

**Religion and the Validation of Magic:**  
**Literary Magic in Middle English Literature**

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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in English  
York University  
Toronto, Ontario

November 2019

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## **Abstract**

Much scholarship on magic in the literature of medieval England has tried to uncover how literary magic reflects actual cultural practices of magic in medieval society. This dissertation contends that the cultural practice of magic, also known as common magic, differs significantly from literary magic. It establishes that literary magic is a uniquely literary form grounded in and reflective of the culture of reading that produced it. It furthermore shows that while conflict with Christian doctrine fosters the decline of common magic in society, the harmonious relationship that literary magic shares with Christianity ensures its survival. To uncover the distinct nature of literary magic and its inherently Christian structures, this dissertation analyzes four components of medieval reading culture in four Middle English manuscripts ranging in date from the early fourteenth century to the mid-fifteenth century. The first chapter addresses the poetic structures that compose literary magic in National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19. 2. 1, the Auchinleck manuscript. The second chapter analyzes the representational relationship between sacred and secular supernatural characters also in the Auchinleck manuscript to show how magic is brought within a Christian ethos in the medieval reading experience. The third chapter considers how reading allegorically shapes the medieval reader's encounter with literary magic in two manuscript from the turn of the fifteenth century: British Library, Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln's Inn Library, MS Hale 150. The final chapter looks at how the materiality of the British Library, Cotton Caligula A. ii changes and reflects the magic depicted within. Throughout, this dissertation reveals how fundamentally the supernatural is intertwined with medieval thought. It also suggests that magic had and continues to have such prominent appeal in literary and popular culture because of its representational establishment in the reading culture of medieval England.

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation could not have been completed without the constant support of my supervisor Dr. Deanne Williams and my committee members Dr. James Carley and Dr. Ann Hutchison. Each was extraordinarily generous with his or her time and support, and I am eternally grateful. Thanks also to York University, the Saint George's Society of Toronto, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for their support. Thanks finally to my husband Joel and my family for their love and encouragement throughout this entire process.

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## **Introduction: Defining Literary Magic**

Magic has always woven its way deep within the threads of literary history. It knits itself through Greco-Roman myths of flying horses and women changed to trees, through Anglo-Saxon epics of fearsome monsters defeated by marvellous swords, through Renaissance plays featuring outcast magicians beguiling hapless heroes, through Gothic yarns of ghostly castles, through Victorian tales of fairies and sprites, and through contemporary stories of dragons, boy wizards, and cranky magical scholars. Today magic is more popular than ever. A cursory walk into any bookstore will introduce the casual browser to a plethora of books featuring its wonders. In the adult fiction section, the browser will find fantastical worlds peopled with magic and wonder, historical novels illuminating the lives of finicky magicians, or the subtle wonders of magic realism. The children's section might well overwhelm the browser with the sheer number of books featuring magic – from C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series, to the enormously popular *Harry Potter* series, to the many magical works they have both inspired. Even the television is crowded

with shows that place magic in a prominent position, retelling the life of Merlin in televised form, for example, or reimagining classical fairy tales in contemporary America. Magic is, and always has been, ingrained in the very fibers of western literary culture.

The same is not true of actual magic – of magic practiced in real life by real people – which I refer to throughout this dissertation as common magic. Common magic is a set of folk practices and beliefs through which individuals seek supernatural aid in their interactions with the everyday world. In the medieval and early modern periods, common magic was a part of many people's lives. With a diverse set of practices that drew on both religion and science, medieval and early modern people tried to understand or materially influence their world through evoking supernatural forces. Magical practices included divination, healing, charms to avoid or inflict harm, and the use of talismans. Most of the practices must have been ineffectual (at least in a contemporary, practical sense)<sup>1</sup> and have little in common with the kind of magic the browser in the contemporary bookstore would find. Common magic in the Middle Ages was not about witches flying around on broomsticks, magicians turning people into toads, or objects enacting fundamental transformations on individuals. Instead it was a set of everyday practices and beliefs, rooted in superstition, that allowed people to understand, navigate, and attempt to influence the natural world in frequently mundane ways.

Unlike literary magic, common magic has largely faded from society. Today, common magic does not hold a prominent position in most people's lives. Science has developed to the degree that much of what was once considered supernatural is explicable in terms of the natural world, and magic practiced by real individuals persists mostly as a form of popular entertainment

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* shows the important role that common magic played in the lives of medieval and early modern individuals. He establishes that such superstitious practices and belief in their efficacy allowed people some degree of understanding and control over inexplicable and uncontrollable phenomena.

or within religious subcultures. Live shows like *Champions of Magic* entertain contemporary audiences with a variety of “magical” illusions and spectacles designed to trick the eye into believing something supernatural has happened; contemporary religions such as Wicca use “magic” to structure some of their ideologies and practices.<sup>2</sup> These, however, are outliers, and common magic holds none of the dominant cultural clout and prevalence that it once did. So, while magic in the literary world has done nothing but flourish, common magic in the real world has faded into the shadows.

This dissertation seeks to make plain why it is that magic has remained so prominent in literature even though it has faded from common practice in society. The persistence of one and disappearance of the other can be partially attributed to the fact that literary magic is so much more exciting than common magic; it is far more enthralling to read of Dumbledore raising a tempest than to follow the flight of birds to determine when the next rain might fall – especially since scientific knowledge has given individuals a better means of determining this. There is, however, more to the decline of common magic and the rise of literary magic than simple popular appeal. The decline of one and the rise of the other are both rooted in their relationships with Christianity.

The decline of common magic was instigated by the rise and development of Christianity. Since the foundation of Christianity, common magic has been demeaned and often viciously persecuted. The Bible itself insists “thou shall not suffer a witch to live” (*The Holy Bible*, Exod. 22.18), and that “a man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely

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<sup>2</sup> A basic overview of the nature of the illusions and spectacles featured in *Champions of Magic* can be found on their website, [championsofmagic.co.uk](http://championsofmagic.co.uk), while the role magic plays in Wicca can be found in any resource on the subject. See for example Cassandra Eason, *A Little Bit of Wicca: An Introduction to Witchcraft*, Tony Bell, *Wicca Teachings: An Introduction and Practical Guide*, or Taryn Price, *Wicca: 10 Wicca Magic Rituals for Beginners: An Introduction to Learning Wicca Magic and Wicca Witchcraft*.

be put to death” (Lev. 20.27); the same fate awaits the “dreamers of dreams” and prophets who give “a sign or a wonder” (Deut. 13.1-5). Wolfgang Behringer in *Witches and Witch-Hunts* notes that the first concerns over magic and legislation against magic appear only thirty years before Christianity is made the state religion of the Roman Empire (Behringer xi). Much of the history of magic is tied to and even defined by the way it has clashed with Christianity.

The contentious relationship between common magic and Christianity is most obvious in witch hunts, which exemplify violent reactions against the practice of common magic as well as the active role taken by the church to stamp out magical practices. Witch hunts were most prominent in the late medieval and early modern periods and came about when harm done to an individual or community was perceived as having come from some illicit practice of common magic (Thomas 436). The individuals persecuted as witches were most often social outcasts who were scapegoated after a misfortune struck a household or community.<sup>3</sup> Witch hunts were often jump-started by a change in Christian doctrine.<sup>4</sup> The most significant change occurred in the late Middle Ages when, as Thomas establishes, the source of a “witch’s” power was determined to be demonic. At this point, “witchcraft had become a Christian heresy, the greatest of all sins,” and “the main agency responsible for the introduction of this new concept was the Roman Catholic Church” (Thomas 438). The church directly connected the practice of common magic to heresy.

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<sup>3</sup> Keith Thomas suggests that the identification and persecution of a witch often came about because an individual did not meet the community’s understanding of “proper” behaviour because he or she (most often she) bothered his or her neighbours in some way – often through requesting charity. As Thomas writes, witch-beliefs “reinforced accepted moral standards by postulating that a breach in the norms of neighbourly behaviour would be followed by repercussions in the natural order ... witch-beliefs may be fairly described as ‘conservative social forces,’ upholding the social norms of village life,” and especially those of “charity and neighbourliness” (Thomas 566).

<sup>4</sup> Brian Levack argues that the Reformation encouraged the growth of witch hunting in the early modern period. Richard Kieckhefer, in *European Witch Trials*, identifies developments in theological literature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and the strengthened perception that magic was essentially tied to diabolism as factors that helped set the stage for large scale witch hunts. There were, of course, many factors involved in inciting a witch-hunt, but religion always played a central role. Behringer, for example, points to the “the hardening of the confessional boundaries after the impact of Calvinism, the ‘Second Reformation’ and, simultaneously, post-Tridentine Catholicism” (Behringer 84), as one of the things that led, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, to “the fiercest witchcraft persecutions that we know of in the history of mankind” (Behringer 8).



This was not entirely new, and prior to this point “the practice of any kind of magic had always been an ecclesiastical offence liable to prosecution before the church courts” (Thomas 465). In the late Middle Ages, however, the practice of common magic by individuals deemed witches by a community became more inherently anti-Christian. The fear that a social outlier or other outcast might make use of common magical practices to harm a person or community was bolstered by the idea that this person had also rejected the church and God and had turned to the devil for power. This idea still holds sway today, and magic is still often seen as anti-Christian.<sup>5</sup>

The tension between magic and Christianity is evident even outside of the violence of witch hunts. Owen Davies in *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* traces the history of the figure of the cunning-man, emphasising that even these cunning-folk, who were practicing “good” magic, were condemned and persecuted by the church. Catherine Rider in *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* has similarly revealed many examples of common magic practiced in the Middle Ages that were censured by the church. Magic has almost always been seen as anti-Christian – as a direct rejection of or reaction against God and the doctrines of the Christian church – and persecuted accordingly. In the early Middle Ages, persecution took the gentler form of penance given by priests to those individuals who confessed to practicing common magic;<sup>6</sup> in the later medieval and early modern periods it was persecuted with all the violent horrors associated with witch hunts. This condemnation and ostracization contributed to the decline of common magic in society.

The complex relationship between magic and religion and the consequent decline of magic is most famously and thoroughly explored in Keith Thomas’s influential *Religion and the*

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<sup>5</sup> This is most obvious in the negative reaction that many evangelical Christians had (and have) to the magic of *Harry Potter*. It has been condemned as inspiring devil-worship.

<sup>6</sup> For some of the various actions taken against magic in the Middle Ages, prior to the onset of witch hunts, see Rider’s chapter “Action Against Magic” (Rider 147-69).

*Decline of Magic*. This book delves into the numerous varieties of common magic practiced in English society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and shows how the Reformation enhanced interest in magic while simultaneously elevating the fear of magic and the persecution of those who practiced it. Thomas's first chapter establishes that in the Middle Ages the belief in the material efficacy of Christian ceremonies and objects including transubstantiation, miracles, holy water, relics, and the agnus dei<sup>7</sup> decreased fears about common magic because the belief gave people a perceived defence against malicious practitioners of magic. The agnus dei, for example, "was intended to serve as a defence against the assaults of the Devil and as a preservative against thunder, lightning, fire, drowning, death in child-bed and similar dangers" (Thomas 31). As Thomas establishes, many Christian practices in the Middle Ages, and especially the early Middle Ages were closely knit with common magic. He argues that Christian missionaries converted the Anglo-Saxons by convincing them that they were "acquiring not just a means of other-worldly salvation, but a new and more powerful magic" (Thomas 26). He goes on to identify aspects of the medieval church that retained and even emphasised magical and superstitious ideas, focusing specifically on saints and miracles and the importance of certain objects – especially holy water and the sacrament. In *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, Valerie Flint furthers this idea, arguing that the Middle Ages in Europe saw "the active rescue, preservation and encouragement" of "certain 'magical' survivals" (Flint 4).

Anglo-Saxon charms are particularly reflective of the way in which common magic and Christianity blend in the early Middle Ages. Many of the charms that Bill Griffiths presents in his *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* combine superstitious and magical practices with Christian teachings. One, for example, suggests that a person can ensure the safety of his or her crops

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas describes this as "a small wax cake, originally made out of paschal candles and blessed by the Pope, bearing the image of the lamb and flag" (Thomas 31).

through a complex ceremony, which at one point involves cutting four pieces of earth from the four corners of the field, putting oil, honey, milk and holy water on them, and carrying them to the church where the priest should sing four masses over them (B. Griffiths 173–76). This close association continued throughout the Middle Ages. Almost every kind of magic performed in medieval Europe was closely tied to Christianity: as Karen Jolly writes, “medieval popular magic reflects a sophisticated synthesis of folk ways, classical medicine, and Christian liturgy in its use of herbs, blessings or adjurations and ritualistic behaviours” (Jolly, *Witchcraft* 23). Even specifically illicit magic is deeply imbedded with Christianity, and many of the examples in Frank Klassen’s *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* have Christian foundations.<sup>8</sup>

These magical practices were not, however, uniformly accepted by the church. Eamon Duffy and Karen Jolly have argued that the most Christian of these practices would not have been understood as examples of common magic by medieval people; they would have been thought of as legitimate Christian rituals.<sup>9</sup> The Anglo-Saxon charms cited above or the agnus dei, for example, would have been understood as Christian rather than magical practices. Those practices of common magic that sat outside of Christian authority were condemned. Catherine Rider shows in *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* that magic was not unvaryingly accepted by the medieval church. Numerous records survive that detail theological debates about the nature of illicit magical practices and provide practical solutions to combat such practices in

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<sup>8</sup> In one ritual, designed to make “battling armed knights appear,” the practitioner is instructed to make a ring, write certain words in human blood, recite a complex prayer to God, and then make a sign on the ground in the ring (Klassen 128).

<sup>9</sup> Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars* argues that this “magic” was in fact a highly Christian practice rather than a pagan legacy. Karen Jolly in *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England* too insists that Christian clergy would never have thought what they were doing was magic, and that contemporary scholars have tended to impose the label of magic on inherently Christian ideas. Rider discusses this debate in the introduction to her book (Rider 10-12).

local communities. Rider cites, for example, an anonymous confession treatise from thirteenth or fourteenth century Oxfordshire that tells “priests to ask ‘if [the penitent] has sometimes believed in harmful magic, sorceries and auguries, conjurations of demons and similar things’” and assign penance accordingly (Rider 132–33). The various examples that she cites show that while many religious rituals resemble and were influenced by common magic in the early Middle Ages, the church worked to untangle the two and condemned practices identified as outside of acceptable Christian ceremony.

The conflict between magic and Christianity grew over the course of the Middle Ages and came to a head with the Reformation. In the Reformation, the Christian objects and practices that made up the accepted Christian “magic” of the medieval church were also outlawed. This increased fears over the use of common magic. As Thomas suggests, people were left with no strategies of defence against malicious common magic – against those whom they perceived to be using common magic to provoke an attack by the devil or instigate other harm – and so became more fearful of its use. Essentially, the Reformation asked people to “renounce the magical solutions offered by the medieval Church before they had devised any technical remedies to put in their place” (Thomas 77). It condemned the “magic” of the medieval church but offered no quick material recourse, beyond faith, to the perceived threat that common magic still posed. An increased fear of common magic arose as a result, and the most severe periods of witch hunts in England took place after the Reformation.

This perceived threat lessened as technology and scientific knowledge evolved over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the seventeenth century magic declined for individuals both “because magic was ceasing to be intellectually acceptable, and because their religion taught them to try self-help before invoking supernatural aid” (Thomas 663). So, while

advancements in science, technology, and empirical knowledge, all of which provided explanations for hitherto inexplicable phenomena, were fundamental to lessening interest in and reliance on magic, conflict between magic and Christianity contributed significantly to the decline of common magic in western society.

In literature, the case is entirely different. In literature, magic does not disappear. In literature, magic continued and continues to flourish despite the many forces working against it, and despite its inherent friction with Christianity. Just as the decline of common magic can be found in its relationship with the dominant religion, so too can the growth of literary magic be found in its relationship with Christianity. The relationship, however, is one of harmony. Literary magic survives and even thrives because of the harmonious relationship it shares with Christianity. Far from contributing to its decline, Christianity provides the representational soil from which literary magic grows.

The harmonious relationship between magic in literature and Christianity has been largely overlooked in scholarly work on literary magic in the Middle Ages because much scholarship on magic in medieval literature tends to search for traces of pagan religions and common magic in the literature of the time. The desire to unearth traces of real magic in the narratives of medieval England stems, in part, from scholarly dismissals in the early twentieth century of narratives that contain magic as fanciful and unimportant. When W. P. Ker differentiated between the truth and historicity of epic and the sentimentality of romances with their “magical touch” (Ker 325), he expressed great disdain for the romance genre, which he says features texts that are “fanciful, conceited, thin in their drama and affected in their sentiments” (Ker 352). His insistence on the importance of historical truth encouraged many early scholars of the supernatural in romance to search for reality and historical validity amongst magicians and

magic rings. This first took shape in an anthropological approach to magic in romance. In Jessie Weston's 1920 *From Ritual to Romance*, she suggests that the magic and miracles that feature in the grail romances are actually "the confused record of a ritual, once popular, later surviving under conditions of strict secrecy" (Weston 4). Later, in *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, Roger Sherman Loomis links the characters of romance to Celtic mythology and even suggests "that most of the British and Armorican knights that encircle Uther's son were once gods or deified men" (R. S. Loomis 5). Both scholars attempt to locate traces of a lost pagan religion in the romances of medieval England. As E. G. Stanley has since pointed out, this approach is problematic.<sup>10</sup> We know so little of the religion that existed in England prior to Christianity that attempts to relate literature written hundreds of years later back to those lost traditions is practically impossible, and must necessarily involve a great deal of speculation and guesswork.

Most recent scholars have given up the search for traces of a complex pagan religion in romance and have turned instead to search for evidence of common magic in medieval literature. The most comprehensive example of this approach is Corinne Saunders's *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*. Saunders begins by tracing the roots of common magic back to Greece and Rome and goes on to outline the kinds of magic that were practiced in medieval England. She then attempts to locate examples of common magic in medieval romance. Like Weston and Loomis, Saunders searches for references to historical practices in the magic of romances. She approaches magic from a somewhat anthropological standpoint, searching for hints of the reality of everyday life in Middle English literature. While this is an extremely important point of analysis resulting in some interesting examples, it does not acknowledge that

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<sup>10</sup> E.G. Stanley emphasises in his *Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* that "the history of scholarship is the history of error," and that in the past hundred and fifty years, "the unknown (as I think, the unknowable unknown) was so firmly used to explain the known that scholars felt no doubt in their methods or their results" (Stanley 122).

literary magic is often different from common magic – as different as healing with herbs is from a giant green man who can live without a head.

These scholars of magic in romance who take an anthropological approach tend to oppose magic and Christianity. They do not see how the two work together, but instead, they see only how they are in conflict. Weston, for example, removes the grail from its Christian roots to explore its pagan origins. Loomis turns the characters of romance into gods from Celtic mythology. In her recent scholarship, Saunders does make some connection between magic and Christianity. Her chapter, “Magic and Christianity,” in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*, begins to build a bridge between the two by considering how romance magic often touches on “the marvellous forces within nature that reflect God’s beneficent powers” (Saunders, “Magic and Christianity” 84). However, she still ultimately opposes magic and Christianity by splitting magic into two categories: “natural magic,” which she calls “licit” and ties to Christianity, and its “more sinister counterpart,” black or demonic magic, which is “illicit” and opposed to Christianity (Saunders, “Magic and Christianity” 86). This is certainly a valid application to common magic, and this distinction did exist in the minds of medieval clergy, scholars, and laypeople.<sup>11</sup> It is, however, much less evident in romance. Saunders has difficulty locating instances of demonic magic in romance, and, indeed, some magic found in romance that stems directly from demons is heavily seated in Christian righteousness. The distinction is indistinct in the literary world.

The desire to find examples of common magic that go against the church has encouraged scholars to build walls between magic and Christianity – to force distinctions and to argue that an

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<sup>11</sup> Most studies on magic in the Middle Ages categorize themselves along these lines, making distinctions between more Christian magic – healing with herbs, and sometimes even divination – and illicit magic that the clergy sought to condemn.

aspect of magic in medieval literature is either pagan or Christian. This comes from the same desire that makes scholarship on witchcraft so prevalent; people are interested in the way magic differs from and conflicts with the dominant religion. This is not the case in literature, and I seek to move beyond these boundaries and show how magic and Christianity work together. I will do this by looking not at historical context, but instead at the literary context, and at magic as a fundamental component of the medieval literary imagination as opposed to a record of an actual lived practice. I look at magic as an inherently literary device distinct and separate from common magic. So doing reveals magic's harmonious relationship with Christianity.

My work is inspired by scholarship that looks at magic as a literary device in the medieval romance tradition. Michelle Sweeney's *Magic in Medieval Romance from Chrétien de Troyes to Geoffrey Chaucer* argues that magic in romance functions to test the moral worth of characters. Helen Cooper's *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* identifies magic as a longstanding and important meme of romance; she argues that it is most effective when it does not work – when a magic ring falls off, or a magic sword is lost. Saunders too frequently diverges from the anthropological approach that structures her book to analyze the literary function of magic in Middle English romance. Each of these scholars considers how magic functions in romance as a literary device, thinking about how it augments the plot or enhances characterizations. None, however, has moved beyond its function as a plot element to consider on a larger poetic scale how it was created, how it was understood, and how it reflects on medieval literature itself. What is more, these scholars limit their analysis of literary magic to the romance genre. This dissertation follows the work of these earlier scholars by prioritizing the literariness of literary magic. But it moves forward to sketch a complete picture of magic in literature. It looks at how it was created, how it was read, and how



it was understood, across all the various genres in which it appears – from romance, to hagiography, to allegory. In so doing, it shows that magic is much more than a vestige of a lost pagan past or a simple device used only in romance to advance the plot. It shows that magic is a complex element of medieval literary form deeply embedded in and reflective of the medieval literary imagination.

To do so, it is essential first and foremost to distinguish literary magic from common magic. Richard Kieckhefer in *Magic in the Middle Ages* gives a summary of the typical practices that constitute common magic. He identifies six categories of magic practiced in medieval society: practitioners of magic (healers and diviners); medical magic (herbs and animals); charms (prayers, blessings, and adjurations); protective amulets and talismans; sorcery (the misuse of medical and protective magic); divination and popular astrology. Each of these categories reflects a different sort of cultural practice that took place in the Middle Ages. Magical practices involving healing, protection, and divination were by far the most common.<sup>12</sup> This is followed by protective magic and divination. Many records exist with detailed instructions of how to perform this sort of magic, and the instructions most often involved a combination of words, prayer, and natural objects. One might, for example, cure a skin disease by mixing goose fat and four herbs together and spreading it on the skin, and then scratching the neck after sunset, pouring the blood into the water and spitting three times (Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* 65). One can also keep venomous snakes away by putting sprigs of rosemary on a person's door (Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* 75). If you have been robbed, you might also write a Latin formula on wax, and hold it over your head with your left hand, and thus enable yourself to see the guilty person in your sleep (Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* 27). These are just a few of

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<sup>12</sup> Karen Jolly says that, "magic associated with medicine is the largest...category of common magical practices in the Middle Ages" (Jolly, *Witchcraft* 30).

countless similar examples of the kinds of common magic practiced by people in the Middle Ages.

Scholarship on magic in medieval literature has hitherto focused on finding traces of such practices in the literature of the period;<sup>13</sup> however, these practices are hardly the stuff of the literary world, and especially of the literary world of romance, the idealized genre in which magic most frequently appears. Spitting, duck fat, and neck scratching are not found in tales of noble deeds, valiant knights, and beautiful ladies. Instead, the magic of literature – literary magic – is idealized, *truly* wondrous, and, most importantly, effective. Skin disease is cured in romance by one friend anointing another with the blood of his soon-to-be reanimated child.<sup>14</sup> Bodies are protected from harm and enemies are avoided through the use of magic rings.<sup>15</sup> Armies are routed through the conjuring of fire dragons.<sup>16</sup> Human beings transform or are transformed into rocks, werewolves, and giant green men.<sup>17</sup> The magic of literature is impressive, awe-inspiring, and wondrous. It is not something fashioned from everyday materials but is instead supernatural in the truest sense of the word – something well above the everyday, natural world. It is astounding, fantastic, wondrous, and most importantly of all, impossible to replicate in reality.

The two definitions of magic provided in the *Oxford English Dictionary* most clearly explain the difference between common and literary magic. The first definition refers to what I

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<sup>13</sup> Saunders, for example, reads the moment when Braunde transforms William of Palerne into a wolf as magic that depends on the “learned use of a magical recipe, concocted in the manner suggested by classical handbooks, manuals of natural magic such as *Picatrix*, or more dubious books of necromancy that combine physical and astrological rituals with the conjuring of demons” (Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural* 159). The connection is interesting but general because the literary magic differs from that found in actual practice.

<sup>14</sup> In *Amis and Amilioun*, Amilioun is cured from leprosy when Amis sacrifices his son to anoint his friend with the child’s blood. The child is shortly thereafter reanimated.

<sup>15</sup> Rings that protect the wearer from harm are extremely common magical objects in medieval romance – one appears in *Floris and Blancheflour*, for example. A ring that renders the wearer invisible appears in *Yvain and Gawain*.

<sup>16</sup> Merlin conjures a fire dragon in the Auchinleck version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*.

<sup>17</sup> Morgan le Faye transforms herself into a rock at one point in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur*, William of Palerne transforms into a werewolf in the romance of the same name, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* famously features a gigantic green man.

identify as common magic: “The use of ritual activities or observances which are intended to influence the course of events or to manipulate the natural world, usually involving the use of an occult or secret body of knowledge” (“Magic, n.” 1a). The second definition, identified as “figurative,” more clearly defines literary magic: “An inexplicable and remarkable influence producing surprising results” (“Magic, n.” 2). The first refers to an actual practice found in the everyday world intended to influence the course of events; the second refers to the wondrous stuff of literature wherein the course of events is tangibly impacted through impossible means. Common magic is an actual practice undertaken by individuals rooted in religious or occult belief in the hope of making something happen. Literary magic appears only in narrative form, is astounding to behold, and affects wondrous change in impossible ways.

This distinction was recognized in the Middle Ages. In John Lydgate’s *The Churl and the Bird* the bird tells the churl of a wondrous stone, “iagounce.” This magical gem renders the bearer “victorious in battle” (line 236)<sup>18</sup>, ensures that he or she will not be impoverished “but of all tresour haue plente” (241), makes all men do the owner reverence (242), and much, much more. It is fantastic indeed, and the churl covets it as soon as he hears of its wonders. As soon as he expresses his desire, however, the bird scolds him, telling him that he should not believe everything he hears: “Thou shuldist nat, aftir my sentence, / To euery tale yeue to hasty credence” (321-22). Hidden within this lesson about not coveting is the implication that while one might hear tales of wondrous stones that make the wearer victorious, rich, and powerful, one must not always believe them. The churl’s willingness to believe in and covet the stone is mistaken and an important example of his stupidity. The bird stresses that this kind of magic is a “tale,” nothing more. The object described within belongs in the realm of narrative and is

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<sup>18</sup> All references to medieval poetry refer to the line numbers. Information on the edition used can be found in the works cited list.

inaccessible to common people. The magic of narrative – of tales – is impossible and a different thing from that which exists in the real world.

Literary magic has not been distinguished from common magic in scholarship up to this point. Not only do scholars search for traces of common magic and paganism amongst instances of literary magic, but some historical accounts of common magic even include literary magic within the larger umbrella of medieval magic.<sup>19</sup> However, distinguishing the two things – one a superstitious practice, the other a literary device – allows for a greater understanding of the nature and impact of magic as a literary form in the medieval period. More specifically, it establishes three important ideas. First, that the relationship between magic and Christianity was largely positive in medieval literary culture. Second, that literary magic as a unique form closely reflects medieval attitudes towards the supernatural and that which is beyond the everyday. And third, that literary magic survives and thrives after common magic fades from society because it is so closely connected with Christianity. In its analysis of magic as a literary form, this dissertation verifies each of these ideas.

It does so first and foremost by analyzing magic within its literary context. The first aspect of the literary context that allows magic and Christianity to exist in harmony in the literature of medieval England is the overwhelming presence of Christianity in day-to-day life and consequently in the literature of the period. In *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred*, Barbara Newman establishes that sacred and secular concerns were much less distinguishable in medieval literature and society than they are today. As she writes,

So thoroughly has secularism become our default that even the religious speak of ‘giving God a place in their lives’ as if he were lucky to get a slice of the pie. This way of

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<sup>19</sup> Kieckhefer’s *Magic in the Middle Ages* has a chapter on “Magic in the Romances and Related Literature.”

thinking would have been impossible in a medieval context. By saying this I do not wish to revive the old cliché about the Age of Faith, for levels of faith varied then as they do now, if less openly. What I mean is rather that the sacred was the inclusive whole in which the secular had to establish a niche. (Newman viii)

Unlike today when the sacred and the secular are firmly separated, in medieval England the sacred and the secular were less distinct. Secular concerns were rationalized within a Christian framework because that was the window through which most people saw the world and the frame that structured their lives. Newman uses this idea in her book to situate the secular within the sacred in a variety of literary genres – from romance to parody.

The manuscript form, the medium through which medieval people encountered literature, further reinforces the degree to which the sacred and secular were blended in medieval literary culture. In the vernacular manuscripts of medieval England, fantastic romances rub shoulders with religious texts, with hagiographic tales of saints and virgin martyrs, with allegorical visions of heaven and hell, and even with sermons and didactic narratives outlining the keys to living a pious life. The proliferation and blend of sacred and secular supernatural in the manuscript form is the material manifestation of Barbara Newman's medieval crossover; it is a physical object that bears testament to the idea of "the secular as always already in dialogue with the sacred" (Newman ix). This blend of sacred and secular in medieval literary culture places magic within a Christian ethos.

The second aspect of medieval literary culture that fosters a positive relationship between magic and Christianity is the overwhelming presence of the supernatural in medieval literature. Diverse examples of magic stemming from both sacred and secular sources fill medieval manuscripts. Romance – the popular literature of the time – abounds with sorceresses, magicians,

wondrous castles, fantastic gardens, cloaks, mirrors, and swords, all with remarkable powers. Religious texts linger over the supernatural consequences of miracle and divine intervention. Allegorical journeys to heaven and hell draw the reader into wondrous Edens and horrifying hellscapes. It would be challenging to find an example of a vernacular manuscript that does not contain some sort of supernatural, whether sacred or secular. The most famous vernacular manuscripts of the Middle English period – the Vernon manuscript, the Auchinleck manuscript, Cotton Nero A. x, Laud Misc. 108 – all feature supernatural moments. The genres of literature popular at the time – romance, hagiography, allegory – are all steeped in it. To belong to the culture of reading in the Middle Ages meant encountering a plethora of magic in both sacred and secular forms. This proliferation fosters the harmonious relationship between magic and Christianity by placing them in constant, overwhelming conversation.

The final component of medieval literary culture that allows for and fosters a positive relationship between magic and Christianity is the manuscript form. The material object through which medieval audiences read literature literally bound sacred and secular supernatural together, creating an inseparable connection between magic and Christianity. Romance magic has traditionally been read by Sweeney, Cooper, and Saunders only alongside other instances of romance magic. However, the nature of the medieval manuscript places romance magic in direct conversation with Christian miracle and other forms of the sacred supernatural. A clear understanding of magic as a literary form can consequently only be gained by reading texts within their manuscript context. As such, this dissertation looks not at a text in which literary magic appears as an individual entity, but instead as a part of a larger community of texts constituted by the nature of the manuscript compendium.

Such an approach adheres to an increasingly important trend in medieval literary studies that finds its origins in M. B. Parkes' foundational chapter "The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book." This chapter established a high degree of intentionality in the way in which manuscripts were compiled and ordered. It also identified certain cues available to modern day scholars that reveal the logic behind compilational structure – behind how scribes produced manuscripts and how readers read. Of particular importance was Parkes's sense that items in manuscripts tended to be grouped in some way (whether thematically or generically). This led many to try to find a logical, thematic structure within manuscript volumes,<sup>20</sup> and even more importantly, to the sense that manuscripts have an identity and that this identity reveals fundamental clues about those who interacted with them. As Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel write in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, "far from being a transparent or neutral vehicle, the codex can have a typological identity that affects the way we read and understand the text it presents. The manuscript agency – manuscript kind or identity – can thus offer social or anthropological insights into the way its texts were or could have been read by the patron or public to which it was diffused" (Nichols and Wenzel 2). Felicity Riddy's work on *Sir Thomas Malory* is an early example of this approach. In this study, Riddy looks at the implications of the manuscript context of some romances and points to the frequency with which they are set alongside devotional and moral material. She suggests "the fact that they frequently occur alongside moral and devotional material suggests that for their readers there was a continuity

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, A. S. G. Edwards' understanding of the ordering of Auchinleck in his "Codicology and Translation in the Early Sections of the Auchinleck Manuscript." He identifies the first section as one of religious texts (Edwards, "Codicology and Translation" 27). See also Murray J. Evans's analysis of the romance of Isumbras within a variety of manuscript volumes and his identification of thematic links in *Rereading Middle English Romance* (Evans 51-82).

between these different kinds of writings. They were not the same thing, obviously, but they did not necessarily minister to wholly unrelated imaginative and spiritual needs” (Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* 17).<sup>21</sup>

The importance of connections between texts in the same manuscript brought forward by Riddy has been enhanced in recent years. Scholars have moved beyond the traditional approach to a manuscript that compares the texts contained within largely to determine provenance, date, and occasionally purpose, to look at broader, thematic implications behind the collection of texts housed within a single volume. This takes a variety of forms. Some read the whole book to determine cultural context. The collection of essays, *The Medieval Manuscript Book*, edited by Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen, for example, looks not at the historical origins of manuscripts but rather at how they fit into a cultural context as determined by how humans interacted (and interact) with them. Others, including Evans’s *Rereading Middle English Romance*, look at the generic and structural implications of reading texts within their manuscript context. Several, such as *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers* by Andrew Taylor, take into account how page layout, structure, and marginalia impact the way each text was and can be read. Studies of individual manuscripts, like that on the Auchinleck manuscript or the Harley manuscript, both edited by Susanna Fein, approach a single compendium from multiple angles and seek to sketch a complete picture of that one volume.<sup>22</sup> Each of these approaches prioritizes what Johnson and Van Dussen call “the post-production lives of manuscripts” (Johnston and Van Dussen 3). Their primary interest is less with how a

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<sup>21</sup> Riddy concludes that there are four areas of particular focus in romance compendia “good manners, right conduct, the claims of the next world and the British past” and that these concerns continue into the era of print (Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* 24). She formulates her study of Malory around these four themes.

<sup>22</sup> See *Studies in The Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253* as well as *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*. The essay by Cathy Hume, for example, in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, reads the Life of Adam and Eve within the larger concerns for family matters present in the manuscript.



manuscript was constructed,<sup>23</sup> than with the information that can be gleaned about its history by engaging with the surviving manuscript as a coherent object.

Less frequently, this approach extends purely into the realm of literary analysis, and interpretive conclusions are made about a text in a manuscript in light of the body of literature it is bound alongside. Scholars read entire manuscripts to gain understanding about how the texts approach single issues in coherent ways. Siobhain Bly Calkin's *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript*, for example, looks at the depiction of Muslim characters, "Saracens," throughout the Auchinleck manuscript and argues that their depiction bolsters English national identity. Sarah McNamer in "Female Authors, Provincial Settings: The Re-versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript," compares the love lyrics of the Findern manuscript to rethink the character of love presented in the manuscript. My approach adheres to this later trend in its determination to uncover how manuscript context influences the way in which literary magic was read and understood.

What is inherent within these various approaches and in the final one especially is the implication that the individual texts within a manuscript were read together. Almost any introduction to medieval literature will tell you that individual texts were most often read aloud, individually to a listening audience. Joyce Coleman's *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* asserts "that people *were* hearing" literature (Coleman 180), and that reading was a social activity. Numerous manuscript illuminations survive of individuals reading aloud to listening audiences. While the aural consumption of literature might seem to remove texts from their manuscript context – the audience does not encounter the physical form and so does not experience the texts together – the fact remains that all texts in a single

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<sup>23</sup> There are of course exceptions. Both volumes edited by Susanna Fein include essays on the creation of the manuscripts.

manuscript are still inextricably linked by their physical presence in the same volume. The texts may not have been encountered together all at one time, but over several nights, weeks, or even months members of a court or household would hear all the diverse texts from a single manuscript and make connections between them. Just as in any university English classroom today, the student's learning experience is shaped by the way in which texts are collected and presented over the course of a semester, so too was the medieval reader's understanding shaped by the way in which texts were collected and presented.

What is more, even the staunchest supporter of the idea that texts were read aloud will admit that medieval reading practices were diverse and complex. Manuscript illuminations of individuals reading privately with closed lips also survive.<sup>24</sup> Even Coleman admits to the blendedness of reading practices in the Middle Ages and to the existence of private reading. Laurel Amtower asserts that a part of the prestige of book owning came from the ability to engage privately with that material (Amtower 38). The various kinds of reading discussed in Mary C. Flannery and Carrie Griffin's volume *Spaces for Reading in Later Medieval England* further show how diverse medieval reading practices were: "the book and the individual reader, the book and the scribe or copyist, or the reader surrounded by a rapt audience, are all pervasive images in medieval culture" (Flannery and Griffin 4). Medieval reading practices were diverse. However, whether a person read silently to him or herself or heard a text recited aloud, the manuscript form still fundamentally determined the reader's experience and consequential understanding. Reading texts in their manuscript context thus gives the greatest insight into how literature was consumed in the medieval period.

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Saenger's "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society" in particular notes the number of silent readers who appear in manuscript illuminations.

Manuscript context was even seen as important in the Middle Ages. Alastair Minnis has argued that medieval readers thought of manuscripts as compilations and considered themselves free to peruse them at will – to jump around among the texts, reading one after another, or not, as they pleased. Referring to Chaucer’s *General Prologue* and the narrator’s advice that the reader “turne over the leef and chese another tale” (I. 3176-80) if he or she is offended by the Miller’s tale, Minnis advances the idea that readers had freedom of choice in an encounter with a compilation (Minnis 201). Arthur Bahr has expanded this idea to suggest that this moment implies “that even less self-consciously literary and more straightforward compilations than *The Canterbury Tales* would have been understood as subject to the reader’s imaginative intervention and physical manipulation” (Bahr 8). Readers were understood to have the agency to engage with a manuscript volume at will, to turn through the pages, and, most importantly for the purposes of literary analysis, to make imaginative connections amongst texts. The surviving manuscripts consequently allow insight into what kinds of interpretive connections might have been made between texts in a volume. These interpretive connections make it vital to account for the manuscript context in literary analysis of medieval texts.

That said, neither I, nor I think anyone, can presume to know exactly how a medieval reader would have encountered a manuscript object, and what kind of imaginative connections he or she might have built amongst the texts. As a modern reader, I and all contemporary scholars are at a remove, destined to place modern ideas on a medieval manuscript. There exists an inescapable divide between the historical object and the contemporary reader, particularly in the realm of literary interpretation. This divide, however, is not insurmountable. Arthur Bahr’s *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* navigates this division between past and present by proposing a method of reading that “mediates between the occluded

or lost original medieval intention and the subjective, contemporary apprehension of text and manuscript that informs their meaning” (Bahr 5). This method recognizes both the historical artifact that is the manuscript and all the information that it has to offer alongside the inescapable modern perceptions that guide contemporary scholarship. It takes the manuscript object as the material subject of its analysis and draws conclusions based on the surviving material as filtered through modern eyes.

Bahr does this by reading “compilationally” – by reading manuscripts as compilations. He sees the compilation “not as an objective quality of either texts or objects, but rather as a mode of perceiving such forms so as to disclose an interpretably meaningful arrangement, thereby bringing into being a text/work that is more than the sum of its parts.” He takes the form established by the manuscript and reads it as a single, interpretable entity. He embraces both the historical object by letting it act as a guide to interpretation, and the modern-day experience with the manuscript by reading it as a single entity. This method of reading is fundamentally grounded in history, in “an object’s historical specificity, in describable cues that can be physical, textual or both,” but also recognizes the importance of the modern reader and of subjective interpretation in an encounter with a manuscript (Bahr 3). Most importantly, Bahr emphasises that compilations “compel texts to change their meanings in ways that a purely linear historicity cannot fully recover or anticipate.” It sheds new light on medieval texts because “a particular text’s relation to its broader codicological forms makes us see or rethink or resee something that by itself might seem straightforward, uninteresting, or overfamiliar” (Bahr 5). A text when read within a manuscript is not the same as a text read outside of its manuscript context. Situating that text within that manuscript context – which its surviving nature insists upon – allows for greater understanding. Because the manuscript object is one of the only surviving witnesses of the larger

culture in which literature flourished in the Middle Ages, reading the texts compilationally provides vital insight into that culture. While we can never know the medieval reader's mind, we can access the literary milieu within which he or she encountered a text by reading the entire manuscript in which the text survives. The volume itself is a living witness to how readers might have read and to the kinds of interpretations that they might have made.

