly identity, propelled by the question of what version of Gawain he is expected to be and, relatedly, what sort of romance is he in? As Gail Ashton notes, the poem is one in which 'the centre can never hold but is continuously reconfigured across a range of positional alterations. Thus one perverse dynamic replaces the previous one in a play of continual movement, a disturbing oscillation of motive and desire'.¹⁰ At the centre of this oscillation is the constantly shifting bedchamber through which Gawain is caught in a nexus of changing meanings. He is constantly refigured through his contact with both the bedchamber and its operatives in the form of Bertilak and the Lady. The multiplicity of signs operating in the text are reconciled through the aesthetic of enclosure precisely because of their slipperiness. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is an example of the literature of the bedchamber in the sense that, through its structure, it recreates the bedchamber.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I will explore how the bedchamber functions in relation to the rest of the court, both at Hautdesert and Camelot. The enclosures created by the multiple layers of textiles establish Gawain's bedchamber as private, in

⁸ On textiles as signifiers of nobility and economic value, see E. Jane Burns, 'Why Textiles Make a Difference', in *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth Work and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. by E. Jane Burns (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 1-18; P.J.P. Goldberg, 'The Fashioning of Bourgeois Domesticity in Late Medieval England: a Material Culture Perspective', in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household*, pp. 124-44.

⁹ Claire Vial, 'Clothing the Debate: Textiles, Text-Isles and the Economy of Gift-Giving in Four Middle English Breton Lays', *Études Anglaises* 67 (2014), 3-18.

¹⁰ Gail Ashton, 'The Perverse Dynamics of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Arthuriana* 15 (2005), 51-74 (p. 54).

contrast to the more public space of the hall. Although the hall is itself a domestic and interior space to which access is privileged and restricted, I refer to it as public throughout this chapter to contrast its function within the court to that of the bedchamber. In the microcosm of the court, the hall stands in for a public space: it is one to which all members have access and which is used for business and ceremony as much as it is for leisure. As in Troy, privacy in *Gawain* is not an absolute and the private and the public exist on a spectrum with each other that includes other categorisations of space, such as the domestic. The aesthetic of enclosure that the bedchamber generates separates it from the rest of the court, but it also characterises how power dynamics function across the court. Hautdesert, unlike Camelot, is shaped by its bedchambers rather than its hall.¹¹ The textiles produce various registers that define Hautdesert and the relationships within it. In the way in which it involves Gawain in the game of seduction and the exchange of winnings game, and in the way in which Bertilak and his wife operate within it, Hautdesert functions like a textile.

In the second section, I will return to the interior of the bedchamber to examine both it and Lady Bertilak and their roles in the game of seduction. The bedchamber at Hautdesert is an actant in Gawain's seduction, following Latour's definition of 'things [which] might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on'.¹² Lady Bertilak seduces Gawain in synchronicity with the bedchamber. She does so by using the aesthetic of enclosure as a rhetorical strategy to trap Gawain that is mirrored in her bodily occupation of the space, into which she also implicates the reader. Gawain is caught both physically in the bed and semantically by Lady Bertilak's exploitation of shifting registers.

¹¹ Spearing, 'Public and Private Spaces', p. 141.

¹² Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 72.

In the final section of this chapter, I will assess how the bed functions as a perilous one, comparing Gawain's experience at Hautdesert to other instances of the perilous bed in romance. While Gawain is not the only questing knight to encounter such a bed, the way in which his acts as one differs from, for instance, that which he faces in Chrétien de Troyes' 'The Story of the Grail'. The bed at Hautdesert is perilous because of its slipperiness, not because of any immediate physical danger in which Gawain is put. It is here that Gawain's 'trawpe' starts to be tested. Throughout this thesis, I use 'trawpe' in the sense set out by A.C. Spearing, who argues that both it and the pentangle refer to the interlocking of Gawain's virtues rather than a singular one.¹³ The test of his 'trawpe' therefore comes as much in the destabilising of his identity and those signifiers that he accrues for it, including the pentangle, as much as any single action undertaken by either the Green Knight or Lady Bertilak.¹⁴ Moreover, the peril does not end once Gawain has left the bed. Rather, as I will suggest, the girdle acts as a prosthesis for the bedchamber, extending both the bedchamber and the enclosure that it offers to the Green Chapel and on into Camelot. The girdle is the means through which the last half of the poem is drawn back into the enclosure of the bedchamber, even as it too becomes slippery in its significance.

The Court and the Bedchamber

The promise of the bedchamber is part of both the seduction of Gawain and the means through which, at least in part unknowingly, he is enmeshed in the game of seduction and exchange of winnings game. From the moment that he arrives, the court appears to be one that Gawain understands and this familiarity is as seductive to him as the lure of somewhere

¹³ A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: a Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 207.

¹⁴ Clare R. Kinney reads the pentangle itself as a 'new' symbol invented by Camelot along with Gawain's public persona, suggesting that Gawain's identity is always contingent throughout the poem. 'The (Dis)Embodied Hero and the Sign of Manhood in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 47-58 (p. 50).

comfortable to sleep. As a questing knight in the wilderness, Gawain is not surprised when the castle pops up out of the landscape as if in answer to his prayers:¹⁵

‘I beseche þe, lorde,
Ad Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere,
Of sum herber þer heȝly I myȝt here masse,
And þy matynez to-morne, mekely I ask...’
Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot þrye,
Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote. (753-64)

The castle’s sudden appearance is a romance trope. Percival, too, ‘caught sight of the top of a tower’ against a horizon that had previously been empty: ‘he looked all around him and saw only sky and earth’.¹⁶ It alerts Gawain to the type of text that he is in and the type of court that he is about to enter. The castle appears to be a known quantity in which he might find respite from his travels. Framed as a request for a space in which he might fulfil his devotional duties, the desire for somewhere to sleep is implicit in Gawain’s prayer: he wants to hear mass today and then sleep overnight for ‘þy matynez to-morne’ (756). He has also previously beseeched the Virgin Mary to ‘wysse hym to sum wone’ (739). The court is emblematic of the bedchambers that it contains, but its other significations are less fixed. The provenance of the castle remains ambiguous in the poem: whether it was always there and Gawain finally catches sight of it; whether it appears in response to Gawain’s prayer; or whether something more supernatural is at work.¹⁷ It is the first of the slippery signifiers that he encounters at Hautdesert but for Gawain the appearance of the castle is also the appearance of a potential bedchamber for the night and a moment of respite from the wilderness, returning him to civilisation.

¹⁵ Charles Ross, *The Custom of the Castle: from Malory to Macbeth* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 131.

¹⁶ ‘The Story of the Grail’, p. 418. For a discussion of the suddenly appearing castle as a romance trope see Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁷ Cooper, p. 290.

Hautdesert is structured to draw Gawain into the bedchamber through a series of enclosures. The vista it presents is attractive.¹⁸ Appearing to have been ‘pared out of papure purely’ (802), the outline of the castle emphasises its ‘towres telded bytwene, trochet ful pik’ (795) and ‘chalkwhyte chymnees’ (798). While giving little sense of the building’s interiority, both features are suggestive of the bedchambers within.¹⁹ Once inside, the castle becomes increasingly interior. Gawain is ushered through ‘þe brode ȝate, ȝarked vp wyde’ (820) into the courtyard in which ‘stabeled his stede stif men innoȝe’ (823) before ‘Knyȝtez and swyerez comen doun þenne | For to bryng þis buerne wyth blys into halle’ (824-25). At each stage the enclosure is more complete, from the temporarily open gate to the cocoon of the bed. This early series of enclosures forms a template for both Gawain’s time at Hautdesert – when he leaves for the Green Chapel his movements through the enclosures are reversed – and the rest of the narrative that ultimately returns to, and therefore encloses, Camelot and its central hall.

The bedchamber textiles provide a register for the court through which Gawain is formed in its image, positioning him within the role that he should occupy there. As soon as he arrives at Hautdesert, the court attempts to define what sort of knight Gawain should be, according to their expectations of romance.²⁰ The courtiers assure each other, ‘Now schal we semlych se sleȝtex of þewez | And þe teccheles termes of talkyng noble, | With spede is in speche vnspurd may we lerne’ (916-18). In the bedchamber, Lady Bertilak counsels Gawain on not living up to the stories about him that she has heard:

For to telle of þis teuelyng of þis trwe knyȝtez,
Hit is þe tytelet token and tyxt of her werkkez
How ledes for her lele luf hor lyuez han auntered,

¹⁸ Rob Liddiard, *Castles in Context: Power, Symbolism and Landscape, 1066-1500* (Oxford: Windgather Press, 2005), pp. 97-121.

¹⁹ Spearing, ‘Public and Private Spaces’, pp. 141-42. See also Edward Wilson, *The Gawain-Poet* (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

²⁰ The Gawain of romance is considered by Cory J. Rushton in ‘The Lady’s Man: Gawain as Lover in Middle English Literature’, in *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. by Amanda Hopkins and Cory James Rushton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 27-38.

Endured for her drury dulf stoundez,
 And after wenged with her walour and voided her care,
 And broȝt blysse into boure with with bountees hor awen —
 And ȝe ar knyȝt comlokest kyd of your elde,
 Youre wode and your worchip walkez ayquere,
 And I haf seten by yourself here sere twyes,
 Ȝet herde I neuer of your hed helde no wordez
 Pat euer longed to luf, lasse ne more. (1514-24)

Lady Bertilak is a courtly lady, and she has her 'boure' (1519), but Gawain is not living up to her expectations.²¹ Whereas Troilus retreats to his bedchamber in order to take on a specific role – that of the lovesick young knight – Gawain finds himself required to take on a specific role because he is in the bedchamber. His identity is malleable depending on the space that he occupies. Following the initial description of Gawain's lavish accommodation, the luxuriousness of the textiles is reiterated to cover the knight himself so that his outer appearance comes to reflect the inner qualities that Hautdesert perceives him, and wishes him, to have. He is no longer the knight of the pentangle, but the knight of

Ryche robes ful rad...
 For to charge, and to chaunge, and chose of þe best.
 Sone as he on hent, and happed þerinne,
 Pat sete on hym semly wyth saylande skyrtez,
 Þe ver by his uisage verayly hit semed
 Welnez to vche hapel, alle on hwes
 Lowande and lufly alle his lymmez vnder,
 Pat a comloker knyȝt neuer Kryst made hem þoȝt. (862-70)

Through the description of his new clothing, the textiles of the bedchamber are immediately re-invoked and Gawain is formed as part of that space. The 'comlych panez' (855) are bested only by Gawain himself as the 'comloker knyȝt'. Gawain is enclosed in the register of the bedchamber textiles and is enclosed physically as well. With their 'saylande skyrtez' that put 'alle his lymmez vnder', the robes wrap around and subsume Gawain bodily so that his appearance and the impact that it has on those observing him is formed through the textiles, recalling Guinevere and her near-total textile enclosure at Camelot. Moreover, as with the

²¹ Angela L. Florscheutz imagines Gawain among a community of Arthurian romance readers and fan-fiction writers at Hautdesert. 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Canonicity, and Audience Participation', *Transformative Works and Cultures* 30 (2019), <<https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2019.1631>> [accessed 26/09/2019]

queen, the enclosure afforded by the robes reaches out of the more private space of the bedchamber and into the public one of the hall where the dressing of Gawain continues and ‘a meré mantyle watz on þat mon cast’ (878). Just as the bedchamber is created through multiple enclosures formed by the textile barriers, so too is Gawain’s public form at Hautdesert formed by layer upon layer of cloth shifting around him. This construction begins in the bedchamber but continues into the hall, undertaken by the court as a whole, suggesting it is both an ongoing and pluralistic process, and one in which Gawain is mostly passive. To begin to be the type of knight that he is expected to be at the court, he must go into the bedchamber and come out again. At Hautdesert, Gawain is a product of the bedchamber.

Gawain is physically and symbolically made up of the textiles that he wears. The aesthetic of enclosure starts, not at Hautdesert, but with his arming at Camelot. The scene at the start of Fitt II foreshadows the bedchamber at Hautdesert through the luxury of the materials and the enclosure for which they are used:

Fyrst a tulé tapit tyzt ouer þe flet,
 And miche watz þe gyld gere þat glent þeralofte;
 Þe stif mon steppez þeron, and þe stel hondelez,
 Dubbed in a dublet of a dere tars,
 And syþen a crafty capados, closed aloft,
 Pat wyth a bryzt blaunner was bounden withinne.
 Penne set þay þe sabatounz vpon þe segge fotez,
 His legez lapped in stel with luflych greuez,
 With polaynez piched þerto, policed ful clene,
 Aboute his knez knaged wyth knottez of golde... (568-77)

The arming blazon both constructs the body of the knight and consolidates his singular knightly identity through the motif of enclosure.²² It also provides a point of contact between

²² Jill Mann links the enclosure of the armour to the enclosure of the pentangle so that it is specifically Gawain’s identity as the knight of the pentangle that is constructed through the arming scene. ‘Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 31 (2009), 231-65 (p. 245). E. Jane Burns argues that, divested of his armour, a knight could be gendered feminine due to his unisex gown; the body that is made in the arming scene is a male one. ‘Refashioning Courtly Love: Lancelot as Ladies’ Man or Lady/Man’, in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 111-34.

the two courts that anticipates both the disarming and re-arming that Gawain undergoes at Hautdesert.²³ The enclosure of Gawain's arming negotiates between outer appearance and inner qualities:

The ethical and material merge into a single dazzling image of knightly excellence, embracing 'clanness' in all its senses, and the connection between them appears to be not metaphorical but intrinsic. Moreover the movement is not only from outward adornment (the gold embroidered pentangle) to inward virtue ('trawpe'), but reconceived as adornment (Gawain is purified like gold and adorned with virtues).²⁴

Gawain himself is not, however, either a stable signifier – of 'knightly excellence', of "clanness" in all its senses' – nor a stable signified to which the pentangle refers back. The connection between the outer layers of enclosing armour and the knight inside is only 'intrinsic' in the sense that neither are stable in the meanings that they produce. At Camelot, the enclosure of Gawain appears to produce a singular and stable Gawain; at Hautdesert the arming scene is repeated and revised, and so too is Gawain's knightly identity. The arming scene therefore also looks forward to Gawain's return to Camelot and the schism in interpretation that he causes through the differing meanings attributed to the girdle, as I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter. The enclosed Gawain is a site of interpretive instability at the heart of Camelot, making both his departure to Hautdesert and his return to Arthur's court inevitable as part of the circular, enclosing structure of the text.

By dressing Gawain and providing him with a bedchamber, Hautdesert is able to make him into the knight that they wish him to be and that they therefore are in relation to him. The sumptuousness of the bedchamber textiles and the robes in which Gawain is dressed befits his status as a noble and valued guest. Such treatment of guests is common to medieval

²³ For (dis)arming as a romance trope see Derek Brewer, 'Armour II: the Arming Topos as Literature', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, pp. 175-80.

²⁴ Mann, 'Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics', p. 249.

romance.²⁵ When Gawain comes across another mysterious castle in ‘The Turke and Sir Gawain’, for instance, he finds ‘chamber, bower, and hall | Richly rayled about with pale, | Seemly to look uppon’.²⁶ In contrast to the Turk’s caution, Gawain is eager to take advantage of this mysterious hospitality as he knows that it befits his status and that it is how he should be treated as a guest. As soon as he arrives at Hautdesert he is recognised as ‘worþy’ (819) and someone who they should ‘honour’ (830). The textiles focus Gawain’s status through the lens of the court. His appearance in the gifted robes is such ‘Þat a comloker knyzt neuer Kryst made hem þoȝt’ (870) and ‘Hit semed as he moȝt | Be prynce withouten pere’ (872-73). Gawain’s identity at the court – both his nobility and his nearness to Christ – is a product of the perspective of the court, generated and confirmed by the clothes in which they clad him. By taking Gawain out of his armour and redressing him in their own textiles, the court at Hautdesert removes the pentangle and portrait of the Virgin that acted as signifiers for Gawain’s qualities when he set out on his quest and replaces them with ones of their own.²⁷ They remake Gawain in their own image and, in doing so, foreground how unstable Gawain is both as a signifier and as the signified.²⁸ The pentangle and image of the Virgin are only restored to him as signifiers of his knightly identity once he leaves Hautdesert, and then they are modified by the addition of the girdle to his armour. As flexible, malleable and portable material goods, the textiles are adaptable and transferable signifiers within the context of the court. When he arrives at Hautdesert, the significance of the textiles is transferred to

²⁵ The giving of clothing as a gift is a motif in medieval romance. Kathryn Marie Talarico has charted the 22 instances of it in Jean Renart’s *Roman de la Rose*: ‘Clothing in Jean Renart’s *Rose*’, *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 8 (2012), 115-32 (p. 119).

²⁶ ‘The Turke and Sir Gawain’, in *Sir Gawain: Eleven Romances and Tales*, ed. by Thomas Hahn (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), ll. 80-82.

²⁷ For a discussion of how the pentangle relates to Gawain see Catherine Batt, ‘Gawain’s Antifeminist Rant, the Pentangle, and Narrative Space’, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992), 117-39; Geraldine Heng, ‘Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *PMLA* 106 (1991), 500-14.

²⁸ Mann reads *Gawain* in its Ricardian context to discuss how textile gifts were used to construct the identity of those who gave them, as well as the recipients. ‘Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics’, pp. 234-35. See also Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, pp. 68-79.

Gawain. Standing in his bedchamber and clad in his newly borrowed outfit at Hautdesert, Gawain is the sum of the court's textiles. So, too, is Hautdesert.

The aesthetic of enclosure marks Hautdesert as initially very different from Camelot and these differences prevent Bertilak's court, and the expectations that it has of him, from being fully legible to Gawain. The reader's first encounter with both Arthur and his court is through his entrance into the hall: 'Fro þe kyng watz cummen with knyȝtes into þe halle' (62).

Although there is the suggestion that he has been at chapel prior to his entrance (63-65), this movement does not foreshadow Gawain's journey inwards into Hautdesert; the reader meets Arthur as he is already making his way into the hall rather than starting from the outside.

Similarly, the Green Knight first appears at Camelot when he comes straight into the hall: 'Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster, | On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe' (136-37). While the Green Knight's appearance at Camelot presents a challenge and disruption to the court, his sudden entrance straight into the hall fits with the geography of Camelot:²⁹ there is inside the hall and there is everywhere else.³⁰ The points of intersection between the two courts, however, further complicate the legibility of Hautdesert for Gawain. Like Gawain himself, Guinevere is a site of enclosure at Camelot. The manner in which the textiles and their enclosure function is, however, in direct opposition to Hautdesert.

Guinevere is enclosed in multiple layers of expensive and decorative textiles:³¹

Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute,
Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer
Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoughe,
Þat were enbrawdred and beten wyth þe best gemmes
Þat myȝt be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye, in daye. (75-80)

²⁹ For a discussion of the Green Knight's entrance into Camelot, see Greg Walker, 'The Green Knight's Challenge: Heroism and Courtliness in Fitt I of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *The Chaucer Review* 32 (1997), 111-28.

³⁰ Aisling Byrne suggests that Arthur also moves to rhetorically assimilate the Green Knight into the hall. 'The Intruder at the Feast: Negotiating Boundaries in Medieval Insular Romance', *Arthurian Literature* 27 (2010), 33-58 (p. 54).

³¹ William F. Woods considers the extent of Guinevere's enclosure in 'Nature and the Inner Man in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *The Chaucer Review* 36 (2002), 209-27.

Other than the queen, people move around within the hall and come and go from it and there is a general hubbub created through the ‘riche forth runnen to reche hondeselle, | 3ezed zeres-ziftes on hiz, zelde hem bi hond | Debated busily aboute þo giftes’ (66-68). At Hautdesert, enclosure is a movement inwards; at Camelot it is a fixed and single point.³² Moreover, it is gendered feminine through its association with the queen. Guinevere’s fixedness contrasts sharply with Arthur, full of festive energy in his role as lord of the hall and host at Christmas as he ‘louied þe lasse | Auþer to longe lye or to longe sitte, | So bisied him his zonge blod and his brayn wylde’ (87-89). The aesthetic of enclosure begins at Camelot, but it is only at Hautdesert that it is revealed as a structuring force.

The bedchamber textiles provide Gawain with a framework to understand Hautdesert, just as they provide Bertilak’s court with a lens through which to view Gawain. The textiles link Hautdesert to Camelot through the socio-economic register that they form. The provisioning of Gawain establishes Hautdesert as a model of courtliness through the way in which it treats its guests, even when their identity is still unknown.³³ By specifying the textiles in the bedchamber as ‘of tuly and tars’ (858), the wealth of Hautdesert is demonstrated while Guinevere’s ‘selure... Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe’ (76-77) is also invoked, drawing a parallel between the two courts: they are both alike in refined luxury. Moreover, the origins of the textiles allude to the trade in luxury fabrics that extended across Britain and into Europe and Asia.³⁴ Gawain might have come across Hautdesert while travelling through the wilderness, but it is not disconnected from the rest of the world. Camelot and Hautdesert are not just mirrors of each other in terms of the luxury that they both display,

³² Ashton reads Guinevere’s enclosure and fixity as a ‘touchstone’ for the poem as a whole, p. 54.

³³ Ad Putter uses Hautdesert as just such an exemplar in ‘Ralph the Collier’, in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. by Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 145-58 (pp. 152-54).

³⁴ Edward Miller, ‘The Fortunes of the English Textile Industry During the Thirteenth Century’, *The Economic History Review* 18 (1965), 64-82. See also Su Fang Ng and Kenneth Hodges, ‘Saint George, Islam, and Regional Audiences in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010), 257-94.

they are part of the same economic networks and the networks of meaning generated by the textiles.³⁵ The implied movement of textiles through these networks replicates the mirrored symmetry of the poem as a whole identified by Cooper: just as the story starts at Troy and works inwards to Hautdesert at its centre, so too do the textiles start in Asia and end in the bedchamber. The textiles bring the two courts into contact with each other, blurring the differences between them. Hautdesert is not a distant court to which Gawain must travel and from whence he needs return at the end of the poem. Rather, the courts are two nodes on the same network, already enmeshed.

The giving of the robes and bedchamber to Gawain links the two courts on a close personal level. Gifts of clothing and other textiles create and help to cement complex social ties both within courts and households, and between them.³⁶ In Chrétien de Troyes' 'Erec et Enide' Guinevere's gift of 'the new tunic and the mantle of rich green cloth with the crossed pattern' welcomes Enide into the court and marks the two women as equal: the tunic and mantle 'had been tailored to [Guinevere] personally'.³⁷ As with the Gawain-Poet, Chrétien goes into some detail as to the value and luxury of the fabrics involved. The economics of such textiles makes them suitable gifts for both the giver and the recipient. Equally, the bestowal upon Gawain of a private bedchamber, at a time when such spaces were limited, demonstrates both the wealth of the court and the status of the guest.³⁸ In romance, one of the social ties that the giving of clothing creates is the opening of a cycle that necessitates the giving of another gift

³⁵ Gillian Rudd, 'Shifting Identities and Landscapes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in *Medieval English Literature*, ed. by Beatrice Fanon (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2016), pp. 45-60 (pp. 55-57).

³⁶ The portrayal of these social networks in romance is explored by Monica L. Wright, "De Fil d'Or et de Soie": Making Textiles in Twelfth-Century French Romance', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 2 (2006), 61-72.

³⁷ Chrétien de Troyes, 'Erec et Enide', in *Arthurian Romances*, pp. 37-122 (p. 57).

³⁸ Woolgar, pp. 24-25.

in return so that it might be closed.³⁹ Such a cycle lies at the heart of the exchange of winnings game, yet one is also implicit in Gawain's first moments at Hautdesert. Being the knight to fulfil the significance of those textiles is the gift that the court expects in return.

The bedchamber textiles render Lady Bertilak desirable. They do so through the material worth of the textiles and her interaction with the space around her. Her performance of desirability is part of the way in which she attempts to seduce Gawain. Her enclosure displays her through the exposure that it hints at, aligning her with Gawain rather than Guinevere. She, too, echoes the bedchamber textiles in terms of how they signify. Like the knight, she is richly dressed,

In a mery mantyle, mete to þe erþe,
 Pat watz furred ful fyne with fellez wel pured,
 No hwez goud on hir hede bot þe hazer stones
 Trased aboute hir tressour be twenty in clusteres;
 Hir þryuen face and hir þrote þrowen al naked,
 Hir brest bare bfore, and behinde eke. (1736-41)

As with both Guinevere and Gawain, the detailed description of her outfit marks her as desirable due to the status of her clothing while also linking her aesthetically to the knight. Their visible nobility provokes, if not love, then desire.⁴⁰ Unlike both Gawain and Guinevere, however, the Lady's rich clothing does not displace the body it encloses but displays it. In an early description of her dress with 'kerchofes... wyth mony cler perlez' that 'hir brest and hir bryȝt þrote bare displayed, | Schon schyrer þen snawe þat schedez on hillez' (954-56), the pearls are both the adornment on her outfit and the signifiers that Lady Bertilak herself is something to be looked at. Her enclosure is a framing device through which she is displayed. The description of her skin as shining 'schyrer þen snawe' aligns the Lady with the materiality of the pearls, blurring the line between the fabric of her dress and the appearance and texture of her skin: both are presented as luxurious and desirable in the same terms.

³⁹ Monica L. Wright, *Weaving Narrative: Clothing in Twelfth-Century French Romance* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2009), pp. 81-83.

⁴⁰For a discussion of 'aristophilia', see Schultz, pp. 97-100.

Both the Lady and her pearls are valuable due to the same qualities and the elision between them places Lady Bertilak within the register of economics that characterises Hautdesert. Lady Bertilak signifies the value of her outfit and her outfit signifies her desirability. Like the textiles, she is a malleable signifier, and her desirability is based on that malleability; she has the potential to signify according to the desires of those who observe her.

Bertilak uses the bedchambers and the aesthetic of enclosure at Hautdesert to exercise his authority over the court and to shape his relationship with his guest. In the hall at Camelot, Arthur sits ‘ay abof, as hit best semed’ (73) and so holds a position that is both public and exposed. It also evinces a hierarchical, top-down power dynamic. The audience witnesses this power dynamic play out when Gawain insists that it would be ‘not semly’ (348) for Arthur to take up the Green Knight’s challenge himself. The medieval hall was designed with the dais opposite the entrance, so that the lord or king was on display to those coming into the hall, and the focal point of the space.⁴¹ In contrast, Bertilak occupies a series of different types of space at Hautdesert and his authority is established and displayed through his movement between them. When Gawain first arrives at the court Bertilak ‘loutez fro his chambre | For to mete wyth menske þe mon on þe flor’ (833-34) and then ‘hym charred to a chambre’ (850). Bertilak’s movement from private to public to private shapes the court and Gawain’s experience of it. As in Troy, withdrawal is a privilege at Hautdesert and one that is both displayed and conferred by Bertilak. Unlike at Camelot, space at Hautdesert is not so explicitly hierarchical. The hall is just one of the many spaces in which Bertilak, Gawain and the other members of the household spend their time. The divisions between different types of space at Hautdesert in terms of how they are used and therefore what they signify are less clear than at Camelot and so less clear than Gawain expects or knows how to parse. The aesthetic of enclosure, defined by the bedchamber at Hautdesert, governs the court, its social practices, and how power relations are expressed both within it and in relation to Camelot.

⁴¹ Marilyn Stokstad, *Medieval Castles* (Westport and London: Greenwood Publishing, 2005), p. 67.

In the section that follows, I will return to the bedchamber itself to explore how the game of seduction and the exchange of winnings game destabilise Gawain's knightly identity both separately and together. Bertilak and the Lady use the materiality and language of the bedchamber to do so while the illumination of the first bedchamber scene generates a further lack of stability for Gawain while implicating the audience, enclosing them, too, within the space of the bedchamber.

Lady Bertilak and the Bedchamber

The different expectations regarding Gawain and his knightly identity are mapped on to the bedchamber at Hautdesert. Lady Bertilak uses the bedchamber and its textiles to ensnare Gawain in the game of seduction and within his bed both literally, through their materiality, and symbolically, through the aesthetic of enclosure. It is here, with Gawain in his bed, that the expectations that Hautdesert has of Gawain as a result of the romances they have been reading come into conflict with other versions of Gawain as a result of Lady Bertilak. The bedchamber is therefore also where his 'trawþe' is tested. As discussed above, the bed and its hangings are initially read by Gawain to be protective and to guarantee his privacy, but ensure that he remains where he is, captive to the Lady's desires. When Gawain is first brought to the bedchamber, it is presented as a space that both honours him and allows Hautdesert to form him into the type of knight that they want him to be. The Lady's wooing of the knight destabilises him in that role and further ensnares him in the games by introducing an ambiguity as to what type of knight Gawain is meant to be in response to her advances. From the moment that he arrives at Hautdesert, Gawain's reputation is constantly invoked and his worth reiterated, especially once his identity is revealed:

When þe lorde hade lerned þat he þe leude hade,
 Loude laȝed he þerat, so lef hit hym þoȝt,
 And alle þe men in þat mote maden much joye
 To apere in his presense prestly þat tyme,
 Þat alle prys and prowes and pured þewes
 Apendes to hys persoun, and praysed is euer. (908-13)

Hautdesert a mirror for Camelot as a whole and for Gawain himself, reflecting back the image of the knight that the court wishes him to be. Just as Troilus has to consistently perform privacy, so too is Gawain's knightly identity an iterative production. Carolyn Dinshaw notes that Gawain is only Gawain when he is acting like him, but what version of Gawain should he be at any given moment?⁴² Moreover, Gawain's identities are produced in conjunction with those around him and Lady Bertilak continues the strategy, begun with Gawain's entrance to Hautdesert, of using praise to define him in a specific way, according to the Gawain that she wants him to be. Adopting a courtly register, she reminds him,

Bot hit ar ladyes innoze þat leuer wer nowþe
 Haf þe, hende, in hor holde, as I þe habbe here,
 To daly with derely your daynté wordez,
 Keuer hem comfort and colen her carez,
 Pen much of þe garysoun oþer golde þat þay hauen. (1251-55)

By comparing Gawain to 'þe garysoun oþer golde' of the courtly ladies, Lady Bertilak positions him as an object to be desired, and one whose worth is set by the value placed on him by those who would possess him. The language that the Lady uses recalls the bedchamber textiles, and renders Gawain one of them. He is an object of the bedchamber. While Lady Bertilak is the one who has 'hit holly in my honde þat al desyres þurze grace' (1257), the benefit of her being the one who has Gawain, and the value of Gawain as something to be had, is created through the desires of those others in the court. The type of knight that Gawain is meant to be in relation to Lady Bertilak is also refracted through those multiple desires.