These connections and interpretations are vital to the creation and sustenance of literary magic in the Middle Ages. Literary magic is established in the compilations in which it was encountered. Reading compilationally allows what has long been seen as an insignificant device or as a vestige of a long-lost pagan past to arise as an important form firmly grounded in and even representative of the medieval reading experience. Reading compilationally allows for a thorough exploration of literary magic across a wide range of texts, casting off the limitations of genre, purpose, religiosity, and audience that are often placed on medieval literary study. This focus on text and literary context gives access to what a medieval reader might have taken from a literary work and allows connections between the different kinds of supernatural common to the medieval reading experience to be seen by modern eyes. Ultimately, reading compilationally makes the nature and import of specifically literary magic in the medieval reading experience apparent.

This dissertation identifies and explores the literary magic of the Middle English period through reading four manuscripts compilationally. Each chapter shows in a different way that literary magic is determined by the form that literature takes in the Middle Ages and by the culture of reading that surrounds it. All of the chapters focus on literary context, literary magic, and the culture of reading that allowed literary magic to arise and thrive. This reading culture is most fundamentally defined by the crossover between the sacred and secular that is built into the

reading lives of individuals and into the manuscript form; but there are four further components of this reading culture that determined medieval reading experience and the consequential form that literary magic took. Medieval literature and the medieval encounter with literary form can be characterized by the poetic forms that make them up, the character types who inhabit the literature, the kinds of interpretive thought applied to literary works, and the manuscript form in which the material survives. While these components do not encompass every aspect of the medieval reading experience, the style of writing (both form and content), the nature of readerly engagement with a text, and the material support that allowed literature to be read are among the most fundamental building blocks of medieval literary culture.

This dissertation is structured to identify and analyze the nature of literary magic within these four components of the medieval reading experience. The first chapter focuses on poetic structures. Using one of the most famous surviving manuscripts of Middle English romance, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19. 2. 1, the Auchinleck manuscript, this chapter identifies the stock poetic forms used to create literary magic within the larger system of medieval poetics identified by Paul Zumthor. It then considers how these forms reflect a larger approach to the supernatural in the literature and culture of the time. The second chapter moves on to look at another ubiquitous part of the medieval reading experience – the character type – to consider how magical characters are created within stock, typological character structures typical of medieval romance especially. It argues that the same representational structures used to create holy men and women are used to render supernatural characters both powerful and legitimate. The third chapter turns to the reader and looks at how the reader's understanding of the supernatural could have been influenced by the most fundamental mode of interpretation of the Middle English period – allegory. Through an analysis of two manuscript

compendia that hold allegorical texts at their core – London, Lincoln’s Inn, Hale MS 150 and London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero A. x – this chapter argues that the medieval focus on allegory and allegorical interpretation further strengthens the bond between the sacred and secular supernatural. It concludes by suggesting that literary magic itself bears close resemblance to the genre of allegory. The final chapter moves to consider how the manuscript form – the primary medium by which literature was read in the Middle Ages – impacts the reader’s understanding of the literary magic contained within. Through a comparison of the manuscript object – in this chapter represented by London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A. ii – and supernatural objects, the chapter suggests that manuscripts themselves reflect medieval attitudes towards the supernatural.

The conclusion looks ahead to the sixteenth century and the transition of literary magic into print. It shows how literary magic retains resonances of the poetics, the characterization, the allegory, and even the manuscript structure of the medieval compilation. It argues that evidence of the establishment of literary magic as an acceptable literary device can be seen in its manifestation in later periods, when manuscript context has been lost and when persecutions of common magic are in full force. By looking ahead, the conclusion reaffirms how the medieval culture of reading helped to establish magic as an acceptable component of literary culture. Together the chapters show that magic thrives in medieval literary culture across the Middle Ages. Beginning in the early fourteenth century with the Auchinleck manuscript, before moving up to the turn of the fifteenth century with two smaller compilations, and finishing in the mid-fifteenth century with a household manuscript, this dissertation traces both the nature and evolution of literary magic as it grows, changes, and stays the same over the course of the later Middle Ages.

It does so not only to characterize and analyze medieval literary magic as its own important, interpretable entity, distinct from common magic, but furthermore to consider how medieval literary magic contributes to the longstanding popularity of magic in literature and popular culture across history. Throughout, this dissertation argues that literary magic survives and even thrives because of how fundamentally intertwined it was with literary form in the Middle English period. The culture of reading surrounding medieval literature – made up of the way it was written, the way characters were depicted, the way it was understood, and the material form it took – brought all kinds of magic within a Christian ethos. Within a Christian framework, literary magic not only survived the Reformation and the intense condemnations of magic that occurred at that time but flourished over the years that followed, running entirely counter to common magic. Magic and Christianity coalesce in the medieval period and materialize in a literary form that has dominated popular culture for centuries.

I opened this introduction by stressing the popularity of magic in literature today and throughout literary history. This dissertation seeks to show how this popularity and longevity stem directly from the early medieval history of this literary device. So much of what we see in literature across history and today finds its roots in medieval literature. Much is unattributed and unrecognized; however, I hope to show that the magic so many love to become entrapped within is rooted in England's early history of reading. It is found not only in the content – in the famous magicians, like Merlin, who still appear in popular culture – but even in the way in which literature was written and in the way people read six to seven hundred years ago. It is part of and representative of the very nature of medieval literature and its ubiquity stems directly from its integrality.



## **Chapter 1: The Poetics of the Marvellous**

### ***Introduction***

At its most basic level, literary magic is a poetic form. It exists not in reality, in the actions taken by individuals or in experiences encountered, but in the meaning made by a certain combination of words. This is the main difference between common and literary magic. Common magic is a superstitious practice used in real life. Literary magic is an imaginative form constituted through language. The poetics of literary magic, which I define as the words and poetic devices that poets use to create a supernatural moment, are the building blocks of magic as a literary form. The ways in which literary magic is rendered poetically and the implications of its construction are consequently the foci of this chapter.

The poetics of magic in the Middle Ages is very different from poetics of magic today. I originally approached medieval romance with the expectation of enjoying wonderful and plentiful instances of fantastical magic: from witches flying on broomsticks, to humans

transforming into animals, to spells that knock entire armies to the ground. Contemporary fantasy inspired by medieval romance – by J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling, and the like – establishes an expectation in contemporary readers of effusive and elaborate magical descriptions. In *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, for example, C. S. Lewis describes every detail of the reanimation of a stone lion: “a tiny streak of gold began to run along his white marble back – then it spread – then the color seemed to lick all over him as the flame licks all over a bit of paper – then, while his hindquarters were still obviously stone, the lion shook his mane and all the heavy, stone folds rippled into living hair” (Lewis, *The Lion* 168). J. K. Rowling similarly lingers over transformative magic. For example, she describes rather gruesomely the effect of taking a potion that transforms the drinker’s appearance: “next, bringing him gasping to all fours, came a horrible melting feeling, as the skin all over his body bubbled like hot wax, and before his eyes, his hands began to grow, the fingers thickened, the nails broadened, and the knuckles were bulging like bolts” (Rowling 162). Both descriptions go on from here, detailing each aspect of the changes happening to the living bodies. Both use various poetic devices – metaphor, simile, etc. – to do justice to this other-worldly experience and to explain the magic to the reader.

The version of magic the medieval reader encountered was entirely different. Instead of lavish and elaborate descriptions, medieval literary magic exhibits a lack of effusiveness. It is subtle to the point that is sometimes hard to see. The first time I read *Sir Tristrem*, for example, I missed the moment the lovers drink the magical potion that sets off the course of events and found myself having to retrace my step to figure out why these individuals were throwing everything away for their affair. Authors of Middle English romance almost never provide

detailed descriptions of magical events.<sup>1</sup> Helen Cooper has also noted this lack of effusiveness. She writes that supernatural elements, “far from being the most exciting features of the plot...have the potential for being among the most boring” (Cooper 137). Here Cooper refers to the potential for excitement generated by magic as a plot device; however, the same sentiment applies to descriptions of magical moments.

Scholars of common magic in literature struggle with the fact that authors do not provide detailed descriptions of events. Corinne Saunders is challenged at times by the lack of detailed description of magical procedures. Saunders dedicates the first four chapters of *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* to the practices of common magic in medieval England and their biblical and classical precedents. When she moves forward to discuss some of their manifestations in romance, however, the historical material mostly falls away. This is largely because common magic is so different from literary magic, but also because the romances do not provide accounts that are detailed enough to make solid connections between the historical practices and literary depictions. Faced with a similar lack, Michelle Sweeney turns mostly to French romances by Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France and to certain English redactions of these authors for her analysis of magic in romance. Unlike the popular English romances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, French romances, especially those by Chrétien de Troyes and Marie de France, linger longer over their depictions of magic. When these romances are translated into English, however, many are purged of the detailed magical material. As I verify in the first section of this chapter, the poetics of literary magic in Middle English literature is scant indeed.

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<sup>1</sup> Magical events are the focus of this chapter. In subsequent chapters I look at magical characters, spaces, and objects. I define magical events as moments where magic actively occurs; this includes both magical transformation and magical actions (lifting, setting ablaze, disappearing, etc.).

Despite its scantiness, the abundance of magic in medieval literature allows for the identification and analysis of literary magic as a poetic system. Magic proliferates throughout Middle English literature. Half of the tales in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* feature some sort of supernatural,<sup>2</sup> and magic appears prominently in most surviving vernacular manuscripts. The supernatural is central to the Auchinleck Manuscript, for example. Many of Auchinleck's texts hold supernatural elements at their core. The opening text, *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, features a miraculous fish. It is followed immediately by the romance *The King of Tars* wherein a lump of flesh is transformed into a child. The legends of Saint Katherine, Saint Margaret, Mary Magdalene, and the Virgin Mary all feature wondrous miracles. The romance texts, including *Guy of Warwick*, its continuation *Reinbroun*, *Sir Degare*, *Of Arthour and Merlin*, *Sir Tristrem*, and *Sir Orfeo*, contain fairy lands, famous magicians, magic rings, marvellous disappearances, giants, dragons, and much more. Almost every text in the manuscript features an appearance or evocation of something supernatural – whether sacred or secular. A comparative analysis of those forms across the diverse genres in which they appear reveals a rich poetic system, which, while scant, is representative of medieval attitudes towards the supernatural.

In this chapter I define and investigate this poetic system. I do so by analyzing the poetic structures surrounding literary magic in the Auchinleck manuscript, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1. This manuscript was composed sometime between 1330 and 1340.<sup>3</sup> The hands of five or six scribes can be found throughout, but the hand of one scribe, now

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<sup>2</sup> *The Knight's Tale*, *The Man of Law's Tale*, *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, *The Friar's Tale*, *The Clerk's Tale*, *The Merchant's Tale*, *The Squire's Tale*, *The Franklin's Tale*, *The Pardoner's Tale*, *The Prioresses's Tale*, *Sir Thopas*, *The Second Nun's Tale* and *The Maniciple's Tale* all have supernatural elements.

<sup>3</sup> The date of composition was established quite early in the extensive history of scholarly work on the manuscript and unlike many other aspects of the text, has been relatively uncontested. The manuscript was produced sometime between 1330 and 1340, a fact which has been confirmed not only by paleographical evidence, but also by a reference in *The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle* to the death of King Edward II and a prayer for the new King Edward (Pearsall and Cunningham vii).

identified as the lead scribe, is dominant.<sup>4</sup> The intended audience has been identified as merchant class.<sup>5</sup> It is a massive compendium made up of 331 folios and fourteen stubs; ten additional fragments have also been recovered. Originally, it would have had more than fifty-two gatherings; each of the surviving gatherings has eight leaves except for one which has ten. The gatherings are collected into twelve booklets. The folios are neatly laid out and most folios have two columns with forty-four ruled lines in two columns. Catchwords and item numbers are visible. Considerable damage has been done to the manuscript over time. At least five of the gatherings are now lost. The miniatures that originally decorated the text have been almost all cut out creating lacunae on the opposite side. However, the catchwords verify that the texts do survive in their original order.<sup>6</sup>

The Auchinleck manuscript survives both as a unique repository of magical material and as a typical example of the medieval reading experience. The Auchinleck manuscript is one of the most important surviving compendia of Middle English literature. Susanna Fein calls it “one of the chief compendiums of literature in the Middle English period” (Fein, *The Auchinleck Manuscript* 10). Maldwyn Mills says it is “the most important surviving repository of all” (Mills

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<sup>4</sup> Five or six scribes were involved in the copying of the manuscript, and while it was once thought to have been compiled in a bookshop in London, scholars now see Scribe 1 as the sole compiler/overseer of the compendium. For a summary of this debate see the introduction to Susanna Fein’s *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* (Fein, *The Auchinleck Manuscript* 5). I discuss the implications of this debate further in the introduction to my second chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Scholars generally agree that this manuscript was created for a merchant class audience, and that it contains popular texts. Elizabeth Salter writes that it was “specifically designed to attract and satisfy a vigorous, secular, middle-class public” (Salter 33). Pearsall and Cunningham emphasise that this is not a deluxe book, but one, nevertheless, that would have been expensive to buy. They suggest that it is meant to both edify and entertain, and that “the taste that it appeals to and is designed for is that of the aspirant middle-class citizen, perhaps a wealthy merchant” (Pearsall and Cunningham viii). Fein’s recent volume has narrowed and complicated this broad definition of the audience. Hume’s essay in the volume argues for a family audience while Runde’s essay focuses on the religious authority in manuscript and its consequential emphasis on “prayerful activity” (Fein, *The Auchinleck Manuscript* 8).

<sup>6</sup> For more details see Fein, *The Auchinleck Manuscript* 4-6. See also Pearsall and Cunningham xi-xiv. Alison Wiggins also provides a detailed description of the physical makeup of the manuscript on The National Library of Scotland’s *Auchinleck Manuscript* website.

and Rogers 52), and Rhiannon Purdie suggests that while it does not contain the earliest examples of Middle English romance, it is the earliest manuscript to “foreground the genre” and “does contain the earliest examples of tail-rhyme romance” (Purdie 93). It is most famous for its romance material, which takes up approximately three-quarters of the bulk of the manuscript; many of the romance texts survive only in the Auchinleck manuscript, and most are in the earliest surviving copies. In addition to its famous romance material, however, Auchinleck presents a diverse collection of other literary genres: saint’s lives, visits to the underworld, satirical poems, works of religious instruction and other religious narratives, historical pieces, and humorous tales.<sup>7</sup>

In as much as it is unique in its importance, the manuscript is also typical in this diversity of texts. Romance manuscripts were typically miscellanies of texts that presented a wide swath of reading material to medieval audiences. The equally famous Harley Manuscript (British Library, Harley MS 2253) for example, contains a similar collection of romance material, saint’s lives, and religious texts. The supernatural proliferates across this range of texts in vernacular manuscripts, and for medieval readers, reading a manuscript like Auchinleck meant encountering instances of the supernatural in a variety of forms. When these various instances of the supernatural in Auchinleck are read together, a coherent poetic system used by medieval poets to create literary magic becomes evident. This chapter consequently reads all instances of literary magic that appear throughout Auchinleck against one another in order to identify and define the nature of the poetics of literary magic.

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<sup>7</sup> The best description of the Auchinleck manuscript can be found in Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham’s introduction to their 1977 facsimile edition of the text. They categorize the kinds of literature to be found within, provide a detailed physical description, and a map of the gatherings (Pearsall and Cunningham vii–xvii).

Two critical approaches to poetics guide this analysis. My methodological approach is structured broadly by a postmodern attitude towards the nature of poetics. In her categorization of postmodern poetics Linda Hutcheon suggests that theorists must move beyond concrete critical poetic structures to create “an open, ever-changing theoretical structure by which to order both our cultural knowledge and our critical procedures,” because, as she suggests, poetics “is both a way of speaking – a discourse – and a cultural process involving the expressions of thought” (Hutcheon 14). Hutcheon’s nuanced theory of poetics most significantly informs my own, because the poetics of the marvellous cannot and should not be defined as a concrete unchanging system but rather as a fluid cultural process, evocative of medieval modes of thought. It is a poetics that shifts and changes over time and within different contexts. Édouard Glissant opens his *Poetics of Relation* by emphasising the importance of approaching poetic systems not as a single concrete structure rooted in one specific tradition, but rather as a rhizome with multiple entry points and modes of exploration that all link together and impact one another. I shall show how the poetics of the marvellous that emerges from the Auchinleck manuscript springs to life not simply through a concrete linguistic structure, but also the reading culture of the manuscript, the relationships amongst the texts, and the influences derived from the historical climate of its production.

Within this overarching understanding of the fluid, changeable nature of the poetics of the marvellous, however, my study is also guided by concrete, structuralist ideas of the function of poetics inherent to medieval literature. Medieval poetics are characterizable by their clear, consistent forms recognizable across genres. This is particularly true of romance which was even mocked by Chaucer for its formulaic construction. *The Tale of Sir Thopas* parodies the conventions of tail rhyme romance with an emphasis on its rough, formulaic verse forms and on

the conventions typical to romance – the fair young knight, the beautiful armament, the quest for fairy love, the encounter with a giant. These seemingly simplistic structures make up the backbone of much romance material, and the turns of phrase and repeated words used over and over again in romance in many ways define the genre. However, when these phrases and structures are compared and analyzed their role in the constitution of literary magic becomes apparent. Such an analysis also reveals how representative these stock poetics are of medieval attitudes towards the supernatural. Consequently, I sketch the poetics of the marvellous both with the rigid and formalized structures of types and keywords, and simultaneously with the broad, multifaceted strokes of contexts, contradictions, and nuances. Approaching the representation of the marvellous in this way allows not only for a categorization and identification of the system, but also for a greater understanding of the cultural and literary climate from which it emerges.

This chapter follows this methodological approach in all three of its sections. The first section outlines the nature of literary magic at its most fundamental level. It argues that literary magic in the Auchinleck manuscript is scant, manifesting itself less in depictions of magical moments and more in the surrounding circumstances. It furthermore addresses two areas of cultural context that contributed to this kind of writing – Horatian ideas of good poetry prominent in medieval thought, and theological anxieties about the impact of metamorphosis. The second section moves forward to look at the stock phrases and linguistic types used by poets to create magic. In so doing, it identifies literary magic as a coherent poetic type. It pinpoints the stock words, “wonder” and “marvel,” and the stock poetic devices, hyperbole, truth claims, and witnessing, that occur repeatedly with instances of the marvellous. Using Paul Zumthor’s theory of medieval poetic types, this section classifies literary magic as a type prevalent in medieval reading culture. The third section considers the implications of the manifestation of magic in this



reading culture and particularly the acts of “wondering” and “marvelling” that are at its very core. It argues that these two words show the degree to which supernatural forms sit at the center of medieval literature and exemplify how closely the sacred and secular supernatural are blended within medieval thought. The conclusion reflects on the significance of the act of “wondering” and shows how interest in the marvellous helped solidify magic’s place in literary and popular culture. Through identifying a complex, nuanced system of poetics that makes up the medieval reader’s encounter with the supernatural, this chapter not only begins the process of uncovering and identifying magic as a unique, evocative literary form fundamental to medieval literary culture, but also uncovers the poetic structures that help ensure its survival.

### *A Scant Poetics*

Medieval literary magic in the Auchinleck manuscript is definable by its lack of effusiveness. Moments that would seem ripe for elaborate description are often among the plainest parts of a text. In the romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, for example, Merlin gives himself and others new appearances, predicts the future, knows all that is and was and will be, wields dragons of fire, and raises tempests. These magical events are never described in detail. When, for example, Fortigern tries to force Merlin to help him fight Uther and Pendragon, Merlin magically disappears. The poet describes the moment as follows:

Anon þai wold him han ynome  
Ac þai nist where he was bicomē.  
Þe king & his folk also  
Þerfore made michel wo,  
Þai him souȝt & nouȝt him founde.

He was oway in a stounde

Vnto his maister Blasy (lines 1687-93)<sup>8</sup>

The guards make to grab him and discover that he is nowhere to be found. The moment of his disappearance is not described at all. There is no smoke, no flash of light, not even a statement that Merlin disappeared. The poet draws no attention to the fact that Merlin has performed magic, enacting a fantastic transformation that takes him from the grip of hostile enemies to a pastoral forest. This magical disappearance manifests itself solely in the fact that he is suddenly not in the presence of the guards but rather on his way to see Blaise. The poetics of the marvellous exemplified here is scant to the point of near nonexistence. The only way a reader knows that magic has happened is because of the consequences of the magic: Merlin is suddenly and inexplicably not where he was. This example illustrates the nature of the poetics of literary magic at its most basic level; literary magic is scant and created not through effusive descriptions of events but rather in the circumstances surrounding the event.

Medieval poets create magic through emphasizing what comes before and after a magical event. This can be seen in a particularly impressive example of supernatural transformation that occurs in the romance *The King of Tars*. This romance depicts an unwilling marriage between a beautiful, pious, Christian princess and a Saracen emperor. The emperor and the princess have a child together that is born as a lump of flesh. When the child is baptised, however, it marvellously transforms from a lump of flesh into a baby.<sup>9</sup> One can imagine a scene of

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<sup>8</sup> All quotations from the Auchinleck manuscript come from the transcription edited by David Burnley and Alison Wiggins for the National Library of Scotland. I cite the relevant line numbers. This project can be found at <http://auchinleck.nls.uk/>. The editorial material accompanying the transcription provides information about any available editions of each text.

<sup>9</sup> This racially charged and extremely problematic moment has inspired much academic discussion. Siobhain Bly Calkin argues that the lump of flesh results from the intermingling of Christian and Saracen blood and “represents a wholesale integration of Christian and Saracen, and occupies an undefined space between the two religions....the “flesche” lies beyond the realm of human definition and identification” (Bly Calkin, *Saracens* 118). When the baby

transformation similar to that seen in *Harry Potter* – with limbs sprouting like branches out of the lump, and a head, face, and nose carving themselves into the flesh. The poet’s description is rather simpler:

Be prest toke þe flesche anon,  
& cleped it þe name of Ion  
In worþschip of þe day;  
& when þat it cristned was  
It hadde liif & lim & fas,  
& crid wiþ gret deray.  
& hadde hide & flesche & fel,  
& alle þat euer þerto bifel,  
In gest as y ȝow say,  
Feirer child miȝt non be bore (772-81)

There is no limb sprouting or face carving. Instead, the poet states that after it was christened, the baby “hadde” life and limbs and a face. The transformation itself is not described; the actual magic is entirely passed over. What is described are the results of the transformation: the before and after. When the baby is first born, it is described as “a rond of flesche /... / Wiþouten blod & bon” that “lay ded as þe ston” (580-85). After its baptism, it is transformed into a child full of

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is baptised, she argues, Christian law “is firmly imposed on the “flesche,” and this ends its hideous indefiniteness and integration of Christian and Saracen identities” (Bly Calkin, *Saracens* 121). Geraldine Heng in *Empire of Magic* focuses on the monstrosity of the baby in *The King of Tars*, “a monster of the flesh, in the flesh: the physical embodiment of an obscene marriage,” arguing that the “explicit lesson in this representational script of hideous birth is that religion, which we had assumed to belong purely to the realm of culture, can shape and instruct *biology*” (Heng 228). The baptism of the child, she notes, reveals Christianity’s ability to “reshape biological fleshly matter and, we must assume, also to confer a divine soul in the process of making a human” (Heng 229). Jane Gilbert in “Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*” links the formless child to Aristotelian and Lacanian ideas of fatherhood, arguing that the child is lacking symbolic paternity because “non-Christians are incapable of exercising the Paternal function” (Gilbert 335). This is a small sampling of an enormous body of scholarship.

life. It has life, limbs, a face, flesh and skin, and its humanity and childishness are further emphasised through its immediate cries. The marvelousness of the moment is created not through the description of the actual transformation, but rather through the change that has occurred. The moment of transformation is poetically unimportant. What is important is the change itself: the direct and physical results of the miraculous event.

The representation of a magical moment within the surrounding circumstances is not limited to magic in secular texts; it appears as commonly in Christian miracles as in secular magic. *The Life of St Mary Magdalene* contains an evocative transformation that perfectly illustrates this point. Mary Magdalene reanimates the Queen of Merseilles and her child after they die in childbirth. The King sits on the beach beside his wife's corpse and implores of Mary Magdalene:

‘þat þou miȝt now wiþ þi preiing

Mi wiif oȝain to liue bring.’

As he bigan swiche mone to make

His wiif bigan þo to awake.

Vp sche aros & gan to seyn

‘Ybliscd be þe Maudelain’ (446-51).

Here again, the transformation is not described. One moment the Queen is dead, and the next, she wakes, then stands, then speaks. There is no description of the skin brightening, or of life re-entering the Queen's body. She transitions immediately from dead to alive. The moment of metamorphosis is bypassed and what remains important is not the reanimation itself, but rather the end result – a living breathing person. Important too, and in the previous example, is the situation surrounding the supernatural event. In both instances faith activates these supernatural

transformations. Both miraculous events occur because of the direct involvement of some Christian figure. In *The King of Tars* it is the priest who performs the baptism; here it is Mary Magdalene. The surrounding texts are both steeped in religious ritual and prayer, and both poets linger over these circumstances.

One final example from *Sir Tristrem*, an early version of the Tristan and Isolde romance, further illuminates the scant nature of the poetics of the marvellous. The romance pivots on the magical love potion consumed by the lovers that sends them spiralling into an ill-fated love affair filled with strife and sorrow. Typically, the moment they consume the drink does not seem magical at all. Isolde asks her maid for a drink. It comes in a “coupe” “richeli wrouȝt.” The author emphasises that “In al þe world nas nouȝt / Swiche drink as þer was in” (1664-65). The maid, Bringwain, to,

swete Ysonde it bitauȝt;  
Sche bad Tristrem bigin,  
To say.  
Her loue miȝt no man tvin  
Til her ending-day  
An hounde þer was biside  
Þat was ycleped Hodain;  
Þe coupe he licked þat tide  
Þo down it sett Bringwain  
Þai loued al in lide (1668-77)

The poet goes on to describe the passionate nights Tristrem and Isolde then spend together on the boat as well as the loyalty of Isolde’s dog – all enjoyed “in ioie & ek in pain” (1680). The

potency of the potion is evident in the immediate emotional transformation wrought over the three characters. Before the drink, they are travelling companions; after consumption, they are inseparably bound by a magical link that transforms their lives. Following the typical manifestation of magical moments in the manuscript, the transformation itself is not portrayed. The poet does not describe the physical or even emotional metamorphosis that occurs inside the minds of the characters and instead focuses entirely on the external impact of the magic. The supernatural nature of this potion dwells within the results – in the love affair into which they proceed and in the loyalty of Isolde's dog.

The way in which magic is poetically rendered through its impact on the external world is further emphasised by the inclusion of Isolde's dog in this scene. It seems a bizarre addition, and one omitted in later versions of the tale and in the source material.<sup>10</sup> The dog drinking the potion adds nothing to the tragedy or romance of the scene. In Alan Lupack's introduction to his edition of the text, in which he reads the romance as a parody, he suggests this scene has comedic effect. He dismisses an earlier claim made by T. C. Rumble that the scene is "an obvious attempt to give some rational explanation for the unusual faithfulness of Tristrem's dog" (Rumble 225) and instead argues that "the scene is more farcical than expository" (Lupack 147). Beyond adding comedic effect however, which seems bizarre at this pivotal moment, the addition of the dog enhances the supernatural without explicitly emphasising magical transformations. The magic of the potion extends even beyond the lovers to encompass most of the surrounding players. Tristrem and Isolde's romantic entanglement is to a certain extent fated from the beginning of the romance – one could imagine that even if there were no magical potion, the two would still

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<sup>10</sup> In Sir Thomas Malory's version of the tale, for example, the dog is nowhere to be found when Tristan and Isolde drink the potion (Malory 258). T. C. Rumble argues that the *Tristrem* poet adds the scene to appeal to his audience and fill "another weakness in the story" (Rumble 225).

fall in love. The dog, however, a thoroughly unimportant player in this version of the tale, is in no way bound by the destiny of the romance, and so, in consuming and being affected by the potion, the dog brings attention to the supernatural nature of the potion; its supernatural qualities are so powerful that it brings all – from human to animal – under its influence. In removing any emphasis on the magical transformation and including the dog in this scene, the poet thus manages to still highlight the astounding supernatural qualities of the potion without actually depicting magic.

This is a trend throughout the manuscript and an important difference from much of the source material from which these romances were translated. As T. C. Rumble shows in “The Middle English *Sir Tristrem*: Toward a Reappraisal” the poet of *Sir Tristrem* actually modified or removed most aspects of the supernatural found in his source material. As Rumble writes,

The English poet apparently cared little for the element of the supernatural that he found in his source. He discards completely the magic motif of Petricru’s bells.... And he deliberately omits to tell us that the wounds which Tristrem receives from Morholt are poisonous...this would require, as in his source, their magical healing. (Rumble 225)

The same kinds of omissions can be seen in other texts in the manuscript. In *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, for example, Merlin’s various transformations are significantly reduced from their French source, *Lestoire de Merlin*, part of the French Arthurian Vulgate cycle.<sup>11</sup> Some of his most impressive transformations are gone. In the Vulgate version, Merlin spends pages transforming into various disguises. This is most easily seen in the names the translator, Rupert Pickens, gives to many of the chapters: “Merlin as a bird catcher,” (ch. 233) “Merlin as a messenger boy,” (ch. 271) “Merlin and the Emperor of Rome” (in which he transforms into a

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<sup>11</sup> O. D. Macrae Gibson established this source and explores the English treatment of it in his companion volume to his edition of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*.

stag) (ch. 315). Most of these transformations are omitted from the Auchinleck version.

Somewhat surprisingly considering its size, no instances of Ovidian style metamorphosis appear anywhere in the manuscript. The poets and translators regularly omit these effusive magical moments. Why?

I would like to propose two components of medieval literary culture that may have influenced the creation of this scant poetics. The first is medieval attitudes towards poetics and writing grounded in the work of the Roman poet Horace. The second is theological attitudes towards metamorphosis that saw magical change and especially metamorphosis as problematic.

Horace was read prominently throughout the Middle Ages and greatly influenced the culture of reading at the time. His *Ars Poetica* has been identified as one of the most influential works on writing.<sup>12</sup> Its afterlives can be seen not only in the rich collection of commentaries and prologues to editions of the text that survive, but also in resonances running throughout much literary theory from the time, including such works as Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria*, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*.<sup>13</sup> Its influence can also be seen in the poetic construction of the marvellous in Auchinleck.

In the *Ars Poetica* Horace insists that good poetry should be natural and simplistic. As he writes,

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<sup>12</sup> In his chapter on "The Reception of Horace in the Middle Ages" Karsten Friis-Jensen writes that "Horace was among the most widely read Roman poets throughout the Middle Ages" (Friis-Jensen, "The Reception of Horace" 293). O. D. Hardison and Leon Golden also showed that the *Ars Poetica* is the only classical text on literary criticism consistently known throughout history, and that "it was read and cited throughout the Middle Ages" (Hardison and Golden 3). The introduction to medieval literary criticism, in *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism*, also affirms that "the primary document for rhetorical criticism *qua* criticism throughout the Middle Ages was Horace's *Ars Poetica*" (Preminger et al. 271).

<sup>13</sup> Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter in their anthology *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric* emphasise Horace's importance to medieval literary thought and include several examples of commentaries on the *Ars Poetica* (Copeland and Sluiter 551-58). They also emphasise the many and various texts either based on or influenced by Horace's work. The works mentioned above can be found on pages 559-72 and 594-606, respectively.



If a painter were willing to join a horse's neck to a human head and spread on multicolored feathers, with different parts of the body brought in from anywhere and everywhere, so that what starts out above as a beautiful woman ends up horribly as a black fish, could you my friends, if you had been admitted to the spectacle, hold back your laughter? (Horace, trans. Golden 7)<sup>14</sup>

If, as Horace says, a poet writes about such nonsensical and unnatural things as a feathered-horse-human-fish, he will be met with derision. He goes on to stress that “the foundation and source of literary excellence is wisdom” (Horace, trans. Golden 16).<sup>15</sup> Poets should draw from what they know, and especially from the natural world. Ultimately “poetic fictions should approximate reality” (Horace, trans. Golden 17).<sup>16</sup> In addition to depicting reality and the natural world, poetic verse should not be overly ornamental. Horace reminds his readers, who might wish to sew the “purple patches” of flowery description onto their writing, that poetry “is not the place for such embellishments” (Horace, trans. Golden 7).<sup>17</sup> So, according to Horace, good poetry should depict reality, be from the natural world, and be simplistic in its description.

This attitude resonated throughout the Middle Ages. One anonymous scholar wrote in a prologue to an edition of the *Ars Poetica* that “just as a painter ought to imitate nature either as it really is or as it is in the opinion of men...so a poet, even though he may represent fictitious things, ought not to stray out of keeping with human opinion” (Copeland and Sluiter 557-58).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This translation was prepared by Leon Golden in his *Horace for Students of Literature*. The Latin, from an edition of the text edited by Burton Raffel et al., is as follows: “Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam / iungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas / undique collatis membris, ut turpiter atrum / desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne, / spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici?” (Horace, ed. Burton et al. 1–5).

<sup>15</sup> “Scribendi recte sapere est et principium et fons:” (Horace, ed. Burton et al. 309)

<sup>16</sup> “ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris” (Horace, ed. Burton et al. 338)

<sup>17</sup> “inceptis gravibus plerumque et magna professis purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus et alter adsuitur / ... / sed nunc non erat his locus” (Horace, ed. Burton et al. 14–19)

<sup>18</sup> For detailed accounts of the texts edited, and often translated by Copeland and Sluiter, and for information about each of the texts (including contexts and available editions), see their anthology *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*:

Matthew of Vendôme similarly writes that students of language should “be advised in the treatment of their material to strive to imitate wonted events, so that they utter truths or verisimilitudes” (Copeland and Sluiter 570). John of Garland stresses Horace’s evocation that poets pick only “material equal to [their] talents” (Copeland and Sluiter 644) – that which they will be able to fully articulate – and names digressive description as the second most important vice to avoid in verse (Copeland and Sluiter 652). Even Eberhard of Béthune opens his *Graecismus* by blaming “ignoramus” who “give expression to their asinine stupidity by imagining Chimera-like statues and dreaming up something inconceivable” (Copeland and Sluiter 586-87). Here Eberhard speaks of poorly constructed sentences; however, his metaphorical choice to compare the fault of bad grammar to something unnatural and “inconceivable” shows just how engrained the importance of sticking to the natural world in the construction of texts really was.

The poetics of the marvellous evident within the Auchinleck manuscript follows these principles of good poetry. The poets, telling of wondrous transformations, of bodies changing form, and people disappearing, do not engage in lengthy accounts. They attach no “purple patches” of elaborate description to their work. In not describing magical transformations at all, they attach not even a stitch of purple. In so doing, they avoid the *faux pas* of writing poetry that strays away from the natural, knowable world. If a poet should “imitate nature” and stick to “wonted events” then depictions of the supernatural – of that which by its very nature is above the natural world – would be distasteful. The choice of each poet throughout the manuscript to stick to that which is known – to the tangible, physical circumstances surrounding the event – in their descriptions of magic, supports this point. A description of a baby, or of a group of people

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*Language Arts and Literary Theory. AD 300-1475.* In each case I have quoted from their editions of the texts and included references to their anthology.

missing one person, or even of a body that is dead and a body that is alive all fall within the realm of natural, everyday experience. Omitting descriptions of supernatural transformations and focusing on the circumstances surrounding a magical event enabled poets to depict the supernatural while adhering to these ideas. While it is impossible to say for certain that each and every poet, scribe, and translator involved in the creation of the Auchinleck manuscript was directly influenced by Horace and his imitator's ideas on poetry, the fact that these authors chose not to depict the supernatural moments suggests that the influence must have been present, at least to some degree.

The second piece of cultural context that may have influenced the scant poetics of the marvellous was theological concerns over the potential dangers of metamorphosis. Caroline Walker Bynum has shown first in *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* and later in *Metamorphosis and Identity*, that depictions and conceptions of marvellous transformations and metamorphosis posed theoretical challenges to scholars and theologians in the Middle Ages. She suggests that people were intrinsically fascinated by change,<sup>19</sup> but also that there was a great deal of anxiety and fear over, and even some potentially heretical associations with metamorphosis and supernatural transformation. She writes, “church lawyers continued to employ the famous Canon episcopo of ca. 900 that prohibited as blasphemy the belief in metamorphosis or body-exchange” (Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis* 82). She goes on to say that “theorists ... resisted metamorphosis so profoundly, even as an image, that they felt reading such

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<sup>19</sup> As she writes, “intellectuals, religious leaders, and (insofar as we can glimpse them) ordinary people were fascinated by change as an ontological problem - not merely the birth and decay inherent in the life cycle, the economic and political opportunities attendant upon growth, the threat and promise posed by shifting gender relations and family structures, the efforts to position self engendered by cross-cultural contacts and emerging national identities – but also and pre-eminently change itself: the fundamental fact that something can become something else” (Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis* 18).

stories was heretical” (Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis* 178).<sup>20</sup> As she shows in *The Resurrection of the Body* this idea stemmed from theological conceptions that the body was essential to one’s identity. She writes,

The materialism of this eschatology expressed not body-soul dualism but rather a sense of self as psychosomatic unity. The idea of person, bequeathed by the Middle Ages to the modern world, was not a concept of soul escaping body or soul using body; it was a concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity – and therefore finally to whatever one means by salvation....person was not person without body, and body was the carrier or the expression...of what we today call individuality. (Walker Bynum, *Resurrection* 11)

By their very nature, supernatural transformations affect the bodies of living beings. Through unknown means, both divine and secular, marvellous events cause bodies to change shape (as in *The King of Tars*), to change their place in space (as in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*), to change their state of existence (from living to dead as in *The Life of St Mary Magdalene*) and even to change their sense of self (from reasonable individual to irrational lover in *Sir Tristrem*). Magic and the marvellous change bodies and individuals. If a person’s identity is tied to his or her body will that person be the same after undergoing magical transformation? Is Merlin still the same when he reappears in a new locale? Is the Queen of Marseilles still herself after her resurrection?

The poets of the Auchinleck manuscript do not engage in any forthright way with the sort of theological and philosophical debates that Walker Bynum shows were happening from the twelfth to early fourteenth centuries; however, the unease present amongst the scholarly and theological community seems to manifest itself in the popular literature through omission. The

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<sup>20</sup> While Walker Bynum speaks here of lycanthropy, she evokes the idea that the process of change so often involved in magical transformation was problematic at the time and generated a great deal of concern and disquiet.

poets chose not to show the moment of transformation, but instead focus on the before and after. They chose to focus on the stable moments of magic – on a dead body and on a living body, on a lump of flesh and on a baby. Their poetic depictions are of bodies in stasis rather than bodies in flux. Perhaps this choice to focus on stable bodies and purge all descriptions of supernatural transformation occurred in part because of the theological and scholarly debates over the impossibility of the retention of identity within a transformed body. Instead of actively engaging with a complex debate with potentially heretical associations, these authors redirected focus onto that which was acceptable – the representation of people, places, and things. These scholarly debates must have been swirling around in the cultural consciousness of the time and have had some influence on poetic standards. The very lack of depiction of magical events and in some cases the conscious change of sources to exclude those moments of transformation suggest these ideas may have had an impact on the poetics of the time.

Ultimately, the scant poetics of the marvellous, and the tendency of poets to create magic in literary form through a focus on the surrounding circumstances, both find foundations in the cultural context of the time. I present these ideas not with the intention of confirming direct, singular influence on the poetic system but rather as nuggets of cultural context that can help explain its nature. In addition to standards of poetics that prioritize natural, simplistic description, cultural unease over metamorphosis and its impact on identity help explain why it is that the poetics of the marvellous in the Auchinleck manuscript is so very scant. Having established the general nature of literary magic, I turn now to focus on the surrounding circumstances, wherein the poetics of the marvellous truly lies.

### *Literary Magic as Poetic Type*

While the actual moment of transformation is rarely represented, the consistency of the poetic structures found in the text surrounding a magical event attests to the presence of a poetic system used to create magical events throughout the manuscript. This poetic type is made up of certain keywords and certain poetic devices that poets tend to use surrounding a magical moment to enhance its marvelousness. These words and devices act as cues to the reader signalling that something magical has taken place. They are consistent enough to be counted among the stock motifs common to much medieval literature.

Stock motifs are a familiar feature of medieval romance particularly. As Derek Pearsall writes, “stock motifs – the disguised hero, the false steward, the accused wife, the credulous husband, the giant or dragon-fight – recur from romance to romance” (Pearsall, *Old English* 148). Alongside stock motifs – of which magic is certainly one, although not included here by Pearsall – come stock phraseologies and poetic structures. G. A. Lester in *The Language of Old and Middle English Poetry* explores this particular aspect, noting that “recurrent formulae ... are particularly common in the rhymed romances and in poems of the Alliterative revival” (Lester 127).<sup>21</sup> Stock poetics were common to the medieval reading experience and in many ways characterize vernacular, popular poetry. This is especially true of the poems of the Auchinleck manuscript whose stock phrases have been observed before. The arguments made about the material compilation of the manuscript and the role of the scribe/compiler by Loomis, Pearsall and Cunningham, Wiggins, and Fein, often center on the ways in which certain phrases are

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<sup>21</sup> Lester and before him Pearsall attribute the tendency towards and acceptance of stock formulae to the oral origins of romance. As Pearsall notes, the fact that the poems were meant for oral delivery resulted in “conventional apparatus” which remained even after the romances transitioned into collections intended for private reading. Romances are full, Pearsall suggests rather derisively of “verse-fillers and rhyming tags” which are “of minimal artistic importance” (Pearsall, *Old English* 149). Lester further notes common syntactical patterns that make use of tags and the more artistic verse formulae apparent in many texts (Lester 130).

repeated in various texts.<sup>22</sup> Literary magic is created through just such stock formulae and constitutes a prominent poetic type.

Paul Zumthor in *Towards a Medieval Poetics*, defines the poetic type as a “typical element” of a medieval text created through the repetitive use of linguistic formulae. As he writes,

I give the name types to all these formal marks, which are the numerous ready-made expressions to which partial analyses have given such often contradictory names as clichés, topoi, formulas, key images, and motifs. The word “type” will be used here to designate any element of “writing” that is both structured and polyvalent, having functional relationships between its parts and being indefinitely reusable in a whole variety of contexts. (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 56)

For Zumthor, types are the typical written elements of a medieval text that appear over and over again in a variety of contexts. They appear both “on the level of forms of expression” and “on the level of forms of content” (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 57). In other words, a type constitutes not just a poetic commonality like the beautiful virgin, but also the kinds of phrases typically used to denote her. Types are recognizable because they appear repeatedly in the same way.

They are made up of “a set of organized features, comprising a fixed kernel (semantic or formal) and a small number of variables” (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 57). So, the type is made through

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<sup>22</sup> Laura Hibbard Loomis bases her bookshop theory on the “verbal indebtedness” certain romances have to one another; she focuses on *Guy of Warwick*, *Reinbrun* and *Amis and Amilioun*. In their introduction to their facsimile edition of the manuscript Derek Pearsall and I. C. Cunningham add to this list, suggesting that there is common phraseology among many of the various texts, including, but not limited to, *The King of Tars*, *Lai le Freine*, and *Sir Degare*. They suggest this provides evidence for a common origin in a bookshop (Pearsall and Cunningham x–xi). Alison Wiggins relies on the phraseology in the manuscript to revise Loomis’s earlier analysis of the similarities amongst the romances listed above in “Imagining the Compiler: *Guy of Warwick* and the Compilation of the Auchinleck Manuscript.” More recently, Susanna Fein’s “The Fillers of the Auchinleck Manuscript and the Literary Culture of the West Midlands” builds an argument about the western borrowings of the Auchinleck compiler based on similarities amongst texts within the manuscript and other contemporary manuscripts. For a complete account of this debate, see Chapter Two.

the repetitive use of certain words or forms alongside specific variable phrases. One of Zumthor's examples is an "epic formula" such as "attack with the lance," which he shows rendered in a consistent way across a range of epic texts (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 57-58). All together, these become "an easily recognized configuration." Readers recognize the phrase, and its repetition creates "a semiotic system" that operates as a referent amongst poetic texts (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 65).

The marvellous in the Auchinleck manuscript is a similar poetic type that must have been as recognizable to medieval readers as any of the others mentioned by Zumthor. It is made up of both keywords and poetic devices. The repetitive and persistent use of the words "wonder" and "marvel" function as keywords or, as Zumthor would say, lexical connections, between the various instances of the marvellous in the manuscript. Meanwhile, three poetic devices used to render a moment marvellous – hyperbole, truth claims, and witnessing – constitute the variable kinds of expressions mentioned by Zumthor. Read together these keywords and poetic devices constitute a consistent system through which medieval poets render something supernatural and through which medieval readers understood that thing as supernatural. The structure is not as concrete as those posited by Zumthor. His structuralist approach delineates a variety of very concrete types categorized in a very specific way. In the poetics of the marvellous in Auchinleck, there is no "fixed kernel" that appears on *every* supernatural occasion. The poetic system is more fluid and must be understood not as a fixed, inflexible, unchangeable system, but rather one that shifts and blends as is required in the moment. However, there are significant continuities and repetitions amongst the magical moments that make identification of the poetic type of literary magic possible.



The words “wonder” and “marvel” are the first most essential components of the poetics of literary magic in the Auchinleck manuscript. The word “wonder” derives from Old English “wunder.” It refers to “something that causes astonishment: a marvelous object; a marvel.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is first recorded in English as early as 700, appearing in Caedmon’s hymn, one of the earliest surviving pieces of Old English poetry (“Wonder, n.”).<sup>23</sup> It appears in *Beowulf* and throughout medieval literature, in religious texts, chronicles, drama, satire, romance and much more. Entries exist for the word as a noun, an adjective, a verb, a gerund, and even an adverb. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, as a noun it is defined primarily as “an extraordinary thing, a marvel, prodigy” (“Wonder, n.”).<sup>24</sup> As an adjective it is said to render something “extraordinary, phenomenal; unusual, strange” or “miraculous” or “magical” (“Wonder, adj.”). As a verb it shows the action of being “struck with awe” or feeling “wonder about sth;” one might also “marvel” or “be astonished or astounded” (“Wondren, v.”). The word “marvel” comes originally from Latin (“*mirabilia*”) and arrives in England via Old French and Anglo-Norman (“Marvel, n.1”). The earliest example of the word “meruail,” identified by the *OED*, only appears at the turn of the fourteenth century. Despite its late arrival, “marvel” quickly inundates the English language, already appearing more than thirty times in Auchinleck, which was produced only shortly after the first documented use of the word. “Marvel” functions in many similar ways to “wonder;” it is also defined as “a wonderful or astonishing thing; a cause of surprise, admiration, or wonder; a wonder” (“Marvel, n.1”). All

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<sup>23</sup> For more details, see the entry in the *OED*. The word is also found in Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Old High German, and Old Norse in very similar forms. Its origins are ultimately unknown (“Wonder, n.”).

<sup>24</sup> There are seven entries, each with multiple subheadings, for the noun form of the word. Each generally refers to something marvellous, miraculous, surprising, or extraordinary. Each heading and subheading has multiple quotations exemplifying the different usages. Several examples from the Auchinleck manuscript appear in the quotations in the *MED* (“Wonder, n.”); however, the diversity of manuscripts in which examples can be found is a testament to the prominence of the word and thus of the marvellous throughout Middle English and Old English literature.

of these uses can be found in the Auchinleck manuscript, and each time “wonder” appears, it denotes something extraordinary or supernatural.

The words “wonder” and “marvel” are used, for example, to establish the supernatural nature of various characters. In the short romance *Floris and Blancheflour*, the magical emperor is first introduced as “so wonder a gome” (line 275). The poet then goes on to describe the powers of the emperor, which manifest themselves through his magical garden. This garden picks his wife for him through a series of magical tests. The use of the word “wonder” in the character’s introduction establishes that the emperor is not simply a man, but a “wonder” of a man who is able to evoke supernatural aid in his selection of a wife. The word “wonder” prepares the reader for the magic to come, foregrounding the fantastical nature of this ruler and rendering this emperor supernatural through the simple act of naming. In *The Life of St Mary Magdalene* the poet describes Mary Magdalene when she dies and ascends to heaven as “so fair & wonderlich briȝt” that none might behold her (640). In this moment, Mary Magdalene shines with supernatural light. The adverbial use of the word “wonderlich” identifies the supernatural quality of her appearance and illuminates the marvellous quality of Mary Magdalene’s beauty, almost divine upon her death. It works emphatically, suggesting that she is extraordinarily bright, and supernaturally, emphasizing that her brightness places her above other humans. Both of these examples show how “wonder” is used to help characterize a character as supernatural. The word enhances their supernatural nature but does not clearly define that nature. Mary is not called divine, just as the emperor is not called magical or a sorcerer. The word “wonder” simply emphasises the marvellous nature of these two individuals, laying the foundation of their supernatural characterizations.

Certain objects are also rendered supernatural through the use of the words “wonder” and “marvel.” In *Kyng Alisaunder*, for example, Alisaunder arrives in a foreign land and asks to see a marvel. After a perilous journey he finds a “bischof” who “ledeþ the king to þis wonder” (6821). The “wonder,” also described as “a gret meruaille” (6749), is a relic, lit by divine light, smelling of sweetness, and the fairest thing Alisaunder has ever seen. Its status as something truly remarkable is identified poetically by the act of naming. The hot springs of Bath in *The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, built by the magical King Bladud, are similarly described as “a wonder þing” (539). The author paints a picture of these marvellous baths, describing the supernatural mix of many things (chemicals, minerals, fire, demons) that ensures the baths “brenneþ boþ niȝt & day” (559). However, the poet’s initial characterization of these wondrous baths as “a wonder þing,” gestures towards the simplistic power of the word “wonder.” In using that word, the poet sets the stage for the fantastical description to come, preparing the reader to encounter something marvellous. The lengthy description following may not even be necessary; the baths have been established as a “wonder”ful thing, something to marvel at and to be amazed by. With one word the poet turns something as everyday as a bath into something wondrous.

The most evocative instances of the words “wonder” and “marvel” appear in their verbal forms. In the Charlemagne romance *Roland and Vernagu*, Vernagu, a pagan knight and a giant,<sup>25</sup> comes to the city of Pampiloun to find and fight Charlemagne. The giant is described as possessing “tventi men strengþe, / & fourti fet of lengþe” (473-74); his nose is “a fot & more” (479), and he is impossibly hard: “So hard he was to fond / þat no dint of brond / no greued him,

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<sup>25</sup> In *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*, Siobhain Bly Calkin shows that Vernagu is characterized as a magical and monstrous giant and yet still inhabits the role of a valiant and noble warrior (Bly Calkin, *Saracens* 23).

apli3t.” (470-72). A forty-foot-tall giant, with a nose that is a foot long, and skin so hard that swords cannot hurt him cuts an impressive figure. Charlemagne agrees:

Charls wonderd þo

When he sei3e him go,

He beheld him ich a lim

For seþþen he was ybore

He no hadde ysen before

Non þat was so grim. (491-96)

Catching sight of this extraordinary figure, more fearsome than any he has seen before, causes an understated reaction in the famous king. He does not cower in fear, but simply wonders at this fantastic figure. However, it is this act of wondering that poetically renders Vernagu a marvellous figure. Through wondering, Charlemagne emphasises that the giant transcends his own realm of experience – he has never seen anything like him before and cannot fully understand him. This act places Vernagu above the realm of the natural, knowable, everyday world and in the realm of the supernatural. The poet thus highlights Vernagu’s supernatural nature not only by the description given in the text, but in Charlemagne’s reaction.

This verbal form, alongside the adverbial, adjectival, and noun forms, are key components of literary magic as a poetic type, common to poets and familiar to readers. A person, place, or thing can be rendered fantastic simply by the use of either “wonder” or “marvel.” Most of the supernatural occurrences in the Auchinleck manuscript are created in this way. They range from the “meruail[s]” that the magician Virgil does in *The Seven Sages of Rome* (1986), to the “wonder” that is the fairy land of Arderne in *Reinbrun* (879). From “þe kni3t” who “wonderd” at the underworld presented in *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* (260), to the “gret meruail”

the pagan giant Vernagu experiences upon hearing the story of the virgin birth in *Roland and Vernagu* (732). From the elders of the temple who “wonder” at the eloquence of the two-year-old Virgin in *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary* (108), to the audience who “wonder hadde” at the similarly eloquent infant Merlin in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (1068). The repetition of the words “wonder” and “marvel” alongside supernatural events is common enough to identify these two words as one of the most fundamental aspects of literary magic in the reading culture of medieval England. Importantly too, at this most basic linguistic level, there is no distinction between Christian and secular marvels. All marvels, whether Christian or secular, are created by the use of these two words.

This is not to say that these words do not function in other ways in Auchinleck. The words “wonder” and “marvel” are used outside of the poetic structures surrounding literary magic. They are used emphatically, for example, as evident in *Lay le Frain*, when the mother is described as “wonder gret wiþ childe” (34). The mother is not supernaturally impregnated, but rather in possession of a very big belly because she is bearing twins. “Wonder” here could be replaced with another emphatic such as “very.” “Wonder” is also often used to describe the titular knights and ladies of romances. Guy is struck with “grete wonder” at the beauty of his love interest, Felice in *Guy of Warwick* (117). Similarly, when Tristrem exhibits his great hunting prowess and strange customs in *Sir Tristrem*, “þer wondred mani a man” (519). As Helen Cooper notes, these knights and ladies are not meant to be supernatural, but simply greater than their peers.<sup>26</sup> However, these varied usages do not detract from the ways in which “wonder”

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<sup>26</sup> There has historically been a great deal of scholarly anxiety over potentially magical heroes in romance narratives. Critics have long worked to make these heroes human. This impetus stems all the way from W. P. Ker who in *Epic and Romance* works hard to historicize Beowulf and remove any taint of the supernatural. The anxiety has shifted in recent years and Neil Cartlidge even includes Merlin in his edited volume of essays on *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*. However, as Cooper outlines in *The English Romance in Time*, heroes of romance almost never

and “marvel” work within the poetics of the marvellous. Even in moments that are not specifically supernatural, and thus not included within this poetic system, the words are meant to elevate the described person, place, or thing above the everyday. “Wonder” and “marvel” are used to make the ordinary, extraordinary. More often than not, this elevates the natural into the realm of the supernatural.

When it does, poets use different poetic devices to enhance the supernatural nature of the event, person, place, or thing. They turn to the variable poetic constructs that help render a moment supernatural. Hyperbole, truth claims, and witnessing are three poetic devices that most commonly characterize instances of the marvellous. They constitute the variable component of the poetic type of the marvellous. Hyperbole, the most common by far, simultaneously grounds the supernatural in the natural and elevates it above the everyday. Truth claims accompany depictions of marvellous events and reinforce the legitimacy of the event by calling on written authorities. Human witnesses also reinforce truthfulness, and most supernatural events are witnessed by at least one person. Together and individually, these poetic devices elevate certain moments into the marvellous realm and constitute the second aspect of this poetic type.

Hyperbole proliferates throughout medieval literature. The medieval reader and anyone familiar with the texts of this period are well acquainted with the effusive rhetoric of praise that often accompanies depictions of religious figures, royalty, women, knights, places and so much more. J. A. Burrow’s *The Poetry of Praise* sketches a history of laudatory poetry from antiquity to today, focusing especially on medieval literature. Burrow shows that instead of praising gods, historical figures, and heroes (as was normal in Antiquity and in Old English literature) Middle

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possess supernatural powers or objects because, “the more special the magic powers, the less special the characters appear who have them at their disposal. Magic and heroism find it very hard to occupy the same text, or the same portion of the text.... The highest heroism lies in the ability of a mere man to resist such supernatural powers” (Cooper 142–43).

English praises the “here-and-now”; “directly or indirectly, they address their *laudes* to a variety of individual subjects, male and female, human and divine, public and private” (Burrow, *Poetry of Praise* 61). Just such rhetorical praise is everywhere in the Auchinleck manuscript: beautiful women and daring knights parade through lush gardens and spectacular castles enjoying delectable feasts.

Hyperbolic praise is especially common in the manuscript alongside instances of the marvellous. Any text featuring the wondrous Virgin Mary, for example, exudes praise. The poet of *The Clerk who would see the Virgin* exclaims: “Hou fair sche is, þat maiden briȝt / Hou briȝt sche is no tong may tell” (64-65). Here, in a typical hyperbolic construction, the Virgin is rendered as so bright and beautiful, description is impossible. This kind of hyperbolic praise is not limited to important religious figures. The same kind of hyperbolic portrayal can be found alongside instances of secular marvels. In *The King of Tars*, for example, after the child has been miraculously transformed from a lump of flesh into a baby, the poet describes that child as the fairest ever born: “Feirer child miȝt non be bore” (781). Similarly, when describing the love potion consumed by Tristrem and Isolde, the poet of *Sir Tristrem* stresses that “In al þe world nas nouȝt / Swiche drink as þer was in” (1664-65). Like the supernaturally transformed child, and like the Virgin, the magical drink rises above any drink found in the world. In all three instances the use of hyperbolic superlatives places the supernatural object above the every day. All instances characterize the supernatural thing not just by what it is, but by how it is greater than other everyday versions of the same thing. The baby is not just a beautiful child, it is more beautiful than all other children; the drink is not just a wondrous drink, it is greater than any other drink in the entire world; the Virgin is too beautiful for any human to comprehend and express. All are quite literally super-natural – above the natural. This mode of description

enables the poets to characterize the supernatural object by relating it to the reader's everyday experience. They then emphasise its marvellous nature by showing how much better it is than the more mundane, everyday version.

This hyperbolic superlative structure frequently makes use of negation to accomplish this. In the above example the poet does not simply say that the drink is the greatest drink ever, but instead grounds it in the familiar through the use of negatives. A clear example of this technique appears in the description of an Angel found in *The Clerk who would see the Virgin*. Religious figures and relics in medieval literature often exude pleasant smells.<sup>27</sup> Following this tradition, the poet writes:

Wip him þer com a gret odour;  
Nas neuer no smel half so swete.  
So swete a smal nas neuer non,  
Of rose no of no spicerie (51-54).

Instead of describing the holy smell through the use of positive adjectives, the poet characterizes the aroma by what it is not. The description first asks medieval readers to imagine the familiar: the sweetest smell they have ever smelt. It then evokes wondrous smells found in the everyday world to stimulate sensory memories. After bringing up these two familiar smells, the poet uses negatives to ask readers to cast aside the familiar because it cannot compare with how wondrous this angel smells. The description of the magical drink works in the same way, encouraging readers to imagine the greatest drink they have ever had and emphasising that even that cannot

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<sup>27</sup> This odor of sanctity is evident throughout the Auchinleck Manuscript and across medieval literature. In Auchinleck, when Alisaunder encounters relics in *Kyng Alisaunder*, for example, the poet writes that those present, "neuer smelled so swete odour" (6825). Heaven is described by the bishop in *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* as having "a swete smal of al gode" (1088). When Mary Magdalene dies in *The Life of Mary Magdalene*, the chapel fills with "a swete a smal" (657). Even Guy of Warwick, who becomes a saintly figure in death, is said to have "a swete braþe com fram his bodi" (10447). For a discussion of the prominence of the aroma of sanctity across not only the Christian tradition, but from ancient Rome to Islam, see Suzanne Evans, "The Scent of a Martyr."



compare with this wondrous drink. Negations enable the poet to ground the marvellous in the everyday world and to emphasise how much it rises above those everyday, natural experiences.

This construction is a fundamental component of the poetic type of literary magic and reflects on how closely this poetic type is tied to medieval readers' experiences. Poetic depictions of the marvellous in the Auchinleck manuscript and in other texts throughout the Middle Ages use hyperbolic expression, created through the use of superlatives and negatives, to render something marvellous by comparing it to something real and then bringing it above that everyday thing. It draws on the everyday world in its creation of something inherently beyond the everyday. It is not rooted in superstitious practices of common magic. Instead, it is grounded in tangible things and lived experiences habitual to everyday life. It grows out of the reader's knowledge of the everyday, natural world – of pleasant smells, delicious beverages, beautiful images, and ordinary events. It becomes magical because poets evoke the everyday only to show how far beyond the everyday the magical moment rises.

By bringing something above an everyday experience through hyperbole, however, the poet risks taking it too far, or in other words, bringing it so far outside of the realm of the reader's experience that it becomes unbelievable. To have impact, stories must be believable. Getting caught up in and believing in a fantastical moment is what gives stories, and indeed literature, power. J. R. R. Tolkien's famous characterization of fantasy literature in his short text "On Fairy Stories" emphasises the need for sustained belief in effective narrative, because "the moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed" (Tolkien 41). Tolkien does not suggest that one must believe utterly in the truth of a fantastic story, but rather that the text must work to sustain belief within the reader. The same sentiment can be found in medieval conceptions of wonder and belief. In *Metamorphosis and Identity*, Caroline Walker

Bynum notes that one of the most important characteristics cited in medieval conceptions of wonder is that it is a response to facticity. She cites Gervase of Tilbury, who “asserts that only facts can induce wonder: although you will wonder at what you cannot explain, you cannot be amazed by what you don’t believe” (Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis* 54).<sup>28</sup> Although, according to Walker Bynum, Gervase speaks of the difference between history (*res gestae*) and stories (*fabulae*) in this particular theorization the sentiment remains relevant for depictions of the marvelous. If the reader does not, to some extent, believe in the truth of a story, it is easily dismissed. However, if some semblance of truth and reality comes alongside depictions of even the most marvellous things, the impact is all the more potent.

As a result, truth claims are a second device that help make up the poetic type of literary magic, and the frequency with which they appear alongside depictions of magical events reveals the importance of truth to the creation of magical narrative. In *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, for example, the poet tells of the seventeen years that Gregory lived chained to a rock on the ocean in penance:

þerin was his woniing

To seuenten winter weren agon;

Wiþ penance & great fasting

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<sup>28</sup> Walker Bynum draws on Book III of Gervais’s *Otia Imperialia*: specifically on the preface and the opening lines of chapters 42 and 92. In presenting a books of marvels as “Recreation for an Emperor,” Gervase stresses the importance of truth in marvels because the person who does not believe in marvels will not wonder at them, and so they will have minimal impact: “sunt qui fantastica non credunt, et quorum causam nesciunt, materiam non mirantur” (“There are some people who do not believe in anything supernatural, and even if they do not know the reason for things, they do not marvel at their existence”) (Gervase of Tilbury 3. 92). It is also important that marvels be true because otherwise they are a waste of time and unfit for an emperor’s leisure hours: “Enimuero non ex loquaci ystrionum garrulitate ocium decet imperiale imbui, sed potius, abiectis importunis fabularum mendaciis, que uetustatis auctoritas comprobauit aut scripturarum firmavit auctoritas aut cotidiane conspectionis fides oculata testatur ad ocium sacri auditus sunt ducenda” (“To be sure, it is not proper that an emperor’s leisure should be contaminated with the prating of babbling players; on the contrary, the crude falsehoods of idle tales should be spurned, and only those things which are sanctioned by the authority of age, or confirmed by the authority of scripture, or attested by daily eye-witness accounts, should be brought to his venerable hearing in his leisure hours”) (Gervase of Tilbury 3. Preface).

To God of heuen he made his mone,  
Wipouten mete, wipouten drink,  
Bot dewe þat fel on þe marbel ston.  
Þe stori seyt wipouten lesing,  
Oþer liif no ladde he non. (946-53)

In recounting the story of Gregory chained to a rock at sea with only dew to live on, the poet clearly appreciates the unbelievable nature of the tale. To offset any skepticism and to create a greater impact, however, the poet includes a statement which both calls upon a source and reemphasises the truthfulness of his account. His reference to “þe stori” evokes an authoritative source outside the poet’s own mind. Referencing a written account suggests the story has stood the test of time and provides the poet with a greater authority in recounting this event. He stresses his account’s veracity even further by saying that his source, “þe stori,” tells of this event “wipouten lesing,” without falsehood. In so doing the poet stresses the true nature of his tale, making it believable in the eyes of his readers and thus creating a greater impact. One cannot be impressed by the saintly Pope Gregory, if one does not believe in the miracle he performed.

The same can be seen in various accounts of the secular supernatural. When Merlin, for example, in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* casts a particularly effective spell, the poet refers to a written source.

Ac Merlin cast enchauntment  
Pat her paulouns on and alle  
To þe grounde gun to falle  
& so ich in þe boke y fine (3816-19)

Merlin's wondrous magic here enables him to flatten an entire camp, and the poet, seemingly aware of its impossibility, chooses to refer to his source at this moment to reemphasise the truthfulness of his account. Merlin's magic would be less impactful and impressive if there were no sense of truth behind it. What makes Merlin impressive, and perhaps such an enduring figure within medieval literature, is his potential historicity. If, as according to Gervase of Tilbury, only that which is true can inspire wonder, then Merlin's poets have worked hard to maintain his wonder-inducing status by planting him firmly within the bounds of written authority.

Referring to written authorities is not the only way the poets of the Auchinleck manuscript emphasise and bolster the truth of their accounts of the marvellous. As much as a sense of truth is essential in inspiring wonder, so too is an observer to experience that wonder. The adage, "if a tree falls in the forest, and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?" seems relevant here. If a marvellous event occurs, and no one is around to see it, does it really happen? Will anyone believe that it did? The poets of the Auchinleck manuscript avoid this philosophical quandary by always ensuring that numerous witnesses are present to observe any supernatural event. Witnessing is thus used commonly in poetic constructions of literary magic. It is the final poetic device that characterizes the poetics of the marvellous in Auchinleck.

The supernatural events are also most often characterized by the reactions of those witnesses. When, for example, in *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary*, Joseph is called into the temple as a potential marriage candidate for Mary, and chosen through a sign from God, the moment is recounted through the eyes of witnesses.

Ac þo he to þe auter come miracle men miȝt ysen:

Wel fair bigan his ȝerd to blowe þat ere was old & bare

& þeron sat a coluer white – fair miracle was þare.

Vp þe 3erde he sat long while & seþþen þe folk it sey3e

þat it flei3e about in þe temple & seþþen into heuen on hei3e.

Per nas non þat þis sei3e þat sore adrad þo nas. (163-68)

In this natural and somewhat pastoral miracle, Joseph's staff blossoms, and a white bird comes and perches atop it. Recounting the miracle, the poet focuses on the perspectives of the witnesses. He does not simply say that this miracle happened, but instead frames it through the eyes of the bystanders. Three times in five lines he writes some form of "men/folk/all see" this miracle. He even reports the emotional response of the witnesses, stressing that they are all frightened by the supernatural event. Framing the miracle through the eyes of witnesses bolsters the truthfulness of the account. Many present can testify to the actuality of these events. Even though the supernatural event is recounted in narrative without reference to a source in this case, the inclusion of witnesses helps strengthen the truthfulness of the moment.

Another example can be found in *Of Arthour and Of Merlin* after Merlin unearths the secret of the dragons who knock down Vortigern's tower each night. After the dragons are released and have a spectacular and prophetic battle, the poet emphasises the marvelousness of the whole situation through the eyes of the beholders:

Alle þat euer sei3e þis

Wonder hadde gret, ywis,

Of þe dragouns þat fou3ten þo

and of child Merlin also (1545-48).

The bystanders see the fight, affirm its reality, and begin to wonder both at the dragons and at Merlin's ability to determine their presence. The great wonder that each witness experiences not only enhances the veracity of the marvellous event, but also reflects upon the reader. Just as

those within the text see and wonder, so too do those reading the text see and wonder. Witnesses here act as a sort of mediating presence almost fulfilling the role of reader in the text as they see and attempt to interpret the events.

The romance *Sir Orfeo*, which appears towards the end of the manuscript, elevates further the importance of witness and seeing as a poetic device. All supernatural events that occur in this romance rely on the presence of witnesses to verify their magical nature. The romance begins when Heroudis is taken in her dreams by the king of the fairies to his kingdom and told that she must abide there with him for eternity. Throughout the scene, she physically remains in the garden with her maids. The only way the reader knows, for sure, that Heurodis's vision is real (as opposed to a terrible nightmare) is her physical reaction to that dream and the presence of the maids who witness that reaction. After seeing Heroudis tear her hair and scratch her face in a violent response to her magical encounter, the maids run to the castle "& told bope squire & kniȝt" (86), before returning to the Queen with "Damisels sexti & mo" (90). When Orfeo comes he first "biheld" the Queen (101), before asking her what had happened. The supernatural event is created and verified not only in the physical reaction the Queen experiences, but in the eyes of those who see her reacting in this way. The importance of witness is again reiterated a little further on when Sir Orfeo brings "wele ten hundred kniȝtes wiȝ him" (183) to try to stop the Fairy King stealing Heurodis. Given that the Fairy King has already proven his ability to act entirely within the mind of his acquisitions, one or two knights would be as effective as "ten hundred." However, in emphasising the number of knights present, the poet affirms the truth of the magical abduction:

Ac ȝete amiddes hem ful riȝt

Ȝe quen was oway ytyȝt,

Wiþ fairi forþ ynome;

Men wist neuer where she was bicomme (191-94)

The Queen is taken. Not one of the thousand men can determine where she has gone, but their presence reinforces the truly marvellous nature of her magical disappearance. She did not run away. She was not taken by some non-magical means. The numerous witnesses render anything other than a truly marvellous disappearance impossible. As in the above examples, not only a single witness, but multiple witnesses help to verify the veracity of the supernatural event.

Ultimately, eyewitness accounts add an additional layer of truth to the tale beyond references to written authority. Supernatural moments are created and verified within the texts themselves, made real through the presence of witnesses and oftentimes, through an emphasis on the vision of those witnesses. As Gervase of Tilbury suggests, appropriate tales which are (or perhaps seem) truthful, must be “sanctioned by the authority of age, or confirmed by the authority of scripture, or attested by daily eye-witness accounts” (Gervase of Tilbury 3. Preface). In the Auchinleck manuscript, eye-witness accounts alongside written authorities and truth claims reinforce the veracity of magical moments. Literary magic is by its very nature beyond the realm of everyday experience and impossible in the everyday world. Poets make it more real for readers and counter its impossibility through the poetic devices that reinforce its veracity. Furthermore, the supernatural nature of many marvellous moments in the Auchinleck manuscript is built in the eyes of the beholders. Eyewitnesses elevate the marvelousness of a marvellous moment through their reactions. The wonder of witnesses to a magical moment enhances the astounding nature of the event – even despite the fact that the magic itself is not described in detail. This process is reflected in the reader who also bears witness to the event and wonders at its occurrence. It is as much the reader’s reaction, as the characters, that builds literary magic. I

will return to this idea in my final section. For now, I want to turn briefly to some potential implications that arise from the relationship between seeing and truth outlined above.

While there was a complex understanding of the relationship between seeing and truth in the works of some philosophers in the Middle Ages, the approach to seeing and truth in Auchinleck is straightforward. In diverse analyses, David C. Lindberg, Dallas Denery, Suzanne Akbari, and Carolyn Collette, reinforce the notion that the relationship between seeing and knowing was anything but simple in medieval philosophical thought.<sup>29</sup> Medieval scholars and theologians debated the role of vision in the production of knowledge and belief, and, drawing on Neoplatonic and Aristotelian ideas, ruminated upon the impossibility of a direct relationship between seeing and knowing or believing (Collette 401). In Auchinleck, however, seeing *is* believing.

Witnesses are often included in depictions of marvellous events to attest to the occurrence of the event, marvel at it, and enhance the truthfulness of the moment; however, witnesses never question its truth. Characters do not wonder whether or not they can believe their eyes, and there are few attempts to understand why such a marvellous event has taken place. Poets place emphasis on the presentation of the event, on its impact, on the surrounding environment, and on the emotional reaction of those viewing the event. Truth is assumed, and poets do not complicate the relationship between seeing and believing.

This straightforward relationship between seeing and believing reinforces the primary purpose magic serves as a literary device – entertainment. At its most basic level, magic

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<sup>29</sup> David C. Lindberg and Dallas Denery in, respectively, *Studies in the History of Medieval Optics*, and *Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology and Religious Life* provide historical accounts of theories of optics in the medieval world. For a concise account tied to literature and related to magic, see Carolyn Collette's "Seeing and Believing in 'The Franklin's Tale.'" For a more recent and more detailed literary account see Suzanne Conklin Akbari's *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory*. While Collette focuses more on philosophical conceptions of seeing and its relationship to one's ability to perceive the world, Akbari provides an account of scientific conceptions of seeing and optics in relation to medieval allegories.



entertains, amusing audiences with marvellous transformations and otherworldly experiences. A poet looking to construct this kind of enthralling moment within his story would not question the truthfulness of his own plot. The poet would want to emphasise the veracity of a marvellous event so that readers could engage with and be entranced by that event, not be left questioning whether or not it really happened. The impact of the transformation of a lump of flesh into a child, or of Heurodis's capture by fairies, or of Pope Gregory's ability to survive without food would be lessened if there were any doubt that it had happened. For poets of popular literature, looking to engage and entertain, the relationship between seeing and truth in the creation of magic must be simple and enable the production of entertaining narrative.

Where the poets of the Auchinleck manuscript do complicate the relationship between seeing and knowledge/understanding is in the interpretation or mediation of an event; complexities arise depending on the person who is doing the witnessing. Mediation is identified by Akbari and Collette as vital to the relationship between seeing and truth in medieval thought. Akbari and Collette both consider the fallibility of sight and the necessity for mediation between seeing and understanding in the work of courtly poets such as Chaucer, Jean de Meun, and Dante. Akbari notes that sensory perceptions as well as language serve mediating functions, and yet are "imperfect mediators, defective due to the Fall and man's defiance of God's authority at the tower of Babel" (Akbari 6). Drawing from Augustine's *De Trinitate*, Collette insists upon the importance of will in mediating what one sees in the world (Collette 405). For these scholars, mediation, in the form of language and will, are fundamental to the relationship between seeing and truth. This applies to Auchinleck. Mediation by witnesses helps reinforce the truthfulness of a moment in Auchinleck. More importantly, it also helps determine the nature of a wondrous event – identifying whether it is good or evil. Any depiction of the supernatural necessarily

brings alongside it certain concerns over the potentially heretical nature of magic. This is true even in the somewhat tolerant environment of the early fourteenth century. Mediation allows poets to characterize the marvellous occurrence as either positive or negative.<sup>30</sup>

In the *Lives of Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret*, for example, mediation determines the interpretation of the supernatural occurrences. Both Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret perform many wondrous supernatural acts, in defiance of the evil emperors who seek to convert, marry, and kill them.<sup>31</sup> All of these miracles are witnessed by crowds of people. Saint Katherine, for example, breaks the torture wheel in the presence of “many a moder child” there “to loke þe maiden opon” (242). Through witnessing, many of those bystanders are converted by what they see, thus both verifying and validating the miraculous event. Their mediating presence guides readers in their understanding of that moment – as an act of God. However, both the emperors Maxens and Olibrious view these supernatural women as witches and their powers as witchcraft. The Emperor Olibrious calls Saint Margaret a “wiche” (288) and eventually tells his executioner to “lade þis wiche out of toun” (338). Saint Katherine is called a witch four times in her short legend. When the Emperor’s queen converts, the emperor blames the “wichecraft of þat woman” (262). He later orders her execution so that she may never “bitray ous wiþ þi sorcerye” (320). In the eyes of the pagan emperors, the supernatural abilities of Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret are evil, and so the emperors brand the women as witches. However, the medieval reader knows that these women are not performing evil magic but rather channelling power directly from God. The emperors, on the other hand, are villainous and evil: pagans who torture and murder

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<sup>30</sup> My second chapter delves more deeply into the poetic characterization of marvellous figures and provides a more detailed analysis of their moral natures. I want to stress, however, most magic in the Auchinleck manuscript (and indeed in the vast majority of medieval romance) is characterized as good. Very little evil magic actually appears in medieval literature. The matter of perspective, however, remains important.

<sup>31</sup> Their depictions and supernatural powers will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two when I deal with the characterization of supernatural women in the Auchinleck manuscript.

Christians. So, while they perceive Katherine and Margaret as witches, the fact that they themselves are evil renders that opinion invalid. The miraculous abilities of the two women are made all the more positive by the ill opinions of their tormentors. Their supernatural acts are thus in part characterized by the way in which an outside person perceives and interprets that force. Mediation plays an important role in the relationship between seeing and knowing in the Auchinleck manuscript; it helps establish how a supernatural event should be interpreted.

As my subsequent chapters deal closely with the depiction of magical characters, I will leave this analysis here for now. What I have sought to show in this section, however, is the means by which poets typically render something supernatural, and how this reflects on the literary culture surrounding magical narrative. The words “marvel” and “wonder,” alongside the poetic constructs of hyperbole, witness, and truth claims allow medieval poets to create a marvellous poetic moment that is true, believable, and engaging to their reader. These devices, which are consistent yet variable in their application, are what make literary magic identifiable to readers as a poetic type. This type was extremely common. It is omnipresent not just in specifically magical romance narratives but in didactic religious texts, in saint’s lives, and even in satirical encounters with the everyday world. The literature of Auchinleck is made up of supernatural forms, and the ubiquity of those forms hints at the degree to which the supernatural was inherent to the medieval reader’s experience. They appear repeatedly, operating in many situations and throughout the manuscript with variable but recognizable consistency.

Having established the nature of marvellous poetics in the manuscript, I move now to address the implications of reading all supernatural – sacred and secular – as a single poetic type. Identifying a poetics of the marvellous reveals literary magic’s ability to transcend religious and

generic boundaries. It also shows how closely the sacred and secular supernatural are blended in medieval thought.

### ***Marvellous Wondering***

The poetics of the marvellous does not abide by the boundaries of the sacred and the secular. An individual is made supernatural within the same poetic type whether that person is a saint or a sorcerer. Poets use the words “wonder” and “marvel,” hyperbole, truth claims, and witnessing across the manuscript, without distinction. A supernatural event initiated by Saint Katherine is described in the same way as a supernatural event initiated by Merlin. Poetically, the sacred and secular supernatural are knit together. The unification of all kinds of supernatural within a poetics of the marvellous, however, relies on the intervention of the reader. Through engaging with the compendium and constructing a larger poetic system of literary magic in his or her mind, the reader brings both sacred and secular supernatural together. And so, it is to the reader and his or her role in the creation of literary magic, that this final section turns.

As Zumthor establishes, the poetic type is created and upheld within the mind of the reader. After identifying the nature of the literary type, Zumthor goes on to suggest that the type is sustained as a tradition because of readerly interaction with it. “The type” he writes “has in fact allusive rather than descriptive power, operating as a referent, which, while it evokes a distinct entity beyond the bounds of the text (the tradition), makes that entity potentially present in its entirety within the text by means of its own action” (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 65). To a reader, the type functions as a referent: Zumthor likens it to a pronoun. It represents not only what it is at that moment (a giant, for example) but also the tradition from which it stems (the

marvellous more generally). The reader is reminded of the entire tradition each time he or she encounters an example of the type. Zumthor goes on to clarify this idea:

The type suggests more than it means; it “evokes” in the full sense of the term, establishing a similarity between a linguistic sequence and, not exactly a thing, but what would be produced in the mind and emotions by meeting that thing stripped of its accidental characteristics. It creates an aura, provides indubitable proofs and gives a sense of being really ‘in the presence of...’ (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 87).

When a reader encounters a poetic type (a repeated phrase, word, or form common to a certain trope) he or she is reminded of other instances of that poetic type and the sense gained from those other encounters. Consequently, he or she may remember or experience certain emotional responses associated with that type, built from years of repeated encounters. A reference to a wondrous relic Alisaunder observes, for example, might bring to the mind of the medieval reader another relic from another text that he or she encountered or even another magical object that was described in a similar way. It might even allow the reader to recall an actual relic possessed by his or her local cathedral. Alisaunder’s relic becomes much more than a single reference, it becomes an evocation of all of the reader’s encounters with similar supernatural objects. A single instance of a poetic type evokes the entire tradition from which it stems while simultaneously bolstering and enriching that tradition. Poetic types are both self-referential and self-fulfilling.