The 'daynté wordez' (1253) that Lady Bertilak and Gawain exchange during the first bedchamber scene are about the bedchamber. Her threat that she will 'bynde yow in your bedde, þat be ze trayst' (1211) invokes the courtly convention of the knight as his lady's

⁴² Carolyn Dinshaw, 'A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Diacritics* 24 (1994), 205-26 (p. 213).

prisoner.⁴³ It also accurately summarises the situation in which Gawain has found himself: because of Lady Bertilak sitting ‘on þe bed-syde’ (1193) he is unable to get up. This moment also hints at the potential eroticism of the bedchamber and the Lady’s presence within it. Megan Leitch argues that Gawain and Lady Bertilak ‘speak *through* their relation to and deployment of space; they also speak *about* space, to pursue or prevent the same potentially sexual ends’.⁴⁴ The divergence of purpose in using this courtly, spatial register opens up the gap between its simultaneous metaphorical and literal objects that also exposes Gawain’s difficulty in assessing the knight that he is meant to be in this context. To refuse Lady Bertilak’s advances, and to take more seriously the danger implicit in her language, would damage his reputation as a romance knight famed for ‘luf-talkyng’ (927) and risk offending his hosts. To embrace the metaphorical mode of their conversation and to woo her in kind would also risk offence and the wrath of Bertilak. His response, beseeching Lady Bertilak to ‘deprece your prysoun’ (1219) so that he might ‘boze of þis bed, and busk me better’ (1220), addresses the urgency of his situation while matching the Lady’s register. He is ensnared both within the bed and his own need to maintain the courtly register that befits him as a knight. The fact that Gawain is unable to get up and ‘busk me better’, meanwhile, draws attention to his nakedness under the covers and thus his vulnerability at the hands of the Lady: the courtly register takes on a more predatory note.⁴⁵ While Greg Walker argues that it is not Gawain’s nakedness but his ‘trawþe’ that prevents him from getting out of bed while Lady Bertilak is still present, as he needs to abide by her wishes, the various versions of Gawain that the language of the bedchamber used by Lady Bertilak produce break down the

⁴³ James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Leitch, p. 46.

⁴⁵ David Mills charts the movement between courtly and more explicitly sexual language in ‘An Analysis of the Temptation Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *The Journal of English and German Philology* 67 (1968), 612-30 (pp. 612-18).

concept of 'trawþe'.⁴⁶ The different modes of knightliness that Gawain could use to respond to Lady Bertilak are incompatible with one another, breaking apart the interlocking nature of his virtues as symbolised by the pentangle. Deciding on either a courtlier or more literal reading of Lady Bertilak's words would necessitate being one version of Gawain over the others.

The materiality of the bedchamber is integral to Lady Bertilak's seduction. When she first enters the bedchamber, the textile enclosures around Gawain are barriers through which she must penetrate, a movement that foregrounds both the potential for danger and for sex that she represents to Gawain and the intersection between the two:

Pat droȝ þe dor after hir ful dernly and styлле,
 And boȝed towarde þe bed...
 And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,
 Kest vp þe cortyn and creped withinne,
 And set hir ful softly on þe bed-syde,
 And lenged þere selly longe to loke quen he wakened. (1188-94)

In addition to the 'cortyn', the 'clopes' in which Gawain has wrapped himself to feign sleep form a further barrier between them. Lady Bertilak's movements into the interior of the bed are themselves stealthy. While there are clear parallels between the bedchamber scenes and the hunting scenes, they are also counterparts to each other, each one showcasing a different type of hunt. Bertilak's chase is full of noise: 'Baldely þay blw prys, bayed þayr rachchez, | Syþen fonge þay her flesche, folden to home, | Strakande ful stoutly mony stif motez' (1362-64). The Lady's hunt of Gawain is intimate and predatory.⁴⁷ Not only does she step 'stilly' and 'stel' over to his bed, but in entering the space within the bed-hangings, she does not open the space up to her entrance but maintains the enclosure, insinuating herself within it. In relation to the bed and Gawain, the Lady's movements within the bed-hangings constitute a series of substitutions within the layers of textiles in the bedchamber while maintaining the

⁴⁶ Greg Walker, *Reading Literature Historically: Drama and Poetry from Chaucer to the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 111.

⁴⁷ Anne Rooney notes that the courtly hunt was like courtly love: both 'practised in a highly artificial and ritualistic form'. *Hunting in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), p. 164.

enclosure that they form. Moreover, coming to rest ‘on þe bed-syde’ (1193), Lady Bertilak completes that substitution by becoming part of the enclosure around Gawain and in doing so redefines the significance of that enclosure as one that includes her and contains rather than protects Gawain: she enacts the aesthetic of enclosure bodily.



The potential versions of Gawain are reflected in the illumination of the first bedchamber scene in the *Gawain* manuscript (left). The textiles depicted in it provide a visual register for Gawain and the viewer. It demonstrates how Lady Bertilak becomes one of the textile barriers surrounding the knight while also inviting the reader to play an active role in his enclosure within the bedchamber.⁴⁸ The placement of the bed-hangings

in the image positions the Lady and the audience in turn.⁴⁹ The poem describes the moment at which the Lady ‘kest vp þe cortyn and creped withinne’ (1192), presenting the bed as an enclosure: it is a space within that of the bedchamber into which the Lady needs to enter and which has a definite boundary that she must cross. It is also one that is permeable: she is able to breach that boundary. In the illumination, Lady Bertilak has already entered the space circumscribed by the bed-hangings and, as a result, it is presented as a complete space,

⁴⁸ London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A X/2, fol. 129^r.

⁴⁹ Since the illuminations were famously dismissed as ‘coarsely executed’ (*Syr Gawayne: A Collection of Ancient Romaunce Poems, by Scottish and English Authors*, ed. by Sir Frederick Madden (London: Bannatyne Club, 1839), p. xlvii), there has been much debate as to the value of the illuminations (as outlined by Paul F. Reichardt, “Several Illuminations, Coarsely Executed”: the Illuminations of the ‘Pearl’ Manuscript’, *Studies in Iconography* 18 (1997), 119-42). They were also added to the manuscript at a later date (for discussion of the dating, see A.S.G. Edwards, ‘The Manuscript: British Library MS Cotton Nero AX’, in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, pp. 197-220 [pp. 198-99]). I will be following Reichardt and Hilmo in their assessment of the illuminations as a ‘fifth text’ (Reichardt, “Several Illuminations, Coarsely Executed”, p. 129) within the manuscript that can be read alongside the poems and that provides a reading of them (Maidie Hilmo, *Medieval Images, Icons and Illustrated English Literary Texts: from the Ruthwell Cross to the Ellesmere Chaucer* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing 2004)).

of which Lady Bertilak is a part, within the larger enclosure of both the bedchamber and the page. Unlike the other illuminations in the manuscript, the image of the bedchamber is confined to the space inside the bed-hangings.⁵⁰ By comparison, the image of the dreamer in *Pearl* in the first illumination in the manuscript (below) fills the page with the garden in which the dreamer falls asleep: the trees behind him extend to the top of the page and the grass on which he sleeps to either margin.⁵¹ Other images of the bedchamber also show it as filling the whole space. The bedchamber illumination leaves the top quarter of the page blank apart from the description. The bedchamber is reduced to the space within the hangings with the result that the viewer's gaze is entirely focused on the events occurring within them. Moreover, although the blue shading on the curtains evokes the soft luxury of the 'comlych panez | Of bryzt blaunner aboue' (855-56), the definite lines of the curtain rail in the



illumination provide a clear barrier that bounds the enclosed space of the bed. Other medieval images of the courtly bed show the curtains open or partly open so that the bed is not entirely separated from the space of the bedchamber as a whole and the viewer sees the bed from the outside of the hangings and at a certain distance.⁵² Not only are the hangings in the *Gawain* illumination closed, but they are pictured as extending out of the page, with the implication

that the space of the bed within them carries on outside of the limits of the page. The illumination is not so much a cut away of the area within the bed-hangings as an extended space that expands to include the viewer as well. Through the placement of the curtains, the reader is positioned on the other side of the bed to the Lady and is therefore included within

⁵⁰ The majority of the illuminations in the manuscript depict scenes set outside, while of those set inside (such as that showing the Green Knight's entrance into Camelot [fol. 90^v]), the bedchamber is the only one that does not fill the entire page. See below for a full size version of the image at figure 1.

⁵¹ London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A X/2, fol. 37^r.

⁵² For instance, the courtly lovers in bed in London, British Library, Harley 4373, fol. 88^v (*below*).

the private space of the bedchamber. The intimacy of the scene is both transgressed by the audience and includes them. The audience is complicit in the Lady's breach of Gawain's privacy.





Fig. 1: London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A X/2, fol. 129^r.



In reading the manuscript, and the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the reader is included among the romance readers at Hautdesert. Like the courtiers, the reader too has heard tell of Gawain's reputation of a knight and his skill at 'luf-talking' (927). In drawing the audience into the space of the bedchamber, the illumination exposes Gawain to the audience's evaluating gaze. And like Lady Bertilak, the reader is invited to evaluate how he is performing Gawain through the iconography of the image and the relationship between Gawain and Lady Bertilak that it implies. Compared to other examples of courtly figures in bed, Gawain is both more enclosed and more exposed. The exposure of the knight is compounded by the depiction in the illumination of Gawain sleeping with the top portion of his chest exposed,

suggesting the nakedness that lies beneath the rich bed covers. In manuscript illuminations, courtly gentlemen are similarly exposed in bed, but the *Gawain* illumination differs in that the knight is alone in bed while his courtly Lady looks on fully clothed.⁵³ Only one of them is

⁵³ For example, the illumination of Mordrain and Giseult, London, British Library, Royal 14 E III, fol. 32^r (top), or Venus and Mars in London, British Library Egerton 881, fol. 141^v (below).

exposed.⁵⁴ Any potential eroticism within the scene is directed through the gaze of Lady Bertilak with Gawain as its object. I am not arguing that Gawain is necessarily rendered feminine by his position in relation to the Lady, and I shall go on to discuss the way in which Lady Bertilak, Gawain and Bertilak move between gender roles later in this chapter. The Lady is, though, clearly placed in the dominant role while he is rendered vulnerable.⁵⁵ Her chin-chucking gesture towards him signals the potential eroticism of the situation but is more commonly enacted by men to women as a signifier of the power dynamic between them: the gesture is at once affectionate and infantilising.⁵⁶ The vulnerability of Gawain makes Lady Bertilak's intention towards him, and the version of Gawain to whom she is responding, ambiguous. There is a clear power-imbalance between the dressed Lady and the naked, seemingly asleep knight, but what she intends to do with that power is less obvious. The image holds the potential for eroticism, harm or care, or some mixture of the three, all in the same moment. In exposing Gawain's chest, the illumination draws attention to his fleshly physicality. The whiteness of his skin along with the angle of his neck towards the viewer foreshadows the description of the cut that he receives from the Green Knight. In preparation for the promised blow, Gawain 'lened with þe nek, and lutte, | And schewed þat schyre al bare' (2255-56). The word 'schyre' — glossed by the Middle English Dictionary as 'fair or white' flesh — is repeated when the blow is finally delivered: 'Þe scharp schrank to þe flesche þurȝ þe schyre grece' (2313).⁵⁷ In the illumination, and illustrating the mutability of

⁵⁴ The Lady's dress in the illumination differs from that in the text. Although still luxurious in the illumination (a jazzy polka dot number speckled with blue and red jewels), it is somewhat more modest than the one described in the poem, with a very high neckline as opposed to one that leaves 'Hir brest bare bfore, and bihinde eke' (1741).

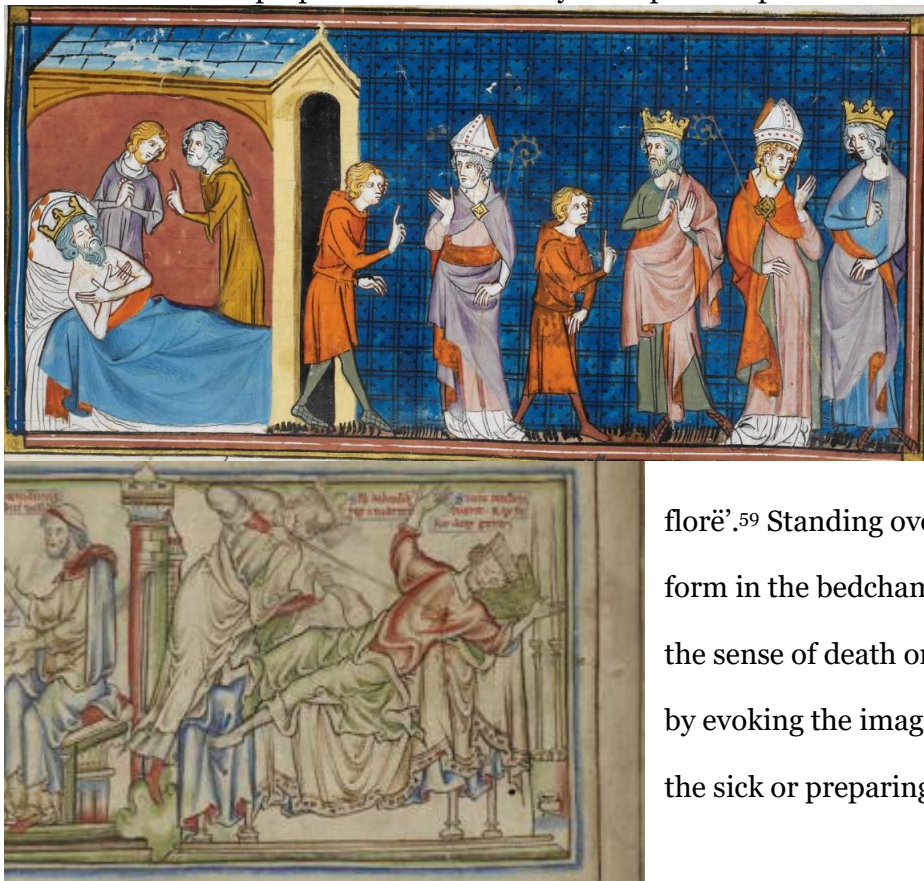
⁵⁵ Ashton, pp. 51-74. Corinne Saunders, meanwhile, argues that it is the bedchamber itself that is feminised and feminising as he is 'cocooned in a feminised world, sleeping on his luxurious bed while Bertilak rises early to hunt'. 'Religion and Magic' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, ed. by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 201-17 (p. 208).

⁵⁶ Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (London: Abrams and Chronicle Books, 1998), pp. 234-35.

⁵⁷ Middle English Dictionary, 'shir(e)', definition 2. Accessed online. Date of last access 30/10/16.

the bedchamber, it is not the Green Knight who stands over Gawain but the Lady, reminding the viewer of the role that she plays in causing him to receive the nick on his neck as well as the space of the bedchamber in which his ‘trawþe’ was tested.

The harm that awaits Gawain at the Green Chapel is further foreshadowed as the cover provided by the bedding does not, as Gawain might hope, minimise his vulnerability. The partial covering of the bedcovers in the illumination, tightly wrapped as they are around the lower two thirds of his body, suggests a shroud. While bedsheets were more likely to be passed on in wills than used as a shroud, Pierre D’Urfé’s account of the laying out of Charles VIII describes the cloth that will be used as a shroud as temporarily becoming bedsheets, as it covers the bed in preparation for the body to be placed upon it.⁵⁸ In the lyric ‘Whan Mine



Eyen Mistëth’,
meanwhile, the bed
is listed as the first
of the body’s final
resting places:

‘Than I shal flit |
From beddë to

florë’.⁵⁹ Standing over Gawain’s prone
form in the bedchamber, the Lady adds to
the sense of death or illness in the scene
by evoking the image of someone nursing
the sick or preparing a body. The

⁵⁸ Quoted in Alain Boureau, ‘A Royal Funeral of 1498’, in *Medieval Christianity in Practice*, ed. by Miri Rubin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 59-66 (p. 59). For sheets in wills, see Morgan, pp. 28-30.

⁵⁹ ‘Whan Mine Eyen Mistëth’, in *Medieval English Lyrics 1200-1400*, ed. by Thomas G. Duncan (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 26, ll. 15-16.



depiction of Gawain feigning sleep
parallels other illuminations

depicting the dead or dying, such
as the death of Charlemagne in
British Library Royal 16 (above).⁶⁰

By evoking a shroud, the
bedchamber textiles foreshadow
the danger that the knight faces at
the Green Chapel and the image of
Gawain in bed also echoes those
illuminations that locate the

moment of death in the bedchamber, such as those showing Svein Forkbeard being killed in his bed by the vengeful ghost of St Edmund (above).⁶¹ In the bedchamber, Gawain is vulnerable to the desires of both Lady Bertilak and the Green Knight, anticipating the events at the Green Chapel and collapsing the distance between it and the bedchamber. Moreover, the illumination echoes both the Green Knight and the Green Chapel through the predominance of the colour green in its depiction of the bedchamber textiles.⁶² While the text does not specify the colours of the bedclothes, red and gold are more dominant in the colour palette at Hautdesert: the bed-hangings, for instance, run on ‘red golde rynges’ and the curtains have ‘cler golde hemnez’ (854, 857). Instead, the green bedcovers of the illumination encircle Gawain in the manner that the girdle will come to do so. Through its depiction of the first bedchamber scene, the illumination relocates the peril in which Gawain has become ensnared from the Green Chapel to the bedchamber: it is here that his ‘trawpe’ is

⁶⁰ London, British Library, Royal 16 G VI, fol. 194^r.

⁶¹ Cambridge University Library MS Ee.3.59, fol. 4^v (top); London, British Library Harley 2278, fol. 103^v (bottom).

⁶² Derek Brewer, ‘The Colour Green’, in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, pp. 181-90.

tested and here that the outcome of his encounter with the Green Knight at the Green Chapel will be decided.

A dynamic of exposure works across both the poem and the illumination through which the reader becomes part of the series of enclosures around Gawain. The knight is exposed in his state of undress and exposed to the Lady's gaze, the direction of which is ambiguous in the illumination. She simultaneously looks down upon Gawain, following the line of her hand, and out at the reader as they look into the bedchamber and the space within the bed-hangings. The intimacy of the bedchamber changes the nature of her gaze compared to other outward-facing figures depicted in the manuscript illuminations, who Hilmo argues reflect the audience back at themselves.⁶³ In contrast to the other figures, who occupy public spaces, the picture of the Lady does not just mirror the reader, but actively engages them, drawing them into the bedchamber and directing them to look down at Gawain, who is the object of the audience's gaze rather than the Lady. It is therefore the reader's gaze, too, to which Gawain is exposed. In the poem, Gawain's own line of sight engages with that of the Lady creating an interplay between the two characters that is modulated through the material form of the bed and its textiles. Gawain's gaze is shaped by the bed and the reader follows his line of sight from the deep interior of the bed out to the door as 'he heuez vp his hed out of þe cloþes, | A corner of þe cortyn he caȝt vp a lyttel, | And waytez warly þiderwarde quat hit be myȝt (1184-86). As it passes around the covers, his gaze is shaped further by the curtains and the shape of the bedchamber (the gaze is directed specifically 'þiderwarde' by the location of the door in relation to the bed) and takes on an almost material form, intersecting with the material reality of the bedchamber. The bed is an actant in how Gawain views the bedchamber and the Lady's entrance into it. In turn, Gawain's gaze is met by that of Lady Bertilak as she moves into the bedchamber and through the textile enclosures around him.

⁶³ Hilmo, p. 145.

The interchange of gazes identified by Sarah Stanbury as forming Gawain's perception of his situation changes through the illumination to be between the Lady and the reader rather than the Lady and Gawain.⁶⁴ With his eyes closed as he feigns sleep, the Gawain in the illustration exists purely as an object, formed through the perceptions of the audience and Lady Bertilak. The reader's perceptions of Gawain add further possibilities to the question of what Gawain he is meant to be during the bedchamber scenes, as well as adding to the potential eroticism of them. Each time Lady Bertilak enters Gawain's bedchamber, there is the frisson for the reader that the Gawain of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* might turn out to be the same as the Gawain of *The Carl of Carlisle* and he will sleep with his host's wife.⁶⁵

The exposure of the body when it should remain covered is a constant source of anxiety for Gawain during the seduction scenes. The enclosure of the bedchamber appears to protect against such exposure, but the entrance of the Lady proves that enclosure is not always covering, nor is it synonymous with privacy. In the first bedchamber scene, it is Gawain's body as well as his skill at 'luf-talkyng' (927) that is at stake, drawing attention to the connection between the two of them.⁶⁶ The courtly discourse in which Gawain is so skilled is underwritten by the fact of his body as a noble and desirable knight. In the hall, he is able to detach his discourse from that body in a manner that is not possible in the bedchamber.⁶⁷ In the bedchamber, his body is too visible, stripped of the protective textiles in which Hautdesert has clothed him. Those textiles signify the value of the body they enclose but also

⁶⁴ Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 109-10.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of whether Gawain is expected to sleep with Lady Bertilak or not, see Lawrence Warner, 'Mary, Unmindful of her Knight: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Traditions of Sexual Hospitality', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 35 (2013), 263-87.

⁶⁶ Derek Pearsall argues that the bedchamber scenes are an attempt to get 'Gawain's body to disobey his purposes of honour', but the one is not so neatly cleaved from the other. 'Courtesy and Chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the Order of Shame and the Invention of Embarrassment', in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, pp. 351-63 (p. 354).

⁶⁷ The Gawain of the hall could be considered all mouth and no trousers.

replace it. Gawain attempts to hide his nakedness under the bedclothes while Lady Bertilak's presence on the side of the bed both ensures that he remains covered by the blankets and simultaneously prevents him from getting dressed. The erotic potential of the scene hinges not only on Gawain's courtesy, but his body - a body that has been the focus of the court since his arrival. The dressing of Gawain in luxurious robes might have befitted both his status and that of Hautdesert, but the Gawain-Poet also makes it clear that it is an act of appreciation of the knight's physical form: 'a comloker knyzt neuer Kryst made' (869). The bedchamber – the space of sex, of undressing – adds to the eroticism of both the scene and Gawain's body. It cannot exist outside of the context in which it is placed, and within the bedchamber there is an expectation on the part of the Lady and the reader that he will act as a courtly lover, hence Lady Bertilak's assurance that '3e ar welcum to my cors, | Yowre awen won to wale' (1236-37). His body leads to the possibility of hers as well. Neither giving into the demands of the body nor potentially committing adultery are necessarily in opposition to Gawain's chivalric code or out of character.⁶⁸ To a guest, the bedchamber and the presence of a beautiful lady can be an invitation to either chastity or courtly love. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain is unsure what type of romance he is in, and therefore what type of romance bedchamber he also occupies and how he should conduct himself accordingly. Does he have the permission of his host to sleep with his wife? Even once Bertilak reveals his complicity in the bedchamber scenes and the game of seduction, this remains unclear and the type of knight Gawain is meant to be ambiguous. It is not so much what Gawain may have done with the Lady that prompts his feeling that what should have been private has been made public, but a question of space: because it occurred in the bedchamber, his relationship with the Lady, in whatever form, should have been kept private. To his chagrin, it has not been.

⁶⁸ K.S. Whetter, for instance, refers to Gawain's 'reputation as a lady's man'. K.S. Whetter, *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), p. 93. Lawrence Warner, with reference to the *Carl of Carlisle*, points out that the Gawain tradition does not exclude the possibility of him sleeping with his host's wife: 'He would most happily sleep with his host's wife – so long as the host approves, and especially, and necessarily, if the host commands'. 'Mary, Unmindful of her Knight', p. 277.

The bedchamber textiles render the game of seduction one of commerce which plays out across both the public space of the hall and the more private one of the bedchamber. Through the games, the distinction between those spaces is collapsed and they are enclosed within one another. Both the game of seduction and the exchange of winnings game are based on the premise of establishing that one thing is worth another. The value of Lady Bertilak is established in the hall; as Gawain is in a public space there, he is free to acknowledge her as desirable without jeopardising any part of his knightly identity. The ‘luf-talkyng’ (927) that he demonstrates there confirms the value of Lady Bertilak and extends the commerce register from Hautdesert to Camelot by comparing her to Guinevere: she is ‘wener þen Wenore’ (945). The asymmetry of the exchanges and transactions that Stephanie Trigg identifies as characterising the games obscures the fact that they are taking place within a closed system.⁶⁹ Although the kisses are what Gawain has ‘won’ during his time at Hautdesert, he won them from Bertilak, as the Green Knight makes clear when he announces ‘þe wowyng of my wyf; I wro3t hit myseluen’ (2361). There is some irony in Bertilak’s request that Gawain tells him ‘Where ȝe wan þis ilk wele bi wytte of yorseluen’ (1394); he already knows. While Gawain believes that he is trading the kisses for the spoils of the hunt, he is in fact returning them to Bertilak.

The moment of the kiss on each of the three evenings is the point at which the game of seduction and the exchange of winnings games intersect and become fully enclosed within one another. The games at Hautdesert are also enclosed textually by the games of beheading that bracket them on either side. They are not just parallels to each other — both receiving a blow and both surviving — but enclosed within and through one another by the overarching

⁶⁹ Stephanie Trigg, ‘The Romance of Exchange: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Viator* 22 (1991), 251-66.

test of Gawain's 'trawþe'. The Green Knight's confession that 'þe wowyng of my wyf; I wro3t hit myseluen' (2361) alerts both Gawain and the reader to the extent to which each of the games is implicated in the others. The scene at the Green Chapel is both the completion of the beheading game begun at Camelot and the result of the intermingled games at Hautdesert. The enclosure of the Hautdesert games within one another can be traced through the figure of Bertilak; his involvement in the game of seduction goes beyond the sense of him having set it in motion or masterminded it on Lady Bertilak's behalf. As Ashton points out, from the moment that he arrives at Hautdesert, Gawain is wined and dined by Bertilak. His host's wife is not the only one to woo him.⁷⁰ Moreover, the culmination of his seduction of Gawain occurs in Bertilak's own bedchamber. The lord draws his guest inwards towards the intimate space of the hearth where he demonstrates his own aptitude at 'luf-talkyng':

þe godmon hym lachchez,
Ledes hym to his awen chambre, þe chymné bysyde,
And þere he draȝez hym on dryȝe, and derely hym þonkkez
Of þe wynne worschip þat he hym wayued hade,
As to honour his hous on þat hyȝe tyde,
And enbelyse his burȝ with his bele chere. (1029-34)

Bertilak establishes the bedchamber, with its air of the gentleman's club, as a space of luxurious relaxation that is suitable for a knight such as Gawain and as a space for courtly discourse of the type that his wife then exploits. Bertilak also insists that Gawain stay in bed until late. He both echoes the more bodily way in which Lady Bertlak binds Gawain to his bed, ensuring Gawain's physical presence there, and participates in it.⁷¹ Gawain is trapped in his bed due to the combined efforts of his host and his host's wife, and his obligations of courtesy towards them both.

⁷⁰ Ashton, p. 61.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 61. Ashton identifies three occasions on which Bertilak insists that Gawain has a lie-in: 1071-72, 1096-99 and 1676.

The intimacy promised by the scene in Bertilak's bedchamber is deferred until the kisses. They are the inevitable consequence of both this bedchamber and that of Gawain once Lady Bertilak has intruded. The kisses slip between the two bedchambers to which they refer back and, as a result of this double origin, they render both Bertilak and Gawain unstable in how they each signify as participants in those kisses. Under the terms of the agreement made in Bertilak's bedchamber, Gawain and Bertilak represent themselves during the kiss. At the same time, the context of Gawain's bedchamber results in Gawain, as the giver of the kiss, standing for Lady Bertilak, and her husband, as the recipient, signifying Gawain. The parallels between the first bedchamber kiss and the first hall kiss underpin this criss-crossing of signified identities. In the bedchamber, it is the Lady who is the active party: she 'comes nerre with þat, and cachez hym in armez, | Loutez luflych adoun and þe leude kyssez' (1305-06). In the hall, this position is both reversed and maintained: Gawain is now the active party, but in the role of the Lady as he mirrors her actions and 'hasppez his fayre hals his armez wythinne, | And kysses hym as comlyly as he coupe awyse' (1388-89). The iterative kisses destabilise Gawain's identity as a knight and as a man, and Dinshaw traces the ways in which he is feminised through his contact with both the Lady and Bertilak, concluding 'the straight behaviour that Gawain enacts is so fundamental that without its guarantee of unity he is subject to – or, better, of – corporeal disaggregation. And such disaggregation threatens the possibility of meaning itself'.⁷² The kisses, though, do not just act on Gawain and he is not the only one subject to the disaggregation identified by Dinshaw. Just as Gawain is feminised through the Lady's actions towards him, so too is she masculinised as the active party. When Gawain performs her kiss, he is both feminised and re-masculinised through his association with Lady Bertilak, while the feminisation of Gawain is reflected back on to the Lady. In turn, Bertilak is feminised through his association with the feminised Gawain as the recipient of the kisses while also standing in for the courtly figure of Gawain who was the object of his wife's desire. The feminine is not just either entirely missing or figured solely by Gawain, as

⁷² Dinshaw, 'A Kiss is Just a Kiss,' p. 214.

suggested by Ashton, but alternately signified by all three parties to the kiss.⁷³ Each also signifies masculinity as a similarly contingent and relative identity. The kisses generate multiple identities that Gawain, Bertilak and Lady Bertilak all slip in and out of in relation to one another, creating a constant feedback loop of significations produced by the two bedchambers, linked by the games and kisses. In the next section, I will explore how the girdle acts as a prosthetic for the bedchamber as a slippery and flexible signifier through which multiple versions of Hautdesert, Camelot and the characters who populate them are brought into potential contact with one another.