The poetic type of literary magic, built within the mind of the reader, is consequently a rich mosaic of sacred and secular supernatural. The mosaic created by Auchinleck blends miracle, marvel, and secular magic, and links all together with similar poetic structures. When the reader hears or reads of the child in *The King of Tars* being returned to life and immediately crying, for example, he or she may be reminded of the Queen of Mersailles’ reanimation at the

hands of Mary Magdalen, which is marked by the return of the Queen's voice. Similarly, Merlin flattening an entire camp with his enchantment might remind the reader of God flattening a torture wheel in *Seynt Katerine*. Certainly, the moments are not the same but the poetic structures through which they are created and the reader's encounter with those structures create a link between them. The reader or listener who hears of the flattened camp might well remember the flattened wheel from the opening of the manuscript and make a mental connection. The connection is not necessarily cognizant or marked but rather referential, evoking related feelings and emotions. I do not suggest that a reader would hear of a magical act and feel exactly the same way as he or she did in hearing of a miracle, but rather that the emotions associated with the encounter with the miraculous would colour the encounter with the magical. In the process, secular magic is painted with the same brush as the sacred miracle and made legitimate. The degree to which this is true will become even more apparent in the coming chapters when I address how magical characters, spaces, and objects are brought within a Christian ethos through the poetic structures of various manuscript compendia and the reader's interaction with those poetic structures.

To show how the blending of sacred and secular supernatural works at a poetic or linguistic level, however, I would like to return to the two lexical kernels that help make up the poetic type of the marvellous, "wonder" and "marvel." The import that "wonder" had in the Middle Ages, the etymology of these words, and the impact that the act of wondering carries in the Auchinleck manuscript show how magic is brought firmly within a Christian ethos in the language of this manuscript. These two words also give insight into the role of the reader, and why it is that magic was and remains such an important part of literary experience.

A great deal of scholarly work has been done on the prominent position “wonders” and “marvels” held in medieval culture and thought. Stephen Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* analyses the use of wonder in medieval and early modern travel narratives and shows how wonder shifts from an action representative of dispossession to one indicating possession. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park’s *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* focuses on marvellous things and the work of philosophers, emphasising that wonders and marvels sit on the boundaries of nature and science. Meanwhile, Carolyn Walker Bynum in *Metamorphosis and Identity* analyses how important thinkers and historical narratives depicted wonders and experiences with wonder. She argues that “medieval theorists...understood wonder (*admiratio*) as cognitive, non-appropriative, perspectival and particular. Not merely a physiological response, wonder was a recognition of the singularity and significance of the thing encountered” (Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis* 39). Following Tzvetan Todorov’s publication of *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, and his identification of the “marvellous,” many have applied his categorizations to medieval literature. One of the most influential applications can be found in Jacques le Goff’s chapter “The Marvelous in the Medieval West.” Le Goff shows that it is impossible to apply Todorov’s theory and categorizes medieval marvels differently, dividing them into three categories, *mirabilis* (the marvellous), *magicus* (magic) and *miraculosus* (miracles), clearly distinguishing between Christian and non-Christian and blending historical and literary marvels (Le Goff 30). Zumthor too includes a small section on marvels in *Toward a Medieval Poetics* and, recognizing its incompatibility with Todorov’s classification, suggests narrative categorizations similar to Le Goff’s in that they separate the Christian from the secular (Zumthor, *Medieval Poetics* 102-03). The collection of essays edited by Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger, *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles:*

*Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, represents the diverse and various approaches that scholars have taken to marvels – from analyses of miraculous traditions, to the creation of the foreign “other” through marvels, to studies of monsters and identity. This body of scholarship emphasises the very great role wonders and marvels played in medieval thought; they were sought after, considered, discussed, all at great length.

The prominence of “wonders” and “marvels” is also evident in the language and literature of the time. The extensive entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary* attest to the widespread and multifaceted use of the word “wonder” across Middle English literature. This can also be seen in the Auchinleck manuscript where the words “wonder” and “marvel” hold prominent position. They are among the most commonly used words in the manuscript. “Wonder” appears more than 165 times, while the word “meruail” appears more than thirty. Few other words appear with this regularity; even words like “slepe” and “þink” appear less than half as frequently.<sup>32</sup> Both words appear as adjectives, adverbs, gerunds, nouns, and verbs. They appear equally in saint’s lives and magical romances. The word “wonder” appears first in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the very first text, and finally in *The Simonie*, the very last text. “Wonder” and “marvel” are among the most fundamental words of the Auchinleck manuscript. They are central to the manuscript as a whole in sacred and secular texts alike. Their centrality reinforces the importance of encounters with both sacred and secular supernatural in medieval literature and medieval thought.

Their prominence in medieval literature and thought is significant because of the degree to which “wonders” and “marvels,” and more importantly the acts of wondering and marvelling, inherently blend the sacred and the secular. The etymology of these two words and the uses to

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<sup>32</sup> “Slepe” appears just over eighty times, while “þink” appears approximately forty.



which they are put in Auchinleck reveals the degree to which this is true. I focused earlier on the similar ways in which “wonder” and “marvel” are used throughout the manuscript; however, there are some fundamental differences between the synonyms that contribute to the manuscript’s creation of literary magic and to its blend of sacred and secular. First of all, while both “wonder” and “marvel” are used to mark supernatural moments, “marvel” is reserved for that which is *truly* marvellous. It appears far less commonly than “wonder” and almost never describes human wonders (such as knightly prowess or beauty). It characterizes only that which is really beyond the human – the deeds performed by magicians, or certain religious miracles.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, while “wonder” and “marvel” denote similar kinds of events and experiences, their differing origins add nuances to their usages. “Wonder” originates in Old English; “marvel” on the other hand, comes originally from Latin (“*mirabilia*”), and arrives in England via Old French and Anglo-Norman (“Marvel, n.1”). The word “marvel” is not endemic to the earliest English literary tradition. The Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, which features monstrous creatures and marvellous swords, does not contain any form of the word; it instead defines the supernatural through the use of the word “wundor.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, while the word “wonder” is deeply ingrained in early English representations of the supernatural, the word “marvel” comes to English literature later. It comes with the Norman conquerors, part of not only a political conquest, but a cultural reinvention.

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<sup>33</sup> Neither the word “meruail” nor any of its derivative forms appears in the glossary to *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, as edited by R. D. Fulk et al. The word “wunder” and various compounds appear with great regularity throughout the text (Fulk et al. 461). The marvellous in *Beowulf* is defined through the use of a variety of poetic techniques, which differ from those evident in Middle English. I have written more extensively about this elsewhere.

After the Norman conquest an important merging of cultures takes place in England,<sup>34</sup> and many French words find their way into early English romances because of the influx of French texts into the literary culture of England.<sup>35</sup> Many words associated most closely with romance narratives (“chivalry,” “courtesy,” even “romance” itself) derive from Anglo-Norman and French. Alongside typical romance phrases and ideals, supernatural words including “fairy” and “magic” make their way across the channel and into the literature of England (Pope 6). Christopher Cannon in *The Making of Chaucer’s English* demonstrates the process by which these French words infiltrate English narrative. Through a close comparison of the English *Guy of Warwick* with its Anglo-Norman counterpart, he shows how translators simply transposed words for which they could not find a suitable English alternative (Cannon 76).<sup>36</sup> Presumably, “marvel” arrived in England in just this way, evoked for the first time when a translator failed to find a way to express this complex idea. Considering its origin, and the way in which it arrived in England, “marvel” thus seems to be intrinsically bound with the magical romance genre.

This idea becomes complicated, however, when one looks closely at the differences in definition between “marvel” and “wonder,” and at the earliest documented use of “marvel” in Middle English. Both the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* define “wonder” simply as anything marvellous or extraordinary; it is not specifically assigned to

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<sup>34</sup> A few examples from the rich scholarly tradition that looks at the impact of the Norman invasion include Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity 1290-1340*, Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Culture*, William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England*, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al., editors, *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100-c.1500*.

<sup>35</sup> Mildred K. Pope notes in *The Anglo-Norman Element in Our Vocabulary*, that “the profound social revolution of the twelfth century was accompanied by one correspondingly great in literature,” during which romances and tales of “love and adventure” replaced the heroic narratives (Pope 5). In “Middle English Language and Poetry,” Simon Horobin outlines further borrowings from the French language related to romance. He suggests that romance words were borrowed from French because the culture was so admired for things associated with romance: “aristocratic pursuits such as hunting, music, fashion, cooking, dance, love-making and science” (Horobin 190). Similarly, G. A. Lester in *The Language of Old and Middle English Poetry* connects many loan words to activities, especially those “connected with administration and courtly life” (Lester 95).

<sup>36</sup> A process, he stresses, countering many earlier scholars, that began long before Chaucer.

designate either the religious or secular supernatural but more generally denotes anything beyond the human. “Merveille,” on the other hand, is defined first and foremost as a religious miracle. Both the *MED* and the *OED* prioritize this definition. “Marvel” in the *OED* is first defined as “a miracle,” and in the *MED*, the second most prominent usage given is “a miracle.” The Latin word *mirabilia*, from which “merveille” derives furthermore came to denote a “miracle” in Medieval Latin.<sup>37</sup> What is more, Cannon, the *OED*, and the *MED* all identify the earliest appearance of the word to have been in religious texts - *The Early South English Legendary* and *The Childhood of Jesus*. One would think, therefore, that given the origins, original usage, and prominent definition, the word “merveille” would frequently, if not always, modify instances of the religious supernatural. The Latin word originally meant “miracle;” it is commonly defined as “a miracle;” it should be safe to assume that the word typically appears alongside the Christian supernatural.

In Auchinleck, the opposite is true. While some form of “marvel” does occasionally appear with moments of religious miracle, it more commonly appears alongside the secular supernatural. “Merveille” is conspicuously absent from every single hagiographical text in the manuscript, never characterizing the religious men and women. The examples I gave in my second section all derive from romance texts, where the word occasionally identifies the religious supernatural. Most frequently, however, the English derivative of *mirabile* characterizes secular magicians and their magic. In *The Seven Sages of Rome*, for example, the empress tells of the wondrous magic that the magician Virgil used to defend Rome. He first creates a man of copper to defend the city and when this is not enough, “Virgil dede 3it more

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<sup>37</sup> Keith Sidwell’s *Reading Medieval Latin* includes a singular and a plural form of *mirabilia* specifically used to denote miracles: *mirabile*, *mirabilis* and *miranda*, *mirandorum* (Sidwell 389). The *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus* edited and revised by J. F. Niermeyer and C. van de Kieft includes several derivatives: *mirabile*, *miraculose*, *miraculosus* & *miraculum*, all defined as “miracles” or “miraculous” (Niermeyer and van de Kieft 901).

meruail” (1986), creating more men and casting images that watch over the city. Each of his magical deeds is described as a “meruail.” Similarly, in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, the activities of Merlin are often called “meruailes.” The poet at one point describes Merlin’s activities in general as “meruaile / & profecies & oper þing” (8574-75). “Marvels” in the Auchinleck manuscript, then, are most often magical deeds done by magicians. “Meruail” does not denote supernatural actions performed by saints or by holy individuals, but rather the activities of magicians. Where “wonder” characterizes the impressiveness of secular and religious marvels alike, “marvel” is more specifically reserved for secular marvels – a fact which seems contrary to its linguistic origins.

The result, however, is that the originary definition of “marvel” enhances the close connection between the sacred and secular supernatural. In describing an instance of magic as a “meruail” the poet evokes the original sense of the word as a religious miracle, further colouring the depiction of secular magic with tinges of Christianity. This colouring becomes even darker if we turn once again to the function of the poetic type. As I have established, the words “wonder” and “marvel” act as markers that signal the poetics of the marvellous. Each time either word is used the reader is unconsciously reminded of the entire tradition of the marvellous, of all supernatural moments that he or she might have encountered – secular and sacred alike. Thus, each instance of the supernatural is coloured by all other instances of the supernatural – both sacred and secular. Accordingly, each and every time a reader encounters the poetics of the marvellous, the entire tradition, made up of both Christian and secular marvels, influences his or her interpretation. “Marvels” done by Merlin might remind readers of the “marvels” of a relic, just as a character “wondering” at a saint might remind readers of a character “wondering” at a giant.

The poetic choice to use a word derived from miracle to describe magic, and “wonder” to describe miracle highlights the fluidity with which the boundary between the religious supernatural and the secular supernatural operates in Middle English literary culture. The lack of distinction between sacred and secular at this most basic level speaks volumes to the comprehensive yet permeable approach to that which is beyond the human (to the supernatural, and perhaps even to the divine) in medieval thought. It also shows that in these foundational texts magic is not something dangerous or contrary to religious belief and Christian righteousness. In its poetic construction, it is constituted entirely within the bounds of Christian acceptability. It is not something transgressive or anti-Christian but is firmly seated within Christian discourse.

The stakes of the permeable relationship between sacred and secular supernatural inherent in Middle English literary magic are brought even higher by the ability of things that cause wonder and marvel to inspire reflection and even transcendence in the reader. At their most basic level, wonders and marvels entertain; beyond entertainment, however, wonders also inspire reflection. Fantasy literature has a great deal of power over the human mind – both in its ability to inspire wonder and to inspire reflection.<sup>38</sup> In “On Fairy Stories,” Tolkien extolled fantasy’s ability to inspire wonder in readers, and in so doing, to encourage them to see the world around them in a new light (Tolkien 58–59). Wonder can be transformative, affecting the lives of readers in very real ways. Tolkien and others attribute this characteristic largely to modern fantasy; however, the transformative nature of “wonder” and “marvel” is an essential aspect of their function in Auchinleck.

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<sup>38</sup> Beyond Tolkien, some key works on fantasy and its transformative power include T. E. Apter, *Fantasy an Approach to Reality*, C. N. Manlove, *The Impulse of Fantasy*, and Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*.

In his *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Stephen Greenblatt illustrates the creative and yet ambiguous nature inherent to the act of wondering. “When we wonder,” he writes, “we do not yet know if we love or hate the object at which we are marvelling.” He goes on to call wonder “the discourse of discovery” which “stands for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed” (Greenblatt 20). Here, Greenblatt identifies the process of wondering as a process of discovery and even of creation. He pinpoints this conceptualization of wonder to the early modern period and goes on to show how late medieval and early modern travel narratives use the experience of wonder to categorize and define the marvels they encounter in the New World.<sup>39</sup> This conception of wonder – as a mental process that reaches towards discovery – is also evident in the representation found in Auchinleck. Even more than this, wonder in Auchinleck carries a transformative weight. Wonder exists not as an attempt to achieve knowledge, but rather as a process of unknowing that can lead to transcendence.

The transformative nature of “wonder” can best be seen through the passive form of the verb found throughout the manuscript. It appears in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, for example, when Merlin proves his supernatural powers to the Justice by revealing, in front of the Justice’s mother, that the Justice was illegitimately born. When the Justice’s mother hears all that Merlin knows, she experiences great wonder: “Ac so gretliche sche awondred was / þat hir chaunged blod & fas” (1137-38). Most basically, this use of the word “wonder” highlights Merlin’s supernatural nature. However, instead of being an act that someone performs, which is typical in contemporary uses, its passive form suggests that wonder is something that happens to the

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<sup>39</sup> T. G. Bishop both questions and expands on Greenblatt’s idea in *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder*. He finds Greenblatt’s historicist approach somewhat limited and instead focuses on the relationship wonder creates “in the transactions that occur between the stage and its audience” (Bishop 12–13).

mother. Upon seeing a demonstration of Merlin's powers, she experiences wonder as a sort of outside force – "sche awondred was." Wonder is, in a sense, given to her, and it affects her both physically and mentally. Wonder is more than a simple action. It is an autonomous thing, an entity with the power to impose itself on a character. It does so to great effect. After experiencing the "wonder," the Justice's mother immediately confesses her infidelity, convincing the Justice of Merlin's mother's innocence and saving the lives of Merlin and his mother. Here, wonder acts transformatively, dramatically changing the course of events and the lives of the characters.

The power of wonder becomes even more apparent when performed collectively. More often than not, wondering in the Auchinleck manuscript is a group activity. Many wonder, for example, at the prowess of the various titular knights performing great deeds in their romances. When Beves, of *Beues of Hamtoun*, disguises himself as a palmer, all who see him "wondred on him" (2248) because he is so much fairer than all the others. When Guy of *Guy of Warwick* crosses a great and fast-moving river: "Alle þai wondred þerof for soþ" (5462), because he did not drown. More frequently, however, many wonder at supernatural characters and events. When Mary first enters the temple at age three in *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary*, and exhibits her fantastic intelligence, eloquence, and industriousness, many wonder about her: "Gret wonder hadde of þat 3ong þing ich man þat it sei3e" (108). Everyone who sees her wonders at her braveness and at her great abilities. Similarly, in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, when Merlin's wit is tested shortly after his birth, he wows all with his eloquence: "Wonder hadde þat it herd / þat so coupe speke & go / & was bot of 3eres tvo" (1068-70). Both of these moments exemplify the use of collective wondering to denote something beyond understanding – in the sense that it is beyond the human. Children under the age of three who speak and argue eloquently are an anomaly and the great wonder experienced by all who hear them amplifies their supernatural

characterization. Wonder here is used as a noun but given verbal force. These people do not wonder, but rather *have* wonder. Wonder is not always something one does, but sometimes something one possesses. As in the passive form of the verb, it takes on a life of its own, transcending a simple experience, taking hold of the observer, impacting them materially. So too does this reflect on the medieval reading experience. The audience members listening to a text read aloud are given the opportunity to wonder together at the marvels encountered, and perhaps even be moved by that collective act.

This kind of collective wondering can even lead to transcendence. From *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary* comes a final moment of collective wondering that exemplifies most significantly the transformative and transcendent nature of this action. When the angel announces to Ann that she will bear a child who will be the salvation of the world, the angel predicts that “al þe world schal wonder þerof & þerof ysaued be” (73). According to the Angel, the world will wonder at the birth of Mary and because of this be saved. The second “þerof” (I have translated it as “because of this”) could refer to the miracle of the virgin birth; however, the indefinite phrasing allows for a second interpretation. The second “þerof” could also refer to the act of wondering itself. The lack of true comprehension of the miraculous birth and life of Mary and of Christ, will cause “all” to “wonder” at the event. In wondering, or in seeking to comprehend this miraculous birth and by extension the nature of God himself, the whole world will be saved. Here, wondering becomes much more than a lack of knowing and act of discovery, as Greenblatt characterizes it. It becomes an act of religious reflection. Even more, it becomes an act that can lead to salvation. There is no need to discover the nature of God in order to be saved, wonder itself is enough. In this instance, the act of wondering takes on a whole new level of significance. It represents a process through which one can seek to know that which is



beyond the human and potentially be saved through that reflection. Wondering at something miraculous or even marvellous can lead to salvation, and the potential for salvation lies not in achieving understanding, but rather in the transcendence found in the act of wondering itself.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have argued that medieval literary magic manifests itself in the material surrounding a marvellous event. For stylistic or perhaps religious reason, poets were hesitant to provide detailed descriptions of magical transformations. What results is what I have identified as a concrete poetic type that lives in the material surrounding the supernatural moment: in the repetitive use of the words “wonder” and “marvel” and in the consistent appearance of certain poetic devices – hyperbole, witnesses and truth claims. I have finished by ruminating upon the ways in which the act of wondering or marvelling, inspired by the poetics of the marvellous, can lead to transcendence and potentially even salvation. Each of these factors shows how important the supernatural is to the medieval literary experience, and furthermore provides one explanation for how literary magic is established as a device and why it remains prominent. Medieval literary culture is so steeped in magic that transcends the boundary between the sacred and the secular that it becomes a device that is not one or the other, but always both. Secular magic is tied in its typological structures to sacred magic. Magic in its literary form does not sit outside of the dominant, accepted religion, but instead sits comfortably within.

The degree to which this is true is apparent in the idea that encounters with the supernatural – whether sacred or secular – can lead to transcendence. And so, by way of a conclusion, I would like to expand a bit further on the potentially transformative nature of literary magic. I will suggest that its transformative reach extends beyond the text to the reader.

In encountering the poetics of the marvellous the reader could also be struck by this reflective, transcendent process.

In attempting to explicate things that are beyond the everyday (the supernatural, whether a Christian miracle or a secular marvel) poets strive to understand something unknowable. They seek to understand that supernatural thing by grounding it firmly in the everyday world through the use of poetic devices and images. They also, however, recognize the ultimately unknowable nature of the supernatural. They do not try to outline in detail how marvels occur or the process by which they occur; instead poets depict characters wondering or marvelling at the supernatural without ever reaching complete understanding. In so doing, the poet leaves the moment of interpretation and the attempt to understand in the hands of their reader or listening audience. A person could turn the leaves of the manuscript encountering marvel after marvel, never really able to comprehend their true nature, but able to reflect upon and interpret that which is beyond their realm of experience. Different, nuanced versions of the supernatural are built in the mind of the reader and in the act of wondering about the wonder or marvelling at the marvel the reader could come closer to understanding what it is to be beyond the human. Whether that marvel is sacred or secular matters not, anything beyond the human provides scope for interpretation and even perhaps for transcendence.

In its refusal to characterize the exact nature of magic, both sacred and secular, the poetics of the marvellous enforce the role of the reader in considering the nature of that which is unknowable. The reader can bring each supernatural moment within their own world view and reflect on it in terms of current preoccupations. For the medieval reader well-versed in religious doctrine these preoccupations must frequently have been even more deeply based in religious exegesis. Secular marvels can be brought within a Christian ethos and considered within the

framework provided by religious thinking. The reader can wonder at a magic ring as they do at a relic, not in the same way exactly, of course, but in a way that strives to understand something inherently unknowable and uncharacterizable. Even today, when the reader does not inherently turn to religion as a means to measure a marvel, magic continues to inspire wonder and reflection, and this wonder can be grounded in a reader's personal experience.

The exegetical freedom that literary magic provides explains the continued popularity of magic in contemporary culture. While the magic of fantasy authors is much more descriptive than that found in medieval culture and thus, perhaps, relies less on the reader to evoke its wonders, it still appeals to the reader's imagination and understanding. Magic in literature still evokes wonder in a reader: it evokes wonder at what a reader might do with supernatural powers; wonder at what it feels like to transform inside out; wonder at the moral implications of turning another person into a toad. Magic continues to inspire wonder and consequently interpretation. What is more, the version of magic encountered in some contemporary kinds of magical texts – like the magic realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, for example – does not explain itself and thus provides room for reflection and interpretation. In these instances, magic is not about enforcing a single interpretation but rather about opening up interpretive possibilities and opportunities to wonder. The flexibility of this device and the importance it places on the reader is relevant at any time and at any historical moment. It is a device that places interpretive power in the hands of the reader and makes significant his or her understanding and experience. In light of its iteration in medieval culture, it is no wonder that it has such enduring appeal.

## **Chapter Two: Magical Characters in the Auchinleck Manuscript**

### ***Introduction***

If, at its most fundamental level, literary magic is composed of poetic forms, at the imaginative/readerly level – the level that appeals most to readers of magical literature – literary magic is made up of the characters who wield its powers. Few characters have quite so much appeal to readers, to viewers, to all consumers of popular culture as magicians. Their quirky characteristics, timely appearances, bizarre attire, and ability to wield balls of flame, disappear at will, and shake the earth with extraordinary powers have entranced individuals for centuries. They have consistently flourished throughout literary history, evident everywhere from Shakespeare's Prospero, to Perrault's Fairy Godmother, to Tennyson's Lady of the Lake. They were exceedingly popular in the Middle Ages. The figure of the fairy mistress was common enough to the romance genre to be included as one of Helen Cooper's eight memes, and Merlin, Morgan le Faye, and Vivienne were among the most popular characters of the period. Many of the Auchinleck manuscript's texts feature supernatural individuals, and readers throughout the

manuscript's history have been particularly interested in these figures. Some of the heaviest concentrations of marginalia appear alongside its most powerful magicians.<sup>1</sup> Today, magicians continue to flourish. New and old alike appear in various television shows – *Supernatural*, *Once Upon a Time*, *Merlin*. The great magicians of literature Merlin, Gandalf, even Harry Potter, continue to inspire contemporary depictions that line bookstore shelves. They are and always have been a fundamental component of literary magic.

The literary magician today is almost always depicted in a positive way. Gandalf and Harry Potter are two examples of contemporary magicians who are not only positive figures but practically messiahs in their fantasy worlds. Both characters sacrifice themselves to defeat great evil, and both are resurrected to ensure the ultimate triumph of good over evil. They are just two examples of many contemporary magicians who are situated at the top of a strikingly Christian structure of morality that governs their fantasy world. Such status would seem entirely counter to traditional understandings of magic as opposed to Christianity and of the magician as a practitioner of evil. In the literary world, however, the magician is actually a strikingly Christian figure. The Christian nature of this literary figure is established in medieval literary culture.

Stock characters are a ubiquitous component of medieval literary culture and vital to the situating of magical characters within the bounds of Christian righteousness. Many of the most popular genres of the time can be defined by the kinds of stock characters that are present within. Hagiography often features a beautiful virgin martyr and her evil pagan persecutor; allegory typically features an Everyman or “Christian” character who meets and converses with archetypal manifestations of sin; romance is peopled by valiant knights, beautiful maidens,

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<sup>1</sup> Nicole Clifton identifies “at least five hands” in the margins of the romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and notes the particular attention paid to Merlin (Clifton, “Early Modern Readers” 72). As she notes the hands range from the fourteenth to eighteenth century.

tyrannical kings, and fairy mistresses. The characters of romance are particularly notable for their stock characteristics, and many of these characters survive in contemporary literature inspired by the genre – in fantasy, fairy tale, and adventure narratives. While some modern readers might dismiss characters of romance as simplistic because of their stock or archetypal nature, it is exactly this feature of medieval literary culture that allows magical characters to continue to thrive across literary history. As this section argues, medieval literary culture brings the figure of the magician in the Middle English period into a Christian representational structure through stock characteristics and attributes that connect magical characters with religious figures.

Supernatural stock characters can be found in both sacred and secular genres. In secular genres, the fairy mistress is the most easily recognizable. But alongside her lives the evil sorceress, the magical helper, and the wicked sorcerer. In more sacred genres, virgin martyrs, angels, pious saints, popes, and biblical figures all appear. Biblical figures are, of course, not traditionally understood as stock characters. When I refer to saints and biblical figures like the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene as stock characters, I mean only that they are depicted in consistent ways across various medieval texts. Medieval readers would be used to seeing these kinds of supernatural characters appear in varied but consistent manifestations throughout the literature of the period. The reader's understanding of the nature of the characters would be built in repeated encounters with these various manifestations, and an intertextual map of typical characteristics would live in the reader's mind.

Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* and *Words with Power* give insight into how just such an intertextual map develops. These texts famously explore the extensive history of intertextual literary representation that lives in the minds of all readers. He establishes that the most important building block of this intertextual map is the Bible: in William Blake's words, "the

Great Code of Art” (qtd. in Frye xvi). The Bible contains a system of characters, structures, and imagery that make up the very core of western literature and art. As Frye posits, the Bible forms the mythological backbone of western culture. This “mythology rooted in a specific society transmits a heritage of shared allusion and verbal experience in time.” It permeates all literature and all readers and, ultimately, this “mythology helps to create a cultural history” (Frye 34). The shared mythology of the Bible, constituting itself, as Frye shows, through imagery, allusion, character types, and narrative structures is what western literature, and consequently the western literary imagination, is built on. This foundation is especially relevant to the medieval reading experience, which flourished at a time when England was heavily steeped in Christian language and imagery. Most readers of Auchinleck would have been intimately familiar with the structures of imagery, narrative, and characters in the Bible. This intertextual background would have coloured their understanding of character types and allowed readers to understand all characters within a Christian system of morality. Readers would have considered magical characters within the structures provided by “the Great Code of Art” and consequently within a Christian ethos.

The nature of the medieval manuscript further strengthens this code and helps situate magical characters firmly within Christian understanding. Because, even if readers were somehow not familiar with the characters of the Bible, the manuscript compendium provides its own code. The Auchinleck manuscript itself is structured in such a way as to establish an interior intertextual code that foregrounds religious characters and imagery. A. S. G. Edwards has recently reasserted that Auchinleck opens with a collection of religious texts before moving into more secular material.<sup>2</sup> As Edwards notes, the “early sections comprise poems on religious

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<sup>2</sup> Like so many manuscripts from the medieval period, the Auchinleck manuscript has suffered damage. Almost all the miniatures have been cut out, pages, and in a few instances entire gatherings, are missing. Pearsall and Cunningham estimate that “it consisted in its original state of considerably more than 386 leaves” (Pearsall and

subjects that are assembled in several distinct booklets, differentiated to varying extents by scribal stints and quire boundaries from each other and from the later booklet divisions in the manuscript” (Edwards, “Codicology and Translation” 26). There are exceptions, and booklet three in particular combines religious and romance material; however, generally, the manuscript’s order moves from religious texts to more secular ones.<sup>3</sup> This structure influences the kinds of supernatural characters encountered as a reader moves through the manuscript in chronological order. At first, all supernatural events, even those that do not happen at the hands of saints and divinity, are distinctly and specifically religious: the transformation of the lump of flesh into a baby in *The King of Tars*, for example, occurs because of a baptism. By the time a reader gets to *Sir Degare* or *Floris and Blaunche flour*, however, the specifically Christian supernatural has begun to fade and secular magic takes center stage. This transition impacts how magical characters can be understood; by the time a reader reaches the secular material, the Christian supernatural and magic are so inextricably linked through representational similarities that magic retains these Christian residues, despite the fact that it is now Merlin instead of Saint Katherine manipulating supernatural forces.

This section argues that the Christian texts that appear early in the Auchinleck manuscript, and most importantly for my purposes, the characters who appear within those texts, function as sort of pretext or type to the magical ones that appear later on. I use the word type in a different sense than in my first chapter when I discussed Zumthor’s poetic types as linguistic

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Cunningham xi). It now has 331 folios and 14 stubs. Edwards calls the lost material “of an indeterminable length” (Edwards, “Codicology and Translation” 26), but he does not amend his understanding of the structure based on the missing material.

<sup>3</sup> *The Legend of Pope Gregory* appears first, followed by *The King of Tars*, three saint’s lives (Adam and Eve, Katherine, and Margaret), *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* (an allegorical journey through heaven, hell, and purgatory), a dialogue between a body and a soul, *The Harrowing of Hell*, and a miracle of the Virgin. The list of religious texts continues all the way to *Sir Degare*, the seventeenth item in the manuscript. Only two romances appear amongst this early stream of religious texts, and these are all emphatically Christian, featuring a priest (in *The King of Tars*) and Angels (in *Amis and Amilioun*) who perform the supernatural elements.



constructions. In this chapter, I use a version of typology as outlined by Northrup Frye in *The Great Code* to consider the creation of stock characters in the Auchinleck manuscript. Frye defines typology as follows: “everything that happens in the Old Testament, is a ‘type’ or adumbration of something that happens in the New Testament, and the whole subject is therefore called typology” (Frye 105). For Frye, typology refers to the function of the Bible as a concrete pretext for itself; it provides types (in the Old Testament) that are fulfilled by antitypes in the New. In this chapter, I apply a looser version of these structures to the relationship between supernatural characters in the Auchinleck manuscript. I focus not just on the general religious ideas that colour the medieval reader’s intertextual map, but also on the way in which the manuscript itself acts as its own typological structure. This structure builds representational links amongst all supernatural characters, rendering potentially dangerous or even demonic magicians, as not only good, but as godly saviours and nation-makers. Through this interpretive process, the magicians of Auchinleck are made into positive Christian figures and enabled to live on in literary history.

Because my analysis prioritizes the material structure of the manuscript and the way the texts inform one another when the compendium is read from beginning to end, it rests to some extent on the idea that the book *was* in fact read from beginning to end and that there was some degree of intentionality in its compilation in such a way. The intentionality behind its compilational structure is undeniable. The circumstances of the manuscript’s composition – who made it and for whom – affirms this statement. In 1942 Laura H. Loomis argued that the manuscript was produced in a “secular London bookshop in the first half of the fourteenth

century” (L. H. Loomis 602). Her theory held ground for a long time,<sup>4</sup> but in the 1980s Timothy Shonk challenged Loomis, refuting the bookshop theory and suggesting that Scribe 1, who copied most of the material in the manuscript, was the solitary editor (Shonk 73).<sup>5</sup> Shonk’s sense of Scribe 1 as the principal compiler and even editor of the book is now generally accepted.<sup>6</sup> The shift from Loomis’s theory to Shonk’s seems a drastic one, and to a certain extent, it is; scholars have moved from a physical bookshop to a lone scribe addressing a client’s needs. Materially, however, the change is not all that dramatic. The difference from Loomis (and her supporters) to Shonk (and his supporters) is simply the removal of a building. Each scholar’s theory supports the idea that one artistic presence governed the collaborative composition of the manuscript.<sup>7</sup> While some uncertainties remain, therefore, over the identity of the compiler of the Auchinleck manuscript,<sup>8</sup> and where he did his compiling, there is consensus over the idea that an artistic presence – perhaps in consultation with a buyer – governed the creation of the manuscript. Someone, at some point, intended that the manuscript be compiled in the order that it is. In affirming this idea, I do not wish to attribute intentionality to the consequential representative

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<sup>4</sup> Pearsall and Cunningham support “the collaborative activity of translators, versifiers and scribes in a London ‘bookshop’” (Pearsall and Cunningham xi), in their 1977 facsimile edition of the manuscript. They do differ slightly in that they suggest that the texts were produced in “booklets or fascicles” which were selected by the buyer and then bound together (Pearsall and Cunningham ix).

<sup>5</sup> Shonk suggests that Scribe 1 dealt with the buyer, farmed out pieces to independent scribes, and compiled the final product.

<sup>6</sup> In his 2005 book *London Literature, 1300-1380*, Ralph Hanna supports Shonk’s approach, going so far as to call Shonk’s work “the finest single study of the manuscript” (Hanna 75). Susanna Fein supports this argument even more in her chapter “The Fillers of the Auchinleck Manuscript and the Literary Culture of the West Midlands.” The recent volume *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* edited by Susanna Fein also supports this theory.

<sup>7</sup> Derek Pearsall recently supported this idea in his update of his Auchinleck scholarship. In “The Auchinleck Manuscript Forty Years On,” the opening item of the volume *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, Pearsall admits to the insupportability of the bookshop theory, but emphasises that much of the collaborative essence of production is still the same (Pearsall, “The Auchinleck Manuscript” 14). A. S. G. Edwards agrees in his chapter in the same volume: “The size of Auchinleck, the range of its contents, and the cost of its production all provide evidence of a controlling and coherent taste” (Edwards, “Codicology and Translation” 35).

<sup>8</sup> As the idea of the scribe as compiler takes hold, scholars begin to look for personality and individuality within the texts. Susanna Fein’s article emphasises the importance of this development: “because each book is an extraordinary creation in its time and place” scholars “can detect bits of personality, instances of deliberative purpose, clinging to the arrangements and selections of each collection,” which allows analyses to move beyond merely listing the texts (Fein, “The Fillers of the Auchinleck Manuscript” 65–66).

links between supernatural characters that I identify in this chapter; I wish rather to reassert the importance of attending to the representative links that arise from reading the manuscript compilationally.

That the manuscript would have been read in chronological order is significantly less certain. As with any medieval manuscript, readers and listeners probably encountered individual texts at random from the volume and not necessarily in any particular order. The fact remains, however, that the manuscript survives in a certain order and that this order is an important component of its identity as an object – as the identification of the religious opening of the manuscript reaffirms. The ordering of the texts in the physical volume is the only potential indication of the way in which the manuscript was read. Moreover, my choice to read the manuscript compilationally insists that the order of texts be taken into account. The order of texts is, after all, vital to Auchinleck's status as object. Therefore, while it is not certain that the manuscript would have been read in chronological order (although it is also impossible to affirm that it was *not* read in that way) the very fact that the texts in Auchinleck are bound together in the way that they are demands readerly attention to their ordering and to the representational continuities running amongst them. Whether or not the compiler intended to include continuities between the texts, they exist, formed by the manuscript's nature as a compiled object with which a reader interacts.

My focus, consequently, is on readerly interaction with the manuscript rather than on writerly and/or scribal intentionality. The initial readers of the Auchinleck manuscript have been identified as secular, merchant-class individuals. Presumably, the tastes of such an audience dictated the contents of the manuscript and consequently the way in which the manuscript makes meaning. Certainly, scholars have established that the context within which or for whom the

manuscript was produced informs its preoccupations. Thorlac Turville-Petre, Susan Crane, Geraldine Heng, and Siobhain Bly Calkin have shown that English romance produced in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a time when England sought to individualize itself as a nation, was heavily invested in the creation of national identity.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly evident in Auchinleck. Thorlac Turville-Petre argues in his chapter on Auchinleck in *England the Nation* that the primary focus of this manuscript is history and national identity, and that one historical text, *The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, functions as “the backbone to which the ‘historical’ texts are attached,” ensuring that the romances are understood “not just as entertainments but as sources of historical knowledge.” He ultimately writes, “the Auchinleck manuscript is many things, but most importantly it is a handbook of the nation” (Turville-Petre 112). Siobhain Bly Calkin expands on this idea in *Saracens and the Making of English Identity* showing the specific way in which the manuscript constructs national identity through the creation of the Saracen “other.” Interest in history and nation thus constitutes a principal representational constant in Auchinleck, and this preoccupation, dictated by that original audience, is fundamental to the manuscript’s creation of meaning, including its depiction of magical figures.

The reader’s import to the manuscript’s construction of meaning goes beyond the impact on its original compilation; it extends to how the texts and characters would have been understood. Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen in *The Medieval Manuscript Book* stress the importance of seeing a manuscript as a process. Manuscripts must be studied not only at their

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<sup>9</sup> Susan Crane’s *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* explores the insular preoccupations of early Anglo-Norman and Middle English romance and argues that many reflect baronial anxieties of the time. Geraldine Heng in *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, her seminal study of romance, race and the creation of empire, calls romance “a genre of the English Nation in the Middle Ages” (Heng 7).

moment of composition but also in their “post-partum stages,” when they become unique artifacts that interact with readers in their production of meaning (Johnston and Van Dussen 6). This mode of analysis also follows recent work on medieval anthologies and *sammelbande* and the impact that compilation has on the meaning of any given text.<sup>10</sup> As each medieval reader approached a manuscript, he or she built his or her own connections amongst the diverse texts bound within. One text may have reminded one reader of another text, a certain character may have followed a reader throughout, poetic phrases or engrossing imagery in disparate texts may have struck resonances for another reader. In the reading process new connections constantly arise, and through these connections, the medieval reader became an active participant in the manuscript’s production of meaning. What is fundamental to remember, however, is that the material context of the manuscript – the way in which the texts are bound together as dictated by the compiler and his audience – guided this creation of meaning. It guides the reader through an ordered series of texts, and leads the reader, linguistically and imaginatively, to make certain connections. This chapter argues that in so doing the figure of the magician is aligned with Christian figures and authorized.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first addresses magical men, focusing primarily on the type/anti-type structure evident in the depictions of Pope Gregory and Merlin. I define the typological relationship created in the structure of the manuscript and in the mind of the medieval reader between the two supernatural characters and argue that this structure reveals

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Wakelin in “Humanism and Printing” has argued that the way in which humanist texts are bound together and read in *sammelbande* is impacted by what they have been bound with (Wakelin 231). Similar concerns about the contents of compiled manuscripts and *sammelbande* can also be seen in earlier scholarship on miscellanies and anthologies. Some examples include Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson’s “Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts,” as well as Seth Lerer’s “Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology.” These two texts represent an important transition from thinking of anthologies within their historical context (the materials and circumstances of the compilation), to a later reading of the literary nature of the anthology and its impact on textual meaning. My interests lie within the literary turn.

that Merlin is not in any way evil or demonic, but rather very Christian. I furthermore show that Merlin's investment in the nationalistic preoccupations of the manuscript solidifies his heroism and bolsters his depiction as a kind of saviour. I finish by showing that this representation is mirrored in the other magical men who appear throughout the manuscript. My second section turns to supernatural women. Therein, I show that while magical women are not prominent in early Middle English romance because they do not fit as easily within its nationalistic preoccupations, female power remains vital to the Auchinleck manuscript. I identify the typological link between sacred and secular female power and argue that the women too are brought within a Christian representational system and consequently validated within the manuscript structure. My conclusion considers the implication of this Christian version of secular power and the function of literary magic to bring the sacred to a more accessible level.

Throughout, this chapter identifies the ways in which magical characters are characterized in Middle English literature as represented by Auchinleck. It shows how magicians are brought within a Christian frame of reference and consequently made acceptable in their literary environment. In so doing, it not only enhances the picture of medieval literary magic that this dissertation seeks to paint but uncovers the representational roots that allow for later magical figures – Harry Potter, for example – to take on specifically Christian roles. Far from the dangerous, pagan, ridiculous or even heretical practitioner of common magic, the literary magician of Medieval England is firmly seated within the Christian ethos that structured everyday life. As a result, he or she could use his or her wondrous abilities to save not only the nation, but even Christendom itself. The individuals who give literary magic a face are established in this period as figures of Christian goodness and righteousness.

### ***Of Popes and Magicians: Supernatural Men***

Medieval literature is full of exemplary men who perform great deeds, exude piety, and work to establish kingdoms and nations. One might assume that these men only take the form of valiant knights, pious saints, and noble kings. Workers of magic – magicians, wizards, sons of demons – would seem unlikely to appear amongst this illustrious crowd, but this is exactly where they should be placed. The supernatural men of the Auchinleck manuscript are among its most illustrious: Pope Gregory saves Christendom from certain destruction; Merlin guides Arthur and England towards victory and glory; various fairy lords rule over beautiful, if uncanny, fairy lands; and magical kings bolster the infrastructure of the growing English nation. If they are among its most illustrious, so too are they among its most potentially dangerous: Merlin is the son of a demon created to destroy Christendom; Hengist uses demons to preform his various magical feats; Virgil in *The Seven Sages of Rome* conjures images to save the city when no one else can. Each is remarkably powerful and each hovers on the verge of acceptability. However, each remains a very positive figure and even precursor to the many magical men who heroically save the day in popular literature and culture today. The positive characterization of literary magicians comes from the representational relationship they share with the unequivocally illustrious and supernatural characters who also appear in Auchinleck – with saints, angels, and popes.

The representational relationship between the sacred and secular supernatural characters in Auchinleck is best understood through the lens of typology as mediated by Northrop Frye in *The Great Code*. According to Frye, part of the Bible's literary power comes from reading comparatively, or, more accurately typologically. For Frye, this mode of reading does not limit itself strictly to the Bible and a comparison between the Old and New Testaments. While Frye

affirms that reading typologically is the correct way to read the Bible,<sup>11</sup> he simultaneously removes typological analysis from its strict New versus Old Testament structure and applies it more broadly. He applies it, for example, to Christian doctrine, suggesting doctrines of Christian theology are antitypes of biblical stories (Frye 113). He also applies it to historical thought and figures; he calls Marxism a modern-day typology (Frye 107). He applies it most importantly to literary analysis, analyzing how images and events established in the Bible pervade literary history. In other words, he removes typological analysis from its strictly biblical origins and brings it in to the secular arena.

The application of typological analysis to the manuscript compendium is an obvious fulfillment of this conception of types and antitypes. Frye begins his typological study of the Bible by outlining the text's unique nature as a kind of "library" or collection of individual texts that are read as reflecting on and fulfilling one another. He even says that "no other book in the world, to my knowledge, has a structure even remotely like that of the Christian bible" (Frye 107). The structure of the medieval manuscript, however, bears a resemblance to the Bible. Read compilationally, medieval manuscripts are also little libraries composed of seemingly disparate texts bound together in a certain way. Just as deeper understanding comes from reading the individual books of the Bible against one another (the Old Testament against the New) so too can a deeper understanding of the individual texts and individual characters in a manuscript come from reading them against one another.

The ways in which characters function as types and antitypes is a particularly important part of the typology of the Bible. The example often cited when describing typological analysis is that Christ in the New Testament is the antitype to Adam in the Old. While this aspect of

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<sup>11</sup> He calls it the "'right' way of reading it" because it "conforms to the intentionality of the book itself and to the conventions it assumes and requires" (Frye 107).



biblical narrative does not constitute a large component of Frye's study, it is one that hovers in the background influencing his larger discussion of images and events. It is furthermore of great import to a typological understanding of the manuscript compendium which contains all kinds of characters built as types. As I argue here, just as the New Testament establishes an antitype (Christ) that carries throughout our understanding entire Bible, so too do the early texts in Auchinleck establish a religious antitype that is fulfilled by a secular supernatural type that appears later on.

*The Legend of Pope Gregory* opens the manuscript as it survives today<sup>12</sup> and establishes this exemplary religious antitype which is recognizable by a few prominent features. Pope Gregory is perhaps most notoriously defined by his fraught and deeply sinful origins and youth. He is born of "sinnes sore" (135): or more specifically, of an incestuous relationship between a brother and a sister. He is raised in an abbey, but eventually leaves and accidentally marries his own mother/aunt. His manifestly sinful background remains vital to his representation and is repeatedly emphasised. His mother, for example, bemoans her role in those origins: "So sinful no was neuer no oþer. / Now icham wedded to mi sone / Þat on me biȝat mi broþer" (811-13). This emphatic statement, coming well after the sins have occurred, reiterates the severity of her sins and consequently of her son's sins; he was born in incest and married in incest – dire circumstances indeed. However, Pope Gregory's exemplarity as religious antitype comes, in part, from his ability to overcome these sins and achieve religious greatness. This is a trait common to the religious figures in the Auchinleck manuscript and throughout Middle English

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<sup>12</sup> It was not always first. As Alison Wiggins has identified, this text would originally have been the sixth item in the manuscript. Wiggins provides a detailed account of the damage done to the manuscript in her recent transcription for *The National Library of Scotland*. Her webpage on the "Physical Makeup" of the manuscript accounts for missing items by use of the item numbering on those texts that do survive. Even though Pope Gregory's legend was not always first, it still contains an influential depiction that is sure to colour understanding of the characters who follow.

literature. *The Life of Adam and Eve*, the third item in the manuscript, tells of the couple's fall and their efforts to redeem themselves and re-enter God's graces. Both Saint Margaret and Saint Katherine, the fourth and fifth characters to feature in the manuscript, are born to pagan parents: Margaret, for example, of a father who "leued upon his fals godes" (10). Part of their achievement is overcoming these origins. *The Life of Mary Magdalene* features what was probably the most prominent example of a fallen woman redeemed throughout Middle English literature. Being born in sin – even sin of the worst kind – in no way detracts from a character's status as an exemplary Christian. In fact, the ability to overcome these sinful origins makes the character all the more exemplary.

The ways in which Gregory surmounts his sinful origins constitute a key component of his character. The redemption of his mother comes first. As Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, medieval theology recognized the vital role mothers played in the religious wellbeing of a child. According to medieval theologians,<sup>13</sup> the mother alone provides "the mater" – the flesh – that composes a child (Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation* 210–12). Because the mother supplies the flesh to a child, the mother's actions and piety are vitally important to that child's religious origins. This is most obvious in depictions of the Virgin, whose flesh must be unambiguously pure; however, the same concern appears with other religious figures – if without the same stakes. In the Auchinleck manuscript, *The Nativity of the Virgin Mary* concerns itself with not only Mary's life and sinless body, but also with that of her mother, Anne. It is also evident in the depiction of Gregory's mother, who, despite her role in all the sins surrounding Gregory's youth, is depicted as a good Christian woman.

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<sup>13</sup> Walker Bynum cites many, including Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Catherine of Siena, and Francis of Assis.

While the start of the story is missing from the Auchinleck version of the tale, most other versions emphasise her innocence in the initial act of incest with her brother – depicting the scene as rape.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, in the material that does survive, she redeems herself through Christian charity: “Sche halpe þe pouer & þe lame / þe deuel fram hir for to wreke” (219-20). She goes into a lengthy cycle of penance, performing good Christian works in an attempt to redeem herself. When she marries her son, the narrative further stresses that she does not know it is her son and again emphasises the cycle of sorrow and penance she enacts following the discovery. The actions of Gregory’s mother reflect on his own humanity and therefore on his Christian characterization. The poet shows that Gregory was not born of a woman totally entrenched in sin, but rather of one who encounters unfortunate circumstances but redeems herself. Gregory becomes less culpable as a result. Gregory further surmounts his sinful origins through a devout upbringing, fall, and redemption. He is “cristned in þe salt flod” (361) in a lengthy and detailed ceremony. He is educated in an abbey and even picked to become abbot. He falls briefly when he accidentally marries his mother, but afterwards undergoes extreme penance to redeem himself. This act of penance gives rise to his first supernatural act – the final key characteristic of the exemplary Christian man.

Gregory’s ability to wield supernatural power is key to his character and the Christian antitype. His principal power in the surviving Auchinleck material is his ability to live chained to a rock without food or water for seventeen years. The poet describes the supernatural moment as follows:

Perin was his wonniing

To seuenten winter weren agon;

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<sup>14</sup> Because the scene is missing from the Auchinleck version, I will not speculate more on this here. The Vernon manuscript version, which is closely related, does depict the scene in this way.

Wiþ penaunce & gret fasting  
To God of heuen he made his mone,  
Wiþouten mete, wiþouten drink,  
Bot dewe þat fel on þe marbel ston.  
Þe stori seyt wiþouten lesing,  
Oþer liif no ladde he non. (946-53)

The depiction of Gregory's supernatural feat follows the poetics of the marvellous sketched out in the first chapter of this dissertation. The description is uneffusive. It does not highlight the supernatural nature of this action, but simply states that Gregory lives with no food or drink for seventeen years. The poet also underlines the truthfulness of the story through a reference to a written authority. The source of Gregory's marvellous ability is not emphasised. It is, of course, assumed to be God, but the poet does not explicitly state that the dew that sustains him comes because of God's interference (this emphasis can be seen in the legends of Katherine and Margaret). It seems to be something inherent within Gregory himself that inspires his survival. There is no question, however, that this supernatural feat is good and places Gregory well above other ordinary individuals. Its depiction reinforces his supernatural characterization and sets up a precedent of the kind of character who can lawfully wield supernatural power.

His supernatural power and the elevated status afforded by it leads directly to the final component of his characterization – a saviour. By the time Gregory has finished this miraculous penance, Christendom is in dire straits. The incomplete end of the material in the Auchinleck manuscript depicts the death of the current pope and a desperate search for a new one. Finding an appropriate pope is imperative; only this will ensure that “cristendom nouȝt doun felle” (974). As the poet writes, “þe warld haþ alle nede,” of a pope “to help & ward cristendom” (984-85). A

pope must be chosen to ensure that Christendom does not crumble. Gregory takes on this role. The material where Gregory actually takes on the role is missing from Auchinleck, but the lead up to the search makes clear the important role Gregory must play to ensure the health and continuity of Christendom. The implication is that without this God-appointed individual, Christendom would crumble. Gregory thus becomes a saviour who ensures the permanence of Christendom.

By the time a reader finishes this early text in the manuscript, then, he or she has already had an imaginative encounter with a Christian antitype – a good Christian man who rises from sinful origins to perform supernatural deeds and act as a saviour. The reader is ready to reflect on a potential type. Pope Gregory's characterization might be fulfilled by the medieval readers themselves. This legend was popular in the Middle Ages because, as Brian Murdoch writes, "as an exemplary life in the strictest sense, that of Gregorius offers a pattern of extremity against which more ordinary, but still inevitably sinful, lives can be set for explanation and for comfort, rather than for imitation on the literal level" (Murdoch 29). Readers could peruse the life, reflect upon their own lives, and seek to follow Gregory's example. The compiler may have chosen to place *The Legend of Pope Gregory* early in the manuscript specifically because it is an exemplary antitype that is somewhat easier to emulate: a sinner redeemed. It shows that even those with the most sinful origins can restore themselves and achieve great things.

This is particularly relevant to the problematic magicians who come later in the manuscript. Pope Gregory's depiction functions as an exemplum against which other supernatural characters in the manuscript can be read. Before moving on to discuss how the secular type fulfills the Christian antitype, however, I want to pause briefly to introduce a few other kinds of supernatural men who appear in the manuscript. Because, while Pope Gregory is a

fundamental antitype in this manuscript, many other Christian figures contribute characteristics to the overall constitution of the Christian antitype.

Some of the most prominent are angels, who appear in the pages of Christian and romance texts alike. The angels are distinguished by the divine light usually accompanying them, and often by the wisdom and foreknowledge they impart to the non-supernatural characters. An angel appears in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, for example, to tell the cardinals where to find their new pope. Several others present themselves in the legends of Katherine and Margaret, imparting wisdom to the saints and providing divine aid. Another, in the form of a holy voice, appears in *Amis and Amilioun* to warn Amilioun that if he enters a battle to save his friend he will be struck down with the foulest “mesel” (1207). Angels frequently hold almost prophetic roles, imparting knowledge both of what will happen and what has happened. In *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary*, for example, an angel tells Ann when she is pregnant with the Virgin Mary. Angels are also notable because of the great supernatural feats they perform. Angels sustain Mary Magdalen in *The Life of Mary Magdalene* after she has gone into seclusion, bringing her food each day. They also eventually carry her to heaven, as they do the Virgin Mary in *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, and even Guy in *Guy of Warwick*. Other religious figures exhibit similar powers. Saints, of course, are fantastically powerful as Pope Gregory exemplifies and as will be seen in my discussion of the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Saint Katherine, and Saint Margaret in the coming section. So too are other Christian figures from outside biblical and hagiographical traditions. In *The King of Tars*, for example, the person who transforms the lump of flesh into a baby is a priest called Cleophas. Cleophas is characterized as a wise religious man who saves not only the baby through baptism, but the entire kingdom.

Wisdom, prophetic knowledge, and wondrous supernatural abilities can thus be identified as other fundamental characteristics of the Christian, supernatural antitype of Auchinleck.

Overall, the Christian supernatural antitype can be characterized as follows. He or she is first and foremost Christian; how he or she got there varies but many are born or fall into sin and are redeemed. He or she undergoes Christian ceremonies – often baptism, but this also varies. He or she is wise, often omniscient. He or she is also able to enact fantastic miracles.

This antitype is established in the earliest texts in the manuscript. As the medieval reader progresses through the first sixteen texts of the manuscript, past Pope Gregory, through religious allegory, hagiographical texts, and even pious romance, he or she encounters example after example of supernatural events performed by diverse but typologically consistent Christian characters. These characters, and the miracles they perform, must have blended together to some degree, creating a pretext or antitype that establishes certain representational expectations for supernatural events. All these supernatural occurrences enacted by exemplary Christian figures are perfectly lawful and Christian – sometimes even religious acts in themselves. Therefore, by the time the reader gets to the seventeenth item in the manuscript and encounters his or her first non-Christian supernatural being, he or she is well prepared to read the magical type alongside the Christian antitype, and in so doing, validate it within a Christian framework.

The transition to secular material and the beginning of the secular fulfillment of the religious antitype begins with *Sir Degare*, the seventeenth item in the manuscript. Physically and visually, the transition from the sacred to the secular is unmarked. *Sir Degare* shares fol. 78r with the final lines of *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. *Sir Degare* begins at the top of the

right-hand column of the folio and was once decorated with a colourful miniature.<sup>15</sup> Just before reaching *Sir Degare*, the reader had most recently been engaged with the life of the Virgin Mary – first her conception, birth, and early life, followed by her assumption, which shares the same folio as this magical romance. The reader thus moves in the simple transition between columns on a page of text, from stories of miraculous conception and birth, to that of magical conception and birth. It seems significant that the text chosen to follow the end of the Virgin’s life is one that in its early lines depicts the impregnation of a young virgin by a supernatural being.

The continuities extend beyond physical space: many representational similarities are evident. Both impregnations occur in forests. The young damsel in *Sir Degare* wanders into a beautiful forest where “þhe wente aboute and gaderede floures / And herknede song of wilde foules” (77-78). In *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary*, Anne similarly sits “In on erbere,” and sees “A sparuwe nest wiþ 3ong brides” (63-65). While there, an Angel appears and announces Ann’s pregnancy. In *Sir Degare*, the “fairi-knyzte” approaches the young maiden and “binam hire here maidenhood” (113), immediately telling her that she is with child: “mid schilde I wot þat þou schalt be” (116). The supernatural conceptions are similar. There are, of course, fundamental differences; the princess’s impregnation is a rape, hardly a blessing like Saint Anne’s, and, I do not suggest that a medieval reader would *ever* equate the conception of the Virgin with that of a romance hero. I will suggest, however, that the similarities evoke a fluid representational link, connecting (albeit distantly, and only imaginatively) the two supernatural moments. By the seventeenth text in the manuscript, the medieval reader has experienced numerous supernatural conceptions, and is, perhaps, used to this poetic moment. He or she may

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<sup>15</sup> All but five of the miniatures in the Auchinleck manuscript have been lost. Maidie Hilmo provides a detailed discussion of the remaining miniatures in *Medieval Images, Icons, and Illustrated English Literary Texts: from Ruthwell Cross to the Ellesmere Chaucer*.



have reflected on the moment, and even if he or she ultimately decided there is no concrete link, still equated the power behind that conception with God. It matters not that the source of the supernatural power is not actually God; what matters is a lucid link built between supernatural moments. It is a supernatural type written into a secular text that fulfills the representation established by the earlier Christian antitype.

The fulfillment of the religious antitype with the secular type grows more prominent in the later texts in the manuscript. Merlin is the most important magician and type of the manuscript and perhaps of the Middle English period. Merlin is the only magical figure to appear in more than one text in the Auchinleck manuscript: he plays the central role in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, one of the principal romances, and features in one of the stories told in *The Seven Sages of Rome*. So too is Merlin the most famous magician to make his way through centuries of literary culture. Many scholarly books have been written on the various faces of Merlin from the Middle Ages to today.<sup>16</sup> While historical scholars are determined to uncover Merlin's historicity – often in somewhat bizarre claims, Nikolai Tolstoy turns him into a sort of Druid shaman – literary scholars seem particularly fascinated by Merlin's potentially demonic origins. This fascination is evident in several of the essays included in *Merlin: A Casebook* but is most apparent in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*. Both Neil Cartlidge and Garreth Griffith include articles in this volume about Merlin's heroics, or lack thereof; both place a huge emphasis on his demonic origins and argue that he is evil in medieval literature. Cartlidge goes so far as to suggest he is a kind of antichrist.

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<sup>16</sup> The most comprehensive literary study of Merlin in various texts and guises can be found in *Merlin: A Casebook*, edited by Peter H. Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson. Nikolai Tolstoy argues that Merlin was a historical figure – a druid prophet – in *The Quest for Merlin*. Ann Lawrence-Mathers also takes a (somewhat less extreme) historical perspective in *The True History of Merlin the Magician*. A comparative approach is taken in *Comparative Studies in Merlin from the Vedas to C.G. Jung* edited by James Gollnick. This is only a small sample of a large body of work.

This is not the case in Auchinleck; in Auchinleck, he is a nationalistic saviour. I have already outlined Turville-Petre's and Bly Calkin's arguments that the primary focus of this manuscript is history and national identity. The magical men in this manuscript further enhance its creation of national identity. Many of the magical men in the Auchinleck manuscript are heavily invested in nation-making. Merlin, Blaudud, and Hengist all play fundamental roles not only in their texts, but also in the historical record, in the creation and establishment of the English nation.<sup>17</sup> No compiler engaged in constructing a manuscript with such a nationalistic preoccupation would wish these founding fathers to appear anything less than ideal – despite their associations with demons. Therefore, the poets make use of positive representational structures familiar to readers of the time, derived from religious texts, and famous religious individuals. The manuscript sets up a representational system of types and antitypes that aligns magical men closely with Christian men and so enables them to act as godly, national heroes. Indeed, when Merlin is read within his manuscript context, his characterization as a demonic antichrist becomes entirely invalid. In the Auchinleck manuscript he is the type to Pope Gregory, remaking that saint's earlier depiction in the secular arena and consequently becoming almost saintly himself. Merlin is far from an antichrist; he is a specifically religious and nationalistic leader who is fundamental to the salvation of England.

This interpretation of Merlin is most obvious in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. The longest surviving English example, this romance was originally translated from the French Vulgate cycle *Lestoire de Merlin*.<sup>18</sup> It holds a central position in the Auchinleck manuscript, appearing near the

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<sup>17</sup> For an account of Merlin as a historical figure, see Ann Lawrence-Mathers *The True History of Merlin the Magician*. The other two appear within the chronicle tradition and give their names to various locations in England.

<sup>18</sup> O.D. Macrae Gibson's edition of the romance compares the two surviving manuscript copies: The Auchinleck Version and one in Lincoln's Inn MS 150 (there are some significant differences between the two versions which will be discussed in my next chapter). Macrae-Gibson identifies and discusses the French source of the romance in his second commentary volume.

middle, and is the second longest surviving text – shorter than *Guy of Warwick* by only a few hundred lines. Its 9938 lines tell the story of Vortigern’s usurpation of the English throne, his eventual defeat by Uther Pendragon, Arthur’s conception, birth, upbringing, rise to power and many battles. In and amongst this historical material resides the story of Merlin’s conception, birth, youth, and role in Arthur’s establishment. Despite the fact that this romance is titled *Of Arthour and Of Merlin*, the poet dedicates far more time to Arthur than to Merlin. Merlin and his magic seem to take a backseat to Arthur’s more historical narrative: only a little over five hundred and fifty lines of almost ten thousand are dedicated to the story of Merlin’s early years. This follows the nationalistic preoccupation of Auchinleck, which is more interested in Arthur.<sup>19</sup> However, the somewhat shorter depiction does not in any way detract from the important role that Merlin plays both as nationalistic saviour within the romance itself and as a type within the manuscript as a whole. The shorter depiction is rather indicative of the function of the type/antitype structure. Less time must be spent insisting on Merlin’s religious status in light of his close representational relationship with the Christian supernatural men in the manuscript.

Merlin’s characterization fulfills the religious antitype of Auchinleck, and Pope Gregory’s depiction in particular, in several ways. Merlin begins his life much in the way that Pope Gregory did – as the product of evil and sin. The poet tells of a meeting of the devils in which they discuss the virgin birth and decide they want to “to Ligge bi a maidenkin / & biȝeten a child in her” (671-72). The Devil does just that, impregnating a young virgin whose family he

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<sup>19</sup> The focus of this version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* becomes understandable in light of this preoccupation, and indeed, in *Saracens and the Making of English Identity* Bly Calkin shows how *Of Arthour and of Merlin* follows the fixation of the manuscript from its opening lines, which address the status of the English language, to its preoccupations with Englishness and English history as set up against Saracen “others.”

first destroys.<sup>20</sup> However, just as in *Pope Gregory*, Merlin's mother is rendered less culpable in her impregnation. That narrative recounts how the devil came to influence Merlin's mother's family, destroying all but her. While her entire family falls into sin, the narrative insists that Merlin's mother resists the devil; the devil only manages to impregnate her because of a small mistake – she forgets one night because of her sister's behavior to seal her doors and windows with a blessing.

Like Pope Gregory's mother, Merlin's mother also immediately repents and redeems herself for that mistake; every day after she “serued God wiþ hert gode” (882). So too does Merlin undergo a process of conversion and redemption. Merlin is christened as soon as he is born, a scene the text is careful to depict – just as in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. Merlin's christening, redemption, and casting off the devil are even more emphasised when he recounts the tale of his own birth. He says:

A fende it was þat me biȝat  
And pelt me in an holy fat  
He wende haue hadde an iuel fode  
Ac al icham turned to gode,  
Ac þurth kende of hem y can bo  
Telle of þing þat is ago  
And al þing þat is now (1053-60).

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<sup>20</sup> Neil Cartlidge insists that consequently Merlin “is literally a devil's child” (Cartlidge 226), conceived “to play precisely the role that is, ultimately and superlatively, Antichrist's own” (Cartlidge 225). Both Cartlidge and Griffith discuss the French tradition of the romance – that by Robert de Boron and the Vulgate version – and insist that Merlin is ultimately a sinister character, problematic and ambiguous in his potentially demonic origins and ways. This does not apply to the English renditions, and I think, is an incorrect reading of the French versions. Merlin may have demonic origins, but the text works extremely hard to counter those origins with an appropriate religious upbringing, and Merlin ends up playing the role of a savior more than an anti-saviour.

Here Merlin describes first his demonic father and the remarkable abilities received from him. Merlin defrays any potential demonic associations, however, and emphasises his redemption, by saying that he has now “turned to gode” – reminiscent both of his christening and of his now established devoutness. Merlin further says that he was put into a “holy fat”; this choice of words is distinctly reminiscent of those used to describe the Virgin Mary.<sup>21</sup> In referring to his mother with these words, Merlin relates her to the Virgin and begins an association between himself and Christ. This is a key aspect of the beginning of Merlin’s characterization as a specifically Christian saviour. Here, however, unlike in later versions where these lines are more heavy handed, the characterization is subtle; but it is made stronger in the links created within the manuscript context. Merlin and his mother are a type to the exemplary antitype established by Pope Gregory and his mother.

The links built between Merlin and the Christian characters in the manuscript can even be seen in his supernatural abilities. Because miracle working plays a fundamental role in depictions of Christian supernatural figures, Merlin’s magical powers find all kinds of Christian precedent in the manuscript. Merlin’s ability to speak and reason soon after birth, for example, is first seen in *The Nativity and Early Life of Mary*. When the young Virgin enters the temple at age three, she impresses the scholars with how “reynable and quaint sche was of witt & of ded” (111). Merlin too possesses unbelievable wit and eloquence at a very young age. The speech quoted above was spoken by Merlin when he was only two years of age and all who hear him are struck with wonder: “wonder hadde þat it herd / þat so couþe speke & go / & was bot of ȝeres tuo”

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<sup>21</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum’s work most clearly emphasises the importance of depictions of the Virgin Mary as a holy vessel for Christ. While this depiction is apparent in the Auchinleck manuscript, it is far more evident in the lengthier Marian texts, such as *The Mary Play from the N. Town Manuscript*. For a discussion of the importance of Mary’s body as a vessel in that play see Matthew J. Kinservik “The Struggle over Mary’s Body: Theological and Dramatic Resolution in the N-Town Assumption Play.”

(1068-70). Merlin's great wisdom (practically omnipotence) and foresight also find precedent in the manuscript in the depiction of angels who frequently work as conveyors of knowledge of future events or of things happening far away. Merlin fulfills the same function. He knows the history of all individuals he encounters – he saves his mother, for example, by revealing that the justice himself was illegitimately conceived. He also orchestrates Arthur's battles, flitting between armies, always knowing who needs what and providing it at a moment's notice.

Like the supernatural Christian men, Merlin also possesses the ability to enact fantastic transformations – changing his own appearance and those of others. This ability has been used by Gareth Griffith as proof of “the darker side of Merlin's character” in which the “powers inherited from his evil father” are most clearly demonically inspired (Griffith 105). While there are moments in which Merlin uses his transformative abilities to entertain himself and others, more often they are used to verify the moral standing of the other characters in the text and, even more importantly, in fulfillment of his ultimate goal – the salvation of England. When the boy Merlin first abandons Vortigern in search of the true king of England, he tests the moral worth of Uther Pendragon's men. He appears in the guise of an old beggar and asks the men for food in the name of “Godes loue” (1936), essentially asking that they prove their Christian charity and worth. When the men refuse: “þai seyð he schuld nouȝt haue / Bot strokes & bismare” (1937-38), Merlin scolds them and refuses to help. It is only when Uther comes himself and is kind to Merlin disguised as a “swain” that he reveals himself and helps Uther become king. Far from purposeless, Merlin's disguises and ability to disguise others is an important way in which he ensures the salvation of England – his ultimate function in this romance.

Merlin's function as a savior is most evident in the role he plays in Arthur's establishment and youth. Merlin is born at the time when England is in its direst circumstances,

sold by Vortigern to the “heþen Sarrzins” (479).<sup>22</sup> The poet insists that “al þis lon / To þe deuel gon an hond” (487-88): that England has fallen into total disrepair, and even into the Devil’s hands. Merlin comes onto the scene to save England from this descent and bring it back into the Christian light. He plays a fundamental role in ensuring Arthur’s birth, establishment as King, and victory in defeating the invaders, acting as counselor, guide, and wielder of fire. He also acts as a specifically Christian leader for Arthur and England. After Arthur is born, Merlin is the one who takes him to be baptized:

So we finden in þe blake;  
It was Merlin þat him afeng,  
Forþ he ȝede wiþouten lesing,  
To a chirche he went wiþ honour  
& dede þat child cristen Arthour. (2702-06)

The poet again makes much of Merlin’s role in Arthur’s baptism, including two truth claims to affirm the veracity of the moment. It is a significant moment. Merlin is more than a simple magician; he takes on the role of religious guide here, helping to ensure the Christian upbringing of the future king. Merlin’s religious role does not end here. When it comes time to choose the King – or rather to ensure that Arthur becomes king – Merlin takes counsel with “þe bischop” who “seyd his helping / He schuld haue in al þing” (3053-54). Merlin works with the man who should be ensuring the religious prosperity of England, and in so doing himself helps ensure the religious prosperity of England. Merlin continues to play this role throughout this romance,

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the depiction of the Saracens in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and of the ways in which they inform English identity, see Bly Calkin’s chapter “Saracens, Englishness, and Productive Violence in *Of Arthour and Of Merlin*.” She argues that “the Saracens in this text expose the many ways in which “Inglisch” identity is a product of violence” (Bly Calkin, *Saracens* 167).

guiding Arthur towards reestablishing England, elevating it from its fallen, war-torn, even pagan, position.

Finally, Merlin, like Pope Gregory, never falls from this role. The poet of the Auchinleck version of this romance chooses to end his tale while Merlin is still at his peak. In the Vulgate tradition of the romance, Merlin eventually falls in love with Vivienne and is trapped in a rock for eternity – prevented from further serving England. Here, however, the romance ends with Merlin riding out to ensure Arthur's victory, followed by a large celebration. Scholars range from bafflement to disappointment at the state of this ending. O.D. Macrae-Gibson's final note in his edition of this text exhibits the range of responses: one scholar (Kolbing) suggests that "the poet was working from an imperfect transcript," another (Ellis) that "mere weariness" caused the poet to stop. Macrae-Gibson refutes both suggestions but ultimately says that "he cannot suggest any really satisfactory explanation" (Macrae-Gibson 2. 161). Only more recently has Bly Calkin attributed purposefulness to this ending. She suggests that readers were intended to rely on their own knowledge of Arthurian legend and "chose-their-own-adventure," or their own ending to this text (Bly Calkin, "Endings" 173-75). Even without exterior knowledge of the legend, however, the ending can still be seen as intentional, and in fact, is reflective of Merlin's characterization. Visually, the ending in the manuscript is purposeful. The final line on fol. 256vb is followed immediately by a miniature and another text. Thematically it is also purposeful. The text ends with Merlin in the peak of his role as a nationalistic hero. In this final scene, he takes on a highly military role, and helps ensure Arthur's victory on the battlefield. He by no means takes on this role throughout the text, so the choice to end here, sets him up, and sustains him, as an integral part in ensuring Arthur's military and national success. Ending before Merlin's fall with an image of him in his prime keeps Merlin at his highest, still acting as a



nationalistic hero and key player in the establishment of England, the nation. It eliminates the very human act of succumbing to a woman and instead leaves him as infallible, as above those human weaknesses, and as superhuman. The reader was and is left with no sour feeling about Merlin's ultimate fate; he continues on in glorious, specifically nationalistic posterity.

Merlin's role as savior and his continued representation as a religious figure solidify his status as a type to Pope Gregory. He fulfills the same function in a very similar way, just within a secular context. Pope Gregory overcomes sinful origins to become the salvation of Christendom. Merlin overcomes sinful origins to become the salvation of a Christian England. The medieval reader, having moved past the similar depictions of Pope Gregory to encounter Merlin, would have been more willing to accept him as a lawful figure and to colour his depiction positively with imaginative connections to his representational antitype. The manuscript context is vital to this interpretation. The fact that these two men inhabit the same compilation and are read alongside one another is what solidifies Merlin's depiction as a positive, Christian saviour. Even without being read in chronological order the typological relationship is valid. Simply reading the texts together, whether within a few nights or weeks of one another must have built these same kinds of resonances. In the representational relationship between Pope Gregory and Merlin, created by their typological relationship, this magical figure, literally born of a demon, is validated; he not only shakes off his potentially dangerous, demonic origins, but also becomes a powerful religious figure. In later renditions of this romance, which I discuss in Chapter Three and in the conclusion, more steps are taken to place Merlin in a positive Christian role within the romance itself; here, however, the manuscript context and consequential typological interpretation is sufficient to legitimize this national hero. The positive characterization of the

literary magician derives from the very apparatus through which literature was consumed in the medieval period.

This representation, and its ultimate function, is not limited to Merlin; other male magicians are validated within the same typological relationship built in the manuscript context and reveal the means through which many literary magicians – even the most problematic – are rendered Christian and legitimate in Middle English literary culture. The story of the magician Virgil, for example, told in *The Seven Sages of Rome*, depicts a man “þat coude of nigramancie werke” (1956). He uses those skills to construct various defenses for the city of Rome. In so doing he protects the city and saves Rome from defeat by its enemies. The greedy king who destroys these defenses is severely punished, and Virgil is left as a would-be-saviour thwarted by human greed. The relationship is similar to that of Merlin and Fortigern.<sup>23</sup> *Sir Orfeo* and *Reinbrun* both feature fairy knights who guard highly allegorical fairy lands, testing the virtue of the heroes and functioning as guardians of an almost religious space.<sup>24</sup> The true impact of the type, antitype structure working within the manuscript can best be seen, however, in magical men who appear almost at the end of the manuscript in *The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*. By the end of the manuscript, a reader who has been meandering along has encountered example after example of Christian supernatural. He or she has also become accustomed to the secular supernatural men in the middle of the manuscript, Merlin, Virgil and the fairy knights, who act as types to their Christian counterparts. Near the close of the manuscript, however, the reader finally encounters two magical men who, according to all we know of conceptions of historical magic, should be exceedingly evil.

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<sup>23</sup> In his article “Merlin: Prophet and Magician,” Paul Zumthor builds further links between Merlin and Virgil in other texts of medieval literature. He notes their similarities in the Auchinleck manuscript, but also shows resonances across medieval literature – including, for example, in *Orlando Furioso* (Zumthor, “Merlin” 143-46).

<sup>24</sup> I discuss the allegorical nature of supernatural spaces in the next chapter.

In its lengthy narrative of English history, *The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle* depicts two magicians who are fundamental in the establishment of England as a nation. Blaudud uses his knowledge of “nigramacie” to establish Bath (537), while Hengist uses his magic to construct a marvelous bridge and conquer some of France, Wales, and Scotland: “Tvelue kingdome into his hond he nam” (858). Both kings use what historians of magic would categorize as demonic magic in their various feats. Hengist “Coniourd þre hundred fendes of helle” (740) while Bladud makes a deal with “þe deuel” (583). And yet, neither is depicted even slightly negatively. Both have long, full reigns, respectful deaths, and are instrumental in founding many of the great cities of England. Turville-Petre emphasises that Hengist in particular is everything a king “ought to be” (Turville-Petre 110). Within the context of the manuscript, they are even less problematic. The reader is already well used to supernatural individuals, often with fraught origins, who are able to accomplish great things. Far from looking down on them, the context of the manuscript validates and venerates these men. They are instrumental in the foundation of England as a nation, something so key to the discourse of this manuscript and to the state of England at the time.

Ultimately, the literary magician is characterized through the relationship he shares with Christian, supernatural individuals in the manuscript. Within the nation-making preoccupation of the Auchinleck manuscript, a representational tradition that bridges sacred and secular supernatural power is clearly evident. The manuscript context allows magicians to be both Christian and magical as they fulfill their roles of secular and even sometimes religious leadership. The typological structure identified here is an example of the means by which magical men can be prominent and heroic features of medieval literary magic. Because they are seated so firmly within the larger tradition of supernatural literature apparent within the

Auchinleck manuscript, the magical men become embroiled in the construction of English national identity and in depictions of the Christian supernatural. In the process they are made Christian and consequently rendered lawful in the medieval mind, removed from any potential demonic or pagan associations. The stage is set for magicians to step out of their manuscript context in later examples of literary magic but still retain the same representative residues of this blend of sacred and the secular.

### ***Of Saints and Sorceresses: Supernatural Women***

Magical women do not claim the same stakes as the men in the creation of national identity in Middle English literary culture. There is no female equivalent to Merlin who uses her fantastic powers for the greater good of the nation. In fact, at first glance, it seems magical women play almost no role at all in this “handbook of the nation.” Despite its being the first manuscript compendium to foreground the romance genre, and despite its massive size and the number of romances held within, the Auchinleck manuscript contains almost no explicitly magical women.

The extraordinarily powerful women of contemporary fantasy literature and culture – like Hermione Granger from the *Harry Potter* series or Emma Swan from *Once Upon a Time* – are rare in the Auchinleck manuscript and even in Middle English literature before Chaucer.

However, female magicians still manage to cement their place in literary history becoming as popular in later years as their male counterparts. Despite their relative rarity, supernatural women are an important component of medieval literary magic and are ensconced in a rich representational system that carries into contemporary depictions. However, their origins can only be uncovered if our understanding of female power is widened. The medieval origins of the type of the magical woman lie not just in depictions of magical women, but in other kinds of

female power. While magical women seem marginalized and even omitted in Auchinleck and in early Middle English romance more generally, female power holds a prominent position in Middle English literary culture. It is evident in many different characters – from saints and religious women to particularly powerful romance heroines. This section explores the depiction of these powerful women and argues that it is in their depiction that the nature of the supernatural women as an important component of Middle English literary magic resides. Within the structure of Auchinleck a consistent, religious representational type of the supernatural woman can be seen.

While Helen Cooper, James Wade, and Corinne Saunders, have correctly identified magical women as a key feature of romance,<sup>25</sup> explicitly magical women were not so in the early years of Middle English romance.<sup>26</sup> In fact, their appearances are rather rare. This is quite distinct from French and Anglo-Norman romance of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries within which explicitly magical women flourish. Auchinleck itself most obviously testifies to this difference. In its more than six-hundred surviving folios there are only two brief mentions of magical women, amounting to less than two hundred lines: The Queen of Ireland, Isolde's mother, plays a magical part in *Sir Tristrem*, and Carmile appears briefly in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. The depictions of these two women are vital to understanding the way in which supernatural women are represented in Auchinleck. However, before moving on to an analysis of

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<sup>25</sup> Helen Cooper identifies the fairy mistress as “the ultimate woman of romance” and includes this figure as one of her memes of romance (Cooper 173). Her discussion centers on Fairy Queens from later English romances – Spenser's Gloriana, Triamour from *Sir Launfal*, and Melusine. James Wade dedicates his entire *Fairies in Medieval Romance* to a discussion of the intrusion of fairies on the lives of men and women of romance and of the way fairies enact a blending of the human and the other world. He too focuses on French romance and later English examples. Corinne Saunders dedicates a section of *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* to fairy mistresses as well as to magical women in a variety of guises – as healers, for example.

<sup>26</sup> When I refer to explicitly magical women, I refer to a woman with powers able to rival Merlin's: someone able to enact fantastic transformation with her magical abilities. In later romance, and in French and Anglo-Norman romance the most obvious example would be Morgan le Faye; others include Melusine, Triamour, and Melior. Not all are fairies.

their characteristics, I want to pause briefly over the evident unpopularity of magical women in the early years of Middle English romance – a striking difference from its French counterpart.<sup>27</sup>

In her *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Medieval Romance*, Gisela Guddat-Figge lists eighteen Middle English romance manuscripts that predate the fifteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Of these, only two feature any magical women at all and none do so prominently. *William of Palerne*, found in Cambridge, King's College, MS 13 features an evil stepmother, Braunde, who turns the hero, William, into a werewolf. The second manuscript is Auchinleck itself. None of the other eighteen manuscripts from before the late fourteenth century contain romances featuring magical women and most later Middle English romances in which magical women star were composed after the late fourteenth century.<sup>29</sup> It is impossible, of course, to say that this manuscript evidence proves irrefutably that magical women did not appear in English romance before the end of the fourteenth century. Countless manuscripts have been lost and even Auchinleck itself might have

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<sup>27</sup> I am of course aware that, as Jocelyn Wogan-Brown so thoroughly established in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c.1100-c.1500*, linguistic divides were by no means simplistic in thirteenth and fourteenth century, and that medieval literature should indeed be characterized as multi-lingual. Susanna Fein's recent volume on Auchinleck also emphasises its multi-national, multi-lingual nature. And yet, it still seems important to consider why the early English redactors of romance were less keen to transpose explicitly magical women than those writing in French.