The Perilous Bedchamber and the Girdle

The bed in which Gawain sleeps at Hautdesert is a perilous one. Here, Gawain's 'trawþe' is tested twice over. First, the bed anticipates the danger in which the knight will find himself at the Green Chapel, re-signifying the game of beheading that was established at Camelot as one of constancy in addition to physical bravery. Second, the bed tests the limits and contradictions inherent in Gawain's chivalric code through his response to Lady Bertilak's advances. The Lady poses a danger to his reputation as a courtly knight if he interprets her attempted seduction one way, but so too does Bertilak if he interprets it the other. The incorrect response to Lady Bertilak also risks her husband posing a physical threat to Gawain. Additionally, the bed is perilous to Gawain as he finds it difficult to parse as a perilous one and to identify the nature of the threat to him. His bedchamber at Hautdesert is not the first time that Gawain has encountered a perilous bed. In Chrétien de Troyes' 'The story of the Grail', his host provides him with a bed even more luxurious than the one at Hautdesert and that typifies the trope of the perilous bed in romance:⁷⁴

⁷³ Ashton, p. 56.

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the trope, see Corinne J. Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), p. 172; Roger Sherman Loomis, 'Medieval Iconography and the Question of Arthurian Origins', *Modern Language Notes* 40 (1925), 65-70.

In the middle of the hall was a bed, in which there was not a speck of wood, for everything was gold except for the cords alone, which were entirely of silver. I am not lying about the bed, for at each point where the cords crossed there hung a little bell; over the bed was spread a large embroidered samite cover. To each of the bedposts was affixed a carbuncle, which cast as much light as four brightly burning candles. The bed's legs were carved figures of little dogs with grimacing jowls, and the dogs were set on four wheels which rolled so easily that you could push the bed with one finger and roll it all the way across the room. To tell the truth, the bed was so unusual that none like it had ever been made for court or king, nor would it ever be.⁷⁵

The depiction of this perilous bed on the Walters 71264 casket emphasises its status as both a place of rest and a place of danger.⁷⁶ The lion and arrows are shown as occurring simultaneously, capturing the immediacy of the attack on Gawain, while the decorative swags, which seem as if they would be almost soft to the touch despite being carved from ivory, denote how tempting the bed must be to a weary knight errant. It is the temptation, and the promise of rest, that first makes both Chrétien's bed and the one at Hautdesert perilous.



Beneath the gilding, there are further parallels between Chrétien's bed and the version at Hautdesert: both confer status on their occupants by virtue of their sumptuousness and both appear to be places of rest while actually proving to be another part of the quest.

⁷⁵ 'The Story of the Grail', p. 475.

⁷⁶ Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, 71264.

Moreover, the perilous bed brings the quest, with all of its attendant physical dangers, into the space of the court while obscuring the source of those dangers. Chrétien's bed attacks Gawain as if by magic:

As he sat down the cords screeched and all the bells rang, filling the whole hall with noise. All the windows flew open, and the wonders were revealed and the enchantments appeared, for bolts and arrows flew in through the windows and more than five hundred struck my lord Gawain's shield yet he did not know who had attacked him! The enchantment was such that non one could see from which direction the bolts came, nor the archers who shot them... Before he had pulled [the arrows] out, he was subjected to another trial; a peasant struck a door with a club, and the door opened and a very ravenous strong, feirce, and astonishing lion leapt from a room through the door and attacked my lord Gawain with great viciousness and savagery...⁷⁷

In both instances, the perilous bed is a deceitful one. While occupying it, Gawain does not and cannot know from where the danger that he faces within it comes from. The peril stems from the bed's ability to obscure. At Hautdesert, however, the bed also obscures that it, too, has brought the quest into the bedchamber and that the danger that Gawain faces there is part of his overarching adventure, and not incidental to it. The bed at Hautdesert is therefore more deceitful, and more perilous, than Chrétien's version, while being more difficult to parse.

Does Gawain recognise the bed at Hautdesert as a perilous one? The sense of danger that he feels in the bedchamber stems first from Lady Bertilak and second, as a result of her actions, from Bertilak, rather than the bed itself. Unlike the version in 'The Story of the Grail', it appears clear to Gawain where the source of the potential danger lies at Hautdesert. The poem is clear that Gawain is under threat in the bedchamber: 'gret perile bitwene hem stod, | Nif Maré of hir knyzt mynne' (1768-69). It is, though, ambiguous as to whether this line represents Gawain's view or that of the narrator and so the extent to which Gawain recognises the 'gret perile'. For his part, Gawain is also enjoying the Lady's company and 'wigt wallande joye warmed his hert' (1762). There are some clear differences between the ways in

⁷⁷ 'The Story of the Grail', pp. 476-77.

which the bed at Hautdesert functions as a perilous one compared to Chrétien's version. The latter bed is very explicitly enchanted even before the mechanisms through which it attacks Gawain are revealed. The carbuncles that provide excessive light and the ease with which it can be moved 'with one finger' in spite of its size suggest an otherness: this bed does not obey the laws of physics. That the Hautdesert bed is more quotidian in its sumptuousness is part of the deception.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Chrétien's bed is in the public space of the hall, whereas at Hautdesert it's in the bedchamber. As a continuation of the knight's quest, and thus his public role, it is fitting for the perilous bed to be in the hall, whereas the privacy conferred by the bedchamber at Hautdesert appears to signal a respite from that. On the Walters casket, Gawain is depicted still in his armour, in contrast to the lounge wear in which he is dressed once he arrives at Hautdesert. Finally, while the source of the danger might be unclear in Chrétien's example, as at Hautdesert, the mechanisms through which that harm is inflicted are very obvious: the arrows and the lion. The bed at Hautdesert is a perilous one because Gawain does not fully recognise it as such; the potential danger appears to lie elsewhere in the persons of his host and the Lady, and the known danger lies at the Green Chapel. The threat to the knight is presented as a series of displacements away from him and the bedchamber. Furthermore, the bed at Hautdesert does not appear to be part of the mechanism through which harm is inflicted. Bertilak and his wife, however, operate as part of the bed, binding him to it and so placing him in danger. Gawain's bed is perilous because of the substitutions that are enacted through it, obscuring both the danger that he is in and from where that danger comes.

⁷⁸ Although the Green Knight is fantastical and both his and Morgan La Fay's involvement at Hautdesert is revealed at the end of the poem, there is nothing to suggest enchantment at Hautdesert during Gawain's stay there. Its very ordinariness is part of how Gawain is tricked. Helen Cooper suggests that 'one of the most disturbing things about the Green Knight... is the fact that he cannot easily be classed even as 'other'. His clothes are fine and of rich materials such as any knight might value' (p. 287) and the same dynamic is at play regarding the bed. It is its very ordinariness, even compared to other perilous beds, which renders it such a danger to Gawain.

The girdle is a prosthesis for the bedchamber, extending the reach of the perilous bed beyond its boundaries and acting as the point of contact both between Hautdesert and the Green Chapel and between each of the three games. It also provides a means through which the peril of the bedchamber is realised for Gawain. Like the bedchamber, it too encircles and encloses. Unlike the bedchamber, the girdle is portable and transferable in a way that the bed and its textiles are not. The meanings attached to the girdle are also more flexible and more transferable than those attached to the textiles in the bedchamber. Although the granting of a private and luxurious bedchamber to Gawain reflects his status and that of Hautdesert while he is at the court, this meaning is fixed to the context of the knight being in that space. In contrast, the girdle has the ability to signify and re-signify through its enclosure as it passes from owner to owner and space to space. Throughout the portion of the poem in which it appears, the girdle is never stable in its meaning: as it moves between persons and locations it accrues and sheds significations. By the time that ‘alle þe court als’ have agreed that ‘lordes and ladis þat longed to þe Table | Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue’ (2513-16), the girdle has come to enclose the court of Camelot and the narrative as a whole. By connecting the two courts as it passes through the Green Chapel, the girdle is the mechanism through which the enclosing structure of the poem is achieved. The girdle is part of the aesthetic of enclosure that begins in the bedchamber at Hautdesert and shapes both the text as a whole and Gawain’s experiences throughout it. It is both enclosing and the means through which the enclosure of the bedchamber is continuously enacted.

Lady Bertilak exploits the material and symbolic malleability of the girdle in her seduction of Gawain. She positions it initially as a trifle, telling Gawain after he has turned down the gift of her ring ‘I schal gif yow my girdel, þat gaynes yow lasse’ (1829), only to redefine it as more valuable than the ring in power if not in material form:

‘Now forsake ze þis silke,’ sayde þe burde þenne,
 ‘For hit is symple in hitself? And so hit wel semez.
 Lo! so hit is littel, and lasse hit is worþy;

Bot who-so knew þe costes þat knit ar þerinne,
He wolde hit prayse at more prys, paraventure...' (1846-50)

In the trade register produced by the textiles in the poem, the girdle shifts between valuable and not in a way that severs the connection between signifier and signified: the magical value of the girdle is disconnected from its material status as a thing that seems 'symple in himself' (1847). Lady Bertilak consistently positions the girdle as private and so part of the material and lexical realm of the bedchamber. The knowledge of its magical powers is privileged and the conditions on which Gawain accepts the girdle are that no one outside of the bedchamber ever knows: 'þe leude hym acordez | Þat neuer wyȝe schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne for noȝte' (1863-64). The girdle is not, however, private in the way in which Gawain agrees it to be. Lady Bertilak knows that her husband is fully aware of both the girdle and her gifting of it to Gawain, as the Green Knight confirms when he announces, 'for hit is my wede þat þou werez, þat ilke wouen girdel, | Myn owen wfy hit þe weued, I wot wel for soþe' (2358-59). Even as it is being given to Gawain, the girdle exceeds the boundaries of the bedchamber and the privileged knowledge disclosed within it, reforming them to include Bertilak. The Green Knight's claim of ownership reinscribes the secret status of the girdle: it is not symbolic of a secret between Gawain and the Lady, but between the Lady and her husband. The girdle thus also reinscribes the status of the bedchamber; the privacy that exists there is also between Lady Bertilak and her husband rather than between her and Gawain. The significations of the girdle are transient, changeable and slippery as it passes between people and spaces, moving 'into and out of other, subsidiary vocabularies and lexical frames'.⁷⁹ Enclosed within the girdle, these multiple lexical frames further destabilise Gawain as a signifier. Geraldine Heng argues that 'with the acceptance of the girdle for its putative magic... the desire Gawain believes to be his own becomes annexed to that of the Lady, the Other – and functions, thereupon, as the deflected-reflected form of the other's

⁷⁹ Heng, p. 507.

desire'.⁸⁰ As the revelations at the Green Chapel make clear, however, it is not just the Lady's desire to which Gawain's own becomes appended through the girdle, but that of Bertilak and Morgan as well, each with their own designs upon the knight. Moving between lexical frames, the girdle generates further ones which, as an enclosing and portable object, it transfers to its wearer in turn.

The movement of the girdle from the Lady to Gawain establishes both as objects of desire while also deferring that desire onwards into the Green Chapel. The girdle itself is an object of desire through its material value: 'Gered hit watz with grene sylke and with golde schaped, | Noȝt bot arounde brayden, beten with fyngez' (1832-33). The girdle is one of the bedchamber textiles and the materials from which it is made denote its economic worth, making it appear legible and fixed in meaning: it has a value. The materiality of the girdle, however, also means that it is too slippery and too fragile to support a singular, monolithic meaning. It is simultaneously a trifle and an ornate and expensive object. It also has an erotic potential that is part of Lady Bertilak's strategy of seduction even before Gawain is aware of its power to save him from the Green Knight's axe. In giving it to him, Lady Bertilak hints at the undressing that still remains a possibility while she is in Gawain's bedchamber, if only he were to give into her wooing. To turn the girdle into a gift, she first has to detach it from her person: 'Ho laȝt a lace lyȝtly þat leke vmbe hir sydez, | Knit vpon hir kyrtel vnder þe clere mantyle' (1830-31). The girdle as worn by Lady Bertilak is not a completely external accessory but, caught between the layers of her dress, a component of her physical form. Like the bed, the Lady is made up of multiple and shifting layers of textiles. When offered to Gawain, the girdle transitions from being a part of the Lady and internal to her, to an external and independent object that can be attached to Gawain instead, marking him as desirable. Moreover, the movement of the girdle from the Lady's body to Gawain's is suggestive of the sexual act that she is trying to seduce him into,

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 506.

implying a level of bodily contact and intimacy that his manners and uncertainty prevent him from realising. It also foreshadows the potential of her undressing completely: Heng notes that ‘any gift from the Lady, especially one worn on her body... would carry a strong sexual colouring, be inflected by an unmistakably erotic charge’.⁸¹ The giving of the girdle is suggestive of the sexual act, albeit an inverted version in which a part of the female body of Lady Bertilak is accepted into the male one of Gawain. Like the kisses, the girdle inverts the gender roles that Lady Bertilak and Gawain occupy. The girdle is both a prosthesis for the bedchamber and for Lady Bertilak, signifying both and linking them together. Through the girdle, Lady Bertilak becomes part of the bedchamber. At the same time, the giving of the girdle occurs instead of sex as the culmination of the bedchamber scenes. The sexual act is displaced on to and by the girdle. As the Green Knight goes on to reveal, the climax of the bedchamber scenes is the nick that he gives Gawain on his neck in exchange for the girdle. The girdle moves from signifying Lady Bertilak’s desire, to that of her husband and, potentially, that of Morgan as well. As a prosthesis for the bedchamber, the girdle expands the space out to include the events and characters at the Green Chapel with their competing and intersecting desires.

Once he takes the girdle on as a symbol for himself, Gawain never really leaves either the bedchamber or Hautdesert. As the prosthesis for the bedchamber, the girdle keeps him enclosed in both. Added to his armour alongside the pentangle and image of the Virgin Mary, the girdle as a putative heraldic symbol marks Gawain as a knight of both Camelot and Hautdesert: it creates and signifies further potential identities for Gawain, and therefore also for Camelot. The Green Knight’s invocation of Morgan La Faye as ‘pyn aunt, Arpurez half-suster’ (2464) reminds the reader of Gawain’s familial ties to her, and therefore to Hautdesert, hinting at a different way of formulating his identity separate from

⁸¹ Ibid., 506.

the association with Arthurian knightliness.⁸² Gawain's enclosure within the events of the poem, and Hautdesert, starts prior to the Green Knight's entrance into Camelot's hall. The suggestion that an element of the narrative has been caused 'þurgh myȝt of Morgne la Faye' (2446) opens up the possibility of other narratives existing alongside the main one.⁸³ The revelation about the girdle and the true test of Gawain's 'trawþe' that has taken place across both the court and the Green Chapel creates a network of associations that operates across the poem, drawing different parts of it together into a single enclosed structure. Through this network, new and various possible narratives and identities for each of the main players, and in particular Gawain, are generated, destabilising the central versions. Gawain is a knight of both Camelot and Hautdesert, slipping between both courts and their identities as he leaves the latter and finds that he is out of sync with the former. The story of the girdle suggests that he always had the potential to be so.

Conclusion

The bedchamber at Hautdesert is the structuring force across *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* through the aesthetic of enclosure that it provides. The structure of the poem is not just circular, but entwining and inward looking, referring back to the bedchamber that lies at its symbolic and literal heart. That bedchamber is a shifting one, made up of multiple layers of flexible and deceptive textiles that in turn characterise the aesthetic of enclosure that they form as a slippery one: symbols in the poem are malleable and easily figured into something else. The courtly speech of Lady Bertilak is rendered literal and threatening. Gawain, Bertilak and his wife all stand in for each other through the games of seduction and exchange of

⁸² Cooper, p. 289.

⁸³ Lawrence Warner questions the extent to which the events of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* were the result of Morgan's power; however, her entrance into the narrative here marks the possibility of her involvement, placing the poem in contact with other narratives that include her and re-signifying the presence of the old woman in the court. 'The Lady, the Goddess, and the Text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *The Chaucer Review* 48 (2014), 334-51. On other narratives see Heng, pp. 500-14.

winnings. Bertilak is really the Green Knight, transfigured by Morgan, who is also the old lady in the castle. The pattern of shifting signifiers culminates in the green girdle as prosthesis for the bedchamber. As it shifts from person to person and location to location it accretes and sheds meaning without ever fully embodying a single one. By the time that the poem ends and both the girdle and Gawain are returned to Camelot, the girdle is simultaneously the marker of Gawain's belonging at Hautdesert, the 'vntrawþe þat I am tane inne' (2509) and 'þe renoun of þe Rounde Table' (2519). While it is the first time that it is explicitly articulated, Gawain's return to Camelot is not the first time in the poem that his identity is destabilised through the transience of its symbols. The aesthetic of enclosure and the registers that it produces are used by Bertilak and his wife to ensnare Gawain in the games and are also the means by which those games intersect. Through the games and his arrival at Hautdesert, Gawain is faced with the question of what kind of knight he is going to be when called on to be more than one type of knight at once. As a result, his knightly identity is radically destabilised. The similarities between Hautdesert and Camelot that the aesthetic of enclosure foregrounds underpin this destabilising of Gawain, suggesting that it is not the specific context of Hautdesert that is so destabilising. If such tensions exist between the different parts of this chivalric self at Hautdesert then, the poem implies, they would also exist at Camelot. Gawain's return to the Arthurian court and the different significations that this grants the girdle, now a symbol of Gawain, confirms this. As Dinshaw notes, Gawain is only Gawain when he is acting like him. The aesthetic of enclosure asks what happens to Gawain when it is unclear which Gawain he should be. If Gawain only exists through the series of shifting and slippery symbols that he and others use to define him, then who is Gawain?

The poem asks the question of who is Gawain in relation to romance. He is a romance knight and Hautdesert, from the very moment that it pops up out of the landscape, is replete with romance tropes, including the bedchamber, so I want to end this chapter by considering the bedchamber specifically as a romance one. As a genre, romance both reflects and reinforces

the ideals and anxieties of the nobility, who are both its subject and audience.⁸⁴ The symbols and signs of which romance tales are full signify these ideals and so mark noble identity. Roberta Kruger sets out a change from the thirteenth century onwards, in which the scope of romance widened to include more modest noble courts, representing new interests and so reconfiguring the identities that it reflected.⁸⁵ The Gawain manuscript dates from the middle of the period identified by Kruger, and Hautdesert probes the identity of Gawain as a romance knight and, through him, Camelot. The aesthetic of enclosure that operates at Hautdesert does not, however, mark the two courts as different, but as deeply enmeshed. The same signifiers operate across both courts but are unstable in the way in which they do so. The Gawain of the pentangle is not coherent with the romance expectations of Hautdesert. Located in and, as in the case of the girdle, coming from within the bedchamber, the challenge that Hautdesert poses to Camelot stems from similarity rather than difference, and from very much within. The courtly world of the poem is an enclosed one. Even the Green Knight is not as 'other' as he initially appears, but Gawain's return to Camelot, with the girdle worn alongside his pentangle, opens up a gap in how signifiers are used and interpreted that estranges the Arthurian court from itself. The bedchamber in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* suggests that the symbols of romance, and the identities that they signify, are inherently malleable, transferable and slippery, and not as a result of any outside influence.

In contrast to Gawain, Margery Kempe uses the bedchamber to establish and ground her identity. For her, the bedchamber and its cultural significance are the tools that she uses to create her spiritual authority and the roles that she performs through it, and it is to this that I turn in the next chapter.

⁸⁴ Roberta Kruger, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. by Roberta L. Kruger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1-10 (p. 3).

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.5.

Sleeping on a Prayer: the Bedchamber as Devotional Space in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

When Margery Kempe visits St. Bridget's bedchamber while on pilgrimage to Rome, it is a site for multiple different types of devotional behaviour: public and private, visionary, and sanctioned by the church:

Sche was in the chawmbre that Seynt Brigypt deyde in, and herd a Dewche preste prechyn of hir therin, and of hir revelacyonys and of hir maner of levyng. And sche knelyd also on the ston on the which our Lord aperyde to Seynt Brigypte and telde hir what day sche schuld deyn on. (204)

The presence of the priest marks the bedchamber, Bridget, and her experiences there, as within the orthodoxy of the church, while the bedchamber itself serves as a memorial to Bridget's revelations. In addition, as the space in which she died, the bedchamber evokes a domestic intimacy with the body of the woman before she became a saint.¹ It functions as a relic of her and her holiness.² Although the space is now a 'chapel, which beforntyme was hir chawbre' (204), the fact that it recalls both Bridget's death and 'hir maner of levyng' underscores its status as a bedchamber and that it is the experiences that Bridget had within it as a bedchamber that led to it being a chapel.³ Through its dual status as a bedchamber and a chapel, Bridget's bedchamber provides a model of multiple different types of devotional behaviour for Margery, while that dual status authorises those behaviours.

¹ The dying would have been lifted from the bed to the floor in the moments before death, illustrating that the bedchamber was not only a space in which the dying were visited and mourned, but in which the living had intimate contact with their bodies. French, Smith and Stanbury, p. 79.

² Both the bedchamber and the stone on which Bridget knelt to receive her revelations are secondary relics. See Scott B. Montgomery, 'Relics and Reliquaries', in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: an Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Margaret Schaus (New York and Oxford: Routledge), pp. 704-06; Caroline Bynum Walker, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), pp. 165-66. For a discussion of saints, memory and identity formation, see Karmen MacKendrick, *Fragmentation and Memory: Meditations on Christian Doctrine* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 106-31.

³ Julian of Norwich's cell today provides a modern day analogy, visited as both a devotional space and by people interested in seeing how she lived as an anchoress.

In this chapter, I will argue that Margery uses the bedchamber as a devotional space within which to construct her identity as a holy woman. The bedchamber provides a suitable space for meditation and reflection and is one to which Margery has access; she is therefore able to use Bridget as a model as she has access to the private bedchamber for use as a devotional space. Both women belong to the socio-economic group for whom having a private bedchamber, as a marker of wealth, was possible. Moreover, the bedchamber was becoming increasingly recognised as an appropriate space for personal devotion, linked to the rise in private devotional practices.⁴ Glenn Burger, in his recent work on conduct literature, suggests that the bedchamber might have been a space for specifically female reflection as men would have been more likely to have access to other spaces for such a purpose, such as private studies or offices.⁵ Although the bedchamber was becoming more common as a space for devotion, Margery is unique in the range of devotional behaviours for which she uses it and the centrality that the bedchamber therefore has in her spiritual identity. The ways in which Margery imitates and draws inspiration from Bridget have been much discussed; however, the material basis for her admiration, centred on the bedchamber, has received less attention.⁶ The bedchamber enables Margery to enact multiple different types of devotional behaviour and to form a relationship between herself

⁴ Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), pp. 42-56; Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 11-17.

⁵ Burger, p. 117. As with Criseyde, I do not want to align Margery and the bedchamber on the basis of her gender, however, the connection presented by Burger provides a possible rationale for why Margery and the other women mentioned in this chapter used the bedchamber as a devotional space and why Margery was able to see herself in them.

⁶ See, among others, Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), pp. 116-21; Gunnell Cleve, 'Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian Influence in Medieval England', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* 5, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), pp. 163-78; Diane Watt, 'Political Prophecy in *The Book of Margery Kempe*' in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by John Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 145-60; Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Margery Kempe's Mystical Marriage and Roman Sojourn: Influence of St Bridget of Sweden', *Reading Medieval Studies* 28 (2002), 39-58; Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literatures, Liturgy and Iconography* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 54-62.

and the saint. Moreover, Bridget is not the only woman who provides a model for the devotional bedchamber for Margery. Through her use of the bedchamber, Margery locates herself within a broad community of holy women, including the Virgin Mary and Julian of Norwich, and I will argue that it is the bedchamber's non-spiritual associations – its intimacy and domesticity – that provide the means for her to do so. These relationships provide templates for Margery and authorise her actions, and in doing so allow her to present herself as the most devout of them all.

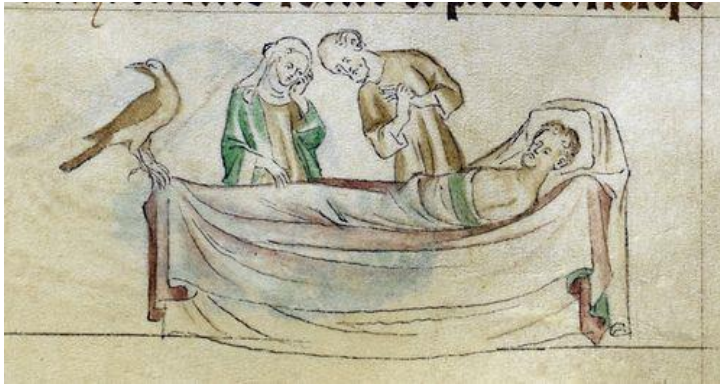
This chapter is split into three sections, each focusing on one of the key relationships that Margery forms through the bedchamber and the ways in which it underpins her devotions and her self-fashioning as a holy woman. First, I will examine the model that Bridget of Sweden provides for Margery. The saint's bedchamber is a template for how the multiple significations of the bedchamber can be used to inform the devotional practices that are performed within it, specifically those that are visionary and enable communion with Christ. In the same way that Bridget's bedchamber has become a chapel and a site of pilgrimage, Margery presents hers as a space that is concurrently devotional and domestic.⁷ When she 'herd a sownd of melodye so swet and delectable' that she thinks 'sche had ben in paradyse', it is while she is 'in hir bedde with hir husbond' (61). Through the inclusion of the detail about John's presence, the bedchamber retains its marital status, even as it becomes a mystical space. John's presence and her subsequent vault from the bed (62) also alert the reader to a tension between the domestic and devotional bedchamber that Margery needs to reconcile. Following on from her hearing of the heavenly melodies, Margery starts to desire celibacy, reconfiguring her bedchamber from a marital one to a chaste version. The second section will focus on the Virgin Mary and images of the Annunciation in the bedchamber. Tara Williams argues that Margery uses her own experience of motherhood to fashion a

⁷ Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa suggests that the fact that Margery is in Rome in the first place is due to Bridget's influence. 'Margery Kempe's Mystical Marriage and Roman Sojourn', pp. 39-40.

spiritual authority modelled on the Virgin.⁸ I will suggest that the bedchamber - as a space associated with childbirth and care – forms the basis of this shared experience that Margery uses to connect herself to Mary. Furthermore, it is the materiality of the bedchamber, foregrounded in the iconography of the Annunciation, which Margery uses to form her relationship with the Virgin Mary and that shapes her devotional behaviours stemming from that relationship. In the third section, I will analyse how Margery uses the bedchamber and the different types of devotional behaviour that she enacts within it to build her relationship with Christ. By basing it on multiple models, Margery establishes an authority for her having such a relationship. Moreover, by using several exemplars, Margery suggests that her relationship with Christ is stronger than any of those individual ones that she bases it on. Among the community of women in their devotional bedchambers that she invokes, Margery is *prima inter pares*.

The bedchamber is an important devotional space to Margery: she locates many of the episodes of spiritual significance of her *Book* within one. It is here that she first encounters Christ (52-56); here that she hears ‘the sownd of melodye so swet and delectable’ (61); and here that she is told by Christ to resume the practice of wearing white clothes (217-18). I have also taken references to Margery being in her ‘chawmbre’ – such as during the illness that she suffers and ‘toke hir chawmbre and ete alone vi wokys’ (158) – to refer to the bedchamber as her use of the space plus cultural practices involving it in each instance suggests that it is specifically a bedchamber. It is the space in which she sleeps, has marital relations with her husband (or tries to avoid them), is ill, and lies-in following the birth of her children. Felicity Riddy outlines an increase in single use rooms, including bedchambers, in the houses of the mercantile class in fourteenth century England, particularly in the types of timber-framed merchants’ houses that can still be seen in King’s Lynn today, suggesting that the space that Margery uses for activities associated with the

⁸ Tara Williams, ‘Manipulating Mary: Maternal, Sexual, and Textual Authority in the *Book of Margery Kempe*’, *Modern Philology* 107 (2010), pp. 528-55.



bedchamber is not used for any other purposes.⁹ In total, nineteen separate episodes in *The Book of Margery Kempe* are at least partially set within a space that is identifiable as a

bedchamber, with a further five concerned with bedding or the procurement of bedding and sleeping arrangements.¹⁰ There are also moments in the text that are implicitly associated with the bedchamber, such as Margery nursing John following his fall (332). As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis in reference to Troilus's lovesickness, both illness and the care of the sick would have been connected to the bedchamber in most households and the iconography of illness is often located in the bed, as these double images from the *Queen*



Mary Psalter (above and left) illustrate.¹¹ Not all of the behaviours that Margery locates within a bedchamber are explicitly religious; her care for John is presented as a break in her

spiritual journey. The spiritual and the worldly are not, however, so easily separated; Diane Watt argues that her care of the sick woman in chapter 75 enables Margery to act as an 'intercessor and mediator' to the divine.¹² Rebecca Krug, meanwhile, interprets Margery's own periods of confinement in her bedchamber due to illness as leading to a period of

⁹ Felicity Riddy, "'Burgeis" Domesticity in Late-Medieval England', in *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household*, pp. 14-36.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2 for a full list.

¹¹ *Queen Mary Psalter*, London, British Library, Royal MS 2 B VII, fols. 89^v-90^r.

¹² Diane Watt, 'Mary the Physician: Women, Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages', in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), pp. 27-44 (pp. 38-39).

spiritual growth.¹³ The bedchamber is a space across which its cultural signifiers and Margery's multiple uses of the space intersect. Margery's actions take on a devotional element by virtue of being in the bedchamber.