<sup>28</sup> The eighteen manuscripts as listed by Guddat-Figge which contain one or more romance and predate the end of the fourteenth century are as follows: National Library of Wales MS 572 (early 14th century); Cambridge, King's College MS 13 (1375); Cambridge, University Library MS Gg. IV. 27. 2 (c. 1300); the Auchinleck manuscript; BL MS. Additional 14408 (14th century); BL MS Additional 22283 Simeon MS (c. 1390-1400); Cotton Vitellius D. III (c. 1275); BL Egerton 2862 (end of 14th century); BL MS Harley 1701 (c. 1380); BL MS Harley 2252 (c. 1330-1340); College of Arms MS Arundel 22 (mid 14th century); Gray's Inn MS. 20 (mid 14th century); Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 33(1)+33(2) (c. 1380); Bodleian Library MS Bodley 264 (Pt 1 1338); Bodleian Library MS Eng. Poet A. 1. (c. 1390); Bodleian Library MS. Laud Misc. 108; Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc. 622 (Late 14th century); Trinity College MS. D. 57 (end of 14th century).

<sup>29</sup> There are a few exceptions, although none contained within manuscripts that predate the end of the fourteenth century. *Sir Landevale* (a version of Marie de France's *Launfal*) is thought to have been composed in the first half of the fourteenth century; it survives in three manuscripts and two fragments of early printed books all of which are dated to the late fifteenth century and beyond (Laskaya and Salisbury 206-07). Similarly, *Lybeaus Desconus*, which features a sorceress and survives in six manuscript versions all compiled after c. 1400, is thought to have been composed c.1350 (Salisbury and Weldon 6). The romances that prominently feature magical women, *Partenope of Blois*, *The Romans of Partenay*, *Sir Launfal*, versions of the Arthurian legend that contain Morgan le Faye, were all composed after 1400.

once contained a text with a noteworthy magical woman.<sup>30</sup> However, the surviving manuscript material, as well as the dates of composition of later romances featuring magical women, provide support enough to suggest that magical women were not a popular or prominent fixture of Middle English romance before the late fourteenth century.

The same is not true of French and Anglo-Norman romance.<sup>31</sup> Early French and Anglo-Norman romances contain many magical women. Chrétien de Troyes's *Cliges* features a powerful nurse who orchestrates Fenice's preservation and escape from an evil emperor. Magical women appear throughout the *Lais* of Marie de France: *Lanval* features a fairy mistress who provides her knight with marvelous items and eventually whisks him away to her realm; a magical potion is made by the heroine's aunt to help the hero conquer a mountain in *Les Deus Amans*. Three French and Anglo-Norman manuscripts survive of the romance of *Partenope of Blois* whose heroine, Melior, a beautiful empress of Byzantium, controls her fate with powerful magical abilities. And of course, the French Vulgate Cycle Arthurian romances contain numerous and various magical women and fairies – the most famous include Morgan le Faye and Vivienne. Magical women are a central feature of early French and Anglo-Norman romance. They are more prominent in continental romance but are certainly present in Anglo-Norman examples. French and Anglo-Norman romances are the direct ancestors of the Middle English

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<sup>30</sup> Rosalind Field in "Romance in England: 1066-1400" warns against the danger of attempting to place order upon the developing genre based on this surviving evidence because "the pattern of preservation is so arbitrary" (Field, "Romance in England" 169). Certainly, attempting to impose absolute rigidity on the trend of magical women in romance based on a small surviving sample of manuscripts would be folly.

<sup>31</sup> I use Anglo-Norman to refer to the version of French that was spoken in England after the Norman conquest. The collection of essays edited by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c.1100-c.1500* problematizes this somewhat simplistic terminology and emphasises the multilingual and multivocal nature of language in England at this time. I use Anglo-Norman for the sake of simplicity and because most previous scholars distinguish Anglo-Norman from French romances.

romances.<sup>32</sup> So why then are magical women, a central figure in French and Anglo-Norman romance, so much less prominent in the early Middle English versions – almost all of which are translations of these earlier examples?

Judith Weiss's characterization of insular romance provides a potential explanation for the difference between continental and insular romance. In *The Birth of Romance in England* she suggests that "relatively few marvels, monsters or signs of supernatural" is "characteristic of insular romance, whether in French or English" (Weiss, *Birth of Romance* 2). Weiss's characterization seems supported by the work of other scholars who emphasise the historicity of early romance. Robert Stein's *Reality Fictions: Romance, History and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180* highlights the close ties between early romance and history and the grounding of romance within "the contemporary secular world" (Stein 8). Susan Crane's *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* insists on the use of romance to create real histories for newly established Anglo-Norman aristocracy. While the historicity of early romance is undeniable, I disagree with Weiss's characterization of early romance as uninterested in the supernatural. The manuscript evidence supports the opposite hypothesis. First and foremost, all of the Anglo-Norman romances Weiss translates in her volume depend on supernatural moments: the entire plot of *Amis and Amilioun*, for example, relies on supernatural transformations and miraculous healing. What is more, many, even most, of the early Middle English romances have supernatural elements at their very core. Both romances contained within the earliest surviving romance manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud. Misc. 108, feature the supernatural. *King Horn* (a version of which appears in

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<sup>32</sup> As William Calin in *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* writes "the writers of English romance, in verse and in prose, from *King Horn* and *Floris and Blancheflur* to *Le Morte Darthur*, worked entirely in the French tradition and benefited totally from it" (Calin xiv). For more information, see Rosalind Field's chapter "Romance" in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation*.



Auchinleck) relies on a magic ring to steer the hero and consequently the plot, and *Havelock the Dane* similarly depends on a supernatural light shining from Havelock's mouth to reveal his identity to the appropriate parties. Some of the most popular romances that survive in multiple manuscript copies from the fourteenth century, those "romances of prys" Chaucer names in *Sir Thopas* (VII 897-900), highlight supernatural elements – giants, dragons, magic mirrors, rings, gloves, and fairy lands appear throughout *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hamptoun*, *Floris and Blancheflur*, and *Sir Degare*. While it is certain that insular romance has a more historical, and therefore a somewhat more realistic tone, it is untrue that early Middle English romance can be characterized by a lack of the supernatural. Both secular and Christian supernatural flourish within.

Having rejected this explanation, I would like to suggest two other possibilities for the relative scarcity of magical women in early Middle English romance: the first is a lack of patronage. In the centuries following the Norman invasion, French language and literature became the language of the English court. Women are particularly associated with this newly popular Anglo-Norman literature both as patrons and as readers.<sup>33</sup> Some of the texts these Anglo-Norman noble women were most interested in reading were romances,<sup>34</sup> but this romance material tended to be exclusively in French or Anglo-Norman – especially in its earliest

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<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Tyler argues that shortly after the conquest one woman in particular named Matilda – educated in an Anglo-Saxon nunnery, married to Henry I, and frequently cited as one of the most important patrons of Anglo-Norman Literature – was able "to bridge the literary culture of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England." Anglo-Saxon women, she suggests, may have taken "a very direct role in encouraging the beginning of French written literary culture" (Tyler 176). Susan Crane's work (amongst others') shows that after this initial establishment, "women's patronage and authorship sustain the precocity of Anglo-Norman literary production" (Crane, "Anglo-Norman Cultures" 45).

<sup>34</sup> Many of the essays in Carol M. Meale's *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500* address romance as key reading material for women in the Middle Ages. The reading of devotional material was obviously the most popular reading material of the time, as Felicity Riddy establishes in "'Women talking about the things of God': a Late Medieval Sub-Culture," and communities of women sometimes developed through the sharing and reading of religious texts.

iterations. As Meale indicates “most, if not all, of these romances were in French” (Meale, “Laywomen” 141).<sup>35</sup> Women’s apparent interest in reading and acquiring romances primarily in French prior to the turn of the fifteenth century provides one explanation for the lack of magical women evident in early Middle English romance, because, patronage was an important factor in determining the kinds of romances being produced in thirteenth and fourteenth century England. Derek Pearsall laments the detrimental influence that interest in French and Anglo-Norman poetry had on the development of English romance:

In one important area, English poetry could not approach Anglo-Norman: there is nothing in English, and could not conceivably be anything, to correspond to the noble *Tristan*-fragments of Thomas, the *Tristan* of Beroul, or the *Lais* of Marie de France. These are courtly poems, reflecting the tastes and interests of the exclusively French court of Henry II and his queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine. There will be no such grace, passion and subtlety in English until the late fourteenth century. (Pearsall, *Old English* 90)

For Pearsall, the courtly patronage of Anglo-Norman literature resulted in a higher caliber of poetry. While I do not necessarily agree with the low-value judgements ascribed by many scholars to early Middle English poetry, Pearsall’s sentiment emphasises the great impact patronage had on the kinds of texts being produced in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. This impact extends to the kinds of characters featured in romance texts. Certainly, poets created texts of interest to their patrons, ones that feature characters about whom the patrons would want to read. Courtly women in this same court must have been interested in hearing tales of other powerful women, and poets consequently must have produced romances featuring powerful, magical women in French and Anglo-Norman to appeal to this group of

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<sup>35</sup> She goes on to say that “Evidence that women were reading romances in English is, paradoxically perhaps, less easy to come by” (Meale, “Laywomen” 141).

courtly women. The female patrons themselves may also have sought out these French-language tales of female prowess, soliciting and purchasing copies. The result is that magical women flourish in early French and Anglo-Norman romance.

This argument relies on the assumption that women are the ones who would be most interested in reading about magical women. This would not, of course, be unequivocally true; all people enjoy reading texts of multifaceted subject matter and character types. I am joined, however, in this assumption by many earlier scholars who have posited female readership based on the contents and characters of texts in manuscripts. Felicity Riddy's foundational chapter "Women talking about the things of God': A Late Medieval Sub-Culture," frequently rests on the assumption that women were reading about female saints. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture 1150-1300* accesses a female literary culture by exploring narratives about or depicting virginity – a topic of most concern to women at the time. Nor is this trend limited to hagiographical and devotional literature. Both Judith Weiss's and Flora Alexander's chapters in *Women and Literature in Britain* emphasise a female readership of romance through discussions of the depictions of mothers and female lovers, respectively. So too does Julia Boffey's "'Many grete myracyls...in divers contreys of the eest': The Reading and Circulation of the Middle English Prose *Three Kings of Cologne*" posit a female readership based on the text's contents. It is not then such a stretch to suggest that female readers of romance might have been interested in reading tales of women with wondrous magical abilities.

Like saint's lives, tales of magical women depict powerful women who have risen above society, who possess fantastical abilities, who steer their own destiny, who marry whom they like, who live where they like – all of which is appealing subject matter. Such potential for enjoyment might very well have encouraged the French-speaking women of the English court to

seek out such texts, and most importantly, to provide financial backing so as to ensure that such romances were available reading material. The role courtly women took on as patrons of Anglo-Norman romance thus provides one plausible explanation for the presence of magical women in French and Anglo-Norman romance and their scarcity in early Middle English romance. Women who could afford to patronize poets, buy expensive manuscripts, and enjoy leisure time to read romances were most likely noble and therefore enjoying the Anglo-Norman and French varieties. English-speaking women would have been infinitely less able to do so both because of the exorbitant cost of books and the low literacy levels.<sup>36</sup> Demand for English versions of romances featuring magical women must consequently have been significantly less.

The second explanation is that magical women do not fit into the nationalistic preoccupations of early Middle English romance. The magical women in Auchinleck, and in early Middle English literature more generally, play no part in establishing nations. Their roles are diverse and multifaceted, but never carry the weight of the nation. The work of Turville-Petre, Susan Crane, Geraldine Heng, W. R. J. Barron, and others shows that the impetus towards historicity and nation-making constituted a particular focus of Middle English romance more generally.<sup>37</sup> This focus provides further explanation for the relative scarcity of explicitly magical women. Poets crafting long chivalric romances featuring national and regional heroes fighting exciting battles must have had little interest in giving time to figures who do not fit within its

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<sup>36</sup> For more on the reading practices of women see Rebecca Krug's *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England*.

<sup>37</sup> Many of the essays in *The Arthur of the English*, edited by W. R. J. Barron, show how romances of Arthur functioned to help produce and bolster English national identity and pride. Meanwhile, as I have already emphasised, scholarly works like Geraldine Heng's *Empire of Magic* show how national identity was created through the racialized depiction of other nations especially in crusading romances. More recently, Thomas H. Crofts and Robert A. Rouse's chapter "Middle English Popular Romance and National Identity" has problematized a simplistic homogeneity of national identity, rendering the process more complex and suggesting that it exists in multifaceted ways; they ultimately uphold Rosalind Field's sense that romance works "to create a history for a country, a family, a city" (Field, "Romance in England" 162).

larger nationalistic focus – other than as the sporadic enemy or helper. I do not suggest that magical women were omitted intentionally or maliciously (although that is always possible, of course) but rather that those romances of French or Anglo-Norman origin that feature magical women were less popular with audiences of early Middle English romance. Consumers of early Middle English romance – like those involved in the ordering, purchasing, and compiling of Auchinleck – wanted tales of national heroes and great battles. Magical woman remained outside of this emerging interest in national identity: perhaps they are too fantastical, too exotic, too French.<sup>38</sup> As a result, romances featuring magical women were less widespread, and those sequences that do feature magical women were of less interest to the translators and poets and sometimes shortened in favour of lengthy battle scenes.<sup>39</sup>

The depiction of one of Auchinleck's two magical women shows how this lack of interest in explicitly magical women manifests itself in the romance tradition. Carmile appears in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and her treatment provides insight into why magical women might have been omitted from this massive compendium. *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is heavily invested in depictions of magic and the supernatural as evidenced by its lengthy depiction of Merlin himself. Magical women, however, are not given the same treatment as the nationalistic saviour Merlin, and in fact, are either omitted or reduced. Carmile is the only woman with magical powers to appear in the entirety of this lengthy narrative, and then, only for the briefest of moments. The poet *Of Arthour and of Merlin* takes thirty of his almost ten-thousand lines to describe “a wiche hete Carmile” who “Of wichecraft & vilaine / & eke of nigramance / Of þis world sche coupe mast” (4438-43). This brief introduction seems to set up a powerful adversary for Arthur, Merlin,

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<sup>38</sup> For more on the complex relationship English literature shared with French and “Frenchness” in the late fourteenth century and beyond, see Deanne Williams’s *The French Fetish from Chaucer to Shakespeare*.

<sup>39</sup> A tendency most evident in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* which includes only one 30-line mention of a magical woman amongst over 9000 lines.

and the heroic knights; however, far from coming to play a role in the romance, Carmile never performs any magic. In fact, the author explicitly states that Carmile's magic will not work when Merlin is nearby:

Ac Carmile par ma fay  
Bi Merlines Liif-day  
no miȝt do wiȝ her wicheing  
in Ingland non anooing. (4456-60).

Carmile cannot perform any magic in England because of Merlin's presence. The poet effectively removes any female power from this lengthy romance. He returns to his descriptions of battles, and Carmile is not mentioned again. The poet has little interest in her depiction and gives very little information through which a reader might characterize this powerful woman.

These thirty lines are the only ones in which female magicians are mentioned in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. Within the lines, the poet compares Carmile to Morgan le Faye and "Niniam," important supernatural women in Arthurian romance, but he moves directly on. These two women do not appear anywhere in this Arthurian romance, despite the roles they play in the French Vulgate Cycle from which it was translated.<sup>40</sup> There is, it seems, literally no space for female power in this historical narrative of an English hero and his English magician. The power of women is reduced, not simply overlooked, but made lesser in the face of the masculine, historical narrative guided by the masculine magician. Female power, "witches," are dangerous, and perhaps threaten to weaken the patriarchal nation being built in this manuscript. Carmile herself is powerful. She "hadde a castel of gret noblay" (4450), as well as an army of Saracens to defend it. Perhaps she herself could have offered strength enough to defeat both Arthur and his

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<sup>40</sup> The description of Morgan le Faye's birth and origins which appear in the Vulgate *L'Estoire de Merlin* is, for example, missing (Lacy 207–08).

magician. This threat must be countered, and it is countered here through poetic neglect. This is, of course, entirely speculation, but speaks of the impetus towards countering the threat of the “other” in this manuscript, identified by Bly Calkin. Here, the threat is a feminine, supernatural “other,” and it is entirely diminished by a few words. Elsewhere the threat is lessened through the larger omission of the magical woman.

However, just like male magicians, magical women become established as a fundamental part of Middle English romance and make their way into Middle English literary culture and eventually into literary history. Because of the limited depiction of explicitly magical women in early Middle English romance, an understanding of how magical women become established in literary history can only be gleaned if the definition of female power is broadened. While explicitly magical women may not play a large role in Auchinleck, female power more generally holds an important place within the manuscript. Powerful, supernatural women appear throughout Auchinleck, but they take very different – perhaps less threatening – forms. Virgin martyrs like Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret open the manuscript, slaying dragons, defying cruel emperors, and surviving torture; other key Christian women like Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary perform fantastic miracles, reviving the dead and conversing with angels. Even two influential romance heroines, Josiane in *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* and Rimnild in *Horne Childe and Maiden Rimnild* act as proto-fairy mistresses: not explicitly magical, but powerful, self-sufficient, and distinctly related to that figure. There are also two magical women who do appear in this manuscript; they play very minor roles, but their depictions are significant. Therefore, I turn in the final pages of this chapter to an exploration of the Christian type evident in the depiction of powerful women. This broadened depiction of female power evident in early Middle

English literary culture as represented by Auchinleck allows insight into how magical women became established as an acceptable part of literary magic.

The establishment of the antitype of the powerful, Christian woman begins right from the earliest pages of Auchinleck in its depiction of saints and other female religious figures. The legends of Saint Margaret and Saint Katherine are the fourth and fifth items in the manuscript, followed shortly thereafter by three narratives on the Virgin Mary and one on Mary Magdalene. While each woman has some individual characteristics, they are all generally depicted in the same way. They are all beautiful. Saint Margaret is described as having “michel feirhed” (53), while Mary Magdalene’s face is described as “so fair and wonderlich briȝt” that none might behold it (640). The Virgin Mary is most beautiful of all, and in *The Clerk who would See the Virgin*, the Clerk exclaims, “Hou fair sche is, þat maiden bright. / Hou briȝt sche is no tong may telle” (65-66). The hyperbole here reinforces the divine and astounding nature of her beauty. She is beyond everyday beauty – far above typical realms of experience. Furthermore, both Marys and the Saints are described as bright, often practically radiating light. The radiance ascribed to the supernatural women helps differentiate them from the human heroines in the manuscript, who are also very beautiful.

In addition to being astoundingly beautiful, these women are all characterized as highly educated and intelligent. Saint Margaret is said to be set to books the moment she is old enough (31). Saint Katherine is described as “bold” “of witt and wisdom” (27) and manages to convert fifty scholars through her wise words. In *The Nativity and Early life of Mary*, scholars wonder at the industriousness of the young virgin: “So reynable & quaint sche was of witt & of dede / þat ich man hadde of so ȝong a þing wonder & eke drede” (111-12). Mary is so remarkable and knowledgeable, both in her thoughts and in her actions, that each man wonders at her and even



dreads her. Here, Mary is a little over three years old. Unlike beauty, this particular characteristic does not extend to the romance heroines. The author of *Guy of Warwick*, for example, never describes Felice as intelligent. Neither Herodis in *Sir Orfeo*, nor Frain in *Lay la Frain* (who was even raised in an abbey), are characterized as witty. This trait does, however, extend to those few romance heroines whom I identify as pseudo-magical. Like beauty, intelligence thus constitutes an important typological feature of the powerful woman.

Several other traits can be added to this list: these women are steadfast, even in the face of persecution and torture; they are devoted and pious; they are self-assured and confident in themselves and in God. But the final and most significant trait is, of course, the various miraculous powers they possess. The powers of Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret manifest themselves primarily in their ability to survive torture.<sup>41</sup> They are whipped, flayed, starved, doused in hot oil, boiled in water, and burnt, but they are unaffected. When Saint Katherine is cast in the fire, the author notes “When men kest hem in fer, fair miracle men miȝt se: / Her flesche, her cloþes & her here of wem were quite & fre.” She is cast into the fire, and in a miraculous moment, her skin, hair, even her clothes are all free of fire (113-14). The other fifty men cast in along with her all die, but she possesses the supernatural ability to survive what should kill any earthly human being. The powers of these saints go beyond their ability to endure torture. When a fiend in the shape of a dragon attempts to swallow Saint Margaret, he explodes, and then, as the author writes, “maiden Mergrete / opon the dragoun stode” (209). A dominant figure, she stands upon the dragon, emphasising her mastery over the demonic creature. She ties

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<sup>41</sup> Much work has been done on the problematic implications behind the depictions of female torture in hagiography. See, for example, Robert Mills, “Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief,” Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England*, Catherine Innes-Parker, “Sexual Violence and the Female Reader,” Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, and Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*.

the next fiend up with her wimple and shakes him until he admits who sent him (217-19). Margaret's control of supernatural powers extends to killing and capturing dragons and fiends. Saint Katherine similarly causes a torture wheel to fall completely apart (244-45). Mary Magdalene's powers enable her to control the life and death of others. She converts the pagan King of Marseille by first helping his barren wife conceive and then bringing her and her son back to life after they die in childbirth. Each of these religious women rises above the ordinary human in her supernatural abilities. They perform amazing and marvelous feats to the amazement of bystanders. This sets a precedent early on in the manuscript of extremely powerful women able to control supernatural forces; it furthermore constitutes a biblical or religious antitype in Middle English literary culture – the powerful, yet godly, woman.

Fundamental to this antitype is the source of her power. The authors of each of these texts repeatedly stress that the supernatural abilities of these women come from heaven. An angel, for example, brings Saint Margaret a staff “fourmed after þe rode tre” (188), with which she fights the dragon. Saint Katherine does not break the torture wheel: instead, the lord bids an angel go break the wheel; “þe wheles for to brese & breke / our lord bad an angel gon,” (245). Mary Magdalene herself is given credit for the reanimation of the Prince and Queen of Marseilles. When the Queen awakes she says,

Ybliscd be þe Maudelain.

Right swete & ioieful is þi mede

To helpen hem þat haue need. (451-53)

Here, the Queen praises and blesses Mary Magdalene for restoring her to life. Following the poetics of literary magic outlined in my first chapter, the only indication that something supernatural has occurred is the transformation itself – the dead body suddenly alive – and the

Queen's speech remains the only reference to the source of the miracle. There is no statement saying that God was responsible, and no angel appears to help. Readers consequently must assume that this transformation materializes entirely through the powers of Mary Magdalene. No one would question, however, that these powers arise from anywhere but her devotion to God. There is never any question that supernatural power of each woman comes directly from God. The women are rendered supernatural through divine influence.

However, each woman maintains some degree of control over that power. In the above example, Mary Magdalene keeps absolute control: she alone reawakens the dead Queen and receives praise and prayer accordingly. For the other women, their relationship with and mastery of divine power is mediated, usually with God or angels credited as the source of the power. But the women always take some action to harness that power. This often manifests itself in the simple act of piety and devotion but can also take the more active form of prayer. Saint Katherine, for example, kneels and prays for the torture wheel to be broken by God: "sche sette hir doun opn hir knes, to God of heuen sche bad a bon" (243). To which God immediately responds: "Godes help þer com ful sone. / Þe wheles for to brese & breke our louerd bad an angel gon." (244-45). Katherine prays to God to break the wheel, and God immediately sends an angel down to enact the miracle. Katherine's action is not direct – she does not point her finger at the wheel and make it explode – but her act of prayer inspires the supernatural event, even harnesses and focuses the divine power. Similarly, while an angel provides the staff with which Margaret fights the dragon, she wields that power on her own and defeats the dragon through her ability to do so.

These examples of powerful Christian women show not only how important female power is in Auchinleck but also that female power operates most strongly within a Christian

sphere. The Christian women of the Auchinleck manuscript have the ability to manipulate the forces of God and are powerful as a result. Their supernatural abilities are prominent, impressive, diverse, and within their control, but always firmly grounded in their faith. This grounding in divine power makes their abilities lawful; through performing supernatural miracles, they simply fulfill their religious duties. Less than a quarter of the way into Auchinleck, then, the medieval reader has become acquainted with the antitype of the religious supernatural woman; she is intelligent, beautiful, godly, and able to inspire supernatural events. In encountering these women, the reader compiles a representational structure within which women can wield great power: a pattern emerges, and the type became established. However, the antitype is not fulfilled by an obvious type as was evident in the relationship between Christian and magical men.

Because explicitly magical women are rare, the type/antitype relationship between religious supernatural women and secular supernatural women is not as concrete. There is not enough material to build a rigid typological relationship between the explicitly magical women and the religious ones. However, if we look beyond explicitly magical woman to those women of Auchinleck who wield powers in implicitly supernatural ways the representational structure becomes all the richer. In fact, certain characteristics that will come to define the magical female type appear.

While diverse and multifaceted heroines appear in almost every romance in Auchinleck, a few stand out as remarkably powerful. Rimnild in *Horn Childe*, Josiane in *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, and to a lesser degree Sir Degare's unnamed love-interest all possess a large degree of independence and self-sufficiency. Most importantly they are also closely associated with or in possession of some sort of magical aid that increases this autonomy. These three women are not explicitly supernatural (none can transform herself into a rock like Morgan le Faye), but each

possesses a set of characteristics and skills that gives them individual power and enables them to take control of their destinies. In fact, these women possess the traits that later come to identify the figure of the fairy mistress. I would like to suggest that they represent an early manifestation of this character type.

Helen Cooper in *The English Romance in Time* and James Wade in *Fairies in Medieval Romance* identify the key characteristics of the fairy mistress, to whom the pseudo-magical romance heroine is most closely related. The fairy mistress is first identifiable by her power and wealth, which she often dispenses in the form of gifts and lands. She is also astonishingly beautiful: “more beautiful than the most beautiful of human women” (Wade 112). She is intelligent and full of wisdom, often arbitrating in matters of morality. As Wade and Cooper point out, she also sits uncomfortably in a Christian context and yet still functions easily within that context. She is “other.” As Cooper writes, she is “other in a fuller sense than almost any of the ways in which the term is now used” (Cooper 173). This emphatic otherness stems from her supernatural powers and origin in an “other” world. While this definition applies to each of the heroines listed above, Josiane, from *Sir Beves*, most clearly embodies this role and will be my focus here. Josiane is beautiful, intelligent, rich, resourceful, devoted, stubborn, and in possession of a set of skills and objects that border on the supernatural. While she is not explicitly magical – she does not raise a tempest with the wave of her hand – there is something magical about her. She attains power in her depiction as a kind of proto-fairy mistress but also remains seated within the Christian representational system of the manuscript.

Josaine features in the one of the large central romances of the manuscript, *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*. She is the daughter of the powerful Saracen King Ermyn and falls in love with Sir Beves after seeing his prowess in battle. She pledges herself to him and goes through the typical

romance trials – unwelcome suitors, giants, kidnappings – which she navigates with a particularly large dose of ingenuity. While the author never states that Josaine is magical, she exhibits almost all of the characteristics of the fairy mistress. Being the only daughter of an important king, she is extremely powerful and wealthy. She is also beautiful; a fact the author emphasises:

So faire 3he was & bri3t of mod,  
Ase snow vpon þe rede blod;  
Wharto scholde [I] þat may discriue?  
Men wiste no fairer þing aliue. (521-24).

Here she is described as fair and bright of appearance, standing out as blood does upon the snow. The poet struggles with her beauty stressing the impossibility of describing her: men know no fairer thing alive. She is too beautiful for words or understanding – more beautiful than the most beautiful woman. The use of hyperbole links her back to the Virgin Mary and the other Christian women who were also described as too beautiful for understanding. Her astounding beauty furthermore paints her with a slightly supernatural tone. She is described as so bright and so beautiful that she is somehow unknowable, a poetic technique often used in the creation of literary magic.

She is also “other” in a similar way to the fairy mistress. Her status as a Saracen, who “kouþe nau3t” “of Christene lawe” (526), positions her both uncomfortably within the Christian context and as distinctly other. Bly Calkin dedicates an entire chapter of *Saracens and the Making of English Identity* to Josiane’s status as a Saracen, to her otherness, and to the ways in

which she navigates, performs, and ultimately combines both Christian and Saracen identities.<sup>42</sup> Her status as Saracen “other,” who does eventually convert, places her uncomfortably within the Christian context. What is more, her origins in Ermonie, an “other” place (not Western Europe), enable her to take on and possess remarkable and often marvelous abilities and objects.<sup>43</sup> As Bly Calkin notes, there was unease in the Middle Ages over the technological and scientific superiority of the civilizations in the Middle East (Bly Calkin, *Saracens* 154). Josiane’s place within this community gives her access to knowledge and abilities that are, in some way, “other” to that of the natural English world. Josiane, for example, is a great healer. When Beves is sorely wounded in battle, she heals him entirely with an “oyntiment” (716, 730-35). When a former suitor attempts to kidnap and marry her, she uses her knowledge of “both fysik and sirgirie” and “erbes mani & fale” which “3he hadde lerned of meisters grete” “while 3he was in Ermonie” (3495-99), to give herself the appearance of a leper and repel his advances. Even more significantly, when Bevis is imprisoned for the first time and Josiane is married off to someone else, she makes use of a magic ring to preserve her virginity:

‘Ichaue’ 3he seid ‘a ring on  
 þat of swich vertu is þe ston:  
 While ichaue on þat ilche ring  
 To me schel noman haue welling’ (1469-73)

Here she describes her magic ring on which is a stone that prevents any man from taking her virginity. This ring allows her to maintain control of her body, a boon indeed considering the

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<sup>42</sup> In the chapter “Saracens and She-Wolves: Foreign Consorts and Group Identity” Bly Calkin suggests Josaine, “a Saracen who becomes explicitly linked to England,” provides the clearest example of “the process through which individuals assume and alter their communal identities” (Bly Calkin, *Saracens* 61).

<sup>43</sup> In “The Meaning of “Ermonie” in *Sir Tristrem*” Caroline D. Eckhardt suggests that the reference to “Ermonie” in *Sir Tristrem* as Sir Tristrem’s home could have referred to either Armenia or Brittany (Eckhardt 33). In this case, however, as Bly Calkin asserts in her discussion of Josiane as Saracen, the word points to the Middle East.

circumstances. Her access to this knowledge and this object gives her power within her romance; she can, to a degree, control her own fate.

Her knowledge of healing and herbs, as well as this ring, come from her position in an “other” land. While that land may not be fairy, it has a similar distancing effect, especially in this very English manuscript. Her status as Saracen “other” and the knowledge and power that come along with that allow her to maintain some degree of control. She becomes elevated towards the realm of the supernatural. She sits on the border, never doing magic, but able to control her fate through her knowledge and access to supernatural objects. Josaine can thus be seen as an early example of the figure of the fairy mistress, who becomes popular in the form defined by Cooper and Wade after the end of the fourteenth century. She possesses many of the characteristics that come to define that figure, and even though she is not explicitly magical, she represents an important part of the typological structure of powerful women in Auchinleck.

Like all supernatural characters linked within this structure, Josiane is made positive through her relationship with Christian women. As with the religious women, the source of her power comes from outside of herself. Despite the potential negative connotations that might be associated at the time with a non-Christian woman controlling her fate through access to foreign technologies, Josiane is never figured as evil. Instead, she is closely linked with the pinnacle of goodness established by the religious women who precede her in Auchinleck. Many of the characteristics Josaine exhibits – beauty, intelligence, wit, and the ability to control situations with supernatural forces – relate her closely to the Christian women in the manuscript. She is, indeed, closer to the Saints and the Marys than she is to the other romance heroines. Andrea Hopkins and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne have already linked the heroines of pious romances (such



as *Emaré*) to female saints.<sup>44</sup> This link, however, easily extends to magical women and their proto-magical sisters. Josiane not only exhibits the characteristics Hopkins uses to link the saints with the pious heroines – she is beautiful, outspoken, chaste in her devotion to her husband, and a devoted Christian convert – but is also remarkably powerful. While the other religious women have the ability to inspire supernatural events through their piety and close connection with God, Josiane can inspire supernatural events because of her access to “other”-worldly objects and knowledge. The strong representational connections and the precedent set in the manuscript that supernatural powers stem from God, diminished any potentially dangerous associations with her access to marvels. The representational similarities and access to otherworldly forces simultaneously set all powerful women apart from non-supernatural women and linked them together. Her brand of magic (or pseudo-magic) becomes perfectly lawful within the context of the manuscript.

The same is true in the depiction of the other powerful romance heroine in the manuscript, Rinnild from *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild*. Like Josiane, she is rich and powerful and showers her hero with gifts: a wonderful horse and a sword, “Bitterfer” made by Weland (402-03). She is intelligent, like Josiane, and while she does not have Josiane’s healing powers, she does possess a magic ring that will ensure the continuity of her relationship with Horn. It will change colour when she is no longer faithful to him. Similarly, she has access to a spring which reports on Horn’s faithfulness to her (565-88). Like Josiane, Rinnild never performs magic, but simply maintains somewhat more control over her destiny because of her

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<sup>44</sup> See Andrea Hopkins, “Female Saints and Romance Heroines: Feminine Fiction and Faith among the Literate Elite,” in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England*. See also Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture c. 1150-1300*.

access to magic. Together, these women represent an early example of the fairy mistress in Middle English literature.

If the figure herself and other explicitly magical women were not popular in early Middle English romance, clearly these more subtly magical versions were. This may be because, unlike Carmile, both women fit within the nationalistic narrative that so preoccupies early Middle English romance and Auchinleck especially. Both women help to establish their good English heroes, but do not overpower the narrative or take them away to another land. They function within the private or family sphere, protecting themselves and their own destinies so as to ensure the unquestionable lineage of the hero's family.<sup>45</sup> Both access the supernatural to help their husbands or to maintain their virginity for their heroes. In this light, their representation fits easily within the overall narrative of the manuscript. They can take on their own power, control their own lives, but still sit comfortably within its nationalistic agenda. What is most important, however, is that their depiction constructs early bridges between powerful Christian women and powerful magical women. The representational system becomes established even before this figure reaches the zenith of her power. Powerful women become encompassed within the Christian representational system while still fitting into the larger nationalistic agenda of Auchinleck. The path is laid for more magical women to rise into positions of power in their narratives in the later romance tradition.

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<sup>45</sup> The family has been identified as a secondary concern of Auchinleck. Cathy Hume's 2016 chapter "The Auchinleck Adam and Eve: An Exemplary Family Story" identifies Auchinleck as a household or family manuscript "designed to meet the varied reading needs of an entire secular household" (Hume 36); she points to earlier scholarly work done by Nicole Clifton, Phillipa Hardman, and Linda Olson on the designation of certain Auchinleck texts for a younger audience, and goes on to read *The Life of Adam and Eve* as a positive exemplar for the medieval Christian family. See also Clifton, "The Seven Sages of Rome, Children's Literature, and the Auchinleck Manuscript," in *Childhood in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*; Hardman, "Popular Romances and Young Readers"; and Olson "Romancing the Book: Manuscripts for 'Euerich Ingliche'."

The way in which magical women are linked with their Christian counterparts both within and outside of the nationalism of Auchinleck, must finally be seen in the depiction of the two explicitly magical women who do appear in minor roles within the manuscript. I have already shown that one of these two women, Carmile, does not fit within the nationalistic focus of Auchinleck; the same is true of the second, the Queen of Ireland. Both nevertheless are brought into a Christian framework within the typological representational system outlined above. These two women illustrate how the representational system works in Middle English literary culture to throw a Christian light on all magical women helping to establish the female magician's place in literary culture.

In an early English version of the Tristrem and Isolde romance, *Sir Tristrem*, which is situated near the end of the manuscript, Isolde's mother, the beautiful Queen of Ireland, possesses some magical abilities. She heals Tristrem twice from wounds that no one else can. When he is wounded by a dragon, many "Leches wiþ salue & drink" (1114) are brought in to try to heal him, but only the queen who "mest coupe of medici[n]e" (1204) can. Her medicine, tinged by magic, far outstrips that of the other doctors, and, like Mary Mardalene, she works an impossible transformation on a doomed body. The Queen performs her most important magic, however, when she creates the love potion that sets off the events of the entire romance. After a marriage has been arranged between Isolde and Mark, the Queen makes a potion: "a drink of miȝt,/ þat loue wald kiþe" (1645-46), and gives it to her maid to give to Isolde and Mark after their marriage. In so doing, the Queen hopes to ensure her daughter's happiness. However, on the way over to England, this drink is accidentally consumed by Tristrem and Isolde (1660-75). It is potent, and the pair fall madly in love and rush headlong into a life of strife and misery. The

Queen's supernatural abilities are verified in the efficacy of this drink and in its description. It has clear and immediate effects on those who consume it.

Despite the unintended consequences of the drink and the Queen's impressive powers of transformation – from near death to alive, and from indifferent to madly in love – she is not presented as evil. She is an aloof figure who uses her power only for those she deems worthy. She hesitates at first to heal Tristrem because he killed her brother, but in an act of Christian forgiveness, ultimately does. She operates entirely within the private and family sphere. She gives her daughter the drink in hopes of securing a happy marriage for her. She does not use her powers to try to conquer or kill anyone, but simply to advance the interests of her family and her daughter. As a beautiful and knowledgeable matriarch, her closest relative within the manuscript is perhaps Mary Magdalene herself, who similarly manipulates supernatural forces to help those she deems worthy. What is more, if the Queen's magic were situated within a historical context, it would most certainly be characterized as natural (as opposed to demonic). She relies on potions and healing as opposed to demonic intervention.<sup>46</sup> I have thus far distanced literary magic from historical magic, but the historical version provides some helpful context here, further emphasising the goodness of her magic. The Queen of Ireland thus represents a powerful magical woman who is validated outside of the manuscript's nationalistic agenda. She can be powerful in her role within her family, and she is placed on a pedestal alongside her Christian counterparts.

Even Carmile, the “wiche” who opened my discussion of supernatural women in Auchinleck, is brought within this Christian representational system. Carmile in no way fits into the nationalistic agenda of the manuscript; nor does she sit comfortably within a family or

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<sup>46</sup> For further examples of the appearance of natural magic in romance texts see Corinne Saunders's chapter “White Magic: Natural Arts and Marvellous Technology” (Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural* 117-51).

private sphere. Her power is dangerously nationalistic. However, Carmile is still brought within the Christian representational structure because of the way in which she is described. Carmile is first described as “a wiche hete Carmile” who “Of wichecraft & vilaine / & eke of nigramance / Of þis world sche couþe mast” (4438-43). These descriptors would seem to characterize her as evil and to remove her entirely from the representational system that places magical women within a Christian context. But they do not because Carmile is given no space to perform magic and identify herself as working for good or for evil. The reader is left with only the descriptors to characterize her, and these are inherently ambiguous. As Helen Cooper has shown the word “nigramance” did not have the same demonic associations it now does: “Middle English ‘nigromancy’ is much less pejorative a term than the modern ‘necromancy’: it is magic on the edge of acceptability, not magic conducted through the agency of the dead...the word is often used for supernatural powers derived from sources other than God rather than necessarily from the devil” (Cooper 162). Inherent evil cannot, therefore, be found in that descriptor. The word “vilaine,” seems to characterize more clearly Carmile’s evil nature, but as the *MED* shows, this word can also refer to class, to manners, as well as to evil (“vilein, adj.”). More is needed to solidify this characterization. Even the final descriptor, “wiche” is ambiguous.