Two recent discussion of the bedchamber draw on Margery's awareness of the social context of the bedchamber and the significance of the 'honest bed' (259). Examining 'the bed as an object that projects notions of status, aspiration, decorum, and morality', French, Smith and Stanbury analyse the chamber that Margery is given during her imprisonment in Beverley: 'the bed is appropriate in form, decoration, and the manner of its equipment to someone – herself – who is more than a common prisoner'.¹⁴ The bed becomes a way for Margery to chart her relationship with others, including how she wishes to project her status in those relationships. It is not just Margery's earthly relationships that are reflected in her bedchamber: the status connoted by her bed and chamber is reflected in her spiritual relationships and the standing that she derives from them. Moreover, the devotional aspects of the bedchamber, as well as those identified by French, Smith and Stanbury, inform her understanding of her social status. The 'honest bed' is also at the heart of Hollie Morgan's discussion of Margery in her bedchamber, with a focus on the social implications of it as well. She argues that it is the cultural understanding of the bed as 'honest' that leads Margery to judge it to be 'a particularly appropriate space in which to spend time with God'.¹⁵ Morgan locates Margery's view of the bedchamber as an appropriate space within the meditative tradition to which figures such as Richard Rolle, Ida of Nivelles, and the nuns of Helfta belonged.¹⁶ While this is one signification attached to the bed, Margery's bedchamber is not part of a monastic foundation and it retains its domestic functions

¹³ Rebecca Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017), pp. 24-57.

¹⁴ French, Smith and Stanbury, pp. 61-62.

¹⁵ Morgan, p. 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-52.

throughout the text, even when it is also being presented as a devotional space. Rather, it is the domesticity of the bedchamber, in addition to those models provided by other holy women, that underpins Margery's understanding of the bedchamber as an appropriate space in which to encounter God.

Bridget and the Bedchamber

Margery performs Bridget during her visit to the bedchamber-chapel. When she 'knelyd also on the ston on the whech our Lord aperyd to Seynt Brigyppte' (204), she recreates the moment at which Bridget received her revelations from Christ. She casts herself in the role of Bridget, implying a continuation between the two women forged through both their presence and actions within the bedchamber. Rebecca Schneider suggests that re-enactment is 'the attempt to literally touch time through the residue of the gesture or the cross-temporality of the pose'.¹⁷ The repetition of Bridget's action in conjunction with the tactility of the stone on which both women kneel hints at the haptic nature of Margery's performance. She casts herself back to the moment at which Bridget received her revelations, while also bringing Bridget forward into her own present, collapsing the distance between them and displacing Bridget with herself. Margery forges her relationship with Bridget in a moment of asynchronicity through which there are 'different time frames or temporal systems colliding in a single moment of *now*'.¹⁸ The cross-temporal continuity created by Margery extends beyond her kneeling on the stone. Through the narrative that she constructs around this portion of her pilgrimage, Margery brings Bridget's bedchamber into contact with her own, eliding the two spaces. Immediately following her visit to the bedchamber-chapel, Margery is given access to privileged knowledge while in her own bedchamber: 'Our Lord warnyd hir on

¹⁷ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in the Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), p. 2.

¹⁸ Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 5.

the nyght, beyng in hir bed, that sche schulde not gon owte fer fro hir hostel, for he schulde sendyn gret tempestys' (205). The placement of these two bedchambers – that of Bridget and that of Margery – next to each other in the narrative draws a parallel between the two women while also cementing the bedchamber's status as a visionary space. Just as the saint received her visions, now sanctioned by the church, in the bedchamber, so too does Margery. Moreover, Margery's re-enactment places her revelation, and therefore her, as the successor to those of Bridget.¹⁹ The bedchamber presents a clear causality between Bridget's experiences in her bedchamber and the subsequent sanctification of both the saint and the space. By inserting herself into this narrative and then continuing it on, Margaret uses Bridget's bedchamber to sanctify her own, and her actions within it.

Margery's re-enactment of Bridget creates a spiritual and bodily intimacy between the two women.²⁰ It occurs, however, in a bedchamber that is no longer private: as a pilgrimage site and a chapel, the bedchamber has become public. Margery herself is able to access the site as a member of the public. Moreover, Margery's performance of the saint takes place while 'a Dewche preste' is preaching about Bridget in her bedchamber-chapel and so both Margery and her performance become a part of the sermon; it is the performance to accompany the narrative that turns both into a public spectacle. Schneider considers the feminist possibilities of re-enactment: 'Entering, or re-enacting, an event or set of acts... from a critical direction, a different temporal angle, may be... an act of survival, of keeping alive as passing on'.²¹ As she is outside the structures of the church, and outside the 'normative or

¹⁹ The life of St Bridget contained in *The Myroure of Owr Ladye* recounts how Bridget had an encounter with the Virgin Mary having got out of bed to pray to Christ in her chamber at the age of 12, suggesting a continuation of divine contact that starts not in Rome but in Bridget's childhood and stretches through to Margery via the bedchamber-chapel. *The Myroure of Owr Ladye Containing a Devotional Treatise on Divine Service, with a Translation of the Offices Used by the Sisters of the Brigittine Monastery of Sion at Isleworth During the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. by John Henry Blunt (London: Early English Text Society, 1773), p. xlvi.

²⁰ Schneider, p. 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

dominant time-scheme' through her re-enactment of Bridget, Margery represents a different critical angle to the priest.²² By re-enacting the moment of Bridget's revelation within the bedchamber, Margery returns it to that space, conjuring the saint herself as the authoritative source of the revelations rather than the sermon that is being preached about them. At the same time, Margery's re-enactment reconciles the revelations with the sermon, aligning them with the authority of the church represented by the priest. Her performance becomes part of the appeal that the 'holy seyntys day schulde ben halwyd, and the seynt had in mor worshep than sche was at that tyme' (205). It also brings both women into the present moment of contemporary Rome: Yoshikawa suggests it is not just that Margery is aware of Bridget's relatively low profile but that the detail about the storm after Margery's visit to Bridget's chamber reflects her sensitivity to the contemporary controversy regarding Bridget's canonization.²³ Against this context, Margery's re-enactment becomes a way for her to use the presence of the German priest to provide authority for the revelation as it re-occurs during her performance. Through the foregrounding of Bridget herself and her alignment of the saint with the church, Margery becomes part of the authorisation of Bridget, reconciling her to the orthodoxy of the church. As the means through which that reconciliation happens, Margery is therefore placed in a position of authority over Bridget within the structures of the church. While Bridget might ultimately be canonised, it is Margery, her performance implies, who is making that possible.

Bridget's position outside of an official religious community within her own lifetime is mirrored by Margery and so enables her to use the saint as a template for positioning domestic space as devotional.²⁴ Margery and Bridget were part of the same cultural shift towards the location of devotion within the bedchamber. The use of the bedchamber as a

²² Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?*, p. 24.

²³ Yoshikawa, 'Margery Kempe's Mystical Marriage and Roman Sojourn', p. 48.

²⁴ Claire L. Sahlin, 'Birgitta of Sweden', in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: an Encyclopaedia*, pp. 74-75.

devotional space was, however, largely focused on private, meditative practices and Roberta Gilchrist notes that ‘religious worship in the home was focused on the bedchamber... This space provided the greatest opportunity of seclusion for private reading and devotion’.²⁵ Margery does not present her bedchamber as an addition to devotion in church but as an alternative to it. The staging of the rituals that are associated with the church within the bedchamber gives them a heightened sense of intimacy and presents Margery as an authoritative voice within them, and I will look at the Eucharist in the bedchamber in more detail in the final section of this chapter. At Rome, the bedchamber is privileged over the church as a devotional space. Following her visit to Bridget’s bedchamber-chapel,

whan this creatur wolde a gon the Stacyownys, our Lord warnyd hir on the
nyght, beyng in hir bed, that sche schulde not gon owte fer fro hir ostel,
for he schulde sendyn gret tempestys that day of levenys and thunders.
(205)

The intimacy and mundanity of the bedchamber is evoked through the comparison between it and the outside world: it is hard not to blame Margery for not wanting to get up and go out while the weather is so bad. Through Christ’s authorisation of Margery to stay in rather than go out and complete the circuit of churches that made up the Stations of Rome, the bedchamber is presented as a legitimate alternative to it.²⁶ The ritual of the Stations is both replaced by and relocated within the bedchamber. Where Bridget’s bedchamber has become a chapel, Margery’s is adequate to stand in for a series of them.

Margery uses the bedchamber to stand in for other religious spaces through which she is able to expand her range of devotional behaviours. Through her travels around East Anglia alone, she would have been familiar with a range of different religious architectures and the

²⁵ Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, p. 156. See also Andrew Taylor, “‘Into His Secret Chamber’: Reading and Privacy in Late Medieval England”, in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 41-61.

²⁶ Goodman, pp. 195-200.

religious lives that they supported, enabled and contained.²⁷ As a lay person, however, these were spaces to which Margery had either limited or no access. Critics have used various religious architectures to more sharply define Margery's social and spiritual position outside of them. Sarah Salih invokes the spaces in which religious women lived and the ways in which they and secular women interacted to position Margery in relation to religious communities, locating her outside of the cloister.²⁸ Liz Herbert McAvoy has discussed enclosure extensively, arguing that Margery, in contrast to anchorites, locates and enacts enclosure, and its concomitant disruption, largely in the female body, rather than an architectural space. McAvoy analyses how Margery 'contravened her own allocated spaces and reached out through the boundaries with her body and voice to enter the proscribed spaces beyond'.²⁹ The bedchamber, however, provides Margery with an enclosed space to which she has ready and licit access: it is one of her 'allocated spaces'. From the moment that the reader meets her, in bed and ill following the birth of her child, the bedchamber is intimately associated with the transgressive body that McAvoy identifies. The bedchamber provides Margery with a space within which she can model modes of devotional behaviours to which she would otherwise not have access, and is also the means through which she transgresses those devotional behaviours. In a bedchamber that is variously a chapel, an anchorite's cell, a monastic dormitory, Margery places herself in multiple religious structures simultaneously, disturbing the clear delineations between them, and between each one and the outside world.³⁰

²⁷ Roberta Gilchrist and Marilyn Oliva catalogue the high number of abbeys, anchorholds, beguinages, hospitals and other dwellings in East Anglia. *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, Studies in East Anglian History 1 (Norwich: Centre of East Anglian Studies, 1993).

²⁸ Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Later Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), p. 167.

²⁹ Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), p. 2. See also Denis Renevey, 'Margery's Performing Body: the Translation of Late Medieval Discursive Religious Practices', in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 197-216.

³⁰ Erler considers the extent to which the different modes of religious living available to women could be differentiated. *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 9-15.

Margery draws on a cultural consensus for the bedchamber as an appropriate space for visions, placing herself within a tradition of female mystics. Although her encounters with the divine in the bedchamber are diverse in nature, they tend towards the visionary and mystical. On one occasion, she hears a divine melody ‘as this creatur lay in hir bedde wyth hir husbond’ (61). On another, she ‘toke hir chawmbre’ when ‘owyr Lord mad hir so seke that she wend to a be ded, and sythen sodeynly he mad hir hool ayen’ (158). And the initial encounter with Christ that sets her on the path to a devout life happens with she sees him ‘sytyng upon hir beddys syde’ (55). As part of the same episode, she has a vision of ‘develys... [that] cryed upon hir wyth greet thretyngys, and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendame’ (54). Her near-contemporary and fellow Norfolk-woman Julian of Norwich is also ill in bed when she experiences the sequence of visions that forms the basis of her meditative and devotional practices. Julian recounts that ‘when I was thirty yers old and halfe God sent me a bodely sekeness in which I lay iii dayes and iii nights’, when on the fourth night she sees Christ on his cross and ‘sodenly I saw the rede blode trekelyn downe fro under the garlande, hote and freisly and ryth plenteously’.³¹ Christina of Markyate also has a visionary experience in her bedchamber at the start of her confinement at Flamstead. Following the Biblical tradition of symbolic visions received during sleep, ‘she woke up and interpreted the place as meaning her resolution to remain a virgin: the bulls were devils and wicked men’.³² As a visionary space, the bedchamber becomes a prelude to, and a necessary step towards, enclosure within an anchorhold. Margery’s own visionary experiences within the bedchamber are authorised by the precedents set by anchoresses such as Julian and Christina, while also suggesting that she is equivalent to, or has the potential of, an anchoress.

³¹ Julian of Norwich, *A Revelation of Love*, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), pp. 4-5.

³² *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, ed. by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, trans. by C.H. Talbot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 37.

The bedchamber is both a step towards and a stand-in for an anchorhold and Margery uses the somatic, as well as visionary, associations of the bedchamber to align it with an anchorite's cell. On two occasions she receives the last rites while ill in her bedchamber.

Following the birth of her first child, 'sche, not trostyng hir lyfe, sent for hir gostly fadyr, as



iseyd befor, in ful wyl to

be schrevyn of alle hir

lyfetym, as ner as sche

cowde' (53). Later, while

suffering from dysentery,

'sche was anoynted,

wenyng to be a deed' (271).

It was not uncommon for

the last rites to be received in bed, given that it was the space in which most people were ill and died, as depicted in the image from Yates Thompson 3 above.³³ Margery, however, does not die after either instance of her receiving the last rites. Instead, she receives them during a period of enclosure and so echoes the ceremony during which an anchoress first came to be shut up in her cell.³⁴ Both the bedchamber and the anchorhold are transformed, through the administration of the last rites, into a space between life and death, while Margery and the anchoress occupy a similarly liminal state. Furthermore, in her double receipt of the last rites, Margery echoes Julian of Norwich specifically. As an anchoress, Julian would have received them during her entombment at St Julian's church, but she receives them for the first time immediately before her vision of Christ. She reports having 'vnderfongyn all my rites of holy church, myselfe weneing that I should dye' and that 'my curate was sent for to be

³³ London, British Library, MS Yates Thompson 3, fol. 211^r.

³⁴ Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 42; E.A. Jones, *Hermits and Anchorites in England, 1200-1550* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 16-17; Anne K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

at my endeing... He sett the cross before my face and seid: "I have browte thee the image of thy maker and saviour. Louke thereupon and comfort thee therewith".³⁵ Both Margery and Julian have visions immediately following the last rites and their visions are the direct result of that ritual. Margery is tormented by devils as she remains unshriven: 'hir confessowr was a lytyl to hastye and gan scharply to undyrnemyn hir, er than sche had fully seyde hir entent, and so sche wold no mor seyn for nowt he mygth do' (54). Julian's vision, meanwhile, stems from the crucifix that is held over her during the administration of the last rites: 'After this my sight began to failen and it was all derke about me in the chamber as it had be night, save in the image of the cross wherein I beheld a comon light, and I wiste not how'.³⁶ For both women the spiritual arises from the bodily experience of illness within the bedchamber, and it is through this shared experience that Margery presents her bedchamber as a proxy for the anchorhold. She positions herself as having both the authority and devotion of an anchorite; while her visions enable a closeness to the divine that authorises her position, she also claims the church-derived authority of the anchorite.

Margery draws a direct parallel between herself and Julian of Norwich to establish them as peers while also further legitimising the bedchamber as a visionary space. Diane Watt has questioned the idea that Julian's text is a possible source of influence on Margery's own writing, placing her instead in 'a broad tradition of women's prophetic writing' which includes texts such as the *Vita* of Christine of Markyate or *A Revelation of Purgatory* but excludes Julian's *A Revelation of Love* on the basis of doctrinal differences.³⁷ Margery is, however, aware of Julian's visions, referring to her as an 'expert in swech thyngys,' and would presumably also be aware of the context in which they occurred, although Julian's text is

³⁵ Julian of Norwich, pp. 3-4.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

³⁷ Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 32-33.

much less concerned with the setting for her visions than Margery is for her own. Margery also tells Julian about her own visions. She

schewyd hir the grace that God put in hir sowle of compunccyon,
contricyon, swetnesse, and devocyon, and ful many holy spechys and
dalyawns that owyr Lord spak to hir sowle, and many wondirful
revelacyons whечsche shewyd to the ankres. (120)

In her account of their meeting, Margery situates herself and Julian as equals in their visionary experiences. Moreover, Margery uses Julian's language in her portrayal of their conversation. She records Julian using the phrase 'evyn-Cristen', which Julian herself uses eight times in *A Revelation of Love*.³⁸ The shared language across the two texts suggests that Margery heard a version of Julian's visions, which she then uses to underpin the authority of her own.³⁹

The bedchamber provides a specifically female model of visionary experience, through which Margery creates a community of visionary women around herself. Along with Julian and Christina, St Bridget and the anonymous holy woman whose visions are recounted in *A Revelation of Purgatory* also had visions in their bedchambers.⁴⁰ The bedchamber is not, however, used by each of these women in the same way. St Bridget and Christina of Markyate both have visions in which they occupy the same space as those who appear to them. Along with her dreams of the bulls, Christina 'stood before her bed... everything was

³⁸ Julian of Norwich, p. 10, pp. 12-13 (two instances), p. 51 (two instances), p. 56, p. 70, p. 111.

³⁹ Janet Wilson reads the inclusion of Margery's meeting with Julian as authorising not just her visions, but the *Book* as a whole. 'Communities of Dissent: the Secular and Ecclesiastical Communities of Margery Kempe's *Book*', in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. by Diane Watt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 155-85 (p. 156).

⁴⁰ Although I am focussing primarily on English women here, with the addition of St Bridget given her influence on Margery and the presence of her cult in England, there is a broader, continental tradition of female mystics in their bedchambers. Caroline Walker Bynum recounts examples such as Ida of Louvain who, having been struck down by an illness, 'returned to her room and dallied in spiritual delights for thirteen days. During this time she took material food only once, when the bread lying beside her bed began to smell unnaturally sweet'. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 121-22. During her travels to the Low Countries it is possible that Margery encountered stories of women such as Ida, and Janet Wilson suggests Dorothea of Montau, Elizabeth of Hungary and Mary of Oignies as potential influences on Margery (Wilson, pp. 161-62).

strangely sunk in deep silence. The virgin was standing in astonishment when behold! there gathered around her young men of extraordinary beauty'.⁴¹ Christina and the angels interact within the bedchamber: they speak and the angels place a crown on her head, suggesting a corporeality to their presence.⁴² Many of Margery's visions of Christ are similarly located within the bedchamber and are also interactive but in a much more tangible way than that of Christina; Christ is explicitly corporeal in his presence in Margery's bedchamber. When he first appears to Margery, he does so 'clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke, syttyng upon hir beddys syde, lokyng upon hir wyth so blyssyd a chere that sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys' (55). The addition of the detail about the silk mantle lends a tactility to the experience while the reader can almost feel the weight of Christ settling on Margery's bed. Her visions are multi-sensorial and intimate. In contrast, a sense of distance is created around Christina's through the fact that the things that appear to her refer to others. The angels appear with a greeting that 'the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded... be sent to you', while the crown is symbolic of the fact that he has 'safeguarded her as a virgin in mind and body'. When Jesus appears to Margery, he does so in his own form, with no separation between the signifier and signified. Margery uses the closeness of the bedchamber along with its material details – the textiles, the bed – to create a heightened sense of intimacy around her visions of Christ. He does not just appear in her bedchamber, or send a message to her in it via others, but is physically present alongside her.

For Julian of Norwich and the anonymous holy woman, the bedchamber acts as a starting point for their visionary experiences, but the visions themselves are located in a separate space.⁴³ The anonymous holy woman is taken outside of her bedchamber and into purgatory within her vision, recalling other visions of the afterlife: 'bytwyxe nyne and ten me

⁴¹ *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, p. 53.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

⁴³ For an overview of the identification of the 'Holy Woman' see Mary C. Erler, "'A Revelation of Purgatory' (1422): Reform and the Politics of Female Visions", *Viator* 38 (2007), 321-83 (pp. 323-26).

thoghte I was raveschede into purgatorye'.⁴⁴ The separation of the two spaces is highlighted by her movement between the two on several occasions. The vision is spread across several nights and is punctuated by the woman acting in the waking world of the bedchamber, such as when she recalls that 'in a dredfull fere I wokke, and by-tyme smote the houre of ten byfore mydnyghte. And for drede and for fere to slepe agayne I rose up...'.⁴⁵ In comparison, the space of Julian's vision is more ambiguous. She loses awareness of the physical space around her but, unlike the anonymous holy woman, she does not transfer bodily into a different one: 'After this my sight began to failen and it was all derke about me in the chamber as it had be night, save the image of the cross'. It is 'in this sodenly' that she sees 'the rede blode trekelyn down fro under the garlande', suggesting an internalised, meditative space that is also the continuous site of the Crucifixion.⁴⁶ Similarly, when God shows her 'all that is made' in the form of 'a littil thing, the quantite of an hesil nutt in the palme of my hand,' the perspective from which Julian is seeing it is unclear.⁴⁷ She is both outside of and a part of creation. Margery's visions, too, take her outside of the bedchamber and into various Biblical scenes; like those that occur within her bedchamber, they are characterised by their intimacy and interactivity. Margery takes on the role of handmaiden to the Virgin Mary during her vision of the Nativity, as I will go on to discuss in further detail in the next section. In contrast, Julian and the anonymous holy woman adopt a more observational role in their visions, and a meditative one. Both texts are characterised by the use of phrases such as 'I saw' and 'me thoughte'.⁴⁸ Julian of Norwich and the anonymous

⁴⁴ 'A Revelation Showed to a Holy Woman', *Women's Writing in Middle English*, ed. by Alexandra Barret, 2nd edn. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2010), pp. 162-74 (p. 163). Other instances of the visionary going bodily into the afterlife include *The Vision of Tundale*, *St Patrick's Purgatory* and *Pearl*.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

⁴⁶ Julian of Norwich, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 7. Lynn Staley considers the disorientating effect of 'a littil thing' in 'Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority', in *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture*, ed. by David Aers and Lynn Staley (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 107-78.

⁴⁸ 'A Revelation Showed to a Holy Woman', p. 165.

holy woman are also placed outside of time during their visions. Julian experiences the crucifixion as an ongoing, rather than historical, event and the holy woman suggests that purgatorial time is different to how time passes in the waking world. Margery draws on each of these different types of visionary experience to establish the authority of her own, and the depth of her devotion. For Margery, the bedchamber also acts as a portal in space and time and she is able to actively insert herself into the Biblical scenes of which she has visions. In the next section, I will argue that she uses the bedchamber to rewrite these scenes to include herself.

The Virgin Mary and the Bedchamber

Margery's relationship with the Virgin Mary is formed across their bedchambers. Part of the cultural shift towards the use of the bedchamber as a devotional space included images of the Annunciation depicted as occurring in the bedchamber.⁴⁹ In such images, the Virgin's bedchamber is at once both the subject of devotion for the viewer contemplating the moment of the Annunciation, and an example of devotional behaviour. Images of the Annunciation offered a model that could be much more literally followed by ordinary Christians than the Passion and that mirrored the meditative practices of religious men and women.⁵⁰ In Norfolk, the shrine at Walsingham provided a model of domesticity that was also an object of devotion, both for the pilgrims who visited and in the construction of it. The bedchamber functions in a similar mode to the book the Virgin was frequently depicted reading: it was accessible and therefore replicable.⁵¹ Images of the Annunciation emphasise the quotidian

⁴⁹ French, Smith and Stanbury, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Laura Saetveit Miles, 'The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation', *Speculum* 89 (2014), 632-69 (p. 634).

⁵¹ As with literacy and access to books, the bedchamber is not accessible to all Christians.

nature of the Virgin's bedchamber. In the Annunciation in the Morgan Library Book of



Hours (left), the bedchamber is depicted with heavy, red textiles on the bed and over the low surface that the Virgin is using as a lectern, while the slightly awkward angle of her body implies that she was engaged in her book until the very moment at which the angel appeared.⁵² The details around the bed and chamber, although bespeaking a certain level of wealth, insist on the domesticity of the scene against which the Annunciation happens: it is just an ordinary

bedchamber. By continually presenting her bedchamber as an everyday space, alongside its more spiritual uses, Margery insists on the link between it and that of the Virgin: they are the same because of their very domesticity.

The Virgin's bedchamber accrues multiple significations as an object of devotion. Diane Wolfthal has catalogued examples in which the iconography of such Annunciation scenes suggests that the bedchamber is Mary's nuptial bedchamber 'since her marriage to God

⁵² New York, Morgan Library, Book of Hours, MS M.194, fol. 24^r. Hans Memling's *Annunciation* provides a slightly later example of the same scene, also emphasising the domesticity of the Virgin's bedchamber.

occurred there'.⁵³ The bedchamber therefore also looks forward to the Nativity: the nuptial bedchamber anticipates the bedchamber of childbirth. Miles argues that Mary's bedchamber is a mirror for the anchorhold as both spaces are as idealised and as enclosed as the bodies that they contain.⁵⁴ The *Ancrene Wisse* expands on this rhetoric of enclosure to advise that the heart should be sealed as a chamber is.⁵⁵ For both the Virgin Mary and Margery Kempe, the bedchamber is an externalised representation of the purity of their hearts. Through the model that the Virgin's bedchamber provides Margery is able to draw further links between her bedchamber and the anchorite's cell, adding to those that she has established through her visions and the parallels created with Julian of Norwich. Unlike both the Virgin and an anchoress, however, Margery's body is not idealised and uncontained. Her experience of childbirth, rather than being pain free, leads to illness and exhaustion. She is also unwell in the bedchamber, and labours to care for others who are sick as well. In a mirror image of Mary's arduous trip to Bethlehem before the birth of Christ, Margery protests to Jesus after he orders her to go to Norwich after the birth of her last child that 'I am bothe feynt and feble' (113), providing a point of tension between the spiritual ideal to which Margery hopes to live up and the reality of her embodied experience in the bedchamber. Her evocation of the physical reality of childbearing provides a point of contact between herself and the other holy women who experienced it and Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth argues that Margery attempts to revise her own experiences of childbirth by inserting herself into the more idealised narratives of St Anne, Mary and Elizabeth. She notes that 'Margery's account of Anne's and Mary's birth ignores any physical element of their pregnancy and birth, any pain,

⁵³ Wolffthal, pp. 17-18.

⁵⁴ Miles, pp. 660-61.

⁵⁵ *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. by Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), part II, ll.1-826. For a discussion of the motif of the enclosed chamber in the *Ancrene Wisse* see Bryan, pp. 47-52.

illness, or fear they might have had'.⁵⁶ This process of revision or rectification begins in the bedchamber. By establishing her bedchamber as a domestic devotional space in the manner of the Virgin Mary, Margery uses it to reposition her own body while within it and in doing so establishes the foundations for her claim to virginity. Her body might be 'feynt and feble', but it is enclosed like Mary's.

In her version of the Nativity, Margery replaces Joseph. It is she and not Joseph who accompanies 'owyr Lady to Bedlem' and it is also she who 'purchasyd hir herborwe' (77), arranging the birthing chamber for the Nativity. In Margery's telling the birth of Christ is an all-female affair, but one in which she is the key figure, second only to the Virgin herself.⁵⁷ The assignment of the space as a female one confirms the status of the stable as a bedchamber while it is being used for childbirth, eliding the space with Margery's own bedchamber.⁵⁸ Margery's displacement of Joseph is echoed by the telling of the Nativity in the *N-Town Plays*; Joseph, and the audience, are absent for the moment of the Christ child's birth as he 'wyle go hens out of youre way | And seke sum mydwyvys'.⁵⁹ He returns to be presented with 'the chylde that is born'.⁶⁰ Margery's version of the Nativity is the correlate of that in the play; she performs the scene that happens while Joseph is looking for the midwife

⁵⁶ Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth, *The Reproductive Unconscious in Medieval and Early Modern England* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 49. It was, however, commonly held that the Virgin experienced neither pain nor fear during the birth of Christ and so Margery's version conforms to the standard one.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

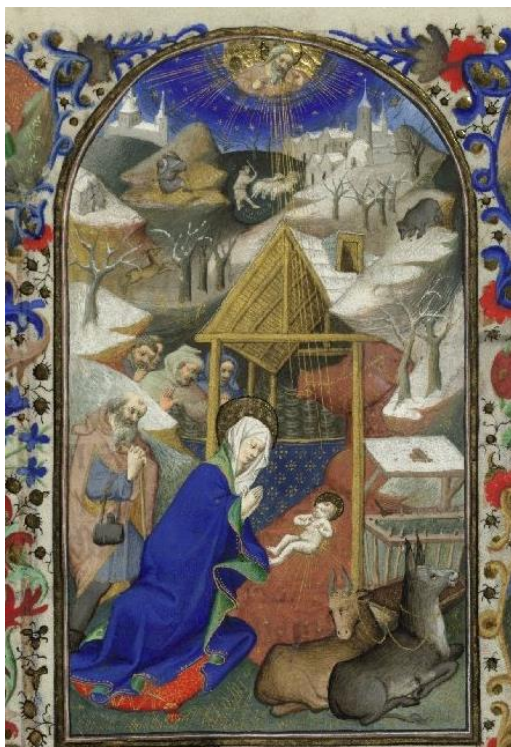
⁵⁸ On the birthing chamber as a female space, see French, Smith and Stanbury, pp. 71-75; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: the Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 42-51; Becky R. Lee, 'A Company of Women And Men: Men's Recollections of Childbirth in Medieval England', *Journal of Family History* 27 (2002), 92-100; Morgan, pp. 191-201.

⁵⁹ 'Nativity', *The N-Town Plays*, ed. by Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), ll. 119-20. Although the extant version postdates Margery it is likely that she would have seen earlier versions and Gail McMurray Gibson considers the specifically Marian focus of East Anglian religious drama compared to versions from other parts of the country. *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 1-18.

⁶⁰ 'Nativity', l. 180.

by taking on that role.⁶¹ In doing so, she replaces Joseph as the provider of care for his wife and the infant Christ and asserts that she has more knowledge of the Nativity than he does through her intimate participation in it.

Margery uses the materiality of the birthing bedchamber to construct a relationship between herself and the Virgin Mary. Through her visions of the Nativity she blurs the boundary between the Marian bedchamber as an object of devotion and as the setting for her own devotional behaviours, implying that those behaviours are therefore on a par with those of the Virgin. Wynne Hellwarth identifies Margery as casting herself as both midwife and re-creator of Christian history, but the specific manner in which she does so is by presenting herself as the source of the material objects in the bedchamber that shape those stories.⁶² Echoing her own concern for procuring bedding while away from home, 'sche ordeyned



beddyng for owyr Lady to lyg in wyth hir blyssed sone' (77), drawing a parallel between the two women through their vulnerabilities. Beds and bedding would often have been the most expensive items in a household, and given Lynn's central role in the cloth trade, Margery would have understood both the social and monetary value of textiles.⁶³ The provision of bedding is an expression of devotion that is specific to, and appropriate for, both the socio-economic status of Margery and the spiritual status of the Virgin. This is echoed in images of the

⁶¹ McAvoy discusses Margery as handmaiden and midwife to the Virgin, pp. 50-54.

⁶² Wynne Hellwarth, pp. 49-54.

⁶³ For the status of beds and beddings in the household see Morgan, p. 22. On Lynn's cloth trade see Goodman, pp. 19-20. See also Sheila Delany, 'Sexual Economics, Chaucer's Wife of Bath and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *The Minnesota Review* 5 (1975), 104-15; Kate Parker, 'Lynn and the Making of a Mystic', in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 55-73 (pp. 57-61).

Nativity in which Mary and the baby Jesus are shown surrounded by rich cloth, despite the otherwise humble surroundings of the stable, as in the Nativity scene in the Bedford Hours above.⁶⁴ In providing the bedding that is used to create the Nativity tableau, Margery positions herself not just as the creator of this moment of Christian history, but also of the Nativity as an object of devotion — one that includes herself.⁶⁵

Through the provision of bedding, Margery extends her involvement in the Nativity beyond the moment itself and so also expands the authority that she gains through it outside of the bedchamber. The bedding enables her to model a range of devotional behaviours that link her to specific figures in Christian history, and the Christian community as a whole, combining her spiritual and visionary existence with her more mundane one. Margery's focus on textiles during her vision of the Nativity echoes both St Bridget and the model provided by the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*: all three are concerned with the 'fayr whyte clothys and kerchys' (77) that Margery procures as swaddling clothes for the infant Jesus. The manner in which all three figures interact with the textiles differs, however, and Mary Dzon notes that Bridget 'remains a reverent spectator', focusing on such details as the textiles, while the *Meditationes* provides the 'pronounced bourgeois focus on hands-on practicality and business' that Margery also exhibits.⁶⁶ Through the bedding, Margery models both active and contemplative forms of devotion, combining the two in such a way as to exceed either on its own. Her contemplation of the textiles exceeds Bridget's through her

⁶⁴ London, British Library, MS Additional 18850, fol. 65^r.

⁶⁵ Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa argues that Margery may have been influenced by specific depictions of the Nativity in Norwich that include the figure of the midwife or handmaiden, suggesting that the image that Margery is constructing is also one in which she is explicitly included. Yoshikawa, *Margery Kempe's Meditations*, pp. 39-40.

⁶⁶ Mary Dzon, *The Quest for the Christ Child in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), pp. 206-07. McMurray Gibson makes the additional suggestion that the attention that Margery pays to the bedding and swaddling clothes is also inspired by her pilgrimage to Assisi and the service offered by the Poor Clares. 'St. Margery: *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold and Constance S. Wright (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), pp. 145-63.

tactile involvement with them, while her spiritual meditation on the Nativity surpasses the practicality of the *Meditationes*. Margery was living during a period in which ‘the boundaries between the active and contemplative lives blurred and became more difficult to define’, and in her care of the Virgin Mary she exhibits both modes of devotion simultaneously.⁶⁷ Rather than moving from one to the other, Margery performs the active through the contemplative, providing care within her vision. Moreover, the concern that Margery demonstrates for the Virgin’s bedding fits within her roles in Lynn. Her behaviour towards the Virgin in her visions utilises the skills, including arranging bedding, which she would have acquired as a bourgeois housewife.⁶⁸ She also echoes the predominantly female practice of donating or bequeathing household textiles, particularly bedding, to the parish church or for the veneration of specific saints.⁶⁹ By giving bedding to the Virgin, Margery takes the practice of donating textiles to its literal conclusion by presenting them directly to the object of her devotion. In doing so she side-steps the church: Margery does not require them to mediate her access to the divine, nor does she require the legal framework of making a will. At the same time, her gift of bedding forms a virtual donation, echoing her wish to have ‘made many abbeys... for religiows men and women to dwellyn in, and a yovyn iche of hem hundryd powndys be yer’ for their devotion to Christ (364). In making such a virtual donation, she is able to access a form of devotion from which she is otherwise blocked: that of being a benefactor.⁷⁰ Through the giving of bedding, Margery asserts her authority both within the Biblical narrative of her visions and the society of medieval Lynn by fusing the two. She is both the handmaiden to the Virgin and her benefactor across both spaces and timeframes.

⁶⁷ Bryan, p. 36.

⁶⁸ Goodman, p. 64.

⁶⁹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 551. See also Katherine L. French, ‘Women in the Late Medieval English Parish’, in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 156-73 (pp. 160-62); Nicola A. Lowe, ‘Women’s Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c.1350-1550’, *Gender and History* 22 (2010), 407-29.

⁷⁰ Her desire to found religious houses also echoes St Bridget’s foundation of her own order.

Margery maps devotional behaviours associated with the bedchamber onto other spaces, using the materiality of the bedchamber to do so, and is able to widen the types of devotion open to her as a result. At various points throughout the text, Margery lies down in order to pray or to encounter the divine, but it is unclear whether she is in her bedchamber. For instance, she 'lay in hir prayer' (80) and 'lay styll' while attempting her 'medytacyon' (75). The pose of lying down to enact her devotions has previously been associated solely with the bedchamber, as when she 'lay aloone' (55) during her first vision of Christ, but becomes one that she performs in a wider array of spaces. Lying in prayer or meditation also evokes monastic practices of lying down to engage in meditative or creative work, and so Margery presents her bedchamber as equivalent to a monastic cell, creating another elision between it and a devotional space to which she would otherwise not have access.⁷¹ Towards the end of her *Book* Margery describes herself engaging in practices that have previously been associated with the bedchamber in other locations. She develops a habit of falling asleep in different religious spaces:

On a tyme, as the sayd creatur was knelyng befor an awter of the cros
and seying an oryson, hir eyne wer evyr togedirward, as thow sche schulde
a slept. And at the last sche myth not chesyn; sche fel in a lityl slomeryng,
and anon aperyd verily to hir syght an awngel. (368)

She also falls asleep 'in the qwer' and sees 'owr Lordys body lying befor hir' (369); in 'a chapel of owr Lady, sor wepyng in the mynde of owr Lordys Passyon' (369); and 'in an hows of the Frer Prechowrys wythinne a chapel of owr Lady', at which point she has a vision of the Virgin (371). The devotional practices that Margery forms in the bedchamber go beyond its boundaries, providing a template for her acts of worship in the more public space of the church. As private devotional practices, as practiced by the laity, became more codified and more prevalent, nuns and other religious groups moved towards imitating secular domestic

⁷¹ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 173-83.

models of devotion.⁷² In bringing her private practices of devotion into the space of the church, Margery enacts this transmission of ideas and positions herself at the forefront of it: a role-model for secular and religious women alike. By transferring behaviours normally associated with her bedchamber – falling asleep, visionary experiences – into the sanctioned spaces of the church or chapel, Margery continues her elision between the domestic and the devotional, but in these instances using the bedchamber rather than the church as the template. The bedchamber, and the devotional practices that she has cultivated within it, are at the centre of Margery's spiritual identity. As I will go on to explore in the next section, that spiritual identity is grounded in her relationship with Christ in the bedchamber.

Christ in the Bedchamber

The enclosure of the bedchamber bounds the space in which Christ is explicitly present to Margery and his physical and bodily manifestation in the bedchamber privileges that space. As discussed above, his first appearance in her bedchamber is marked by his tactility and the physical intimacy that it creates with Margery. This is in contrast to the demons who appear earlier in the sequence and who occupy a more ambiguous space:

And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, develys opyn her mowthys al
inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr, as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in,
sumtyme rampyng at hyr, sumtyme thretyng her, sumtym pullng hyr and
halyng hir bothe nyght and day duryng the forseyd tyme. (54)

The portrayal of the demons echoes that in visions of the afterlife, such as *The Vision of Tundale* and its demons whose 'mowthus wer wyde; thei gapud fast. | The fyre owt of her mowthus thei cast. | Thei wer full of fyr within'.⁷³ It is unclear whether Margery is having a vision of being in hell, in the manner of Tundale, or whether the demons, too, are in her bedchamber, or whether the boundary between the two spaces is blurred. The language that

⁷² Erler traces the cross-contamination of practices between secular and religious communities. *Women, Reading and Piety*, pp. 7-26.

⁷³ 'The Vision of Tundale', in *Three Purgatory Poems: The Gast of Gy, Sir Owain, The Vision of Tundale*, ed. by Edward E. Foster (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), ll. 149-51.

Margery uses to describe her encounter with the demons furthers the ambiguity: it is happening ‘as hir thowt’ and the demons act ‘as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in’. Such language opens up a metaphorical gap between the physical reality of the bedchamber and the reality of Margery’s experience of it. Christ’s presence changes the nature of that experience by re-locating it back within the boundary of the bedchamber and in doing so insisting on his own presence within it. While the demons remain ambiguous in their status, his appearance to Margery is literal and tangible.

The relationship between Margery and Christ is shaped by the bedchamber’s association with marriage. Throughout her *Book* Margery positions the bedchamber as a domestic, marital one, even as she uses it as a devotional space: the bedchamber’s status as a domestic space is central to her understanding and use of it. Tara Williams describes Margery’s authorial strategy as incorporating ‘the material of Margery’s worldly life in order to surpass even Mary’s level of intimacy with Christ’.⁷⁴ The marital bed is a central part of that strategy, allowing Margery to evoke the intimacy that she shares with Christ. Christ takes the place of John in the marital bed, as when he tells her that he wants to ‘lyn in thi bed wyth the’ (196) following Margery’s renegotiation of her marriage with John.⁷⁵ Moreover, Christ frames their relationship explicitly as a marital one:

I far lyke an husbond that schulde weddyn a wyfe. What tyme that he had weddyd hir, hym thynkyth that he is sekyr anow of hir, and that no man schal partyn hem asundyr, for than, dowtyr, may thei gon to bedde togedyr wythowtyn any schame er dred of the pepil, and slepyn in res and pees yf thei wil. (376)

The bed, and their shared occupancy of it, is both the symbol of and location for their marriage. Christ’s vision of marital harmony presents Margery with a way to revise her earthly experiences as a wife. Her marital bed with John came to be a place of strife and discomfort: ‘Sche lay be hir husbond, and for to comown wyth hym it was so abhomynabyll

⁷⁴ Williams, p. 529.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of that renegotiation see Isabel Davis, ‘Men and Margery: Negotiating Medieval Patriarchy’ in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 35-54.

onto hir that sche mygth not duren it, and yet was it leful onto hir in leful tyme yf sche had wold' (69). With Christ, the bed will be a place of 'res and pees' and one in which Margery is able to exercise her will. Equally, in her marriage to John she was publically held to be a bad wife, but with Christ her marriage will be 'wythowtyn any schame er dred of the pepil'.⁷⁶ The bed is offered to Margery as a space in which her spiritual perfection and her domestic perfection can be intertwined: in her marriage to Christ, she is the idealised wife.

The authority that Margery gains through her relationship with Christ is founded in part on the everyday intimacy between them that is created through the bedchamber. Unlike in her visions of him during specific episodes from the Bible, it is in the bedchamber that Christ speaks to Margery directly and familiarly: 'Dowtyr, why hast thou forsakyn me, and I forsoke nevyr the?' (56). Underpinning Margery's use of the bedchamber, Morgan notes, is the understanding that one of the functions and meanings of the bed was 'as a space which was appropriate for a particularly deep level of communication unavailable elsewhere [that] relies upon the physical or implied presence of the bed'.⁷⁷ Margery's use of the space to speak to Christ is informed by an understanding of it as appropriate for specifically marital conversations. Over the course of their long marriage, it is not difficult to imagine Margery and John talking in bed together in the same manner that Margery and Christ are portrayed as doing. The *Ménagier de Paris* provides a template for such conversations with the Prologue to it beginning with an account of conversations in bed between the Ménagier and his new wife:

You expressly promised to listen carefully and to apply yourself
wholeheartedly to preserving my contentment and love for you...
beseeching me humbly in our bed, as I recall, that for the love of God I not

⁷⁶For an analysis of Margery and John's marriage, and the public perception of it, see Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 39-82. Hwanhee Park discusses Margery as an exemplary housewife within the holy family. 'Domestic Ideals and Devotional Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 40 (2014), 1-19.

⁷⁷ Morgan, p. 77. See also French, Smith and Stanbury, p. 67.

rebuke you harshly in front of either strangers or our household, but that I admonish you each night, or on a daily basis, in our bedroom...⁷⁸

Although the conversation is presented entirely from the husband's point of view, he reports his wife's words, presenting the bed as a space in which they can discuss everyday matters, including that of their marriage.⁷⁹ Moreover, in requesting that her husband wait until they are in their bedchamber before admonishing her, the wife understands it as an appropriate space for conversations to which the rest of the household should not be privy. As with Christ and Margery, the husband retains authority in the bedchamber, but this is mitigated by it also being a discursive space for the two of them. Margery uses this cultural understanding of the bedchamber as a space for marital intimacy to highlight the strength of her relationship with Christ and her own status arising from it. He, too, is in a position of authority in their relationship and in the bedchamber, but when they are there, it is a space in which she can speak openly to him. Her interactions with Christ are quotidian and filled with the small intimacies of marriage and it is this that makes them, and her, exceptional.

The intimacy that Margery shares with Christ is a physical one through which the bedchamber is presented as equivalent to the church, and Margery as equal to the priest. Christ authorises Margery's use of the bedchamber as a devotional space. In addition to giving her permission to stay in her chamber rather than visit the Stations of Rome, he cites the bedchamber as one of the spaces in which he is present and accessible to her: 'For whan thou gost to chyrch, I go wyth the; whan thou syttest at thi mete, I sytte wyth the; whan thou gost to thi bed, I go wyth the; and whan thou gost owt of towne, I go wyth the' (100). The same sentiment is repeated in relation to her crying: 'God wolde visiten hir, sumtyme in the cherch, sumtyme in the strete, sumtym in the chawmbre' (164-65). Through these lists, each

⁷⁸ *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris, A Medieval Household Book*, trans. by Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 37.

⁷⁹ Glenn Burger discusses the *Ménagier* as dialogic in structure, pp. 108-12. As noted in the introduction, Chaucer portrays a similar moment of everyday intimacy between Alisoun and John in their marital bedchamber in the *Miller's Tale*.

place is presented as equal to the other: the street and bedchamber are as privileged as the church due to Christ's presence within them all. Across the *Book*, however, the bedchamber is repeatedly privileged over other spaces, besides the church, through Christ's bodily presence and the access to it that Margery is granted.⁸⁰ Reminding her of her marital rights, he tells Margery that 'thu mayst boldly, whan thu art in thi bed, take me to the as for thi weddyd husbond... take me in the armys of thi sowle and kyssen my mowth, myn hed and my fete as swetly as thow wilt' (196). Christ leverages the language of the marital bedchamber to construct a physical relationship with Margery, underpinned by his own bodily reality within that space. By insisting on his own physical presence in the bedchamber, Christ recalls the language of the Eucharist, replacing the dictum 'hoc est corpus meum' with gestures to his own body. As the moment of consecration would not usually have been accessible to ordinary worshippers such as Margery, the access to Christ's body that she does have is in her bedchamber.⁸¹ Where only the priest would have been able to handle the consecrated host with his bare hands, Christ explicitly instructs Margery to touch him. Through his presence, Margery's bedchamber is presented as equivalent to the most privileged space in a church, but one in which she has equal, if not greater, authority than a priest.⁸²

The access that Margery is granted to Christ's body when in the bedchamber repositions her relationship to, and identification with, the Virgin Mary. While women were prohibited from both clerical orders and the space around the altar, medieval worshippers also saw the priest as bearing the body of Christ and so 'Mary – the vessel that bore God's body – was

⁸⁰ Of the 52 times that Margery directly encounters Christ, 20 are located in a church and 14 in the bedchamber.

⁸¹ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 56-60.

⁸² Sarah Beckwith maps contemporary controversies over access to Christ's body in *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 21-42.

priest'.⁸³ Through the access that she has to Christ's body, Margery is identified in turn with the Virgin Mary in a triangulation of associations between Margery, Mary and the figure of the priest. Margery takes on the double authority of the Virgin and the priest within the bedchamber. Moreover, her association with Mary also positions her as the mother of Christ, replacing her earlier vision of herself as the handmaid to his birth. Christ also posits a familial relationship with Margery, referring to her as 'dowtyr' throughout the text, including while also identifying her as his wife (e.g. 356). This nexus of relationships has at its centre Christ's body and Margery's relation to it, as analysed in detail by Beckwith, but the bedchamber provides the framework for articulating this nexus.⁸⁴ Throughout the text, Margery's bedchamber has been simultaneously her marital bedchamber and (and as a result of its status as such) her childbearing one, as well as the space in which she encounters Christ. The bedchamber provides a material touchpoint through which Margery understands marital and parental relations and so it is here that she can be all things to Christ at once.

The bedchamber and its components become, for Margery, a means of signifying her heightened spiritual authority and it is to this that I wish to turn in the last part of this thesis. As the space in which she has direct, unmediated access to Christ across multiple contexts, the bedchamber acts as a status symbol for Margery and is used by those whom she encounters to acknowledge her spiritual authority. In Italy, she meets a group of women who 'ordeyned a good soft bed and leyd hir therupon, and comforyd hir as mech as thei myht for owyr Lordys lofe' (178). The bed she is given here is another example of the 'honest bed' identified by French, Smith and Stanbury, and Morgan: a 'good soft bed' befits her

⁸³ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 278. P.H. Cullum also discusses the gendered aspects of access to the Host and to Christ and provides a useful overview of work on the topic in 'Feasting Not Fasting: Men's Devotion to the Eucharist in the Later Middle Ages', in *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 184-200.

⁸⁴ Beckwith, pp. 74-106.

social standing.⁸⁵ Unlike the bed that she is given at Beverley, however, this bed is not just an acknowledgement of Margery's wealth and class. Rather, it is given in response to her 'wepyn, sobbyn, and cryen so wondirfully and mythtyly that sche was nerhand ovyrcomyn'. The bed is a symbol of the status that Margery gains through her devotional behaviour. Moreover, it is given to her for precisely that behaviour for which she is normally renounced: 'sche noyith the pepil' (288). In their act of giving Margery a 'good soft bed', the women act as a corrective to the people who shun her on account of her crying, restoring her to the social status to which she was born.⁸⁶ As a secular symbol given in recognition of Margery's devotion, the bed proves her worth in both. The bed is, however, given 'for owyr Lordys lofe' and not just for Margery's sake. The women's care for Margery is as much an act of devotion as Margery's own tears and as such Margery is positioned as both an object of devotion, equivalent to the 'ymage in the chist' which they 'wold puttyn schirtys therupon and kyssen it' (177).⁸⁷ The dolls that the women care for as if they are the infant Christ were put to bed in cradles that were themselves devotional objects and were also made to look

⁸⁵ Morgan, p. 50. See also French, Smith and Stanbury pp. 61-62.

⁸⁶ Katherine J. Lewis notes that there was a preference for cults of lay saints around the Mediterranean, suggesting that it was necessary for Margery to leave King's Lynn, and England, for her devotional behaviours to be fully understood and appreciated for what they were. 'Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England' in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, pp. 195-215 (p. 206).

⁸⁷ For a discussion of the episode, see McAvoy, pp. 54-58. Kathy Lavezzo discusses it as an instance of homoeroticism between Margery and the women with Margery replacing Christ not only as the object of care but as the object of desire, suggesting that the bedchamber in which they put her to rest is also one associated with sex. 'Sobs and Sighs Between Women: The Homoerotics of Compassion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,' in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. by Louise O. Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 175-98.



like miniature churches.⁸⁸ In replacing Margery as the object of their care, the women put her to sleep in a bed that also stands in for the church. The act of care is transferred to Margery as a means for caring for Christ, while also equating Margery with Christ, as well as being an intercessor to him on their behalf. Placed in the bed, she is placed in the heart of the

church.

The very lack of bedding that Margery suffers from elsewhere on her travels signifies the depths of her devotion and the authority that she gains from it. Through the intersection between the materiality of the bedchamber and her devotional practices, Margery portrays the vulnerability of her decision to live a spiritual life and the exceptionalism of it. In contrast to her experience in Italy, at the start of her pilgrimage the bed is used as a symbol

⁸⁸ For instance, Crib of the Infant Jesus, South Netherlandish, fifteenth century, wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The use of the dolls and cribs as objects of devotion is discussed by Caroline Walker Bynum in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 198.

for Margery's social ostracism: her fellow travellers 'ordeyned hem beddyng for hemselfe, but nothyng for hir' (159), a situation that is compounded by the theft of the bedding that she does then manage to procure (160). Later in life, Margery's concern for bedding while travelling is repeated when she finds that she and her daughter-in-law 'getyn no beddyng but a lityl strawe' (403) while on the road to Wilsnack. This repeated anxiety over sleeping arrangements evokes the physical discomfort of pilgrimage, especially in later life.

Although the hardship of travel was part of the spiritual undertaking of pilgrimage, Margery seems keen to avoid this element of it.⁸⁹ Instead, her preoccupation with bedding marks her physical and social vulnerability as a woman on pilgrimage. Pilgrimage was, in part, a social construct: 'viewed by society, represented by that society, and interpreted by that society'.⁹⁰ Margery is judged, and shunned, by the society of fellow pilgrims around her. The deprivation of bedding marks her lack of status among them even as they, collectively, journey into a position liminal to the society from which they come. At Wilsnack, the lack of bedding demonstrates her vulnerability both to other travellers on the road and to society more broadly. The theft of her bedding also deepens the physical discomfort that Margery suffers while travelling in direct comparison to that experienced by her fellow pilgrims. The material deprivation and social ostracism that she suffers on the way to Jerusalem deepen the spirituality of her pilgrimage beyond that experienced by the other travellers.

The bedchamber forms the basis of the authority that Margery claims for herself among those who might doubt her. As a lay woman, it is a space in which it is appropriate for her to operate and she leverages this to convey her spiritual authority. The bed at Beverley that she is given might be an honest one, but the chamber is used to imprison Margery: her captors

⁸⁹ On the hardships of pilgrimage see, Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000), pp. xiv-xv. The lack of proper sleeping arrangements is the only part of travelling by which Margery reports having been fazed; the different cuisines to which she would have been exposed on her travels, for instance, merit no comment and language proves to be no barrier.

⁹⁰ Susan S. Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance* (London and New York: Routledge: 2000), p. 4.

shut her in ‘wyth the necessarys, lokkyng the dor wyth the key, and beryng away the key wyth hem’ (259-60). The enclosure that Margery experiences in this bedchamber is paradoxically liberating as it provides her with a space from within which she is able to speak publicly. Locked in the bedchamber ‘than stode sche lokyng owt at a wyndown, tellyng many good talys to hem that wolde heryn hir’ (260). Margery’s description of this episode foregrounds her importance as a speaker rather than the content of her speech. The subject of the ‘many good talys’ remains unknown and the people are listening to ‘hir’ rather than to them. Moreover, the response of the audience is concern for Margery rather than a response to the stories that she is telling: ‘Alas, woman, why schalt thu be brent?’. Margery’s defence against the charge of preaching as a woman while at York is based first and foremost on location.⁹¹ She asserts that ‘I come in no pulpytt’ (253). By making the question of preaching primarily a question of location, Margery opens up the suggestion that there are places from which she might speak publicly without it being classified as preaching. The bedchamber is protective: not only is she securely shut within it, but it signifies her containment, like that of Criseyde, within the private realm. At the same time, it is a devotional space from within which she speaks to those in public ‘that wolde heryn hir’. The bedchamber provides Margery with a space from which she might speak her ‘good talys’ to others on the basis of her own authority.

Conclusion

The bedchamber underpins Margery’s claim to spiritual authority. Through it, she draws on a range of devotional models that have gone before her, predominantly St Bridget and the

⁹¹ Karma Lochrie argues that Margery’s defence against the charge of preaching while a woman rests on the division between preaching and teaching. *Margery Kempe and the Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 97-134. See also Davis, ‘Men and Margery’, pp. 47-50.

Virgin Mary. She affirms her right to use the bedchamber as a devotional space, and not just for her lay devotions, but for those that would otherwise have taken place in a church.

Margery elides her bedchamber with a range of religious spaces, from the church to the anchorite's cell, through which she is able to access a wider range of devotional behaviours than would otherwise have been available to her. The women on whom Margery draws as models for using the bedchamber as a devotional space form a community around her, sanctioning her behaviour and experiences, in particular her visions. By drawing on these multiple models and, through them, engaging in a range of devotional behaviours, Margery positions herself as more devout and spiritual than any of the other women individually.

Margery does, however, consistently identify her bedchamber as a domestic space as well as a devotional one: specifically, it is her marital bedchamber. The domesticity of the space does not diminish its devotional capacity, nor that of Margery within it. Rather, Margery leverages the domestic associations of the bedchamber to form relationships with St Bridget, the Virgin and, ultimately, Christ and so strengthen her devotions. By retaining the secular roles that are associated with the bedchamber – especially that of wife – Margery establishes herself as the most intimate of all with Christ and his mother. The intimacy is physical as well as emotional and underpins Margery's spiritual authority. While others must go to church to encounter the body of Christ, mediated through the priest, Margery has hands-on experience on the divine in her own bedchamber.

Margery is aware of the bedchamber as a cultural artefact. While critics have debated the extent of her literacy, throughout her *Book* she engages with narratives involving the bedchamber.⁹² She could be included among the readers of the literature of the bedchamber evoked by Chaucer in his dream poems and discussed in the next chapter, and 'hir chawmbre wyth hir writer' (379) in which the *Book* is written as equivalent to one of their bedchamber

⁹² Jacqueline Jenkins provides an overview of this debate in 'Reading and *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kemp*, pp. 43-51.

studies. Moreover, Margery uses narratives involving the bedchamber to generate and revise her own. The parallels that she draws between her bedchamber and that of other holy women recast the space as holy, equivalent to that of the bedchamber-chapel in Rome or the Annunciation bedchamber. Through Mary, Margery revises her experiences of childbirth so that she, too, is enclosed and purified. With Jesus, she writes herself into the role of the perfect wife as a result of those very behaviours that caused such tension with John and such mockery from her neighbours. And as a result of the revised narratives that she creates through her relationships with Mary and Christ in the bedchamber, she positions herself as an object of devotion to the Italian women, correcting the charge that 'sche noyith the pepil' (288). Along with the 'cross-temporal' contact that Margery performs between herself and Bridget through the bedchamber-chapel, the bedchamber is a site of textual contact between Margery and the objects of her devotion.⁹³ Through it, Margery sanctifies her bedchamber and establishes it also as being an object of devotion, as well as a part of the devotional literature of the bedchamber.

As a point of textual and devotional contact between Margery and the women she worships and on whom she models herself, the bedchamber acts as a portal. Through it, she is able to insert herself into the Nativity and Christ is able to come to her. As a portal, the bedchamber is also inward facing; her recollections of her visionary experiences enable her audience to access Margery's inner world and how she encounters the divine through her devotional behaviours. In this respect, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is the religious correlate to Chaucer's dream poems, which form the subject of the next chapter. Both stem from a particular cultural moment in which individual devotional practices were becoming more codified and more common, and were located in the bedchamber. This included the practice of meditative reading as a way of encountering the divine by turning to inward contemplation. Chaucer's narrators are not explicitly interested in the divine, but they too

⁹³ Schneider, p.2.

experience their bedchambers as portals into visionary spaces and into themselves. For both Chaucer and Margery Kempe, the bedchamber is a point of access beyond itself.

Sweet Dreams (Are Made of Books): Bedchambers, Books, and Dreams

The bedchamber in Chaucer's dream poems is a space for reading and a space to be read. When the audience first meets them, each of Chaucer's dream poem narrators is a reader rather than a dreamer, and what they have been reading informs how the bedchamber should be read. The connection between reading and the legibility of the bedchamber is made explicit at the start of *The Book of the Duchess*, in which the narrator has taken to his bed to read as a way of managing his insomnia:

So whan I saw I might not slepe
Til now late this other night,
Upon my bed I sat upright
And bad oon reche me a book,
A romaunce, and he it me tok
To rede and drive the night away. (*BoD* 44-49)¹

In using the bedchamber and the book as a response to his illness, the narrator positions the bedchamber as an appropriate space for reading, and an appropriate space for reading romance.² Reading the romance also provides a way for him to access the bedchamber into which he wakes up within his dream, and which is constructed out of romance motifs. It is,

Ful wel depeynted, and with glas
Were al the wyndowes wel yglased
Ful clere, and nat an hoole ycrased,
That to beholde hyt was gret joye.
For hooly al the story of Troye
Was in the glasyng ywroght thus,
Of Ector and of kyng Priamus,
And eke of Medea and of Jason,
Of Paris, Eleyne, and of Lavyne.
And alle the walles with colours fyne
Were peynted, bothe text and glose
Of al the Romaunce of the Rose. (*BoD* 322-34)

¹ All references to Chaucer's dream poems in this chapter are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 'The Book of the Duchess' (ed. by Colin Wilcockson), 'The Parliament of Fowls' (ed. by Larry D. Benson), 'The House of Fame' (ed. by John M. Fyler), 'The Legend of Good Women' (ed. by M.C.E. Shaner), and 'The Romaunt of the Rose' (ed. by Larry D. Benson). Line numbers are given in brackets in the text above with the relevant text indicated.

² Joyce Coleman invokes the image of nobles retiring to their bedchambers to read romances, play at chess and relax, in a less melancholy version of the opening lines of *The Book of the Duchess*. 'Interactive Parchment: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Aurality', *The Yearbook of English Studies* 25 (1995), 63-79.