The word “wiche” appears in only three texts in Auchinleck: in *Of Arthour and Merlin* and in *The Legends of Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret*. After many rounds of unsuccessful torturing the Emperor Olibrius calls Saint Margaret a “wiche” (288); and later tells his executioner to “lade þis wiche out of toun” (338) and decapitate her. Saint Katherine is similarly called a witch four times in her short legend, and when the queen converts, the emperor blames the “wichecraft of þat woman” (262). He later orders her execution so that she may never “bitray ous wiþ þi sorcerye” (320). The amazing powers of these two women, which are evil in the eyes

of their pagan persecutors, inspire their characterization as witches. But they are not witches, nor would they be viewed as such by the medieval reader. Their characterization, however, dulls the poignancy of that word and perhaps even builds representational links between the saints and the “wiche” in *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. Perhaps like the saints Carmile’s power is misunderstood. She too may be being unjustly categorized. Perhaps her role in the text would have been to test Arthur’s faith. We can never know because she is given so little room to demonstrate those powers. The ambiguity of language surrounding Carmile enhances the link amongst all the powerful women in Auchinleck – saints and sorceresses alike. We cannot know what she might represent because her characterization is so ambiguous. Within the larger representational system, readers are left with only the typological links that have already been constructed. Carmile is tied, albeit loosely, to the other religious women. The consequence is that the nature of magic, even potentially evil magic performed by a witch, is rendered ambiguous. If a woman is depicted within the same representational system as the religious women, her power can perhaps be as lawful as that which stems directly from God.

Overall, while it seems at first glance and in the light of the scarcity of magical women in Auchinleck that magical women play no role in the manuscript, female power holds a prominent position. It is found within the lives of female saints; within the miraculous powers of religious women like Mary Magdalene; within the pseudo-powers of proto-fairy mistresses like Josiane; within the healing magic of the Queen of Ireland; and within the more threatening if diminished tones surrounding Carmile. Female power is omnipresent and important to the representational structure of the manuscript, and it is rendered Christian within the typological representational system that guides the reading process. The medieval reader could move from representations of exemplary religious women to those of pseudo-magical and magical women and find

consistencies amongst the depictions. The antitype is built first through religious women performing great supernatural deeds in the name of God. The antitype is fulfilled by the powerful romance heroines and by those magical women who do appear in the manuscript. Female supernatural power is brought firmly within a Christian ethos in the representational system that governs the depiction of powerful women. These early representational structures set the stage for magical women to take prominent and righteous roles in later romance narratives and in later literary and popular culture.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has shown that the magical characters of the Auchinleck manuscript are brought within a Christian ethos and validated through their representational relationship with religious supernatural characters. The combination of the manuscript structure and the typological structures through which characters were created in the Middle English period allowed the medieval reader to understand all supernatural figures in a Christian light. These typological structures build bridges amongst all supernatural individuals removing the magical figures from any potentially problematic associations and allowing them to act within the larger nationalistic narrative of the manuscript. Even the magical women who fit less easily into the nationalistic agenda are still brought within a Christian ethos within this representational system. The representational relationship between all supernatural characters in Auchinleck provides insight into how magicians become so ingrained within literary culture. Within this manuscript, magical men and women are heavily steeped in Christian imagery and mixed in with larger nationalistic or family discourse. Through such close connections, their place becomes fixed within the Christian nation, their powers become lawful, and their position becomes cemented within the

larger narrative of English romance. As I show in the conclusion to this dissertation, the impact of this authorization in the reading culture of the Middle Ages and in the mind of medieval readers is evident in the way in which magical characters are still made Christian in later romance texts that appear after manuscript context has disappeared. Even today, their representational heritage can be seen in the role that magicians still often play as saviours.

I want to conclude this chapter by suggesting that the depiction of supernatural individuals in the Middle English period provides insight into what it is about the magician that appeals so very much to readers of literary magic across times. Magical characters are of course appealing because of the way they navigate their adventure narratives with the help of supernatural forms. It is exciting for readers, both medieval and modern, to see how magic can be employed to conquer a given situation. There is, however, more to it than that.

The poetic interest in supernatural figures gestures towards a desire to bring the inaccessible, even the divine, down to an earthly level. The first chapter of this dissertation notes the impulse in the poetics of the marvelous to transform that which is beyond the everyday into comprehensible terms. It also notes the simultaneous recognition that such an achievement is sometimes impossible; we are oftentimes better to simply marvel at that which we do not understand, and in so doing to appreciate its wondrousness. Depictions of supernatural characters come from a similar place. Hagiographical and other religious texts take the idea of what it means to be a devout, exemplary Christian and render it in narrative. The prominent representation of saints' lives and religious miracles in medieval literary culture shows the desire to see and experience the lives of Christian heroes in diverse narrative forms. Through specific characterizations, readers gain access to and an understanding of what it means to be an exemplary Christian and live an exemplary Christian life. These texts allow readers to experience



the very peak of human potential; wonderful men and women accomplishing fantastical feats all in the name of God. These sacred texts give an insight into what humanity can accomplish given access to divine power and a particularly high degree of devoutness.

The depiction of supernatural characters in Middle English literature comes from a similar place, but there is a difference between the sacred and the secular versions. The figures of religious narrative, even though they are meant to exemplify various aspects of humanity and human life, can be somewhat unrelatable to the everyday reader. Few readers of medieval vernacular literature would have had the devoutness of Saint Margaret, the steadfastness of Saint Katherine, or the patience of Pope Gregory. Even fewer still would have felt divinely appointed by God as his representative on earth. Saints and other religious figures lead lives that would not relate to those led by most medieval readers; most readers would not be imprisoned and tortured for being Christian, for example. They also inhabit the world of the Bible, distant lands, or a distant pagan past unfamiliar to the medieval audience other than through these very stories. Therefore, while sacred supernatural characters do provide a greater insight into what it means to be devout and to rise above the ordinary through the use of supernatural powers, they are somewhat less relatable. They are individuals to be venerated rather than individuals who represent everyday experiences.

Secular supernatural characters are more accessible. They inhabit the earthly realm; oftentimes the English, earthly realm. They maneuver within the courtly world of their narrative, which, while somewhat less accessible to the merchant class audiences, was still recognizable and present in contemporary society. Most importantly, they are still extremely human. While they are Christian, they live a less ideally devout lives. They make mistakes, sometimes do bad things, and suffer the consequences. Their lives are not exemplary, nor are they typically

divinely guided. They have not been chosen by God, but merely make use of their inherent abilities and intelligence to reach their full potential – something anyone could do. As secular types to religious antitypes they provide a different, perhaps more human representation of what it means to “be” a saint-like figure in medieval England. Perhaps this secular form of magic is something people wish to encounter because it makes that which is beyond the everyday achievable by those who are fallible and those who are not canonized.

Literary magic provides another means by which readers and writers can seek to understand that which is beyond the everyday. Perhaps through the representation of supernatural characters, both Christian and secular, medieval poets sought to understand the physical form of that which is beyond the human. By bringing the supernatural into a secular forum they sought to understand how the beyond-the-human can reside in more relatable individuals – in individuals that look more like medieval readers themselves. Or at the very least, they sought to show how supernatural abilities can manifest themselves in diverse ways and in a secular arena. In so doing, they illuminated what it looks like and what it means to have something more than the natural world can endow. It is a very human gesture to seek to find something more in everyday life. The supernatural characters of Middle English reading culture show how individuals can rise above the everyday in diverse and even problematic ways.

This desire and this inheritance continue into contemporary literary and popular culture where writers and directors still seek to find out what it means to be beyond the everyday in the everyday world. Contemporary magical characters inherently ask what it means to navigate our world with supernatural abilities – to navigate high school with magical powers like the Sabrina the Teenage Witch, to live in contemporary Britain as a wizard like Harry Potter, or to fight crime with supernatural abilities as in the show *Supernatural*. Readers and viewers of literary

magic have and always will look to encounter and to be more. Magical characters enable them to do just that – to see what it means to be more than human in a very human world.

## **Chapter Three: Allegory and the Supernatural**

### ***Introduction***

The first two chapters of this dissertation addressed the ways in which poetic constructions inherent to medieval poetic forms and character typologies typical of medieval literature bring magic within a Christian ethos in one manuscript from the early fourteenth century – the Auchinleck manuscript. The first chapter explored the poetic side of this literary culture, the linguistic structures and poetic devices by which the poets of Auchinleck rendered a person, place, event, or thing magical. The second identified typological structures through which magical characters are characterized. Both showed how the reading and writing culture within which magic thrives inherently brings magic within a Christian ethos and makes it legitimate. The words used to create a magical moment and the individuals who perform that magic represent two of the most fundamental forms of the reading culture surrounding literary magic in the medieval period. In both cases the medieval reader plays a fundamental role in creating,

considering, and sustaining a Christian version of literary magic. This chapter turns to focus on the way in which medieval interpretation in and of itself brings magic within a Christian framework. In this chapter, I consider how reading allegorically, one of the modes of interpretation most common in the Middle English period, impacts a reader's encounter with literary magic.

Allegory has long been recognized as one of the most fundamental forms of interpretation. C. S. Lewis insists that allegory is even a form of thought because "it is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms" (Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* 44). For Daniel Boyarin, "all interpretation is allegorical in the sense that it says implicitly: This is the text and this is its meaning, but only the interpretation that people call allegorical does so frankly and openly, laying bare, as it were, the device" (Boyarin 39–40). Thinking and reading allegorically is in some ways synonymous with thinking and reading interpretively. This idea is pertinent to the medieval period when allegory was a popular and prominent genre of literature. At that time, vernacular allegories of personification abounded in such popular literary works as *Le Roman de La Rose* and *Piers Plowman* and even onstage with dramatic texts like *Everyman*. In the commentary tradition, the Bible was read allegorically "as an extended metaphorical narration of events in the life of the soul, Christ or the church" (Zeeman 148). Even Ovid's *Metamorphosis* was allegorized in commentaries that began to appear in the late twelfth century (Whitman 114). Many scholars have gone so far as to suggest that allegory was *the* fundamental literary genre and mode of interpretation of the Middle Ages. As J. Stephen Russell writes, "allegory was not a mode of writing: it was the self-conscious recognition of the way we perforce perceive the world, replace any thing with words or other signs" (Russell xi). It not only structured literary production, it structured literary interpretation,

and even modes of thought. It was fundamental to medieval writing, reading, and interpretation, and, for my purposes here, to the way in which literary magic was understood.

In order to understand how reading allegorically impacts the way in which literary magic was understood in medieval literary culture, this chapter addresses two manuscripts from the end of the fourteenth century that hold allegorical texts at their very cores: British Library, MS Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln's Inn Hale MS 150. These manuscripts contain two of the most celebrated allegories of the Middle English period – *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*. Both alliterative texts from the late fourteenth century draw readers into complex allegorical worlds that endow standard Christian concepts with evocative personalities and forms. The allegorical texts allow readers to experience abstract concepts like sin, piety, faith, divinity, and heaven in a material shape. They ask readers to consider the deeper meanings that lie beneath those representations in order to gain a more complete understanding of the concept. But both manuscripts contain more than just allegorical texts. In each manuscript the religious allegories rub shoulders with romance texts featuring magicians, magical castles, dragons, and sinister sorceresses. This chapter brings the romances and the allegories together. Through reading compilationally, this chapter puts the secular, non-allegorical texts into the interpretive light provided by the allegorical texts. It brings the deeper meaning behind allegorical representations of heaven, hell, sin, and truth to bear on magical castles and sinister sorcerers. In so doing it shows how allegory and the interpretive thinking it inspires draws literary magic more deeply into a Christian ethos.

Cotton Nero A. x is one of the most famous manuscripts from the Middle English period. The manuscript contains just four poems – *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The first three can very basically be described as didactic, Christian texts and the fourth as an Arthurian romance. All are thought to have been composed by a single author and

“copied as a single collection” (Andrew and Waldron 5).<sup>1</sup> The manuscript contains the only surviving versions of these poems, which, while relatively unknown in their time, have become celebrated amongst the foremost literary works of the Middle English period. The manuscript is a small quarto volume measuring 180 x 155 mm. There are 90 vellum folios in seven gatherings of twelve and one gathering of four. Catchwords and foliation are evident in different forms on some of the pages. The text appears on the page in one column of thirty-six lines. Twelve full page illustrations appear in the manuscript and the manuscript was copied by a single scribe.<sup>2</sup> The poet’s dialect has long been identified as that of the West Midlands, and the poet is thought to have been a clerk with extensive reading knowledge in the employ of an aristocratic household.<sup>3</sup> This manuscript thus represents a change from the others addressed in this dissertation both because all the texts within are thought to have been composed by a single author and also because its audience was courtly rather than merchant-class. Its allegorical structure, poetic complexities, and nuanced approach to the supernatural consequently provide vital insight into the similar way literary magic functions amongst a large cross section of medieval readers in both the courtly and popular traditions.

Different in form, content, critical reception, and audience, Lincoln’s Inn 150 is a less widely celebrated collection. This parchment manuscript is fairly small and famously oblong. It measures 130 x 310 mm and has 125 folios gathered into quires of twelve leaves. The manuscript now has a leather binding but wear and tear on the outer leaves suggests that the first

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars do question whether all four poems were composed by a single author (Andrew and Waldron 5); I, however, like most, proceed with the assumption that the poems are by a single author.

<sup>2</sup> For a physical description of the manuscript see “Cotton MS Nero A X/2,” on The British Library website. See also Kenna Olson’s Introduction and Preface to her edition of *Cleanness* in the publications of *The Cotton Nero A. x Project* lead by Murray McGillivray (Olson 3-5).

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of the manuscript see the introduction to Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron’s edition *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Andrew and Waldron 1-12). See also A. S. G. Edwards’ chapter on “The Manuscript: British Library MS Cotton Nero A. x” in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*.

and last folios must have served as the covers for some time over the course of the manuscript's life. The texts were copied by a single scribe. Between forty-eight and sixty lines of script appear on each folio in a single column. There are no illuminations although there are two spaces left for initials (Horobin and Wiggins 30-31). The manuscript was compiled for a popular audience and features texts from multiple authors. Also produced circa 1400 or slightly later, Lincoln's Inn 150 contains five poems: *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Merlyn* (a later version of *Of Arthour and Of Merlin*), *Kyng Alisaunder*, *The Seege of Troye*, and *Piers Plowman*.<sup>4</sup> Its structure is the reverse of Cotton Nero A. x, which opens with three religious poems and finishes with a romance. Lincoln's Inn 150 begins with four romance texts and finishes with a single Christian allegory. The dialect is that of Shropshire but Ralph Hanna has pointed out that, like Auchinleck, it is likely derived from "a sequence of exported London exemplars" (Horobin and Wiggins 31). The oblong shape of the manuscript led Mary Elizabeth Barnicle and G. V. Smithers to endorse the idea that the manuscript was a "holster book" carried in the pocket of an itinerant minstrel.<sup>5</sup> Multiple other studies, however, have since discredited this idea, showing that the format was in popular use amongst educated readers and in households and was unlikely to have belonged to a travelling performer.<sup>6</sup> Simon Horobin and Alison Wiggins stress that the manuscript was likely used as many compilations of Middle English verse were, to be read aloud to listening audiences either in small groups, for educational purposes, or on special occasions. They suggest it was likely in the possession of a "provincial household" and had a wide and varied audience (Horobin and Wiggins 32). The texts have become notorious for the "bad" and "corrupt" quality

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of this manuscript see Horobin and Wiggins 30-32. See also Macrae-Gibson 2. 40-41.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Elizabeth Barnicle first proposed this idea in her edition of *The Seege or Batayle of Troy* (Barnicle xxxvi). G. V. Smithers later supported the idea in his companion volume to his edition of *Kyng Alisaunder* (Smithers 2. 11-12).

<sup>6</sup> See Horobin and Wiggins for a lengthier discussion of the scholarly discrediting of the minstrel book theory (Horobin and Wiggins 31-32).



of their transcriptions. Many scholars – including those who produced editions of these works, like Barnicle and Smithers – dismiss the texts as “so corrupt” that “editing or emending...would be futile” (Smithers xi). Horobin and Wiggins however, reconsider this typically dismissive approach to the manuscript and insist that these individual texts are “of intense and compelling interest and value for literary, cultural, and manuscript studies” (Horobin and Wiggins 31). I also focus not on what is “bad” about this literary artefact but rather on what the unique versions of the texts and their placement together within a single volume reveal about the nature of allegory and magic in Middle English literature of the early fifteenth century.

This chapter moves forward from Auchinleck for three reasons. The first is that both compilations studied in this chapter house fewer texts than are found in Auchinleck or in many other Middle English manuscripts. Each contains less than six texts (Cotton Nero A. x has four, Lincoln’s Inn 150 has five) and therefore provides a more focused insight into the relationship between secular and sacred supernatural in Middle English literary culture. In Auchinleck, the representational relationship of sacred and secular supernatural is built through an abundance of texts, which I read as influencing each other, in part, through the order in which they appear. In these smaller manuscripts, however, fewer texts are placed in conversation with one another sharpening the role each individual text must play in shining a Christian light on magical forms. The relationship becomes simultaneously starker and more nuanced, and I can show its function in each text, in each manuscript. The more limited cross section of Middle English texts in these manuscripts also enables me to determine how magic is brought into a Christian framework without an extensive community of texts.

Second, while my focus has thus far has been on popular texts written for a merchant-class audience, analyzing both Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln’s Inn 150 allows me to expand my

investigation of Middle English reading culture to encompass similar texts produced for different audiences. Courtly and popular romance narratives are often studied separately – in part because courtly texts have long been seen as poetically superior to popular ones. It is vital, however, to show how magic is brought within a Christian representational system in both the courtly and popular traditions. Doing so reveals how much these two seemingly distinct kinds of literature actually have in common. As far as I am aware, Lincoln's Inn 150 and Cotton Nero A. x have never been compared. Differences of "quality" and audience tend to separate these two compilations. Analyzing the representational and interpretive structures through which literary magic is made, however, reveals just how much these two manuscripts actually have in common. As I will show, both make magic in a similar way, and the presence of allegories in both allows that magic to be understood within a Christian framework.

Thirdly, in transitioning to these two manuscripts I advance roughly seventy years in history. Since this dissertation seeks to show how literary magic manifests itself in different ways across the Middle English period, it is important to move forward to analyze examples of its depictions in later compilations. This is especially true because, as the Middle Ages progresses, attitudes towards magic in society begin to shift, and so the stakes surrounding the legitimization of literary magic become all the more important. In the roughly seventy years that separate Auchinleck and Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln's Inn 150 anxieties surrounding common magic multiply. Both Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln's Inn 150 were produced during what Richard Kieckhefer has identified as the third period of European witch trials "roughly 1375-1435." This period is identified first by "a steady increase in the number of trials for witchcraft in general, and second an intensification of concern for diabolism" (Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials* 18). By the end of the fourteenth century, magic was becoming more closely linked with

the demonic than it had ever been before. This increased concern for diabolism is related to “developments in theological literature of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century” and meant that witchcraft was more commonly viewed as a form of heresy (Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials* 22). Although all magic has not yet taken on the extreme demonic associations that it will come to possess in the mid-fifteenth century and beyond,<sup>7</sup> during the period these two manuscripts were compiled, magic was becoming an issue of more serious concern and one that was increasingly associated with heresy. This is an important shift from the time of Auchinleck’s production in the first half of the fourteenth century, during which there was a more lenient attitude towards magic. These attitudes begin to appear in literature, and early fifteenth century anxiety over magic surfaces in the depictions of the supernatural that appear in Lincoln’s Inn 150. As I will discuss in more detail later on, the version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* that appears in Lincoln’s Inn 150, spends a great deal more time stressing Merlin’s righteousness than the version in Auchinleck. In light of these growing social anxieties, it becomes more important than ever to understand how literary magic could still be understood within a Christian framework and in so being maintain its prominent position in literary culture.

The prevalence of allegory and the tendency to read allegorically in medieval literary culture contribute to the way in which magic is brought into a Christian framework in these two manuscripts. Allegory is an ancient and complex mode of writing and interpretation. As Angus Fletcher details in his *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, the word derives from the ancient Greek *allos* and *agoreuein* (“other” and “to speak openly”).<sup>8</sup> Fletcher famously identifies allegory as a “protean device” applicable in diverse ways and in diverse circumstances.<sup>9</sup> As

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<sup>7</sup> For more on this see the introduction to Chapter Four.

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher provides a detailed account of the etymological origins of the word in his book (Fletcher 2).

<sup>9</sup> Angus Fletcher coined this phrase in first sentence of his introduction to *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Fletcher 1). It has since appeared in almost every study of allegory.

Brenda Machosky writes, “allegory is perhaps as old as language itself and certainly as variable as the languages and styles in which it has been written” (Machosky 1). Modern scholarship has divided allegory into two separate categories, allegory and allegoresis. Most basically, allegory refers to a text that means more than it says.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, allegory is understood as two processes: as a mode of composition and a method of understanding. As Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck write

In its most common usage it refers to two related procedures, a manner of composing and a method of interpreting. To compose allegorically is usually understood as writing with a double meaning: what appears on the surface and another meaning to which the apparent sense points. Allegorical interpretation (allegoresis) is understood as explaining a work, or a figure in myth, or any created entity as if there were another sense to which it referred, that is, presuming the work or figure to be encoded with meaning intended by the author or a higher spiritual authority. (Copeland and Struck 2)

Allegory (writing allegorically) and allegoresis (reading allegorically) are the two paths by which allegorical literature is typically analyzed. Allegory and allegoresis are often studied as separate entities and many scholarly works focus on either allegory as written genre or on allegoresis as a mode of reading – rarely both.<sup>11</sup> Such a distinction will be somewhat evident in the coming pages as I look at the generic allegories through the lens of allegory and on the non-allegorical

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<sup>10</sup> How it does so has been a topic of extensive critical debate. Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* provides a thorough account of the development of scholarship on allegory (Akbari 7-12). Other seminal studies of the genre include Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, Rosemond Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Medieval Books and their Posterity*, Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory*, Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular*.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Stephen J. Russel, editor, *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature* and Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory*. Akbari also notes the tendency, originating in Rosemond Tuve’s sense of “imposed allegory,” to divorce “allegory from allegoresis rather than illustrating the extent to which they were presented (by the medieval glossator, at least) as reciprocal processes, both in the realm of biblical exegesis and that of the *enarratio poetarum*” (Akbari 12).

texts more through the lens of allegoresis. A vital part of my discussion, however, grounds itself in the fact that written allegory and the process of allegoresis are absolutely intertwined both within and outside of texts that are categorized as allegorical.

The reading of allegory necessarily stimulates the process of allegoresis, and this process extends beyond the generic allegories into all texts found within the two manuscript compendia analyzed here. My aim is to consider how this powerful interpretive mode, established in the generic allegories of the Middle English period and fulfilled through allegoresis, impacts the reader's understanding of magical forms. This chapter insists on the centrality of allegorical reading – of allegoresis – to the manifestation of literary magic in these manuscript compendia.

Any medieval text that incorporates magic and the supernatural begs to be read through the lens of allegory and with the process of allegoresis in mind. Allegory has also long been closely linked with the supernatural, and, as a genre form, allegory is particularly suited to portrayals of the supernatural. Almost every theoretical study of allegory notes how closely allegory is tied to magic in all its iterations. Akbari calls allegory a “link in the chain connecting humanity to the divine” which “mirrors a remote idea, making it accessible to human reason” (Akbari 13–14). Rosemund Tuve stresses allegory's propensity to convey “ideas concerning ultimate destiny, divine beings, supernatural forces” (Tuve 21). Jane K. Brown even defines allegory in her recent study of the persistence of the genre from Shakespeare to Wagner as “a mode of representation which renders the supernatural visible” (Brown 5).<sup>12</sup> Both allegory and depictions of the supernatural take concepts that are somehow beyond everyday understanding (either because they are abstract Christian concepts like piety or because they are beyond everyday experience) and render them in a recognizable, entertaining form. Both seek to

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<sup>12</sup> Angus Fletcher includes a whole chapter on “magic and ritual forms” and its relation to allegory. So too does Jason Crawford frame his study of early modern allegory around the discourse of enchantment and disenchantment.

manifest that which is incomprehensible or intangible in concrete, human terms. In so doing, both also ask readers to consider the deeper meaning beneath the surface form – to engage in allegoresis. This is as true today as it was in the Middle Ages when reading allegorically was a fundamental mode of interpretation.

Just as the very nature of allegory insists that it not be taken at face value, so do the nature of magical forms with all their wonder and marvel insist on a closer reading. The vivid green, monstrous, and yet courtly Green Knight of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* begs deeper consideration and interpretation in the same way as the more straightforwardly allegorical *Pearl* maiden. A comparative analysis of sacred, allegorical forms in Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln's Inn 150 reveals that, in fact, literary magic and allegory work in similar ways to ground that which is beyond the everyday in literary form, and that literary magic in particular takes the abstract Christian concepts and forms of allegory and renders them in different, secular terms. In Chapter Two I suggested that the close representational relationship between sacred, supernatural characters and secular, supernatural characters reveals a desire to see the superhuman manifested in somewhat more accessible and relatable terms. The close interpretive connection between literary magic and allegory as a genre similarly reveals the medieval interest in secularizing and making concrete divine forms.

The coming chapter shows how allegorical modes of interpretation bring literary magic within a Christian framework in two different ways. It first looks at how the generic allegories that inhabit each manuscript bring literary magic within their own Christian structures through representational, allegorical connections. It shows how the generic allegories that the magical texts are bound alongside bring the medieval reader's understanding of the different magical forms into a Christian light. It goes on to also explore the contrasts, ambiguities, and dissonances

that can also be found in the link between magic and allegory. As much as he may resemble the good figures of an allegory like *Piers Plowman*, there is no question that Merlin is not simply another version of Truth or Conscience. Similarly, Hautedesert in *Sir Gawain in the Green Knight* is not simply another version of paradise. I argue here that generic allegories not only link all supernatural forms but also encourage the reader's interpretive engagement with the magic in the manuscripts. An allegorical link is wrought, but so too is the reader encouraged to dig deeper in and search for true meaning beneath the magical forms. What is revealed are not just characters and spaces that are built from the blocks of Christian allegory, but characters and spaces that take those allegorical forms and render them ambiguous, complex, and sometimes contrary. In so doing supernatural forms are revealed that reflect more closely on how Christianity operates in the real world.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Both sections show first and foremost that the generic allegories of each manuscript function to establish a literary precedent or reading guide against which magical forms can be read; in other words, the allegories provide interpretive guides that seep throughout the compendia and bring the supernatural forms within the Christian framework established by those allegories. Both sections then move on to complicate this connection by showing the ways in which literary magic branches off from its foundation in allegory to present characters and spaces that more closely resemble those found in the everyday world – despite all their wondrous magic. Each section addresses a different manuscript and a different magical form. The first section analyzes the depiction of supernatural spaces in Cotton Nero A. x, considering how the allegorical forms that structure the manuscript bring the secular supernatural within the realm of Christian allegory and consequently away from its potentially dangerous, pagan implications. It then moves on to consider the complexities and ambiguities in

the romance text that render a straightforward connection impossible, suggesting that the secular supernatural spaces of this manuscript reflect more closely the interests and realities of the reading audience. The second section reads the depiction of supernatural characters in Lincoln's Inn 150 and shows how the complex method of allegorical interpretation established by *Piers Plowman* allows for magical characters to inhabit a similar allegorical realm and fit within the Christian, allegorical framework. Here too I move on to complicate this reading and show that neither *Piers Plowman* nor the magical romance texts allow for a simple relationship between magic and allegory or a simple reading of magical characters. The manuscript asks that readers engage deeply in allegoresis so as to uncover the characters' nuances. In so doing, I reveal the complex, ambiguous, and fascinating nature of the magical characters inhabiting Lincoln's Inn 150. The conclusion turns to the relationship between magic and allegory specifically and explores the exegetical potential that both provide.

Throughout, the chapter considers the implications of the medieval tendency to read allegorically and suggests that the relationship between allegory and magic allows for an understanding of magical characters and spaces as different, secular, more complex forms of the abstract, Christian concepts and figures of allegory. This reflects on the diverse ways in which medieval texts manifest and explore Christianity and especially the sacred supernatural in secular form. It also exposes an additional way that literary magic is brought within a Christian representational structure in medieval literary culture, emphasising that reading practices too facilitated the blending of sacred and secular supernatural forms. This chapter shows that even the medieval reader's understanding and interpretation of magical places and people help ensure magic's establishment and ultimate longevity in literary history.



### *Supernatural Spaces in Cotton Nero A. x*

Cotton Nero A. x is a manuscript built on allegory. Each poem relies on allegorical forms and readerly allegoresis in its construction of meaning. Without allegory and allegoresis *Pearl*, which opens the manuscript, would begin as a simple tale of a man upset because he lost an expensive item, a pearl, and *Cleanness* would seem to scold individuals who cannot afford fine clothes. The *Gawain*-Poet, as Priscilla Martin has established, was well versed in the allegorical writing of the Middle English period. Allegorical influence – from secular examples such as the *Roman de la Rose* to Biblical exegesis and the *artes predicandi* – appears everywhere in his work (P. Martin 315). None of his texts, however, is an example of extended or vertical allegory, like *Piers Plowman* or the *Roman*. As Martin suggests “the poet draws on the resources of more extended allegories to analyze or clarify” meanings rather than to produce extended allegories himself (P. Martin 316). His work can be understood as an example of horizontal allegory as defined by Suzanne Conklin Akbari in *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory*. Akbari distinguishes horizontal and vertical allegory by suggesting that “when an allegory as a whole refers to a corresponding level of meaning, it can be characterized as vertical; conversely, when an allegory as a whole does not refer to some other level, but rather only sporadically signifies something other than what it literally says and even contradicts itself within the text, it can be characterized as horizontal” (Akbari 12). None of the texts of Cotton Nero A. x has a distinct, corresponding level of meaning, each makes use of allegorical forms alongside “a poetic amalgam of secular modes” (Zeeman 158) to refer to another layer of meaning.<sup>13</sup> And yet, these allegorical forms fundamentally influence the way in which the poet constructs his narratives,

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<sup>13</sup> Nicolette Zeeman uses this phrase to refer to the *Gawain*-poet’s style in her discussion of *Pearl* in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*. She writes that *Pearl* is, “a poetic amalgam of secular modes – the complaint, the elegy, the lapidary and the courtly poetry of fin’amors” (Zeeman 158). Each of the other texts shows influence from a variety of other genre forms.

and the corresponding allegoresis fundamentally influences the reader's experience with the texts, if somewhat sporadically. This influence extends beyond the confines of the individual texts, and even beyond the confines of the sacred and the secular, to paint allegorical continuities across the diverse religious and romantic texts that make up the manuscript.

Unlike much of the other material featured in this dissertation, the contents of Cotton Nero A. x have frequently been read in the unified compendium in which they survive. This compendium is one of most extensively studied manuscripts of the Middle English period, largely because it contains all<sup>14</sup> of the works of one of the most celebrated authors of that period. Scholarly works on the *Gawain*-poet are thus necessarily focused on this single compendium.<sup>15</sup> That the texts reside in a single manuscript, however, is typically much less important than the fact that all are thought to have been written by a single person. Scholarly interest tends to focus on the author and his style over the manuscript form. My analysis consequently adheres to the tradition of scholarship by focusing on the body of work of this single poet but differs in that my interest centers on the place of these four texts in the same compendium and the interpretive consequences; the stylistic identity of the author is somewhat less important here.

Allegorical studies of the work of the *Gawain*-poet are also plentiful. Most present allegorical readings of individual poems;<sup>16</sup> others look at the poet's use of medieval conventions

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<sup>14</sup> *Saint Erkenwald* is also often attributed to the *Gawain*-poet, but there is no scholarly consensus for this attribution.

<sup>15</sup> Because he is one of the most celebrated authors of the Middle English period, the body of scholarship on the *Gawain*-Poet and the corpus of his work contained in Cotton Nero A. x is too extensive to list in a footnote. A few important studies include A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain Poet*, W. A. Davenport, *The Art of the Gawain Poet*, Derek Brewer and Johnathon Gibson, editors, *A Companion to the Gawain Poet*, Ad Putter, *An Introduction to the Gawain Poet*, J. J. Anderson, *Language and Imagination in the Gawain-Poet*.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Hans Schnyder, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: An Essay in Interpretation*, Maldwyn Mills, "Christian Significance and Romance Tradition in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,'" Morton Bloomfield, "Symbolism in Medieval Literature," and Victor Yelverton Haines, "A Unified Theory of Allegory and Typology: Its Application to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*."

of allegory;<sup>17</sup> some use allegory as a means of understanding a topic or stylistic choice in the poet's works.<sup>18</sup> My analysis most closely follows the final approach. I differ, however, in my interest not just in written allegory, but in the process of allegoresis that it inspires. In other words, I look not at the allegorical traditions that underlie the depiction of the supernatural in the manuscript but more importantly at the interpretive impact those allegorical moments have on the reader's engagement with the supernatural. Such an approach allows not only for an understanding of the poet's use of allegorical forms, but more importantly for an analysis of the underlying meanings that come through allegoresis. It shows how readerly intervention allows a text to mean more than it says. It shows what can be revealed when a reader enters a supernatural space and reflects on the deeper meanings hidden inside.

While Cotton Nero A. x features a diverse variety of supernatural forms – characters, objects, events – this section focuses solely on supernatural spaces. Space generally, as Sarah Stanbury has noted,<sup>19</sup> is central in the works of the *Gawain*-poet, but supernatural space plays a particularly prominent part. It appears throughout the manuscript: in *Pearl* as the heavenly City of Jerusalem, in *Cleanness* as a dead, boiling sea, in *Patience* as the belly of a whale, and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a paradisaal castle and a hellish chapel. The supernatural spaces are built, as I argue here, as allegorical analogues to heaven and hell, and the vertical allegory extends between sacred and secular spaces alike. The poet uses the same representational

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<sup>17</sup> Priscilla Martin's "Allegory and Symbolism," for example, offers a reading of the poet's allegorical forms drawing on medieval traditions of allegory. Ann Astell looks at *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a kind of Ricardian political allegory.

<sup>18</sup> Larry S. Champion in "Grace versus Merit in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" identifies an allegorical approach to grace throughout the works of the *Gawain*-Poet. Sarah Stanbury in "Space and Visual Hermeneutics in the *Gawain* Poet" draws on allegory in her discussion of perspective and space in the poems of Cotton Nero A. x, but does not discuss the genre extensively.

<sup>19</sup> Her article "Space and Visual Hermeneutics in the *Gawain* Poet" explores the prevalence of enclosed spaces throughout the manuscript and the relationship between space and visual hermeneutics. So too does her book *Seeing in the Gawain Poet* address space in terms of visual approaches to it.

structures based in medieval conceptions of heaven and hell to depict both sacred and secular supernatural space. As a result, readerly allegoresis allows for allegorical resonances from the Christian spaces depicted in the three religious texts to seep into the more secular ones depicted in the final romance text, plying the secular supernatural with religious meaning. All supernatural space consequently becomes not just a poetic occasion to depict marvels, but also an opportunity for the characters – and readers – to inhabit, experience, and learn from religious space.

Alongside the similarities between secular and sacred supernatural space, lies a key difference; the sacred supernatural spaces of Cotton Nero A. x are distinctly inaccessible – blocked by gates or available to just one person – while their secular counterparts are emphatically accessible. It would seem, then, that the secular spaces provide a means through which the reader can encounter and reflect on divine space in an everyday setting. In this light, the secular supernatural functions similarly to the genre of allegory. In its personification of abstract concepts and endowment of everyday objects with deeper meaning, allegory seeks to make incomprehensible ideas more accessible. The secular supernatural does the same thing. It allows the poet to remake breathtakingly beautiful and terrifyingly horrid fixtures of the Christian supernatural and situate them within the English countryside. Readers would seem able to experience another means of accessing, enjoying, and engaging with a strikingly different kind of Christian supernatural. However, once characters and readers do gain access to this space, they encounter ambiguity and contrariness that complicates the seemingly straightforward allegorical connection. Hautesdesert is not the paradise and paradigm of Christian goodness it seems from the outside just as the Green Chapel is not the hell its description suggests. In building up and tearing down this connection, the manuscript highlights the medieval attitude

towards the inaccessibility and unknowability of divine space, and the impossibility of such a space existing in the English countryside.

I begin by establishing the allegorical link built between sacred and secular space across the manuscript. As in Auchinleck, this link begins with the depiction of sacred supernatural space in the early religious texts of the manuscript. The allegorical dream vision *Pearl* that opens the manuscript takes place in three distinct settings, two of which can be understood as supernatural and sacred. The first is not supernatural, but rather an earthly “erber grene” (line 38), where the dreamer falls asleep.<sup>20</sup> It is replete with “gilofre, gyngure...gromylyoun, / And pyonys” (43-44), and made beautiful by “blomes blayke and blew and rede” (27). The forest is a highly-naturalized space, filled with every day delights. Its natural beauty contrasts and accentuates the more splendid beauty that comes once the dreamer falls asleep and enters the first supernatural space – a divine forest. The divine forest’s artificial beauty contrasts the natural beauty of the “erber grene.” Instead of common colourful plant life, the divine forest shows cliffs made of crystal, trees with trunks as blue as indigo, leaves like burnished silver that shine with dazzling light, and gravel made of “precious perles of oryente” (74-81). Each part of the natural forest is replaced with a more dazzling, but more artificial version of itself. It is a place that cannot exist on earth, rendered supernatural by the transformation of natural objects into precious objects. It is an expression of divine beauty – in every way above that which is earthly.

This astounding forest is only the gateway to the ultimate paradisal space of the manuscript. The delights of this wondrous forest pale in comparison to the final supernatural space, the New Jerusalem, which the Pearl-Maiden leads the dreamer to towards the end of the poem. The dreamer describes his experience as follows,

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<sup>20</sup> All quotations are from Andrew and Waldron’s 2007 edition of the four poems of Cotton Nero A. x. I cite the line numbers.

As John þe apostle hit syȝ with syȝt,  
I syȝe þat cyty of gret renoun,  
Jerusalem so nwe and ryally dyȝt,  
As hit watȝ lyȝt fro þe heuen adoun.  
Þe borȝ watȝ al of brende golde bryȝt,  
As glemande glas burnist broun,  
With gentyl gemmez anvnder pyȝt,  
With bantelez twelue on basyng boun, (985-92).

As the poet notes, and as Ad Putter and J.J. Anderson have confirmed, the description of the City of Jerusalem is taken directly from John's Book of Revelation (Putter 194).<sup>21</sup> However, as Anderson writes, "the city is presented to an even greater degree than in the Bible as a place of dazzling light, clarity, and purity, with the colours white and gold, the colours of the pearl and pearl-maiden, particularly prominent" (Anderson 64).<sup>22</sup> The poet borrows the images from the Bible, but augments the description to fit within his own imaginative poetics.

There are a few key characteristics of this description relevant to understanding the allegorical rendering of supernatural space in the manuscript. First, the city is set apart from the landscape and the dreamer. It is across a river and raised above the seer, as is evident in the last quotation and in the emphasis on the tiers that are each described in detail. Second, the city provides its own light: "Of sunne ne mone had þay no need/ Þe Self God watȝ her lombe-lyȝt" (1045-46). The text emphasises several times that the presence of God means that the city is always illuminated – it forever shines as a beacon. Thirdly, there is an emphasis on and repetition

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<sup>21</sup> J. J. Anderson suggests that the poet took the description from this source and refers to it specifically in the text in order to add veracity to his own work (Anderson 66).

<sup>22</sup> A.C. Spearing also points out that it is furthermore modeled after the popular art and architecture of the time (Spearing 98), something also apparent in *Sir Gawain*.

of the colour white. Next, the city is represented as having a plethora of food and water. The text reads “Aboute þat water arn tres ful schym, / Pat twelue frytez of lyf con bere ful sone; / Twelue syþez on 3er þay beren ful frym” (1077-79). Food is abundant, and it is not necessary to work to obtain it. Finally, the poet makes extensive use of superlatives throughout his description of the city. He says,

Anvnder mone so gret merwayle

No fleschly hert ne myzt endeure

As quen I blusched vpon þat baly

So ferly þerof watz þe fasure (1080-84).

The New Jerusalem is beyond anything that exists in this world – so wonderful that humans cannot comprehend it. It is a paradise built with a distinctly artificial exquisiteness: a place that exists above and beyond what is natural and ordinary. It is a space of whiteness and light, of abundance and beauty that is removed from the everyday world of the dreamer. Its depiction adheres to typical medieval descriptions of paradise. Each of these descriptors as well as the overwhelming sense of the supernatural, or divine, nature of the space is common in medieval depictions of paradise.<sup>23</sup> Divine space, created through the use of these descriptors would have been recognizable to medieval readers – just like virgin martyrs who were usually defined by their beauty, brightness, and piety. The rendering here is a particularly spectacular vision of the heavenly city that establishes the ultimate idealized supernatural space within the manuscript.