The walls and windows are texts, telling the stories of multiple different romances that both recall the one that the narrator was reading in his waking bedchamber and reconstruct his past reading choices. Reading both the book and the bedchamber is a point of continuity between the dream-chamber and the waking one, the dreamscape and waking reality. The explicit legibility of the dream-chamber suggests that its parallel in the waking world is a space that can be read too. The dream-chamber also creates a disjoint between the present of the narrator, the present of the narrator reading the texts in question, and the narrative presents of Homer, Ovid and the *Rose*.³ Like the Temple of Venus in *The House of Fame*, the dream-chamber is not constructed from texts *qua* texts. Despite the narrator's claim otherwise, the windows cannot truly depict 'hooly al the story' (*BoD* 326) of Troy or Medea; both the transfer into pictorial form and the subsequent understanding of those pictures as 'hooly al the story' require acts of reading. Through its textual decorations, the dream-chamber recreates the narrator's previous acts of reading and externalises them so that they can in turn be read by the audience and re-read by the narrator in his dream. The dream-chamber is both the narrator's memory and his understanding of those memories:⁴ it functions like his memory just as memory 'will function like the Dreamer's chamber'.⁵ The dream-chamber is constructed by the act of reading which, at the end of the poem, becomes that of the audience once the narrator has 'fonde to put this sweven in ryme' (*BoD* 1332). Within the private bedchambers of Chaucer's dream poems, reading is collaborative.

³ Mary Carruthers, 'Meditations on the "Historical Present" and "Collective Memory" in Chaucer and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', in *Time in the Medieval World*, ed. by Chris Humphrey and W.M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 137-56. See also Nancy Ciccone, 'The Chamber, the Man in Black and the Structure of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', *The Chaucer Review* 44 (2009), 205-23.

⁴ For a comprehensive overview of how the medieval memory worked, see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *The Craft of Thought*.

⁵ Corinne Saunders, 'Affective Reading: Chaucer, Women and Romance', *The Chaucer Review* 51 (2016), 11-30.

The role of the narrators as readers shapes their dreams and, subsequently, the dream poems, as do the texts that they consume. Alongside their counterpart in *The Book of the Duchess*, the narrator in *The Parliament of Fowls* has been reading, among other books, *The Dream of Scipio*, while in the 'Prologue' to *The Legend of Good Women*, the narrator is taking a break from the 'olde bokes' that are his 'devocioun' (*LoGW* 25-39). The narrator of *The House of Fame* is a reader too. He is, however, only shown reading once already inside his dream, as when he finds the *Aeneid* 'thus written on a table of bras' (*HoF* 142). The dreams provide a means for Chaucer to describe and externalise the process of reading, as does the bedchamber itself. By reading in the bedchamber, the narrators enter into a form of interiority that is a secular version of that accessed through meditative reading. One of the reasons that Margery Kempe found the bedchamber to be an appropriate space for her domestic devotions was that it was associated with meditative reading, and devotional treatises were more common than any other type of book during the period.⁶ Meditative reading provided a model of interiority that 'seeks to replace the outer world of the senses with an "inner world" of images and feelings that are "inner" largely because they are kept secret and directed exclusively towards God, not because they do not have a colourful fleshly and imaginative life of their own'.⁷ Chaucer's dream poems provide access to those 'colourful fleshly and imaginative' inner lives, and the inward turn of the narrators externalises the process of reading. By describing their dreams for the audience, the narrators also describe the mental steps taken in reading: consuming the text, remembering it, and interpreting it. Rather than being directed exclusively towards God, the literariness of the dreams imagines potential readers, analogues and sources. Critics have started to consider Chaucer's secular engagement with devotional models of reading. Corinne Saunders, for instance, considers Chaucer's engagement with the idea of affective reading as providing 'ways of interpreting

⁶ Bryan, pp. 2-3. Erler, however, notes that devotional texts were the most common to be bequeathed in wills, but that this does not necessarily mean that they were the most common type of text overall. *Women, Reading, and Piety*, p. 3.

⁷ Bryan, pp. 47-48.

the world outside the text, as well as opening on to imaginative worlds'.⁸ In the dream poems, those imaginative worlds are opened to Chaucer's audience, as are the worlds in the texts: the movement from the bedchamber into the dreamscape maps the interpretive process undertaken through meditative reading. Chaucer's narrators represent both the figure of the audience as reader and that of the author, reflecting in turn the audience and the poet himself.⁹ By presenting a secular version of meditative reading, Chaucer probes its limits and the anxiety over interpretation and the authority of the writer. If reading leads to the reproduction and reinterpretation of texts within the audience's mind, as is the case with the dream-chamber, then where does the line between author and reader stand in relation to the text?

This chapter is concerned with the relationship between reader, author and text that lies at the heart of meditative reading. Bryan contends that texts designed to be read meditatively 'ask readers to engage with questions about how and why we read and the relationship between author and reader'.¹⁰ In the dream poems, Chaucer presents reading as simultaneously an interpretive activity and a creative one. Reading is a necessary precursor to creation and both the dreams and dream poems are born out of the reading that Chaucer's narrators undertake in their bedchambers. The addition of the reading narrator to dream poems is a Chaucerian one: it does not appear in any of the source material for *The Book of the Duchess*, for instance, including *The Romance of the Rose*. By including this detail, Chaucer draws attention to the reading that preceded his own act of creation. The reading undertaken by the narrators necessarily follows Chaucer's own reading.¹¹ The interiority that

⁸ Saunders, 'Affective Reading', p. 17.

⁹ I do not mean to suggest here that the narrators of the dream poems are direct representations of Chaucer. Rather, by occupying the authorial role within the poems, the narrators reflect Chaucer in the same way that, as readers, they reflect the audience.

¹⁰ Bryan, p. 4.

¹¹ Carolyn Collette frames Chaucer's inclusion of books and reading within a French humanist context. *Rethinking Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (York: York Medieval Press, 2014), pp. 11-32.

meditative reading exposes includes both the reception of texts by the narrators and the use of them to create those 'colourful fleshly and imaginative' worlds that Bryan evokes and, ultimately, the poems themselves. In this chapter, I will argue that Chaucer uses the figure of the reading narrator to examine the relationship between the reader and author in respect to their authority over the text. By exposing the creative potential of reading and the necessity of reading to authorship, Chaucer de-centralises the authority of the writer, positioning the text as an ongoing collaborative production between author and reader through the interpretive readings undertaken by both.

Using *The Book of the Duchess* as its focal point due to the detailed description of reading in bed with which it starts, the first part of this chapter looks at the spatiality of the bedchamber and its relationship to reading, arguing that the bedchamber acts as a portal space for both the narrator and the audience. As a portal, the bedchamber shapes the dreamscape and how the audience is directed to read it, while also giving the reader (in the form of both the narrator and the audience) access to the interior processes that created it.¹² The dreamscapes are the interpreted texts which the narrators have remembered and then entered into through their dreams. The second part of this chapter is interested in the bedchamber and the texts that are read within them as meditative spaces and how they enable the narrator to look inward. The enclosure offered by the bedchamber renders meditative reading possible, but that enclosure is also transgressed by it through the creative and collaborative aspects of reading. Although each of the narrators is 'alone' in their bedchamber, they invoke the audience within that same space and so exceed the boundaries of it. They also put themselves in conversation with the authors that they have been reading, transgressing the boundaries of the bedchamber further still through that dialogue. By providing models for different types of reading, the narrators demonstrate how their dreams, and therefore also texts, might be interpreted, rendering them malleable and multiple. In the

¹² For clarity, I refer to the reader of Chaucer's texts as the 'audience' throughout as 'reader' refers both to them and to the narrator.

last part of this chapter, I will return to the relationship between the bedchamber, reading



and creativity, comparing *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Legend of Good Women* to Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Christine's narrative is visionary, but not a dream, highlighting the inwardness of both reading and creativity away from the dreamscape. Through her images of construction, the bedchamber is implicated in the creation of *The Book of the City of the Ladies*, and ultimately Chaucer's dream poems as well. Jamie C. Fumo calls attention to the 'compositional consciousness' of *The Book of the Duchess*: 'an attention to the construction of authorship and material textuality'.¹³ Throughout this chapter and through comparison to de Pizan's work, I seek to

relocate this 'compositional consciousness' back into the bedchamber and within the act of reading. The decision to pick up 'a romaunce' does not just predicate the creative act but is an integral part of it. These texts constitute the literature of the bedchamber in the sense that they are from the bedchamber as well as being concerned with, and shaped by, it.

The familiarity of the image of the private reader to a modern audience obscures the relative novelty of it within a medieval context. The private readers that Chaucer depicts in his dream poems stand in contrast to the practice of communal reading that remained more common

¹³ Jamie C. Fumo, *Making Chaucer's Book of the Duchess: Textuality and Reception* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2015), p. 80.

across different types of audience and for different types of texts.¹⁴ Joyce Coleman paints a picture of ‘monarchs, nobles, lawyers and theologians, from the mid-fourteenth century to the late fifteenth century, reading romances, lyrics, histories and other works – by having them read aloud’.¹⁵ Reading was a social activity, conducted in public or shared spaces, as depicted in both the *Troilus Frontispiece* (above) and *Troilus and Criseyde*, when Criseyde and her ladies listen to ‘a mayden reden hem the geste | Of the siege of Thebes, while hem leste’ (*T&C* 2.83-84).¹⁶ Private reading, and in particular meditative reading, was, however, becoming more common, due in part to the increasing prevalence of private bedchambers in noble and bourgeois houses.¹⁷ The link between private space, meditative reading and private reading is made explicit by Paul Saenger, who argues that private reading as a common practice initially developed in religious houses as a form of prayer: there was the assumption that monks would follow a written text as part of their own private devotional and meditative practices in their cells.¹⁸ Private reading was a precursor to prayer and a way of achieving it, and for the laity the bedchamber acted as a stand-in for the monastic cell, echoing the way in which Margery Kempe used her bedchamber in place of a variety of religious spaces, as discussed in the previous chapter. As private reading became more usual across different strata of society it also became more secular, and Andrew Taylor has described the different forms that this reading might take, while linking it inextricably to the bedchamber: ‘In these

¹⁴ Ad Putter uses the example of *The Book of the Duchess* to argue that communal reading was still the overwhelmingly common mode of reading: Chaucer’s narrator is the exception rather than the rule. ‘Middle English Romances and the Oral Tradition’, in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. by Karl Reichl (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 335-54.

¹⁵ Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public*, p. 109.

¹⁶ *Troilus Frontispiece*, Cambridge, Corpus Christ College, MS 61, fol. 1^v.

¹⁷ Erik Kwakkel’s work on the economics of the medieval book trade demonstrates how book ownership, like having a private bedchamber, became more accessible to those other than the nobility prior to the advent of the printing press, suggesting that similar economic forces connected books and bedchambers. ‘Commercial Organization and Economic Innovation’, in *The Production of Books in England 1350-1500*, ed. by Alexandra Gillespie and Daniel Wakelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 173-91.

¹⁸ Paul Saenger, *Space Between Words: the Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 202.

warm and well-lit chambers, one could read in bed, read and eat, read oneself to sleep, read and fantasize'.¹⁹ With the move into the bedchamber, solitary reading as a leisure activity



became possible and desirable. Taylor also notes that the type of reading that was most associated with the bedchamber, and the isolation that the space enabled, was meditative reading 'involving the ability to dwell in sustained reverie on a text'.²⁰ The bedchambers in each of the works discussed in this chapter have a double function as a

study: only the narrators of *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame* are pictured in his bed (the latter very briefly). As outlined in chapter one of this thesis, this dual use of the bedchamber was not uncommon and the illustrations of Christine de Pizan at her desk often include a bed in the same room (above).²¹ I am therefore reading the 'chambers' of Christine and *The Parliament of Fowls* as bedchambers alongside those of *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*. The use of the bedchamber as a study emphasises its status as a creative and productive space. Through his dream poems, and in particular *The Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer uses the conditions of the bedchamber that enable meditative reading to create a secular alternative. This is also evinced by Christine de Pizan: she records her own inward turn as she 'began to examine myself and my own behaviour' and 'dwelt on these thoughts at such length that it was as if I had sunk into a deep trance'.²² The narrators and

¹⁹ Taylor, 'Into His Secret Chamber', p. 43.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

²¹ *Le Livre des Fais d'Armes*, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 9009-11, fol. 118^r. For a discussion of Christine's bedchamber-study, see Susan Groag Bell, 'Christine de Pizan in her Study', *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes* (2008), < <https://journals.openedition.org/crm/3212> > [accessed 16/08/2019]. These bedchambers might be better imagined as the equivalent to an undergraduate's room in college rather than compared to the luxe accommodation of Gawain at Hautdesert.

²² Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. by Rosalind Brown-Grant (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 6. All further references are taken from this edition and given in text.

Christine seek solitude in the bedchamber to turn inwards in contemplation, but of themselves and their inner lives rather than explicitly of their relationship with God.²³

Portal Spaces

Chaucer's bedchambers turn themselves inside out. More so than any of the other bedchambers discussed in this thesis, they are initially presented by Chaucer as enclosed and private spaces. In the waking reality of the dream poems, the narrators do not leave their bedchambers, nor does anyone else enter, other than the attendant who brings the narrator his book in *The Book of the Duchess* (47-48). Christine de Pizan, too, evokes the totality of the enclosure of her bedchamber, 'a room whose doors and windows were all closed' (Christine, 8). As a result of this enclosure, the Chaucerian bedchamber functions as a portal through which the narrators are transported to different spaces within both their dreams and the texts that they read. The level of enclosure is such that the only point of entrance or egress is via the dreamscape. As a portal, the bedchamber is structured as a series of enclosures through which both the narrator and the audience are drawn ever inward from the bedchamber to the bed and finally the book or dream itself. The volume that the narrator reads from is small enough to be held in the hands and read in bed rather than requiring a lectern, as a result of which the enclosed space of a single page forms the focal point for both the narrator and the audience.²⁴ To access either the dreamscape or the text that is being read, the narrator is required to turn inward into himself. The bedchamber is a portal into the narrator's psyche where both the act of reading and the formation of the dream are located. The story of Ceyx and Alcyone is accessed through the book, but exists in the narrator's mind. The audience experiences it as a re-telling rather than as an existing text

²³ For a consideration of religion and Chaucer's dream poems see Stephen Knight, 'Classicizing Christianity in Chaucer's Dream Poems: *The Book of the Duchess*, *Book of Fame* and *Parliament of Fowls*', in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. by Helen Phillips (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), pp. 143-55.

²⁴ On reading in bed see Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), pp. 126-28. Morgan reads the book in *The Book of the Duchess* as forming a second, inner bed within the first, reinforcing the level of enclosure that both book and bed offer, pp. 127-30.

inserted into the poem. Moreover, the dreamscape allows an embodied experience of the narrator's inner-world. Each of Chaucer's dreamscapes is characterised by the narrator having to journey through them; they are material spaces with which the narrator interacts physically and the experience of them is an embodied one. This draws on the tradition of the *Romance of the Rose* but is a contrast to other dream poems, such as *Wynnere and Wastoure*, in which the dreamer is a static observer of the dream as it plays out in front of them.²⁵ Poems such as *Wynnere and Wastoure* belong to what A.C. Spearing identifies as the *Piers Plowman* tradition, as opposed to that of the *Romance of the Rose*, and is distinguished by including 'dreams that offer an insight into life in this world rather than information about the other one'.²⁶ Such poems therefore offer the narrator less of an impetus to explore, and the poet less of a need to describe the dreamscape. By imagining the portal as a physical one, Chaucer presents the bedchamber and dreamscape as distinct spaces. The totality of the enclosure of the bedchamber is mirrored by the totality of immersion in the narrator's psyche.

The act of reading is itself enclosing and part of the mechanism through which the bedchamber functions as a portal. Chaucer creates a pathology of reading to establish the isolation of his narrators. For the narrator in *The Book of the Duchess*, reading is therapeutic; a way for him to cope with, rather than cure, his insomnia. The force of the verb 'drive' in the narrator's expressed desire to 'drive the night away' (*BoD* 49) indicates both his desperation and the isolation of insomniacs everywhere. Instead of ameliorating his isolation, however, reading reinforces it: he is reading because he is awake and alone. Moreover, the narrator justifies his decision to read as 'me thoughte it better play | Then playe either at ches or tables' (*BoD* 50-51), choosing it over more social activities while also highlighting that he has no one with whom to play chess in the middle of the night. The

²⁵ 'Wynnere and Wastoure', in *Wynnere and Wastoure and the Parlement of the Thre Ages*, ed. by Warren Ginsburg (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), ll. 1-504.

²⁶ A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 130.

narrator's reading is a private activity rather than a sociable one. Although less melancholic, the narrator of *The Parliament of Fowls* is also isolated by his decision to read rather than to engage socially. He has no experience of love 'in dede' (*PoF* 8) but 'happeth me ful ofte in bokes reede | Of his myrakles and his crewel yre' (*PoF* 10-11). Implicit within the binary that Chaucer draws between reading and lived experience, and the narrator's enthusiasm for his books, is the suggestion that he has been actively avoiding leaving his bedchamber to find the love that he claims to want.²⁷ Reading is both the marker of his isolation and enclosure within the bedchamber, and the means through which he achieves them. Both narrators are interested in love but in neither case is there any hint that there is an object for their affections. The narrator of *The Parliament of Fowls* seems more interested in love as a concept than love for a particular someone. In *The Book of the Duchess*, the narrator shares many of Troilus's symptoms of lovesickness – the melancholia, the insomnia, the obsessive thought patterns.²⁸ As the narrator is without an object of affection, his experience of lovesickness is entirely private, confined to him alone: he is perhaps more closely aligned with Pandarus than Troilus. Even in love, the narrator is isolated in his bedchamber through his decision to read.

The isolating enclosure of reading in the bedchamber drives the externalisation of the narrators' inner worlds through which both they and the audience are able to access them. As an enclosed space, the bedchamber in *The Book of the Duchess* stands in for the narrator's interiority. To be in the bedchamber is to be in his inner world. In this, the bedchamber echoes other spaces used for meditative reading and Bryan suggests that 'if the anchoress's heart-as-house looked like an anchorhold, the layperson's might have looked

²⁷ David Aers, 'The *Parliament of Fowls*: Authority, the Knower and the Known', *The Chaucer Review* 16 (1981), 1-17; Larry M. Sklute, 'The Inconclusive Form of the *Parliament of Fowls*', *The Chaucer Review* 16 (1981), 119-28.

²⁸ Hill, pp. 35-50; Rebecca F. McNamara, 'Wearing Your Heart on Your Face: Reading Lovesickness and the Suicidal Impulse in Chaucer', *Literature and Medicine* 33 (2015), 258-78.

more like one of the private chambers or closets in aristocratic and bourgeois homes'.²⁹ The narrator's bedchamber functions as a more melancholic version of Margery Kempe's. Her bedchamber acts as an external marker of, and reproduces, her chastity. Just as Christ is present in her heart, so is he present in her chamber. For Chaucer's narrator, the bedchamber reflects both the isolating enclosure that he feels and the enclosure within reading and dreaming that he experiences through moving ever-inward into himself. The dreamscape, however, complicates the model of equivalences set out by Bryan. As an embodied space that also reflects, and literally is, the inner world of the narrator, it is much more open and dynamic than the quite austere bedchamber of the waking world. There is a schism between the bedchamber as outer reflection of the narrator and the inner world to which it provides access. Instead, the dream-chamber in which the narrator wakes up within his dream segues between the waking bedchamber and the dreamscape and is also a virtual version of a bedchamber reflecting the narrator's inner world. The double bedchamber provides access to different versions of interiority: both the melancholic and the creative.

As a mirror of the bedchamber in the waking world, the dream-chamber also acts as a portal, providing access both out into the wider world of the dreamscape and deeper into the inner world of the narrator. The double bedchamber combined with the detail of the narrator waking up within the dream is unusual both in Chaucer's work and the genre of dream poems more generally. In both *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The House of Fame*, the narrator enters an entirely different space to the bedchamber once in the dream and they are transported there fully awake. In *The House of Fame*, the narrator 'to slepe I lay | Ryght ther as I was wont to done' (*HoF* 112-13) but 'as I slepte, me mette I was | Withyn a temple ymad of glas' (*HoF* 119-20). The narrator is both aware that he is asleep in bed and that he is in a dream. The present tense of 'me mette' introduces a note of ambiguity that allows for the double location of the narrator, as well as reflecting the lived reality of dreams; it is not

²⁹ Bryan, p. 49.

uncommon to be aware of being in a dream during the dream itself. For the narrator in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the dream begins within the space of his bedchamber when Scipio ‘was come and stod right at my beddes syde’ (*PoF* 98) before the narrator is taken ‘unto a gate... | Ryght of a park walled with grene ston’ (*PoF* 121-22). Although the dream begins in a bedchamber, it is the same one in which the narrator has gone to sleep, and the transition to the park is abrupt. *The Romance of the Rose* provides a possible source for the second, in-dream bedchamber. Here, the narrator reports that he,

thought a-nyght in my sleping,
Right in my bed, ful redily,
That it was by the morowe erly,
And up I roos and gan me clothe. (*RoR* 92-95)

The *Rose*’s narrator spends no time in the dream-chamber and the detail about it lacks depth compared to the version in *The Book of the Duchess*. Equally, by describing it as ‘my bed’, the *Rose*’s narrator creates a sense of continuity between it and the bed in which ‘faste I slepte’ (*RoR* 25) in the opening of the poem. As in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the first part of the dream in *The Romance of the Rose* is located in the bedchamber of the waking world. Chaucer’s addition of the literary details to the dream-chamber in *The Book of the Duchess*, and in particular the reference to the *Rose* within it, establish it as an interior space: one constructed entirely of the narrator’s memories of, and interpretations of, the texts that he has read.³⁰ Through the inclusion of references to the source texts for *The Book of the Duchess*, the dream-chamber is a spatial representation of the poem itself.

As portals, the double bedchambers of *The Book of the Duchess* provide access to the dreamscape and shape the narrator’s and audience’s encounter with it. When the narrator wakes up into the dream-chamber, the audience enters the new space alongside him and, with it, the narrator’s perspective. As the narrator’s awareness of the dream-chamber around him grows, so too is the space formed for the audience. The enclosed space of the waking-

³⁰ With the additional layer that the narrator is, ultimately, in *The Book of the Duchess*, itself an interpretation of the *Rose*.

world bedchamber becomes the more porous dream-chamber, which in turn opens out into the expansive landscape of the dream and the texts that populate of it. The initial movement from the bedchamber to the dream-chamber is an inward one. The narrator accesses the latter by falling asleep in the former, an action that draws him into himself and his own subconscious: ‘such a lust anoon me took | To slepe that ryght upon my book | Y fil aslepe’ (*BoD* 273-75). In contrast, waking up in the dream-chamber, the narrator’s consciousness expands ever-outward. First, he ‘was waked | With smale foules a gret hep’ (*BoD* 294-95), then he locates these birds outside of the dream-chamber: ‘they sate among | Upon my chambre roof wythoute, | Upon the tyles, overal aboute’ (*BoD* 298-300). The narrator’s attention to the birdsong locates him within the dream-chamber and the dream-chamber in relation to the rest of the house, contrasting with the isolation of the bedchamber in the waking world. Additionally, the birdsong causes the narrator to cast his mind further afield as ‘so mery a soun, so swete entewnes, | That certes, for the toun of Tewnes | I nolde but had herd hem synge’ (*BoD* 309-11). Rather than being enclosed and isolated, the narrator in the dream-chamber is linked through a network of sound to Tunis. Through the paired bedchambers, Chaucer creates a portal that draws the narrator in before expanding out again, and through which the narrator’s own consciousness expands outwards into the dreamscape beyond, taking the audience along with him. Unlike the bedchamber in the waking world, the dream-chamber is neither enclosing nor isolating but opens outwards, linking to the outside world in a way that offers a constant fluctuation between the internal and the external. The dream-chamber is comparable to the bedchambers of Margery Kempe and Gawain; linking through enclosure is a feature of the bedchamber.

In *The Book of the Duchess*, the bedchamber-portal works in both directions: just as the narrator moves from the bedchamber to the dream-chamber and out into the world beyond, so too do the worlds in the texts that he reads move into the bedchamber, rendering it legible. Chaucer situates the bedchamber in a nexus of textual contact and references that operates across it, the book and the dream. The narrator draws a causal relationship between

falling asleep and the story of Ceyx and Alcyone: 'For I ne myghte, for bote ne bale, | Slepe or I had red thys tale' (*BoD* 227-28). Whether he reads himself to sleep or his prayer to Morpheus works, the story provides the cure for the narrator's insomnia: the text acts on his reality. Moreover, the first instance of the bedchamber acting as a portal is through the narrator's entrance into the story of Ceyx and Alcyone and, simultaneously, the entrance of that story into the bedchamber and Chaucer's text. When the narrator declares 'this was the tale' (*BoD* 62) he marks a point of departure from his own story, inserting into it, and replacing it with, that of Ceyx and Alcyone instead. He also inserts himself into the story by acting as the narrator for the romance and the ambiguity of this position is highlighted through the assurance 'that trewly I, that made this book, | Had such pittee and such rowthe | To rede hir sorwe' (*BoD* 96-98). Contained within the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, it is unclear whether the 'I' in these lines is the narrator of the romance in the book that Chaucer's narrator is reading and ventriloquizing through his recreation of the story, or if the 'I' is instead continuously Chaucer's narrator throughout the whole of *The Book of the Duchess* and these lines are a commentary on the story rather than part of it.³¹ The ambiguity of the speaking 'I' is also found in *The House of Fame*. The narrator starts his account of the *Aeneid* with an expanded version of the opening lines: 'I wol now synge, yif I kan, | The armes and also the man' (*HoF* 143-44). The first 'I' is authentic to the text 'thus writen on a table of bras' (*HoF* 142), while the second is the narrator's own inclusion and so asserts his own presence within the story.³² In both *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*, the ambiguous 'I' occupied by the narrator is part of the set of historic present techniques identified by Carruthers as 'attributed to various mimetic motives on the part of the storyteller, such as to imitate continuous action, or to bring an event 'before the eyes' and so into the 'now' of the actual reader'.³³ In the dream poems, however, the narrators are also the

³¹ The 'I, that made this book' also gestures towards Chaucer.

³² While the first 'I' is in the *Aeneid*, the line in the poem is also a translation of 'Arma virumque cano' and so requires some input on the part of the narrator.

³³ Carruthers, 'Meditations on the "Historical Present" and "Collective Memory"', p. 138.

initial readers and the ‘now’ into which the stories are being brought is that of the bedchamber or dreamscape, even as the narrators are simultaneously occupying the ‘I’ position within the stories of Ceyx and Alcyone or the *Aeneid* and the presents within them. Reading in the bedchamber, or in the more inward space of the dream, forms a portal through which the narrator accesses the present of the text, and the text accesses the present of the narrator. In the next section, I will examine how the narrator understands the dreamscape once he has accessed it.

Reading Dreams

Entering into their dreams, the narrators act as models for different modes of interpretation and, through them, Chaucer examines the connection between the text and how it is read. When the narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* falls asleep not only in his bed but ‘ryght upon my book’ (*BoD* 274), the codex becomes a portal as both the smallest level of enclosure within the bedchamber and a substitute for the bed itself. The dream and the text are explicitly positioned as analogues for one another. In *The Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator is interested in how reading in the bedchamber causes the space to function as a portal. He hypothesises,

Can I not seyn if that the cause were
 For I hadde red of Affrican byforn
 That made me to mete that he stod there:
 But thus seyde he: “Thow hast the so wel born
 In lokynge of myn olde bok totorn,
 Of which Macrobye roughete nat a lyte,
 That sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte. (*PoF* 106-12)

The narrator’s suggestion that the dream arises from his reading matter necessarily involves the bedchamber as a reading space in its function as a portal: it is the book and the dream that combine to form the access point. Africanus builds on this idea when he refers to the narrator’s ‘labour’ (*PoF* 112). In addition to the content of the book and its material form, as intimated by Ciccone, the narrator’s acts of reading and interpretation in the bedchamber

turn it into a portal.³⁴ By opening up the text with his 'labour', the narrator has also opened up the bedchamber. The idea of books and reading as portals into texts is evoked in the illumination on folio 14^v of *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy* (see fig. 2 below).³⁵ As with the dream-chamber in *The Book of the Duchess*, the window in the image reflects the nature of the book that is being read rather than illustrating a specific, known passage. Moreover, the book itself in the image is implied to be the portal: the shape of the window and the stained glass panels surrounding it evoke the illuminated page, connecting the two. At the same time, the portal is the chamber window, and Mary of Burgundy is depicted in the process of reading: she continues to look at the book in her hands rather than the portal that she conjures by doing so. Mary is reading a devotional text and so the image that the window shows her is a devotional one in the same way that Chaucer's narrator is reading a romance text and the dream-chamber is comprised of romance images. As a window, the image also demonstrates how Mary is reading: by looking into the text and contemplating the images that she finds there.³⁶ The inwardness of Mary's devotional reading is reflected in turn through her presence in the window scene, kneeling before the Virgin Mary as a sign of her piety.³⁷ The dream-chamber presents a secular variation of this to both the narrator and the audience. Confronted with the images of romance and classical texts on the walls, both are prompted to stop and contemplate those texts and, potentially, the relationship between them. The dream-chamber structure, meanwhile, places the narrator within an amalgamation of the same texts that he is contemplating. Chaucer's narrators both read texts and insert themselves into them. The Temple of Venus in *The House of Fame*, with its engravings of the *Aeneid*, places the narrator within a version of Virgil's text. Mary of

³⁴ Ciccone, pp. 207-08.

³⁵ *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, codex. 1857, fol. 14^v.

³⁶ Filled with symbols, the image itself can be used as an image for contemplation. See Jennifer Kolpakoff Deane, 'Pious Domesticities', in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, pp. 262-79 (pp. 274-75).

³⁷ Burger, pp. 10-16. A more animated parallel to Mary of Burgundy might also be found in Margery Kempe's immersive visions.

Burgundy and Chaucer's narrators act as models for the internal process of meditative reading across both devotional and secular texts that they are at once the audience for and participants within.



Fig 2: *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, codex 1857, fol. 14^v.

Chaucer uses the repeated motif of the narrator in their bedchamber and entering a dream to establish reading and dreaming as analogues for each other. Dreams, as well as books, are things to be read but which also invite multiple different interpretations. Much of the medieval anxiety over dreams and dream interpretation stemmed from the question over whether they had valence in the waking world and, if so, the extent to which they did.³⁸ The narrator of *The Parliament of Fowls* is interested in both dream interpretation and the effects of reading. He has been studiously examining ‘Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun’ (*PoF* 31) and wonders whether the result of this is the dream that follows: ‘can I not seyn if that the cause were | For I hadde red of Affrican byforn’ (*PoF* 106-07). As Piero Boitani points out, Chaucer was the first European writer to use the topos whereby ‘the book (literature) both causes the dream and exists within it... Chaucer consecrates it as the key and integrating element of the dream experience – one of the fundamental activities of the human psyche – and of the creative process itself’.³⁹ Chaucer repeatedly uses the topos as the foundation for his dream poems but, although there is a clear connection between the reading material and subsequent dream in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator’s uncertainty opens up both the dream and the *Somnium* to multiple readings. The causal relationship that the narrator posits is just one potential interpretation. The appearance of Africanus as the dream guide introduces further ambiguity: he can be read either as a product of the narrator’s reading or as a supernatural apparition.⁴⁰ The opening moments of the dream are therefore comprehensible according to two very different models of dream interpretation: as belonging to either the real world or to the supernatural. The narrator’s consideration of the type of dream that he is having and the reason for Africanus’s appearance suggests that he has been reading Macrobius along with Cicero. His

³⁸ Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 17-37.

³⁹ Piero Boitani, ‘Old Books Brought to Life in Dreams’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 58-77 (p. 60).

⁴⁰ Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 92.

understanding of both the dream and the text is part of a chain of interpretations, the end point of which is not the narrator himself, but the audience of *The Parliament of Fowls*. The narrator's dream, unlike Scipio's, does not fit neatly into the categories set out by Macrobius, either at the outset with the appearance of Africanus or as it progresses into the garden.⁴¹ Instead, it moves across methods of interpretation, while frequently intermingling them. Medieval dream theory focuses on the idea of the interpreter as being in a position of authority over both the dream and the dreamer.⁴² Their authority is, however, gained from their role as reader and the ability to interpret correctly the dream. The narrator's reading, and the chain of interpretation that it accrues, decentres that authority figure, whether Cicero, Macrobius or Africanus, by replacing them as reader. The narrator does not, though, become the authority figure in turn. Macrobius is transfigured from an authority – and author – into another reader of Cicero alongside the narrator, who in turn remains uncertain as to how to read his own dream in relation to the books that he has been studying. The interaction between the dreams and the books, through the positioning of them both as texts to be read governed by an authorial figure, subverts the certainty that the narrator has previously displayed towards his 'olde books' (*PoF* 24) and the knowledge that can be gained through reading them. Neither the author nor the reader is placed in a position of authority over the text or dream. Instead Chaucer posits a series of readers, each with their own interpretation, replacing and building on each other.

The dream as analogue for literature facilitates the meditative reading that the narrators model. The use of the topos of the book within the dream identified by Boitani enables the narrators to read themselves and their psyches through the books to which they each turn: the narrator's inner worlds are texts and can be read as such using the other texts as the 'key'. Even before he enters the dreamscape, the narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* reads

⁴¹ Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 87-92.

⁴² Kruger, pp. 23-29.

himself using the meditative model of sustained contemplation through which the self is positioned as an object for examination. The dream provides an additional distance for the narrator that creates the self as object. The narrator complains that he has ‘so many an ydel thocht’ (*BoD* 4) and that ‘suche fantasies ben in myn hede | So I not what is best to doo’ (*BoD* 28-29). He both describes his state of mind and comments on it: his thoughts are too many; his imaginings are of a particular paralysing quality. As with the image of Mary of Burgundy, he is in the text to be examined – in this case, his own psyche – and observing it. The narrator’s self-reflection is a product of his illness and of the bedchamber, and is paralleled by Hoccleve’s *Complaint*. Hoccleve begins:

Sighynge sore as I in my bed lay
For this and other thocht which many a day
Before I took sleep cam noon in myn ye,
So vexid me the thoghtful maladie.⁴³

Illness simultaneously estranges the sufferer from their own body and reduces them to it, and both Hoccleve and Chaucer’s narrator present a double perspective on their inner states, observing them from an objective viewpoint while experiencing them. For the narrator of *The Book of the Duchess*, the story of Ceyx and Alcyone provides an additional way of viewing and assessing his own mental state. Initially, his retelling of the story forms another layer of enclosure within the narrative as a story within a story. As discussed above, the narrator is ambiguously positioned both within and outside of the Ovidian narrative, and the boundaries of it are further transgressed by the same language of melancholy that the narrator uses to describe himself being applied to Alcyone. When she hears of her husband’s death, she has ‘such sorowe’ (*BoD* 95), and ‘for sorwe ful nygh wood she was’ (*BoD* 104). Swooning, Alcyone is also enclosed within her bedchamber when her ladies ‘broghten hir in bed’ (*BoD* 125). Within the dream, the same language is mirrored again by the Man in Black,

⁴³ Thomas Hoccleve, *Hoccleve’s Complaint and Dialogue*, ed. by J.A. Burrow, Early English Text Society OS 313 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ll. 18-21.

providing a way of reading across the three distinct sections of the poem.⁴⁴ The swooning and sorrowful Alcyone provides the narrator with a language in which to talk about and assess his own illness and melancholia, and to potentially recognise that of the Man in Black once inside the dream. His reading of the story is not just diverting entertainment, but the work of therapy.

The narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* is not consistently successful as a meditative reader. Both his own reading in the waking world and the record of his reading that forms the dream-chamber provide a key for how to parse the dreamscape, but it is ambiguous as to whether his immersion in it is adequate to fully understand its significance. On the one hand, he understands that the hunt that he encounters is ‘in good tyme’ (*BoD* 370) and considers the cause of the temperate weather: ‘For both Flora and Zephirus, | They two that make floures growe, | Had mad her dwellynge ther, I trow’ (*BoD* 402-04). On the other, his journey through the dreamscape is directed entirely by external factors and Anderson concludes that the narrator, like his companion in *The Parliament of Fowls*, does not appear ‘to derive any profit from his dream’, suggesting only a surface level engagement with it.⁴⁵ While following a puppy borrows from the *Rose*, it also underscores the narrator’s aimlessness: ‘And I hym folwed, and hyt forth wente | Doun by a floury grene wente | Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete’ (*BoD* 397-99). The narrator’s lack of comprehension as to the meaning of his dream famously culminates in his inability to recognise the grief of the Man in Black, asking instead ‘what ayleth hym to sitten her?’ (*BoD* 449). In all of Chaucer’s dream poems, the narrators are utterly confused as to what they see in their dreams: they are strangers in a strange land even though the dreams are also their inner selves. As texts, the dreams require interpretation by those who have them, guided by external authorities such

⁴⁴ Reid Hardaway, ‘A Fallen Language and the Consolation of Art in the *Book of the Duchess*’, *The Chaucer Review* 50 (2015), 159-77; Elizabeth Liendo, ‘In Hir Bed Al Naked’: Nakedness and Male Grief in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*’, *Philological Quarterly* 96 (2017), 405-24.

⁴⁵ J.J. Anderson, ‘The Narrators in *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parlement of Foules*’, *The Chaucer Review* 26 (1992), 219-35 (p. 234).

as Africanus. The creator, whether in the form of the dreamer or the writer, is not a single authority over the text. Saunders judges the encounter with the Man in Black to be the moment at which the narrator is most aligned with the audience: ‘The Dreamer stands in for the reader, feeling and seeing the affective power of a grief that is written on the body as the spirits withdraw’.⁴⁶ The audience, however, especially one that has been attentive to the melancholy of both the narrator himself and Alcyone, is better positioned to see the Man in Black’s grief for what it is, opening up a dramatic irony between the narrator and the audience. As a result, the audience replaces the narrator as the authoritative reader of his dream. As the dream progresses, the audience is encouraged into the role of the primary meditative reader of *The Book of the Duchess*, following in the footsteps of, and ultimately surpassing, the narrator.

Alongside its devotional uses, Bryan defines meditative reading as teaching readers how to ‘see themselves and to reflect on what they saw, initially as a habit of reading, and then as a habit of mind’.⁴⁷ Although, like the narrator in *The Book of the Duchess*, he is less adept at the practice than the devout individuals in whom Bryan is interested, the narrator in *The Parliament of Fowls* uses the books that he reads as a mirror in which to view his own image. Initially, he sees himself as seeking an objective meaning from the texts that he reads: along with the ‘sentence’ of the *Somnium Scipionis* that he tries to impart (*PoF* 35) he also ‘shal yow seyn the pleyn sentence’ (*PoF* 126) of the verse inscribed on the garden gates. In contrast to this desired textual certainty, he is full of doubt about himself. On the subject of love he ‘nat wot... wel wher that I flete or synke’ (*PoF* 7) and when he has finished his study for the day he ‘hadde thyng which that I nolde, | And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde’ (*PoF* 90-91). His understanding of his role in his dream is equally uncertain; when faced with the choice of whether to go into the garden or not he is unable to act: ‘No wite hadde I,

⁴⁶ Saunders, ‘Affective Reading’, p. 18.

⁴⁷ Bryan, p. 3.

for errour, for to chese | To entre or flen, or me to save or lese' (*PoF* 146-47). The *Somnium Scipionis*, however, instructs its reader to 'know thyself first immortal' (*PoF* 73). Self-knowledge is both the point of access for understanding the theory of the cosmos that the text sets out and the first step to doing so: to understand the self is to understand the universe. While both the Parliament and the text reach a sense of resolution, the narrator ends back where he starts: with a resolution to 'rede alwey' (*PoF* 696).⁴⁸ He is not able to come to a full understanding of himself through either the books that he reads or his dream over the course of *The Parliament of Fowls*, but his continued reading suggests a continued attempt to do so. For the narrators of *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess*, meditative reading, whether devotional or secular, is not a one-off attempt, but a continuous practice requiring work. By portraying both narrators as not always being successful at meditative reading, Chaucer demonstrates for his audience how that practice can be done and invites them to fill in the blanks left by his narrators. Even the intensely personal and private act of meditative reading can be a collaborative one.

Alongside meditative reading, the other modes of reading modelled by the narrators of *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess* initially appear to be very different: the former is studious while the latter reads for distraction and entertainment. Based on this difference, Anderson characterises the narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* as an active 'doer' in his engagement with the books he reads, and that of *The Parliament of Fowls* as a more passive 'thinker'.⁴⁹ In *The Parliament of Fowls*, however, the narrator refers to his reading in active terms. When recounting the *Somnium Scipionis*, he indicates that it is the meaning behind the text that he will be retelling, rather than its story: 'of his sentence I wol yow seyn the greete' (*PoF* 35). He establishes his account of the text as one that he has worked to achieve by reading into it. Understanding the 'sentence' is a process of excavation.

⁴⁸ Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁹ Anderson, pp. 219-35. Anderson also argues that, as a result of this difference in reading styles, the narrators cannot be seen as the same person.

Moreover, the ‘sentence’ of the *Somnium* can be used to uncover the ‘sentence’ of a further dream or text, rendering it a tool with which further interpretive work can be done. While this particular Ciceronian text does seem to be an odd choice for the narrator to be reading to learn about the ‘craft’ of love (*PoF* 1), the description of both love itself and the experience of it as a ‘craft’ suggests that it, too, is a practice.⁵⁰ The narrator’s understanding of love may only have come from reading about it, but it echoes knowledge gained through lived experience: love has his ‘felynge | Astonyeth with his wonderful werkynges’ (*PoF* 4-5). Troilus, for instance, ‘sodeynly... wax therwith astoned’ (*T&C* 1.274) when he is struck with love for Criseyde. Love has acted on the narrator through his reading about it. There is, though, a gap between the learned knowledge of the narrator and the reality of love which, in turn, limits the narrator’s understanding.⁵¹ The narrator’s lived experience is solely limited to the reading that he has been undertaking. It does not wholly substitute for being in love, but it is still a type of active experience comprising the narrator’s ‘busy hevynesse’ (*PoF* 89). In *The Parliament of Fowls*, reading is a type of work through which the narrator is a ‘doer’.

In contrast to his companion in *The Parliament of Fowls*, the narrator in *The Book of the Duchess* reads to diverge from his current lived experience of melancholic insomnia. His decision to read to ‘drive the night away’ (*BoD* 49) characterises reading as both a distraction and a therapy. At various points throughout the poem, he resists interpretive modes of reading, such as his famous blindness to what the Man in Black is actually saying.⁵² In claiming that his dream, too, cannot be interpreted, the narrator cites key medieval theories on dream interpretation:

Y trowe no man had the wyt
To konne wel my sweven rede;
No, not Joseph, withoute drede,

⁵⁰ On the decision to read Cicero, see Boitani, p. 68.

⁵¹ Anderson, pp. 224-30.

⁵² Fumo provides an overview of critical arguments about the narrator’s ignorance of the Man in Black’s grief, pp. 53-55.

Or Egipte, he that redde so
 The kynges metynge Pharao,
 No more than koude the lest of us;
 Ne nat skarsly Macrobeus
 (He that wrot al th'avysyoun
 That he mette, kyng Scipioun,
 The noble man, the Affrikan –
 Such marvayles fortunèd than),
 I trowe, arede of my dremes even. (*BoD* 278-89)

While this narrator is the 'doing' narrator of Anderson's analysis, he portrays himself as not engaging in the work of interpretive reading. His action is limited to using reading as a distracting leisure activity.⁵³ As the inverse of the narrator in *The Parliament of Fowls*, he also portrays such work as not having any value as it cannot explain his dream. By claiming that his dream cannot be interpreted, he invites his audience to attempt to do just that, instigating the ironic distance between himself and the audience that is furthered through the dream portion of the poem, discussed above.⁵⁴ Through this distance, the narrator becomes a text for the audience to attempt to read in a way that foreshadows the relationship of the Man in Black and the narrator. As with the narrator's encounter with the Man in Black, it also invites the audience to step into the role of reader within the poem. Two models of reading are therefore established across the text: the one interpretive and the other not, with the narrator aligning himself with the latter. By establishing these models, Chaucer invites his audience to consider the poem through the lens of both. The narrator's dismissal of different types of dream interpretation provides the audience with a library which they could use to attempt to interpret the dream and, ultimately, the poem.⁵⁵ Equally, the audience could follow the narrator and read both dream and poem for entertainment. The invitation for the audience to take on the interpretive work includes how that work should be done and the poem provides models for different versions of that. In turn, the different ways

⁵³ While all reading is to an extent interpretive, the narrator in *The Book of the Duchess* draws a distinction between reading undertaken for an interpretive, studious purpose and leisure reading. This distinction is also suggested by Christine de Pizan.

⁵⁴ Kathryn L. Lynch, *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (London and New York: Norton, 2007), p. 4.

⁵⁵ The idea of the dream poems as libraries is discussed by Boitani, pp. 58-77.

of reading generate different versions of *The Book of the Duchess*. In the next section, I will discuss further how reading is a collaborative act between the narrator and the audience through which the poem is produced.

Reading the Bedchamber

Chaucer positions his narrators as both readers and creators, private and social readers, through the relationship that he engenders between them and their audience. While the narrators are initially established as private readers in their bedchambers, they repeatedly address the audience, and in doing so they actively and consciously inhabit the role of the narrator of a text. In *The Book of the Duchess*, the narrator cuts short his recitation of the story of Ceyx and Alcyone:

But what she sayede more in that swow
I may not telle yow as now;
Hyt were to longe for to dwelle.
My first matere I wil yow telle,
Wherfore I have told this thyng
Of Alcione and Seys the kyng. (*BoD* 215-20)

The explicit first-person references to the narrator's role in the text echo those of the narrator in *Troilus and Criseyde*, such as when that narrator announces that 'For now wil I gon streght to my matere' (*T&C* 1.53). The narrators of the dream poems are both recounting first-hand experiences and consciously narrating a text. In *The Book of the Duchess*, the narrator's address to the audience positions him as the narrator of both his own story and that of Ceyx and Alcyone while his decision over when to move from one narrative to the other indicates a degree of creative control over both. He is not simply reciting the story as he finds it in the book but reframing and restructuring it into his own version. Similarly, in *The House of Fame*, the narrator departs from the inscribed version of the *Aeneid* to recount his own encounter with the text. He structures his accounts through the use of narratorial phrases such as 'First sawgh I' (*HoF* 151), 'And aftir this was grave' (*HoF* 157), and 'And next that sawgh I' (*HoF* 162). He is both telling his own version of the *Aeneid* and narrating his

experiences of Virgil's version as it is engraved in the Temple of Venus.⁵⁶ The ambiguous 'I' creates ambiguity around the narrator in relation to these narratives, as discussed above. It also positions the audience ambiguously in relation to the narrator. These addresses to the audience have been labelled by Joyce Coleman as 'contemporary and functional' in that they actively anticipate the presence of an aural audience rather than being just 'oral residue'.⁵⁷ Coleman is, however, looking at Chaucer's works as a whole, and the addresses to the audience in the dream poems are made from within the bedchamber (or already in the dream) with the narrator in the role of the private reader: the addresses to the audience are spoken by the narrators as readers. The addresses therefore blur the distinction between the audience and narrators even as they establish them. The speaking 'I' is at once the voice of Chaucer, the narrator, and the reader, and the authority from which the narrator speaks stems from his role as reader: he knows the text.⁵⁸ This elision suggests that the addresses to the audience are primarily neither oral residue nor anticipating an aural audience, but a way of providing a framework for the dream poems and how they should be read. The addresses to the audience mark the collaborative and creative work of reading, whether in private or in public. To be a narrator, and ultimately to be a poet, one first of all needs to be a reader.

Coming from within the enclosed space of the bedchamber, the addresses to the audience made by Chaucer's narrator transgress its boundaries. As a result, the narrators create the audience for their storytelling, implicating them within both their acts of narration and the texts that they narrate. The narrator of *The House of Fame* specifies that he is telling the story of his dream to 'yow echoon' (*HoF* 150), addressing each member of his audience

⁵⁶ The repetition of 'sawgh' also indicates that he is looking at least in part at a pictographic version of the story rather than Virgil's text, and so his narration is an act of translation from images to words and, possibly, from Latin to English.

⁵⁷ Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public*, pp. 149-69. See also Ruth Crosby, 'Chaucer and the Custom for Oral Delivery', *Speculum* 13 (1938), 413-32.

⁵⁸ William A. Quinn, 'Chaucer's Recital Presence in the *House of Fame* and the Embodiment of Authority', *The Chaucer Review* 43 (2008), 171-96.

individually. In *The Book of the Duchess*, the narrator uses his addresses to his audience to form his retelling of Ceyx and Alcyone. By reminding them ‘as I have told yow here-to-fore’ (*BoD* 189), the narrator includes his audience within the process of telling the story by making them reference a point within it. It is not only the narrator’s memory that is involved in the telling of the story, but that of the audience as well. The narrator is relying on the audience’s memory of what he has said before and that of any other version of the story that they know as the narrator’s version is formed partly through the contrast between it and all preceding versions. *The Book of the Duchess* is a palimpsest. By recalling a moment previous in his retelling, the narrator encloses himself and his audience within the structure of the story while asserting the authority of his version over any others. His version is its own reference point rather than any other, including the version in the book that he has been reading. At the end of his retelling, the narrator instructs the audience ‘hyt were to longe for to dwelle; | My first matere I wil yow telle’ (*BoD* 217-18), placing himself in a position of authority over the audience, the story and, ultimately, Ovid by making the decision to truncate the narrative of Ceyx and Alcyone and foreground his own. Including his justification for doing so implicates the audience in cutting the story short as they are implicitly asked to agree with the decision to do so. This specific version of Ceyx and Alcyone is produced not by a single author, but by the narrator and the audience, in relation to each other and the other versions of the story – and therefore the other authors of it – that they know.

The narrator forms his account of his own experiences by subverting the bedchamber boundaries through the inclusion of the audience. The point at which he breaks off his retelling of Ceyx and Alcyone generates the story of the dream: it is through reading about Morpheus that he comes to pray to the god and so fall asleep and dream. To tell the story of the dream he first has to tell the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. His initial act of reading to ‘drive the night away’ (49) creates a chain of narratives that overlap and issue forth from one another. The initial act of private reading in the bedchamber is generative of both the text

and its audience. Moreover, as with the retelling of Ceyx and Alcyone, the audience is also implicated in the creation of the narrative of the dream. The narrator bases the arc of his dream on addresses to the audience, but switches to use the first person plural pronoun in phrases such as ‘passe we over untill eft’ (*BoD* 41) rendering the process of structuring the narrative collaborative and inclusive. As with his version of Ceyx and Alcyone, formulations such as ‘ryght thus as I have told hyt thow’ (*BoD* 271) rely on the audience’s memory of the text as they are being told it. The audience is called on to do the same type of mental work, in the form of reading and remembering, that the narrator uses to construct his narrative. The narrator situates the audience within the bedchamber alongside him so that the enclosed and private space positively bulges. The work of producing the narrative is at once both collaborative and private, generated from within the bedchamber, the boundaries of which need to be constantly expanded to include the audience that it creates.

Through the inclusion of the audience in the act of storytelling, the narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* creates the conditions for multiple different narratives to proliferate from within the bedchamber. The creative work being done in the space is not just that of the narrative as it exists in *The Book of the Duchess*, but potential other versions of that narrative as well.

The invocation of the material form of the book before the narrator starts recounting the story of Ceyx and Alcyone reminds the audience of the previous versions of it: the tale exists as a whole in *The Book of the Duchess* prior to the narrator’s truncated version.⁵⁹ When the narrator breaks off his retelling, he acknowledges that there is still more of the story: ‘but what she sayede more in that swow | I may not telle yow as now’ (*BoD* 215-16). The juncture between the Ovidian narrative that he is re-telling and his own story includes the possibility of the continuation of the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone through the pre-existing versions.

Moreover, these potential continuations are dependent on whether the audience remembers

⁵⁹ On the relationship between ‘Ceyx and ‘Alcyone’ and *The Book of the Duchess* see G.L. Kittredge, ‘Guillaume de Machaut and the *Book of the Duchess*’, *PMLA* 30 (1915), 1-24; Ellen E. Martin, ‘The Interpretation of Chaucer’s Alcyone’, *The Chaucer Review* 18 (1983), 18-22.

the Ovidian version, that of Machaut, or another source altogether. The pleasure of recognition and shared knowledge helps to form the relationship between the narrator and the audience (and, potentially, among the audience); a relationship that is also formed through the shared role of reader that the narrator and the audience both occupy. The recognition and recollection of the various versions of the story cannot, however, exclude their differences, whether between Ovid and Machaut, Ovid and the narrator's version, or across all three.⁶⁰ These points of divergence enable the proliferation of further potential narratives; just as the narrator is telling the version that he remembers, so too will each member of his audience have their own version that they remember, now influenced by that in *The Book of the Duchess*.

Chaucer's focus on the narrator as a reader foregrounds reading as a creative activity and the bedchamber as a creative space. Both the dreams and the dream poems are created out of the literature that the narrators, and ultimately Chaucer, have been reading in their bedchambers.⁶¹ Interpretive work becomes creative work through the assembly of 'textual building blocks' to create the dreamscape.⁶² The bedchamber, too, is a space created through reading even as it is used as a space in which to read. In her analysis of *The Book of the Duchess*, Sarah Stanbury focuses on the textile materiality of the bedchamber to argue that 'the bedroom... is not just a point of departure from the dream-vision, but bricks and mortar that conjoin with language to build a story on English ground'.⁶³ The bedchamber textiles are one of Kiser's 'textual building blocks'. They connect to Chaucer's literary influences, their

⁶⁰ For the role of the classics in recognising textual parallels and differences, see Hester Lees-Jeffries, *Shakespeare and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 48-49.

⁶¹ Lisa Cooper provides a comprehensive discussion of memory as craft in 'Crafting Memory', in *Middle English Literature: Criticism and Debate*, ed. by Holly Crocker and D. Vance Smith (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 183-91, and of writing as a craft in *Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶² Lisa J. Kiser, 'Sleep, Dreams, and Poetry in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', *Papers on Language and Literature* 19 (1983), 3-12.

⁶³ Sarah Stanbury, 'The Place of the Bedchamber in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015), 133-61 (p. 136).

own places of origin, and the English court through John of Gaunt, situating *The Book of the Duchess* in the midst of this network of trade and association. Like Gawain in his luxuriously furnished bedchamber at Hautdesert, the narrator is connected to places far beyond the confines of his bedchamber through its textiles. However, Stanbury's exploration of the bedchamber in *The Book of the Duchess* overlooks the privacy and intimacy of that bedchamber. The objects and allusions that Chaucer borrows from other works are filtered specifically through the narrator's interpretation and memory of them, and it is this creative rather than curatorial work through which the poem, the bedchamber and the dreamscape are made. Moreover, as the bedchamber functions as a portal into the dreamscape, the narrator is present within the literary landscapes that he creates and so the audience witnesses them from his perspective as well, even once he moves beyond the enclosed space of the dream-chamber. In both *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls*, the pastoral landscapes of the dream are cultivated and bounded. In the former, the dreamscape is also presented as a series of enclosures as the narrator travels through it, from the open space of the 'feld withoute' (*BoD* 359) to the more enclosed one of the forest (*BoD* 363) until, 'ryght wonder faste | Doun the woode' (*BoD* 443-44) he comes across the Man in Black. In contrast to the expected wilderness of the forest, the narrator describes it in precise, mathematical terms:

And every tree stood by hymselfe
 Fro other wel ten foot or twelve –
 So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
 Or fourty or fifty fadme lengthe,
 Clene withoute bowgh or stikke,
 With croppes brode and eke as thikke... (*BoD* 419-24)

Through such precise descriptions of the forest, the narrator creates a sense of it as a contained and quantifiable space. The hunt that the narrator encounters prior to entering the forest also suggests that the landscape of the dream is a cultivated one.⁶⁴ Similarly, the garden in *The Parliament of Fowls* contains the dreamscape within an enclosed space and

⁶⁴ Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*, p. 157.

the comedy of that moment at which Africanus ‘me hente and shof in at the gates wide’ (*PoF* 154) reinforces the boundaries around it. The garden is not a wild space but one that obeys the precepts of Nature and the narrator’s previous readings: ‘And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kynde, | Devyseth Nature of aray and face, | In swich aray men myghte hire there fynde’ (*PoF* 316-18). Although such a reference demonstrates the narrator’s learning, Anderson is dismissive of it, noting that it is ‘a scholar’s shortcut’ through which the narrator ‘saves himself the trouble of providing a detailed description of nature’.⁶⁵ The invocation of Alanus de Insulis at this moment is one of the building blocks of the dreamscape described by Kiser and, through the narrator’s gloss, refers back to the reading that he has been undertaking in his chamber: Nature is ‘right as’ Alanus says. It is not only the contents of the books read in the bedchamber that shape the dreamscapes and dream poems, but the act of reading itself as a process within which the audience is implicated. First, they are implicated through their recognition of the ‘textual building blocks’ and second by understanding how they have been put together by the narrator. The extent to which the audience does either (re)forms and (re)interprets the poem based on their own prior reading in combination with their understanding of Chaucer’s work.

While Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* is not a dream poem, the visionary experience with which it opens foregrounds how reading becomes creative. She draws a clear line between her reading of Matheolus (Christine, 1) and the text that she goes on to write, which is also the text that her audience is reading. The autobiographical element of *The Book* is echoed in the ‘Prologue’ to *The Legend of Good Women*. More so than the other dream poems, the narrator here can be understood as an avatar for Chaucer; he is criticised as both the translator of *The Romance of the Rose* and the author of *Troilus and Criseyde* (*LoGW* 329-35).⁶⁶ As with both Christine and the narrators of the other dream poems, however, the

⁶⁵ Anderson, p. 227.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the identification of Chaucer with his narrators, see Michael Foster, *Chaucer’s Narrators and the Rhetoric of Self Representation* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

narrator presents himself as a reader rather than as an author. To start the process of writing *The Legend of Good Women* ‘my bokes gan I take’ (*LoGW* 578), drawing an explicit link between reading and writing. The former is the first step towards the latter. The spur for writing *The Legend* is not only the narrator’s act of reading: both the God of Love and Alceste, too, are critical readers.⁶⁷ Alceste reframes the narrator’s previous works as being in the service of Love:

Al be hit that he kan nat wel endite,
Yet hath he maked lewed folk delyte
To serve yow, in preysinge of your name.
He made the book that hight the Hous of Fame,
And eke the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse,
And the Parlement of Foules, as I gesse. (*LoGW* 414-19)

The inclusion of the phrase ‘I gesse’ emphasises that this assessment of Chaucer’s writing is Alceste’s interpretation of the body of texts. By including this discussion, Chaucer invites the audience of *The Legend* to be critical readers too, and to re-consider his writing as Alceste and the God of Love are doing and in light of the poem that they are reading. Moreover, the God of Love and Alceste diverge in their opinions as to whether Chaucer’s work is in the service of love, leaving the question of how to judge the previous poems open for the audience as well. Laura Getty considers the narrator not as a poet but as an historiographer, arguing that Chaucer leaves ‘open several possible definitions, rather than close off meanings, and that one lens through which his audience would read the short stories that follow would be the tradition of the English historiographers’.⁶⁸ While Christine writes her account of famous women as a corrective to those that have gone before, Chaucer implicitly invites his audience to create their own versions.⁶⁹ *The Legend of Good Women* is part of a

⁶⁷ On readers in *The Legend of Good Women* see Peter L. Allen, ‘Reading Chaucer’s Good Women’, *The Chaucer Review* 21 (1987), 419-34.

⁶⁸ Laura J. Getty, “‘Other Smale Ymaad Before’: Chaucer as Historiographer in *The Legend of Good Women*”, *The Chaucer Review* 42 (2007), 48-75 (p. 48).

⁶⁹ Isabel Davis discusses the relationship between Chaucer and Christine de Pizan within the *Good Women* tradition in ‘Introduction’, in *Chaucer and Fame*, pp. 1-19.

virtual chain of texts, each one generating further versions; a network of intertextuality that comes to include Christine de Pizan.⁷⁰

For Christine de Pizan, reading widely and for different purposes is central to her creative praxis. Her description of the physical toll of studying for long periods of time emphasises the status of mental labour as labour, as well as the need to read widely.⁷¹ She begins:

One day, I was sitting in my study surrounded by many books of different kinds, for it has long been my habit to engage in the pursuit of knowledge. My mind had grown weary as I had spent the day struggling with the weighty tomes of various authors whom I had been studying for some time. I looked up from my book and decided that, for once, I would put aside these difficult texts and find instead something amusing and easy to read from the works of the poets. (Christine, 5)

In her description of deciding what to read, Christine positions the start of the interpretive process, and therefore also the creative one, prior to the moment at which she actually opens a book: she is already categorising her codices into those for study and those for leisure. Alone in her study, Christine differs from Chaucer's narrators through her conscious awareness of other readers and her position within a literary network.⁷² Her rationale for choosing Matheolus to read is that it 'was said to be written in praise of women' but she finds it more suitable for 'those who enjoy reading works of slander' (Christine, 5). The

⁷⁰ For a discussion of the intersections and intertextuality between Chaucer's work and Christine's, see Theresa Coletti, 'Paths of Long Study: Reading Chaucer and Christine de Pizan in Tandem', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006), 1-40; Collette, pp. 68-76; L.A. Finke, 'The Politics of the Canon: Christine de Pizan and the Fifteenth-Century Chaucerians', *Exemplaria* 19 (2007), 16-38.

⁷¹ Deborah McGrady, 'Reading for Authority: Portraits of Christine de Pizan and her Readers', in *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Stephen Partridge and Erik Kwakkel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 154-77.

⁷² As a woman, Christine is at once outside of that network even as she participates within it. See, Mary Ann C. Case, 'Christine de Pizan and the Authority of Experience', in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. by Marilyn Desmond, *Medieval Cultures* Vol. 14 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 71-88.

interpretation of literary criticism is a crucial part of her creative process.⁷³ While critical of others, Christine also depicts herself as misreading. Recalling all of the misogynistic texts that she has read previously, she laments to God, ‘unless I commit an error of faith, I cannot doubt that you, in your infinite wisdom and perfect goodness, could make anything that wasn’t good’ (Christine, 7). She highlights the gap between her interpretive framework for the world, as well as her own lived experience, and her interpretation of Matheolus’s *Lamentations*. In producing her text, she is actively doing what the audience has to do with Chaucer’s dream poems. One of the reasons that Christine is given for undertaking the project of writing *The Book of the City of Ladies* is ‘to prevent others from falling into the same error as you’ (Christine, 11). Unlike the narrator in *The Parliament of Fowls* who, despite his commitment to ‘rede alwey’ (*PoF* 696), seems to be stuck in his habit of looking to learn about love in a hopeless place, Christine allows herself to learn from her misreading. She portrays creativity as a constant process of (re)interpretation and revision; one of the ladies who appears to her reminds her that the misogynistic writers against whom she is railing ‘are all constantly correcting each other’s opinions’ and that ‘it is in the furnace that gold is refined, increasing in value the more that it is beaten and fashioned into different shapes’ (Christine, 8). For Christine, creativity is not just a process of interpretation from author to reader, but also a continuous exercise undertaken by the author as reader themselves.

The image of constructing a city that undergirds *The Book of the City of Ladies* renders visible and physical the labour that constitutes creative and interpretive work. The illuminations for the text emphasise the nature of this work by depicting a building site alongside Christine’s study. In the double image below, she is armed with both book and

⁷³ Christine’s inclusion of other readers also allows her to position herself as unique - she alone is speaking contrary to these opinions on women – and so underpins the political aspect of her writing. Equally, a more collegiate approach can also be found in the body of her writing. Unlike in Boccaccio’s *De Claribus Mulieribus*, Christine mixes pagan and Christian women, contemporary and ancient. See Sandra L. Hindman, ‘With Ink and Mortar: Christine de Pizan’s *Cité des Dames*’, *Feminist Studies* 10 (1984), 457-83 (pp. 470-73).

trowel to undertake the work.⁷⁴



By instructing Christine to ‘construct a building in the shape of a walled city, sturdy and impregnable’ (Christine, 11), the ladies who appear to her present an image of the completed work while also acknowledging the work and time that will go into achieving it: ‘In order to lay the foundations, you shall draw fresh water from us three as from a clear spring. We will bring you building materials which will be stronger and more durable than solid, uncemented marble’ (Christine, 12). The ‘textual building blocks’ of Christine’s reading are transformed into literal building blocks of marble. As the work progresses, each individual story of a virtuous woman is a new element adding to both the city that Christine is building and *The Book of the City* that she is writing. The narrator in *The Book of the Duchess* makes a similar statement of intent to write: ‘I wol, be processe of tyme, | Fonde to put this sweven in ryme | As I kan best, and that anoon’ (*BoD* 1331-33). Christine relocates this statement to the start of her work rather than the end: she is simultaneously author and

⁷⁴ London, British Library, MS Harley 4431, fol. 290^r. For a discussion of the set of illuminations, see Hindman, pp. 457-83.

reader, whereas Chaucer's narrator is a reader first and an author retroactively.⁷⁵ He only fully inhabits the role of author right at the end of the text, and even then his declaration to write is put into a distanced future 'be processe of tyme' (*BoD* 1331). As a result, the audience is consistently aware of *The Book of the City of Ladies* as a piece of creative work; in reading it they recreate the process of writing it. The internal processes through which the dreamscape or visionary world are constructed are rendered external and explicit, as are the connections to the bedchamber. The ladies use the aesthetic of enclosure to explain that the city that Christine is to build is in response to the fact that 'the female sex has been left defenceless for a long time now, like an orchard without a wall' (Christine, 11). In contrast, the city is to be 'impregnable' (Christine, 11). Through the creation of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, the enclosure of both the bedchamber and the city is rebuilt around the women that are to be its subject, Christine herself, and her audience.

Conclusion

Chaucer's dream poems are reading poems. Before they are dreamers, his narrators are readers and the dreamscapes that they go on to inhabit are constructed out of their reading. The dreams are legible and ask interpretation of both the narrator and the audience. By making reading and dreaming analogous for one another, Chaucer uses his narrators to model different modes of reading and interpretation, including meditative reading. In doing so, he decentres the author as the authority within the text, replacing him with the reader who in turn becomes the authority to be decentred by further acts of reading. This anxiety over authorial authority is made explicit in *The House of Fame*: the names on the sunny side of the mountain pre-figure Roland Barthes' statement that the author is dead by almost five hundred and seventy years. Even among those writers who are not forgotten, however, their

⁷⁵ Marilynn Desmond reads all of Christine's authorial statements as a way of asserting her authority as a female author. 'Christine de Pizan: Gender, Authorship and Life-Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 123-36.

authority is not absolute. Observing the parade of writers within the House of Fame itself, the narrator comments,

What schulde y more telle of this?
 The halle was al ful, ywys,
 Of hem that writen olde gestes
 As ben on treës rokes nestes;
 But hit a ful confus matere
 Were ale the gestes for to here
 That they of write, or how they highte. (*HoF* 1513-19)

The address to audience with which the narrator starts shapes the narrative of the dream and the perception of the writers in question. Each author's fame has not prevented their combined works from being muddled together, as they are in Chaucer's own work. Like the dream-chamber in *The Book of the Duchess*, it is the combination of texts that the narrator has previously read and the way in which the narrator structures the narrative that creates both the dream and the text of *The House of Fame*. It is through these acts of reading that decentre the authority of the writer that reading is, in turn, positioned as a creative act. The dream poem form allows Chaucer to demonstrate this literally, building landscapes and structures out of texts. Christine de Pizan too makes the metaphor literal, imagining an actual city being built. The reader does not, however, merely replace the author. Rather, Chaucer suggests that reading and writing are in a constant dialogue with each other, with each act of interpretation creating a text that gives way to the next. In this way, the dream poems look out beyond the boundaries of their bedchambers to their own audiences, imagining them as readers in their bedchambers too, who in turn will create new texts to be read.

The dream poems end by returning the narrator to his bedchamber and to his books.⁷⁶ The structure of each poem thereby takes on a similar enclosing circularity as discussed regarding *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in chapter two of this thesis. The dream poems are, if anything, even more enclosing as the narrators are returned to the enclosed space of

⁷⁶ Other than the unfinished *The House of Fame*.

the bedchamber, rather than Camelot, and, in the waking world, have not actually travelled anywhere. The narrator of the 'Prologue' to *The Legend of Good Women* makes it the furthest, but only into his garden. For the narrators of *The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls*, the enclosure of the bedchamber and the text is reinforced by the fact that they are returned to the same state and moment in which they were prior to their dreams. The narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* wakes to

fond me lyinge in my bed;
And the book that I hadde red,
Of Alcione and Seys the kyng,
And of the goddes of slepyng,
I fond hyt in myn hond even. (*BoD* 1325-29)

Returning to the book and the bedchamber, however, positions both as catalysts for his subsequent decision to 'put this sweven in ryme' (*BoD* 1332). *The Book of the Duchess* is a product of both. This is echoed in *The Legend of Good Women*, the body of which begins in terms of both its creation and as the audience experiences it at the moment the narrator 'my bokes gan I take, | And right thus on my Legende gan I make' (*LoGW* 578-79). The narrator of *The Parliament of Fowls* is even more enclosed, returned as he is to the same cycle of fruitless reading with which the poem opens: 'I wok, and othere bokes tok me to, | To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey' (*PoF* 695-96). The poem does, though, end on a forward-looking note with the narrators 'hope, ywis, to rede so som day | That I shal mete som thing for to fare | The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare' (*PoF* 697-99). While not leading to the creation of a text, the end of *The Parliament of Fowls* makes a case for reading as generative. Across each of Chaucer's dream poems, the enclosure of the bedchamber is the means through which it is rendered a productive space.

Conclusion: “A Chamber with a Bed”

What happens to the bedchamber when it is put on stage? As this thesis has aimed to demonstrate, the literature of the bedchamber is cross-genre in nature. Although the bedchamber is used as a performance space in several of the texts under discussion I have, however, so far not addressed drama. The stage necessarily renders the bedchamber exposed to public view, placing the audience inside of it in a much more literal and physical way than imagined by *Troilus* or Chaucer’s dream poems. Theatre complicates the enclosure and privacy of the bedchamber. What is an enclosed space on the page becomes an open one on the stage. Evaluating the position of drama within the literature of the bedchamber therefore provides a way of assessing its boundaries. To do so, this chapter starts by comparing Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* with both Chaucer’s version and ‘The Dream of Pilate’s Wife’ from *The York Mystery Plays*, which is a rare example of the bedchamber on the medieval stage. By turning to Shakespeare, I am also aiming to consider the ‘medieval’ part of this thesis’s title. The private bedchamber might have been a ‘new technology of space’ when Chaucer was writing, but it is not an exclusively medieval one.¹ *Jane Eyre* could well be considered as an example of the literature of the bedchamber; so too might much commercial women’s fiction. By reading *Troilus and Cressida* alongside the medieval texts, I hope to offer some suggestions as to why the literature of the bedchamber is a medieval phenomenon.

The literature of the bedchamber is interested in the private bedchamber. In each of the case studies that makes up this thesis, privacy is a central part of how the bedchamber is used in the text in question. Privacy allows Troilus to perform lovesickness; Lady Bertilak to seduce Gawain; Margery Kempe to attend to her devotions; and Chaucer’s narrators to read and to dream. Private space is both a privilege and contested. Moreover, the literature of the

¹ Strohm, ‘The Space of Desire in Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s Troy’, p. 51.

bedchamber is interested in how privacy is produced in relation to the bedchamber. First, the bedchamber is the space within which and through which privacy is performed, as I have examined in relation to *Troilus and Criseyde*. Second, privacy is a product of the materiality of the bedchamber and the enclosure that it forms. Enclosure has been a repeated motif throughout this thesis, from Criseyde's closet, to the multiple shifting layers of textiles around Gawain, to the evocation of an anchorite's cell by Margery Kempe. Third, the bedchamber is positioned as private in relation to both the public realm and other domestic and household spaces: John the Carpenter's house, the many spaces of Troy, the court at Hautdesert. Privacy is not absolute, but mediated through the individuals who seek it and their interactions with those around them, other spaces, and the boundaries of the bedchamber. In *Troilus and Criseyde* the limits of the bedchamber and the privacy that they produce are formed through the repeated transgression of them by Pandarus. Like their Chaucerian counterparts, Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida seek privacy in the bedchamber. In their versions of *Troilus and Criseyde/ Cressida*, both Chaucer and Shakespeare model Troy on London and the domestic spaces common to the city. Privacy is at a premium in both iterations of Troy, as it was in medieval and early modern London.² Helen Cooper cites Shakespeare's understanding of space in her pronouncement that: 'The world in which Shakespeare lived was a medieval one... England's topography, infrastructure and rhythms of life were essentially medieval'.³ Given this continuity of space and the experience of it, audience members familiar with other versions of the Troy story, including Chaucer's, may therefore have been surprised that Shakespeare does not use the bedchamber

² Strohm outlines the broad parallels between Chaucer's and Shakespeare's experiences of London, noting that although the city was much smaller in the medieval period than in the early modern one due to the impact of plague on the population, both writers experienced it as a growing city with most of its population living in crowded conditions. 'The Space of Desire in Chaucer's and Shakespeare's Troy', pp.46-48. For a broader assessment of medieval and early modern urban centres, see Karen Newman, 'The Medieval and Early Modern City in Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, ed. by Kevin R. McNamara (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 42-56. Early modern privacy and the household is discussed at length by Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³ Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), p.1.

as a setting in *Troilus and Cressida*.⁴ To the extent that it does not appear on the stage, Shakespeare's representation of the bedchamber is as a totally private space from the audience's perspective.

Pandarus seeks to assure Troilus and Cressida of the privacy that they will have in the bedchamber. Arranging for them to spend the night together, he declares, 'I will show you to a chamber | with a bed; which bed, because it shall not speak of | your pretty encounters, press it to death'.⁵ In a play concerned with reputation and gossip, and set in the claustrophobic environs of Troy, a bed that can be silent is a good thing.⁶ It also suggests that the early modern bedchamber does not signify in quite the same way as its medieval counterpart. In the literature of the bedchamber, the bedchamber is a cultural artefact that is rife with association, from Troilus's sickbed to Margery's marital bedchamber. Pandarus's instruction is, however, ambiguous due to the placement of the 'because'. On the one hand, Pandarus is recommending the bed to them because, if they do press it to death, the bed will not speak and both it and their affair will remain private. On the other, the 'because' renders the lines permissive and conditional: the bed is a suitable location for Troilus and Cressida to consummate their affair because it is a non-speaking one, regardless of their actions towards

⁴ Sasha Roberts notes that, although there are over 350 references to beds across the corpus, only six Shakespearian plays that actually call for a bed to be used as a stage property: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry IV Part II*, *Henry VI Part II*, *Cymbeline*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. "Let Me the Curtains Draw": The Dramatic and Symbolic Properties of the Bed in Shakespearian Tragedy, in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 153-74 (pp. 161-62). Hester Lees-Jeffries considers components of the story of *Troilus and Criseyde/Cressida* that are not included in Shakespeare's version. 'What's Hecuba to Him? Absence, Silence and Lament in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *Troilus and Cressida*', in *Love, History and Emotion in Chaucer and Shakespeare*, pp. 61-75 (p. 64).

⁵ William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. by David Bevington (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1998), 3.2.202-04.

⁶ Much has been written about reputation and gossip in *Troilus and Cressida*. See, for example, R.A. Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); William M. Hamlin, *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare's England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 167-83; Frank Kermode, 'Opinion in *Troilus and Cressida*', *Critical Quarterly* 54 (2012), 88-102; Strohm, 'The Space of Desire in Chaucer's and Shakespeare's Troy', pp. 46-60.

it. The gap in how the bed functions that this ambiguity opens up implies that Pandarus, like his Chaucerian counterpart, may be presenting the bedchamber as something that it is not. Elsewhere in the play, beds speak all too volubly for those who occupy them.⁷ Ulysses describes Achilles as lying ‘upon a lazy bed’ (1.3.147) with Patroclus while refusing to fight. He also foreshadows Pandarus’s notion of an unspeaking bed by adding that the Greek hero is ‘on his pressed bed lolling’ (1.3.162). Achilles’ characteristics – his laziness, his oppressive self-importance – are transferred to the bed on which he lays and which becomes a signifier for them. The bed, although contained in the private space of the tent and not present on stage, is a monument within the Greek camp to Achilles’ reputation as a warrior who is refusing to fight. As a signifier, the bed makes visible to those outside of the tent, including both Ulysses and the audience, what has been happening in the private space within, without itself being visible. By not representing the bedchamber on stage, Shakespeare foregrounds the way in which it works as a signifier, rendering the status of the bedchamber even more complex. As it does to refer to any real space on the stage, the bedchamber exists in the play only in how it signifies publicly, both within the world of the play and to the audience. The absent bedchamber in drama is at once too public and too private.

On the medieval stage, the bedchamber is positioned as being a private and intimate space even as it is exposed to the audience. In ‘The Dream of Pilate’s Wife’, the intimacy of the private bedchamber is evoked through Pilate and Procula going about their nightly routines:

PILATE: Yea, I have wet me with wine.
 Yet hield down and lap me even here,
 For I will slyly sleep until syne.
 Look that no man nor no myron of mine

⁷ Roberts argues that stage beds were likely to give the appearance of beds of state and therefore would have been highly ornate, decorated with heraldic and other symbols that were meant to signify and to be read, at least by those audience members who were close enough to do so, pp. 154-59. Leslie Thomson, however, suggests that, given the need to maintain sight-lines, it is possible that most stage property beds were simpler affairs without curtains or other adornments. ‘Beds on the Early Modern Stage’, *Early Theatre* 19 (2016), 32-58. For staging Shakespeare’s plays, the types of bed required is likely to have been a mix between more ornate and simpler frames. *Othello* clearly calls for a bed with curtains, while *Romeo and Juliet* could be staged using a bed without them. The 2018 RSC production, for instance, staged the bed using a bare mattress on a concrete cube.

With no noise be nighing me near.⁸

The presence of the Beadle, the boy and Procula's maid underscores the domestic intimacy of the scene while also reminding the audience that the privacy of the bedchamber was likely to include individuals such as these. In the bedchamber, privacy is not absolute whether on the stage or not. The play borrows from the tradition of visionary or dream literature. Like Margery Kempe, Procula is assailed by demons in her bedchamber, although unlike Margery she believes that she is 'dretched with a dream full dreadfully to doubt' (176) rather than bodily visited by the denizens of hell. As a piece of theatre, 'The Dream of Pilate's Wife' makes visible and public the inner world of the dreamer: the devil is on stage, occupying the same space as Procula and, implicitly, the audience. As the play was performed by the Tapiters and Couchers, part of the point of it was to publicise the bedding. The audience is invited to imagine their bedchamber as Procula's. By inviting the audience into the staged bedchamber, the play elides that space with the bedchambers of those watching. Performed in the restricted space of a pageant wagon, the bedchamber would have been simultaneously enclosed and exposed to the outside world, even more so than on the thrust stage of Shakespeare's Globe.⁹ While dream and visionary literature recount psychic experiences to their audiences, they retain a sense of being inner, as discussed in relation to both Margery Kempe and Chaucer's dream poems above, and this inwardness is in part a function of the bedchamber and its enclosing, bounded nature. Drama turns the bedchamber inside out: both it and the inner-worlds of those who inhabit it are exposed in public.

While the stage complicates the enclosure and privacy that characterises the literature of the bedchamber, the fact that the bedchamber in 'The Dream of Pilate's Wife' is a productive one

⁸ 'Christ Before Pilate (1): The Dream of Pilate's Wife', in *The York Mystery Plays: a Selection in Modern Spelling*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Pamela King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 154-74, ll.135-39. All further references are taken from this edition and given in text.

⁹ For a discussion of the dimensions of pageant wagons, see Richard Beadle, 'The York Corpus Christi Play', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 99-124; John McKinnell, 'The Medieval Pageant Wagon at York: Their Orientation and Height', *Early Theatre* 3 (2000), 79-104.

places it within the body of texts belonging to it. Through the elision of the performance space with that of the audience, it also suggests the possibility of such dreams to the audience. The bedchambers of the literature of the bedchamber are ones in which things come into being that did not previously exist. In the literature of the bedchamber, the multiple cultural signifiers of the bedchamber are used by those within to form or negotiate their identities. This thesis explored this idea most fully in relation to Margery Kempe and her use of both devotional and domestic models to form her spiritual identity and authority, but it recurs across all of the texts discussed. Chaucer's narrators in the dream poems use the bedchamber as a space to negotiate their authority as readers and authors. Troilus uses the bedchamber and his performance of privacy within it to establish his role as a lovesick young gentleman, while for Criseyde the private bedchamber is central to her role as a chaste and pious widow. The experience of privacy in the bedchamber is itself inflected by identity: Criseyde's is modulated by her gender and the expectations to which she has to conform. As demonstrated by *Troilus and Criseyde*, the bedchamber is also a space for the contestation of identity in relation to genre. While the lovers each have a different generic concept of the bedchamber – Troilus is better suited to lyric but thinks he is in a romance, and Criseyde is more aligned with the social reality of epic – the bedchamber in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* dissects Gawain's identity as a romance knight. As a cross-genre body of literature, the literature of the bedchamber brings generic conventions and tropes into contact with each other, questioning their limits and limitations. In contrast, the bedchamber on the Shakespearian stage forms monuments to characters whose identities have already been formed. Achilles' bedchamber symbolises his unwillingness to fight, while in its absence from the stage, that of Troilus and Cressida points to their reputation being founded on the end of their relationship.

The literature of the bedchamber is itself one of the things that comes into being in the bedchamber. It is generated within and through the bedchambers about which it is concerned. Chaucer depicts this literally in *The Book of the Duchess*, portraying the narrator

as writing that poem, a motif that is repeated in *The Legend of Good Women* and by Christine de Pizan. Margery Kempe uses the bedchamber to revise the narrative of her own life. Through her marriage to Christ, for example, she is the idealised wife, in contrast to her relationship with John. While Gawain finds his identity destabilised in his bedchamber at Hautdesert, this in turn creates the possibility of other permutations of knightly identity as played out in a romance context. In its absence, the Shakespearian bedchamber of *Troilus and Cressida* is not a generative one; for Chaucer, the bedchamber is the space in which the text is both created and consumed. When Pandarus ‘drow hym to the feere, | And took a light, and fond his contenance, | As for to look upon an old romaunce’ (3.978-80), he is at once reading ‘an old romaunce’ and reading *Troilus and Criseyde* in the bedchamber, who he has arranged as if in a romance and according to its conventions. Moreover, Pandarus is able to do so because of the way in which privacy is produced within the bedchamber. The privacy of the bedchamber has enabled him to arrange for *Troilus and Criseyde* to spend the night together and his withdrawal to the hearth creates a second layer of privacy within the bedchamber itself. The bed is positioned as a private space in which *Troilus and Criseyde* can consummate their relationship and the area around the hearth, as a space of withdrawal for reading, becomes a second private space within the bedchamber that allows Pandarus to ‘fond his contenance, | As for to look upon an old romaunce’. I wanted to end with the image of Pandarus reading by the fire in *Criseyde*’s bedchamber as it neatly encapsulates the way in which the literature of the bedchamber functions. The use of signifiers attached to the bedchamber envisions a discursive community to whom they are legible, in both the form of the reader and within the text. *Troilus and Criseyde* has Pandarus, an avid reader of romance who is able to recognise when *Troilus* is acting ‘as do thise lovers’ (2.1306). The courtiers at Hautdesert have been reading Arthurian romances prior to Gawain’s arrival and have keen expectations for how he should conduct himself while there. Margery engages with other narratives of the bedchamber, as well as the iconography of it, to forge her spiritual identity. And the narrator’s of Chaucer’s dream poems are first and foremost readers. The bedchamber is a creative space because it is a legible one: it, too, can be read. By including its

own discursive communities, the literature of the bedchamber becomes an enclosed space within which it is both created and consumed. The literature of the bedchamber and its readers are both products of the private bedchamber.

Appendix 1: Troilus in his Bedchamber

Book One

- Troilus takes to his bedchamber, lovesick, following his first sighting of Criseyde in the temple. He is identifiably in his bedchamber from line 358 to 1073. From line 549 his is joined by Pandarus.

Book Two

- Pandarus, also lovesick, takes to his bedchamber from line 66 to 71.
- Pandarus tells Criseyde about finding Troilus lovesick in his bedchamber from line 556 to 588.
- Following Pandarus's visit, Criseyde is in her closet from line 599 to 812, where she sees Troilus in the street.
- From the parade in which Criseyde observed him, Troilus again takes to his bedchamber at line 935 until line 1092 where he writes her a letter. He is joined by Pandarus at line 939.
- Criseyde enters her bedchamber to read Troilus's letter from line 1173 to line 1179.
- Pandarus returns to Troilus's bedchamber at line 1305 to line 1535 where they plan the excursion to Deiphebus's house.
- Troilus is explicitly in his sickbed at Deiphebus's house by line 1665 to the end of the book at line 1757, visited by Helen and Deiphebus.

Book Three

- Troilus uses his bedchamber at Deiphebus's house to practice meeting Criseyde from line 50 to 58 at which point both Criseyde and Pandarus enter the bedchamber until line 211 when Criseyde leaves. Troilus is rejoined by Pandarus at line 227 and they stay in the bedchamber until line 422.
- Having been on the battlefield, Troilus returns to bed at line 439 until line 483, at which point the narrative switches to Pandarus.
- Criseyde goes to bed in Pandarus's house at line 686. Pandarus and Troilus enter at line 750. All three stay there until Troilus leaves at line 1529, returning to his own bedchamber at line 1535. Pandarus re-enters Criseyde's bedchamber at line 1556 until Criseyde returns home at line 1581.

Book Four

- Following the announcement of the council that Criseyde will be exchanged for Antenor, Troilus takes to his bed at line 220, joined by Pandarus at line 350 until line 558.

- Criseyde, also having heard of her exchange, takes to her bedchamber at line 733, joined by Pandarus at line 805 until line 945 when he goes to fetch Troilus.
- Criseyde and Troilus are explicitly in her bed from line 1247 to line 1701 when Troilus leaves at the end of the book.

Book Five

- Troilus once more takes to his bed following Criseyde's departure from line 211, joined by Pandarus at line 282. They leave at line 434.
- Criseyde goes to her tent bedchamber at line 1021 until morning at line 1030.
- Troilus takes to his bed for the last time at line 1439 until line 1536 when he leaves in anger.

Appendix 2: Margery in her Bedchamber

No.	Brief Overview	Page ref. (Windeatt)	Chapter No.	Key Themes				
	Book 1			Visions	Domesticity	Materiality	Travelling	Religious
1	Opening bedchamber in which MK recovering from childbirth and has first visions.	52-6	1					
2	Marital bedchamber in which MK hears divine melody, as if in heaven	61-3	3					
3	Marital and childbearing bed during period of bodily penance	64	3					
4	Vision of nativity and procurement of bedding for Mary and Jesus by MK	77	6					
5	Recollection of marital bed in which John now too afraid to exercise his rights (part of chastity agreement)	87	11					
6	Jesus' assertion that he is always with MK, including in bed	100	14					
7	Bedchamber in which MK recovering from birth of child when ordered to go to Norwich by Jesus	113	17					
8	Bedchamber in which MK sick and then healed by Christ	158	27					
9	Bedding ordered in Venice for pilgrimage and then stolen by fellow travellers	159-60	28					
10	Bedchamber listed as site of visitations by God among other spaces	165	28					
11	Bed given to MK as part of care offered to her while on pilgrimage	178	30					
12	Ring lost in bedchamber and then found under bed	179-80	31					
13	Lack of bedchamber due to poverty while on pilgrimage	189	34					
14	Visions of angels in bed and in church	192-3	35					
15	Jesus' assertion of his marital relationship with MK	196-7	36					

16	St Bridget's bedchamber	203-4	39					
17	Bedchamber as shelter and alternative to stations of the cross	205	39					
18	MK receives sign that she should wear white clothes again while in bedchamber	217-8	44					
19	Bedchamber in which Mayor of Leicester shuts MK	230	46					
20	Bedchamber in which MK imprisoned at Beverley	259	53					
21	Bedchamber in which MK has vision of Christ approving of her suffering	261	54					
22	Archbishop's bedchamber in which MK visits him	264	54					
23	Bedchamber in which MK ill with dysentery and receives last rites	271-2	56					
24	Christ speaks to MK in bed	319	71					
25	Bedchamber in which MK visits another woman who is experiencing mental health issues following birth of child	328-9	75					
26	MK and John sleeping in different bedchambers and John's illness	330-1	76					
27	Vision of Mary's bedchamber following Crucifixion	352-4	81					
28	MK repeatedly falling asleep	368-71	85					
29	Soul furnished in manner of bedchamber	372-3	85					
30	Jesus contemplating MK's bedchamber as the site of her devotions	376-7	86					
31	Bedchamber in which Book written	379	88					
	Book 2							
32	Bedchamber in which MK's son nursed and dies	390	2					
33	Lack of bedchamber on pilgrimage	403, 411	5, 7					
34	Fear of attack while in bed on pilgrimage	406, 412	6, 7					

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