This description, which goes on for more than one hundred and seventy lines, has garnered much academic discussion. While some scholars tend not to linger on the description,

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<sup>23</sup> See Eileen Gardner’s *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell: A Sourcebook*. Gardner notes the abundance of light, white, precious stones, and food situated in an idealized city as common to the tradition. She also notes the difficulty poets encounter in their descriptions because the nature of heaven is ultimately indescribable (Gardner xxix–xxxi).

unimpressed by the degree to which it copies from John, others discuss its relevance to the text as a whole. Ann R. Meyer in her study of *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem* pays particular attention to the allegorical nature of the city. She reads the city as “a literary expression of the church as a complex symbol of the New Jerusalem” and analyzes “how the author uses poetry to display the veil, or what I will call the ‘mechanism’ of philosophical allegory and how that mechanism serves as the theoretical foundation for the poem as architecture” (Meyer 140). Meyer focuses on the city as the poem’s central ornament and not only as a simple repetition of the commonly depicted City of Jerusalem but as an allegorical “expression of human desire for perfection” (Meyer 154). Meyer thus situates the city as central to the poem’s allegorical meaning; it is both an image of idealized perfection and a representation of human desire for perfection. Or in other words, it both establishes the poet’s literary version of a paradisaical supernatural place based in biblical tradition and is an expression of the human longing for this kind of perfection.

Underlying this allegorical message, however, as Meyer and also Jessica Barr argue, is the overwhelming sense that such a paradise is ultimately inaccessible to humans. From the description, this perfect place seems available to the dreamer. The gates are open: “Þe zatez stoken watz neuer zet, / Bot euermore vpen at vche a lone” (1065-66), making entry seem easy and natural. However, when the dreamer tries to cross the river to access this divine space, he is cast out of the vision: “For ryzt as I sparred vnto þe bonc, / Þat brathþe out of my drem me brayed” (1169-70). The dreamer awakens back in the earthly garden, denied access to this supernatural space. The heavenly city can only be enjoyed from afar; the dreamer can only access the city with his eyes. Both Meyer and Jessica Barr have suggested that the depiction and inaccessibility of the city are means by which the poet simultaneously seeks to understand the



nature of divinity and emphasises its unknowability. As Meyer writes, “in its structure, theme, and imagery it displays a yearning for higher vision, but at the same time illustrates the limits of both image and mind” (Meyer 150). Barr argues that the poem “stresses the limitations on visionary understanding inherent in the human mind” (Barr 123). In other words, the dreamer can view the city and enjoy its splendors, but he cannot come to know and understand the nature of this city and its divine inhabitants because of the limitations of his own humanity. Engagement with and understanding of the supernatural space are cut off from the human world in this poem. This extends to the reader who cannot wander with the dreamer through the city, uncover more of its splendors, and consider the deeper meanings hidden within.

This is not true in all of the works in Cotton Nero A. x. Reading another paradisaal space in the manuscript within the same allegorical frame established in *Pearl* reveals a different means by which the poet depicts a supernatural space and renders it accessible to characters and consequently readers. This space appears in the final text of the manuscript as the castle of Hautedesert in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Scholars have attempted to place the castle, which belongs to Sir Bertilak, but is controlled by Morgan Le Faye, in historical reality. Ralph Elliott, for example, evaluates the landscape and topography of the castle and places it in Northern England.<sup>24</sup> Michael Thompson points to the architectural accuracy of the description of the castle and even relates it to several actual castles in England.<sup>25</sup> However, given the way it is represented in the text, Morgan le Faye’s long established role as a practitioner of magic in Arthurian romances, and how often magical castles appear out of nowhere in these tales (the Grail Castle is the perfect example), the castle is surely meant to be supernatural. I am not alone

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<sup>24</sup> His chapter, “Landscape and Geography,” appears in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*.

<sup>25</sup> See his chapter “Castles,” in which he explores the architectural details and features of the castle and relates it especially to Beeston Castle in Cheshire (Thompson 125).

in this opinion. Anderson suggests that the castle is to be understood “as having no ongoing reality” and “created by Morgan’s magic for a particular purpose” (Anderson 216). Corrine Saunders too suggests that while the exact nature of the castle is ambiguous – whether it is simply otherworldly, demonic, or linked to divine providence – there is no question that it appears magically (Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural* 195). It, like the City of Jerusalem, is a supernatural space, and, even though a fantastic castle of romance seems to differ entirely from a heavenly city, Hautedesert is distinctly related to the City of Jerusalem. A comparative analysis reveals that the same representative structures found in the description in *Pearl* are used to create Hautedesert. This connection is made possible by the allegorical tone of the manuscript and the allegorical approach to literature common in medieval thought that asks readers, in light of the representational similarities, to consider the castle’s allegorical meaning. A reader looking through the lens of allegoresis should recognize the similar forms and consequently interpret the wondrous castle in the allegorical light of the heavenly city. What results is an understanding of Hautedesert as a kind of paradise. But what kind of paradise exactly?

From the outside, it looks a paradise indeed. As in *Pearl*, the magical space appears for Sir Gawain to relieve immense suffering. In the Wilderness of Wyrall Gawain encounters all manner of beasts, endures the worst of weather, and goes without any comforts. He is near death from the weather, icicles grow on his armour, and he rides forth through “pain” and “suffering.” But when, on Christmas Eve, he prays to the Virgin Mary and the castle suddenly appears, it is described as follows:

Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot pryde  
 Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote,  
 Abof a launde, on a lawe, loken vnder bogez

... A castel þe comlokest þat euer knyzt azte, (763-67)

The poet goes on to provide a description that makes use of the same sort of imagery and language evident in the description of the City of Jerusalem. In the above quotation, for example, the poet places the castle on a height above not only the onlooker but the rest of the land. He furthermore uses superlatives to describe it, calling it the fairest castle that any knight could own, a trend that continues throughout the description. He says that “hit schemered and schon” (772) as the knight gazes upon it. It, like the City of Jerusalem, produces its own light. It is also described as the purest of whites. He sees “chalk-whyte chymnees þer ches he innoze, / Vpon bastel rouez þat blenked ful quyte” (798-99). The poet furthermore emphasises that the magnificence of the castle is in many ways unnatural – or supernatural. In describing its structure, for example, he writes that, “So many pynakle payntet watz poudred ayquere / Among þe castel carnelez, clambred so þik, / Þat pared out of papure purely hit semed” (800-02). This quotation augments the artistry and beauty of this castle, elevating it to the level of unreality. It is so perfect that it appears more like an idealized work of art than an actual structure. Like the impossible beauty of the City of Jerusalem, Hautedesert is represented as being too perfect to be natural and is thus elevated to the realm of the supernatural. Another similarity between the City of Jerusalem and Hautedesert is that the interior offers all sorts of luxurious and wonderful things. During his stay at the castle Gawain enjoys every comfort, from lavish clothing and lodgings to feasts, parties, and entertainment. Just as in the City of Jerusalem, food is abundant and got with no effort. Morgan’s castle seems indeed to be an idealized paradise.

What is more, it is a paradise that is accessible to both characters and readers. In his description of Hautedesert, the *Gawain*-poet once again lingers over the description of the gate. Here, however, he emphasises the fact that “þe bryge watz breme vpbrayde/ þe zatez wer stoken

faſte” (781-82). The gate is ſhut, and like in *Pearl*, blocked by water. In this caſe, it is blocked by a moat, deſcribed as a wondrously-deep double-ditch that ſurrounds the place (786-87). The fact that it too has a gate ſuggests that, like the City of Jeruſalem, it is ſomehow inaccessible, or that only thoſe with permission may enter. In *Sir Gawain*, however, even though the gates are firmly ſhut, Gawain ſimply rides up, calls the porter (who, in another important connection to paradise, ſwears by St Peter), and obtains entry into the caſtle. He gains access to this paradise, ſomething the dreamer of *Pearl* cannot. Once inside he is able to benefit from the delights of the caſtle – to enjoy all the lavish comforts this ſpace provides. But once inside, he alſo diſcovers that this paradise is not as unambiguouſly paradisaical as it might ſeem.

Before diſcuſſing the tensions between ſacred and ſecular ſupernatural ſpace in the manuſcript – why *Hautesdesert* is not the paradise it ſeems – I want to eſtabliſh that the allegorical ſimilarities extend across all ſupernatural ſpace – poſitive and negative alike. The ſame allegorical connections can be found in the negative, or helliſh ſupernatural ſpaces that alſo appear in this manuſcript. Once again, the opening Chriſtian texts of Cotton Nero A. x eſtabliſh a repreſentational precedent. A particularly horriſic ſpace can be found in *Cleanness*, the ſecond poem of the manuſcript, which depicts God’s deſtruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. After the cities are deſtroyed, all that remains is a “malſcrande mere,” (991), a charmed ſea.<sup>26</sup>

This charmed ſea, actually the Dead Sea, is deſcribed in detail:

Per þe fyue citees wern ſet nov is a ſee called,  
 That ay is drouy and dym, and ded in hit kynde;  
 Blo, blubrande, and blak, vnblyþe to neze,  
 As a ſtynkande ſtanc that ſtryed ſynne,

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<sup>26</sup> J. J. Anderson translates malſcrandre as “charmed” in his edition of the text (96).

Pat euer of smelle and of smach smart is to fele.  
Forpy þe derk Dede See hit is demed euermore.  
For hit dedez of deþe duren þere zet;  
For hit is brod and boþemlez, and bitter as þe galle,  
And nozt may lenge in þat lake þat any lyf berez,  
And alle the costez of kynde hit combrez vchone. (1015-24)

The poet's description of The Dead Sea is based on the depiction found in *The Book of John Mandeville*, lines 902-917 (Putter 3). Here again, as in his description of the New Jerusalem, the poet embellishes. While Mandeville's version stresses the saltiness of the sea and the inability of life to live within, the *Gawain*-poet adds that the sea is not only "murkey and dark, and dead in its nature" but that it is "livid, bubbling and black...a stinking pool," that "cruelly devours flesh and bone." He also stresses that it overturns the laws of nature in its destructiveness. It is an unnatural feature of the landscape that speaks death to anything living. It is other to life itself. Like the celestial city, it rises above the natural, everyday world but in a negative way – supernatural in its unnaturalness.

Another hellish, supernatural space is found in *Patience* when Jonah, after disobeying a direct command from God, is swallowed by a whale and descends into its belly. The belly is its own kind of supernatural hell. The poet opens the description by noting that none could live inside the "warlowes guttes... bi lawe of any kynde" (258-59). Jonah enters the belly through the jaws of the whale, which he describes as like a "munster dor" (268). He then slides through slimy filth, tormented by the terrifying sound of the mighty ocean just outside. He arrives,

Þer in saym and in sorze þat sauoured as helle,  
Þer watz bylded his bour þat wyl no bale suffer.

And þenne he lurkkes and laytes where watz le best,

In vche a nok of his nauel, bot nowhere he fyndez

No rest ne recouerer bot ramel ande myre (275-79)

Like the dead sea, the belly of the whale is described as dark, filthy, stinky and entirely devoid not only of life but of the ability to support life. It is a hellscape. The jaws of the whale are reminiscent of the mouth of hell often seen in medieval theatre and art (Anderson 300). Both the dead sea and the belly of the whale recall medieval depictions of hell that would have been familiar to readers. As Eileen Gardner notes, these usually feature, “awful smells and horrendous noises...along with other assaults on the tactile and visual senses...fires, bridges, burning lakes” (Gardner xxviii). Like medieval hell, these spaces are dark and murky, they stink, they are uninhabitable, water boils and horrid noises overwhelm the senses. In the same ways as the paradisaal images, the poet emphasises their supernatural hellishness through rendering them as other to nature; in this case as unnatural and uncivilized.

This representational mode carries into the depiction of the hellish but secular supernatural space found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: the Green Chapel where Gawain meets his doom. The Green Chapel is often defined by scholars as a realistic place and many have tried to locate it (Anderson 313-14). So too have scholars like Corinne Saunders emphasised its pagan nature.<sup>27</sup> If, however, the depiction of the chapel is read in terms of terms of the other hellish spaces depicted in the manuscript, it becomes clear that it is built with the same imagery as Christian hellscape. Before Gawain even arrives at the chapel, it is established as uninhabitable and deadly. Gawain is told that the chapel “ful perilous is halden” (2097), and if “com ye there, ye be kyllled” (2111). The guide who leads Gawain to the Chapel insists that he

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<sup>27</sup> Corinne Saunders, for example, writes that “the description also invites interpretation of the Green Chapel as a pagan place of demonic magic” (Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural* 196).

“gos away sum other gate, upon Goddes halve!” (2119). The death surrounding the space, even before Gawain enters, evokes the unnatural, unlivable spaces previously depicted in the manuscript. The reference to the gate of the chapel too, links to images of the gates of hell. The illumination in the manuscript highlights such a reading. A gaping black hole sits at the bottom right hand corner of the page, evoking the dark and deadly mouth of hell common in medieval theatre. Even more connections are built once Gawain enters the chapel. He immediately notes that nothing lives there, except “hyghe bonkkes” and “rughe knobled knarres with knornd stones” (2165-66), and that the stream nearby bubbles as though it were boiling (2174). A horrific sound assaults his sense, that of an axe grinding, which “clattered in the cliff as hit cleve schulde” and was “rawthe to here” (2201, 2204). The unnatural imagery used, the sounds, and the lifelessness are all reminiscent of the other negative supernatural places that appeared earlier in the manuscript. Gawain himself senses this connection. He says,

“Now I fele hit is the Fende, in my five wyttez,

Pat hatz stoken me þis steuen to strye me here.

Þis is a chapel of meschaunce – þat chekke hit bytyde!

Hit is the corsesdest kyrk that euer I com inne!” (2193-96)

Gawain builds the connection with evil Christian supernatural through his reference to the place as one that seems to belong to the devil, and even more so through the repeated identification of it as a “chapel” or “church.” It may have pagan resonances, but the poet keeps it firmly grounded within the Christian supernatural through his use of imagery and language. This secular supernatural space is built with the same imagery as the hellish supernatural spaces and grounded firmly in Christianity.

All supernatural spaces in the manuscript, whether sacred or secular, are thus constructed through the same kinds of imagery and within the same allegorical plane. What is more, each supernatural space in the manuscript – positive and negative, secular and sacred – functions to teach a moral lesson. The Kingdom of Jerusalem in *Pearl* teaches the dreamer about the nature of paradise. The dead sea in *Cleanness* emphasises the drastic consequences of angering God. The belly of the whale in *Patience* makes Jonah repent his disobedience. Hautesdesert in *Sir Gawain* tests Gawain's faith and ability to renounce temptation. The Green Chapel tests his courage and proves his cowardice. Supernatural space allows the characters, and consequently the reader, to interact with the divine and supernatural and learn from it. Furthermore, it does not seem to matter whether that space is sacred or secular – all can fulfill the same purpose. Sacred and secular supernatural operate within the same poetic structures and to the same purpose. Instead of a binary between the two, there exists a dialogic connection.

On the outside all supernatural space seems equivalent and an allegory for heaven or hell. There is, however, one key difference between sacred and secular space that makes this connection far more complex. The secular supernatural spaces throughout the manuscript are far more accessible than the sacred ones. As I stated earlier, much is made in both *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain* of the gates that block entry to The City of Jerusalem and Hautesdesert. However, only the gates in *Pearl* are truly a hindrance – the dreamer is never able to enter the celestial city. In *Sir Gawain*, Gawain enters and enjoys not only the fruits of that paradise but is offered a moral and religious lesson. Similarly, no one enters the dead sea in *Cleanness*, and the belly of the whale seems created for Jonah's circumstance; both are removed from everyday experience. The Green Chapel, however, is seated within the English landscape (which is perhaps why scholars have so long tried to locate it). It seems accessible to anyone who happens to pass by. So, while



the Christian supernatural provides allegorical representational structures through which the secular supernatural can be established, the secular supernatural functions on a more accessible, local level. It would seem, then, that magical spaces function as secular, accessible, and easy to access versions of religious spaces. To some extent magical spaces offer readers a vision of how divine spaces might manifest themselves in the English countryside. Characters and readers can recognize the connection through allegoresis and reflect upon this depiction of heaven/ hell on earth.

However, the very fact that these spaces are accessible, complicates this connection. The unadulterated images of heaven and hell established by the allegorical description shift once characters and readers actually enter these spaces. When Gawain enters both Hautedesert and the Green Chapel, he finds not the respective paradise and hell that the allegorical description leads readers to expect. Instead he finds spaces that are as ambiguous as they are breathtakingly beautiful and eerily terrifying. The interior of Hautedesert does feature paradisaal comforts, but is also filled with temptation, the imminent threat of a gruesome death, and deceit. Temptation appears in the form of the beautiful lady of the castle who enters Sir Gawain's bed on three occasions. Death is made a fixture of life in the castle by the daily hunts on which the lord of the castle embarks and the gruesome deaths of the animals he captures. Deceit hangs over Gawain's entire stay as he remains unaware of the true identity of his hosts. Life in Hautedesert is hardly one of bliss and ease. Similarly, within the Green Chapel Gawain finds, alongside the hellish landscape, a righteous gentleman bent on exposing his wrong. The Green Knight turns out to be far from the fiend Gawain and readers expect, he instead bears closer resemblance to a Christian teacher who corrects Gawain's fault. The amount of scholarly debate surrounding these two supernatural spaces reinforces their ambiguity. Scholars cannot agree on the exact nature of these

places – particularly the Green Chapel.<sup>28</sup> I would argue, however, that this ambiguity is characteristic of the very nature of these supernatural spaces. They are built to look like heaven and hell on earth, but ultimately reveal that such a place cannot exist in reality in a pure manifestation. The humans who inhabit these spaces bring in deceit and death, but also conscience and righteousness. The people inside Hautedesert – the lady, Morgan le Faye, Sir Bertilak – detract from its blissful nature through their schemes, just as the mercy of the Green Knight renders the Green Chapel less hellish. In other words, the complex, manipulative, and flawed nature of humanity make the unadulterated forms of religious supernatural space an impossibility in reality. In this manuscript, neither heaven nor hell can exist in the English countryside.

While it may seem that the impossibility of religious supernatural space existing in an everyday setting detracts from the connection and meaning behind all supernatural space in the manuscript, it in fact reinforces it. I outline above that inaccessibility is characteristic of divine space in the manuscript – and especially of the City of Jerusalem in *Pearl*. I stressed that the inability of characters and readers to enter within suggests a medieval understanding of divine space as inherently unknowable. The ambiguity and ultimate impossibility of secular supernatural spaces reinforces this idea. In Middle English literature, supernatural space can be built in literary form to look like a divine counterpart, but it can never truly be the same. It resembles divine space and may seem like an accessible version of divine space, but as soon as the reader delves in deeper, the façade crumbles and the distinctions become apparent. In the

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Schnyder likens Hautedesert to paradise (Schnyder 55). Mawdlyn Mills highlights the ominousness and evilness of both the Green Chapel and Hautedesert but refutes the possibility of determining a single coherent significance for the poem (M. Mills, “Christian Significance” 486–88). William F. Woods argues that the Green Chapel is “nature’s ‘chapel,’ a place to confront one’s mortality, and to die” (Woods 222). A. V. C. Schmidt calls the chapel “a fitting site for devil worship” (Schmidt 160). Derek Brewer sees it as “the womb of Mother Earth” (Brewer 89). This is only a sample of a large number of interpretations.

medieval world and in Middle English literary magic, only a superficial version of divine space can be accessible to the reader. Medieval readers cannot simply wander in a heaven or hell built for literary entertainment and come to know its true nature. The exact nature of divine space cannot be determined by the reader no matter its manifestation and no matter its seeming accessibility.

Despite its unknowability, supernatural space and indeed literary magic more broadly provide exciting scope for allegoresis and interpretation. In his chapter on the *Gawain*-poet as a vernacular theologian, Nicholas Watson suggests that Gawain's heroism is an imitation of traditional categories of Christian heroism, but in so being is no less praiseworthy and is in fact reflective of his audience and of more interest to them (Watson 311). Perhaps the depiction of secular supernatural space adheres to this same idea. Secular supernatural space can similarly be seen as an imitation of the divine version but is one that brings in all the reality – the sin, danger, and failures – of medieval life. In so being, it is more recognizable to the audience, more akin to the reader's reality and own experience with Christianity, and consequently more interesting. These spaces show a version of religious space that is ambiguous, messy, and sometimes even contrary; a version that is closer to the way Christian ideas operate in the real world. The pure, unadulterated forms are hard to reconcile with humanity's nature and with real life and situations.

Far from being lesser, however, these spaces provide ample room for engagement and interpretation. In being so complex and yet steeped in religious allegorical forms, these spaces provide exciting scope for allegoresis. The allegorical forms and connections used in the construction of supernatural space encourage medieval readers to engage in interpretation – to look for a secondary meaning beneath the spaces. Because of their inherent ambiguity, it is up to

the reader to decide what that space means. A strong enough connection with religious space is built to counter any fears or concerns over their supernatural nature, leaving the medieval reader to revel in the complex, ambiguous, and allusive but religious nature of the wondrous castle and eerie barrow. Whatever conclusions a reader may find, these spaces provide enormous scope for literary interpretation and an insight into how Christian forms operate in the real world. That, I think, was and is an enormous part of their appeal.

### ***Supernatural Characters in Lincoln's Inn 150***

The idea that one can gain insight into the nature of the medieval Christian supernatural and its real-life iteration through allegory and allegoresis is not just evident in the depiction of space. It can be found, too, in the way in which depictions of supernatural characters are influenced by their allegorical counterparts who inhabit the same manuscript communities. For my discussion of supernatural characters, I turn now to Lincoln's Inn 150, which places the popular romance texts *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Merlyn*, *Kyng Alisaunder*, and *The Seege of Troye* alongside the A text of the widespread fourteenth-century religious allegory *Piers Plowman*. Unlike all the religious texts discussed thus far in this dissertation, *Piers Plowman* does not contain any supernatural, Christian characters; despite its setting in a dream, none of the characters perform miracles or stand significantly above the everyday, natural world. Therefore, instead of providing a supernatural and typological precedent,<sup>29</sup> this allegorical text provides an interpretive guide that encourages the reader to understand the magical characters inhabiting the same manuscript community in a Christian light. This process not only shows the diversity of ways in which the supernatural is rendered within a Christian frame in Middle English manuscripts, different from

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Two for my discussion of how supernatural Christian characters provide typological precedents for magical ones in the Auchinleck manuscript.

that seen in Auchinleck, or even in Cotton Nero A. x, but further gestures towards the ways in which literary magic and Christianity are linked in Middle English literature. Like magical spaces, magical characters become another kind of reflection on Christian concepts and another way in which these concepts are manifested in a secular setting. But as with the supernatural spaces, there is a difference. Magical characters function within an allegorical frame, but like the spaces discussed above, are complex, ambiguous, and oftentimes contrary. As I argue, they both fit within and resist a straightforward allegorical reading. However, Lincoln's Inn 150 provides instructions on how medieval readers can engage with and understand even the most complex of these figures. Through an emphasis on the importance of allegoresis, *Piers Plowman* teaches readers how to understand magical figures, and in so doing provides not just a guide to reading, but a guide to accounting for all people – sacred and secular – in a Christian light.

The way in which magic is encompassed within the larger Christian structures of the manuscript is especially evocative in light of the social context of this manuscript. When Lincoln's Inn 150 was compiled at the turn of the fifteenth century social anxieties surrounding magic were increasing. As I outlined in the introduction to this chapter, magic was becoming even more closely tied with heresy and persecutions of those practicing magic were increasing. These anxieties seep into the literature and are particularly apparent in Lincoln's Inn 150. Before moving into a discussion of the relationship between allegory and magical characters in this manuscript, therefore, I want to change course briefly and highlight the changing attitudes towards magic evident in this compendium. Lincoln's Inn 150 is a particularly interesting example of the evolution of literary magic in light of these concerns. The way in which each text in the manuscript approaches magic and magical characters reveals both a heightened interest in and anxiety over the nature of literary magic at the turn of the fifteenth century. Interest in magic

is evident in the increased focus on magical characters, and anxiety over the potentially heretical nature of magic manifests itself in an increased emphasis on bringing magical characters within the realm of Christian righteousness.

*The Seege of Troye*, for example, shows increased interest in magic by heightening the degree of typical romance magic. When Paris recounts the beauty contest that led to his pursuit of Helen, the four Gods involved are turned in to “ffoure ladies of eluene land” (line 508).<sup>30</sup> This is despite the fact that three of them (Saturn, Jupiter, and Mercury) are typically male. So too is Achilles’ goddess mother turned into a “wyche” (1201), who “wiþ wiche-craft and nygremancy þer-til / ...him baþede in þe water of helle” (1344-45). The activities of the Gods are thus rendered throughout the text in forms typical of romance narrative. They are to some extent removed from their association with a pagan religion and remade in a popular form that highlights their romance magic. And yet, the text still points out their problematic paganism, referring to “þe false god, sire Jubiter” (326), for example, and lamenting the religious state of the characters who “Er ihesu weore of marye boren / ... naden non opir a-vowery / Bote false godes and mawmetrye” (330-32). The text recognizes the problematic connection between paganism and magic, both drawing the magical characters of the text closer to the typical forms of Middle English literature, while simultaneously warning readers of the falseness of paganism.

In *Piers Plowman* William Langland also grapples with the potentially problematic nature of magic. When Will first falls asleep and enters into his famous dream, the experience is linked with magic. As Langland writes, “Bote on a may morn on maluarne hulles / Me byfeol a

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<sup>30</sup> I quote from Mawdlyn Mills’s 1969 EETS edition of the romance. The edition of *Lybeaus* found in Lincoln’s Inn MS 150 has not been transcribed or edited by any scholar that I could find. I quote from the Lambeth Palace Library version which, according to Mills’s understanding of the affiliation of the manuscripts, is close to that edition. I also reference Mills’ appendix of variants found in Lincoln’s Inn MS 150 as well as a PDF copy of the manuscript itself, which I received from Lincoln’s Inn Library and intend to transcribe. The text has been more recently edited by Eve Salisbury and James Weldon, but they too use Lambeth Palace Library MS 306 as their primary text.

ferly of fairy me thoghte” (lines 6-7).<sup>31</sup> Will’s nap on the bank and entry into his allegorical dream vision is described initially as an encounter with “fairy.” Langland’s choice of words highlights both the commonness of rendering unusual or fantastic experiences in magical terms in Middle English literature and also the close link between magic and Christianity. Tellingly, however, this line is changed in the later C version of the text. It becomes “Ac on a May mornyng on Mluerne Hulle / Me biful for to slepe, for weryness of-wandred” (6-7).<sup>32</sup> This change has not received much scholarly attention,<sup>33</sup> but it is extremely significant that Langland changes the text to expunge all mention of magic and fairy in the later version. In its early iteration, the connection between fairy magic and Christian vision was comfortably admissible, but sometime before his production of the C text, the moment became bothersome enough for Langland to change it. While it is impossible to be sure why Langland made this change, I would like to suggest that the change reflects directly on the increasing anxiety surrounding magic and religion evident at the end of the fifteenth century and Langland’s own attitude towards the issue.

The end of the fifteenth century in England saw the rise of the Lollards who, following the writings of John Wycliffe, sought reform in the church. As Keith Thomas emphasises in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, one of the things the Lollards, and later the Protestants, objected to was the “magic” of the church. While the main focus of this complaint was the “magical” nature of religious ceremonies such as the Eucharist, the admissibility of magic in society and the inescapable connection between magic and demons more generally played a

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<sup>31</sup> My quotations from *Piers Plowman* come from the version found in Lincoln’s Inn MS 150, transcribed by Dr. Tomonori Matsushita at Senshu University in Japan, which can be found at [piersplowmanmss.sakura.ne.jp/DiplomaticTexts/A10.html](http://piersplowmanmss.sakura.ne.jp/DiplomaticTexts/A10.html). I have chosen this version because I am looking at the text in the form in which it appears in the manuscript.

<sup>32</sup> References to the tradition of the text more generally come from the more comprehensive account edited by A. V. C. Schmidt in *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*.

<sup>33</sup> Ralph Hanna, for example, in “The Versions and Revisions of *Piers Plowman*” writes, “the first ninety lines of the poem in any edition one reads will be more or less similar” (Hanna, “Versions and Revisions” 35).

part.<sup>34</sup> Scholars generally agree that while he was not a Lollard himself, and in fact that he sought to distinguish himself from those religious dissidents in the C version of *Piers Plowman*, Langland shared many similar ideas with the Lollards in his critiques of the church. This is what made his work so easy for the Lollards to use in support of their cause.<sup>35</sup> His choice to expunge all mention of fairy between the A and C versions of *Piers Plowman* suggests a shared dislike of magic in religious discourse. Perhaps as concerns over magic and its implicit connection to diabolism grew, even outside of dissident circles, Langland made the choice to entirely distance his religious ideas from all sense of magic and fairy. The removal suggests that magic was becoming a concern in literary circles at the time.

Despite this growing concern, fascination with magic remains prominent in the romance genre. This fascination, however, is tempered with anxiety. The version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* contained in Lincoln's Inn 150 most obviously reveals the increasing interest in magic, the growing anxiety over its links with paganism, and magic's potentially anti-Christian nature. Only a fifth the length of the version found in Auchinleck, Lincoln's Inn 150's version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* – titled *Merlyn*, by a late sixteenth or early seventeenth century hand – focuses only on Merlin himself. Arthur makes no appearance.<sup>36</sup> The romance tells Merlin's story from his origins up to the point where Fortigern is burned to death in his tower, and Uther and Pendragon emerge victorious. This shift in focus highlights the text's interest in magic. Even the opening of the text reinforces its concentration on Merlin's story. The Auchinleck version opens with an evocation of God and then a much-analyzed discussion of the prominence of English

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas cites one of the Lollards' twelve conclusions of 1395 which expressly links various rituals of the medieval church with magic and "the principle of devil's craft" (Thomas 51–52).

<sup>35</sup> For more on Langland's connection with the Lollards see Lawton 792–93, Adams 109–11, and Baldwin 72–73.

<sup>36</sup> In her study of "The Early Modern Readers of the Romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin*" Nicole Clifton notes that the annotator's choice to write "explicit Merlin" at the tale's end emphasises the focus just on Merlin's story (Clifton, "Early Modern Readers" 77–79).



over French and Latin in England that leads into a historical situating of the narrative in the reign of Constance. Lincoln's Inn 150, however, opens with a promise to tell "How Merlyn was gotten and bore / and of his wisdoms also / And oþer happes mony mo" (line 6-8).<sup>37</sup> The historical narrative, and the "oþer happes" take second place to Merlin's origin story and the account of his wisdom.

As the story progresses the focus stays fixed on Merlin, and particularly on the various wonderful deeds that he performs. Everything from his begetting, birth, appearance and ability to speak and reason practically from birth are described in more detail. The physical reaction of the midwife who attends him at his birth is even described: "And whan þeo midwife herde þat / Almost heo fel down þer heo sat / Heo gan to quake as heo ware wode" (1047-49). This description highlights to a much greater degree than in Auchinleck (where this moment does not appear) the wonderfulness of Merlin's supernatural abilities. They are so astounding as to cause a physical reaction in those who observe them.<sup>38</sup> The moment still adheres to the "scant" poetics of the marvelous outlined in my first chapter because moments of magical transformation are not described. But the poet of this version of the romance takes far more time to describe the circumstances surrounding Merlin's marvelous abilities. Of particular interest is Merlin's supernatural knowledge, which is put on display when he rides with a group of messengers to see Fortigern. En route, the poet describes more effusively than in Auchinleck Merlin's knowledge and critique of a priest's illicit sexual acts. Despite greater social anxieties over the connection between magic and diabolism, Merlin himself and all his magical deeds are of more interest in

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<sup>37</sup> Quotations of this text come from O. D. Macrae Gibson's edition of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, which includes the version found in Lincoln's Inn 150.

<sup>38</sup> Simon Horobin and Alison Wiggins attribute such additions to the fact that the text may have been used for performance, and so the physical moments are emphasised to provide cues to the performer (Horobin and Wiggins 35-39).

this later version of the text than they were in the Auchinleck version where the more historical narrative of Arthur held precedent.

Social anxieties over the nature of magic can also be seen in the lengths to which the poet goes to assert Merlin's status as righteous Christian. This is especially pertinent because Merlin's branch of magic stems directly from his demonic inheritance. I showed in Chapter Two that Auchinleck's version of this romance brings him into a Christian framework and indeed turns him into a specifically religious and nationalistic saviour. I emphasised however that Merlin's Christianization in Auchinleck largely occurs because the manuscript context places Merlin in conversation with a series of supernatural Christian characters who provide typological precedents. In the Lincoln's Inn version of the romance, Merlin is so emphatically made into a positive Christian figure in the text itself that the manuscript context is almost unnecessary to establish his legitimacy. The text works extremely hard to depict Merlin as a specifically Christian hero, or even saviour. This increased need to validate the magician reflects on the larger social anxieties present at the time. The text recognizes Merlin's potential danger and heresy and emphatically counters it. Far from removing all mention of magic as Langland did, this text grounds Merlin more firmly in a Christian ethos and insists on his validity. It effectively recognizes and discounts Merlin's demonic origins by situating him in a Christian narrative.

At the outset of Merlin's story, for example, the stakes surrounding his supernatural conception are made even higher than in Auchinleck. He is situated specifically within biblical history. The section on Merlin's life opens with an account of Lucifer's fall from heaven and the creation of hell, as "Dauid þeo profete and Moyses / Witnesse and seiþ how hit wes" (589-90). Here, the poet stresses the biblical authority on which his account of the fall of Lucifer is based and thus ties the story of Merlin's conception to that authorized, biblical tradition. As the text

recounts, once the devils hear “þat Ihesus was of Marie bore” (618) they decide to create their own version of Christ – an anti-Christ – in hopes “al Cristendam to haue schent” (848). The stakes are tremendously high in this text. Merlin is conceived to be the anti-Christ and to destroy Christianity – a demonic and fearful role indeed. Certain aspects of the text reflect this demonic heritage. When Merlin is first born, the danger and anxiety surrounding his demonic origins are at their peak. Merlin is described as shaped “feol to man” and “Blak he was wiþouwte les / and rough as swyn he wes” (980-82). At the beginning, he is a veritable demon, embodying the social concern over the true origins of his magic. His demonic inheritance as well as the devil’s intended purpose for him make plain the danger of supernatural power in the wrong hands. Had Merlin fulfilled his intended purpose, he would have fulfilled the dangers of magic and the supernatural and strengthened their connection with the demonic.

The text works extremely hard to entirely counter and subvert not only Merlin’s demonic origins but also his intended purpose. Almost from the moment he is conceived, the text links him not with other children fathered by demons, but rather with another individual fathered by a supernatural power – Christ. The version of the romance in Lincoln’s Inn 150 works far harder to establish this connection than the version evident in Auchinleck. The story of Merlin’s mother’s impregnation, for example, was told in Auchinleck as a kind of moral tale. Here, however, Merlin’s mother is rendered almost entirely guiltless in the process. She is not turned in to a cautionary tale, but instead more clearly removed from guilt. The poet takes longer to outline the circumstances surrounding her impregnation and also her piety and places the blame for her impregnation directly on the devil’s manipulation of the people surrounding her. Once she has become pregnant and must explain herself to the Justice, comparisons between this conception and the immaculate conception are made explicitly. Those who hear her story respond by saying

that “in þis world nas neuer child born / Bote monnes flesch weore byforn / Saue Ihesu Crist þoruȝ his myȝt” (907-909). Twelve wives are even brought in to verify that this is the case. Such explicit comparisons begin the process of figuring Merlin as Christian saviour, rather than anti-Christ.

This continues when Merlin is born. The text describes in great detail how he is baptized “in Godes name” (1010), and how “þeo feondes þat weorenin helle / Weore agramed þerof ful sore” (1012-13). Merlin is immediately drawn into the realm of Christian goodness through baptism and consequently, the devil’s plans are foiled. The most explicit comparison, however, comes from Merlin himself, who in a much lengthier description than that found in Auchinleck, figures himself as a specifically Christian saviour. When he defends himself before the justice, he says:

For alle þe feondes wende wiþ me

To haue schent al Cristiaunte

And hadde of me a wicked fode

God haþ me now turned to gode

And now y am a Godes sonde

Forto help al Engelone,

And þoruȝ my fadir’ he seide þan

‘alle thynges y ȝow telle kan

Þat euere was and now ys,

Y kan ȝow telle wel ywis (1133-42)

He stresses that God has torn down the Devil’s plan and made Merlin into an instrument of goodness and Christianity – one whose job it is to save Christianity and England. He even refers

to himself as God's "sonde" or envoy: a sort of divine messenger placed on earth to help England. The text furthermore legitimizes the source of Merlin's power, stressing that even though it comes from the devil, it is lawful because it is to be used in the service of God. This speech is significantly lengthened from the version found in Auchinleck, which does not include any indication of Merlin as God's messenger and places the responsibility for turning away from his demonic origins on Merlin himself, rather than on God as the orchestrator.

This later version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* therefore reveals a heightened awareness both of the appeal of magic in literature and also of its potential dangers – especially in the hands of a man who is half a demon. It counters these concerns, in part, by bringing the magical hero of the text more concretely into a Christian ethos. The legitimization of magical power is, to some extent, internal to the nature of the text itself. While the differences between Auchinleck's version and the version in Lincoln's Inn 150 may be attributed to the fact that different scribes copied from different originals, I think the specific emphases on supernatural power and the need to validate that power by emphasizing Merlin's Christianity reflect both the interests and anxieties of the later period. Magic was becoming less acceptable in the face of religious debate and growing concern over its potentially demonic nature. However, magic is too important to romance narratives like *Merlyn* to be expunged entirely, and so a way was found to counter this concern and make magicians legitimate. This is a key moment in the development of literary magic as an acceptable literary device. Poets and scribes could have tried to remove or change magic in romance – as Langland did – but instead found a way to maintain its prominence. The link between Christianity and literary magic only becomes stronger as fears over magic's problematic nature grow in society – a vital step in ensuring magic's continued place in literary history.

The internal Christianization is not the only way that the potential problematics of magic are countered in this manuscript. This text still survives as part of a compendium and so the manuscript context must be taken into account. When it is, the nature of allegory and allegoresis as dictated by *Piers Plowman* influences the way in which magical characters can be read and understood. I now turn back to discuss how the allegorical Christian text bound alongside these magical romance texts effects the reader's understanding of magical characters. I show first that the allegorical nature of *Piers Plowman* provides a mode of interpretation or reading guide for its medieval audience that further draws magical characters into a Christian frame.

*Piers Plowman* is one of the most complex allegories of the Middle Ages. As Jill Mann notes, "*Piers Plowman* is remarkable...for the variety of allegorical modes that it employs" (Mann, "Allegory" 65). Nicolette Zeeman indicates that it is one of the most diversely allegorical texts of medieval period, "mingling personifications with exemplary individuals, allegorical narrative with mimetic scenes, 'diagram' allegory with typological narrative, secular vision with biblical history" (Zeeman 159). Scholars have tackled the complexities of the allegory from various perspectives, but there are a few central areas of focus. The larger allegorical tradition into which Langland fits is one. Pietro Cali's *Allegory and Vision in Dante and Langland* draws dissonances and parallels between Dante's allegory and Langland's ultimately showing how closely related they are. *In Search of "Kynde Knowynge": Piers Plowman and the Origin of Allegory* by Madeleine Kasten begins with a discussion of allegory as a genre or mode and a challenge to the idea that medieval allegory presents a simple connection between signifier and signified. She goes on to discuss how the significance of the character of Piers Plowman changes over the course of the text and the search for understanding that both readers and characters embark upon.

Another key area of focus is Langland's use of language in his creation of allegory. Pamela Raabe challenges "the increasingly popular" trend to find "proof of the poet's growing doubt and anxiety, not only concerning church doctrine as an adequate account of reality, but also concerning language, poetry, and allegory itself" (Raabe 1). She argues that the text is not about the inadequacy of language, but instead about faith and its impact on understanding. Jason Crawford uses *Piers Plowman* in *Allegory and Enchantment: An Early Modern Poetics* to support his thesis that disenchantment is connected to allegory; he shows Langland's own disenchantment and his implicit distrust of language and allegory. A final area of interest is the mode of allegory employed in the text. David Aers's *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory* analyzes "the practices of exegetical allegory," "the preacher's allegory," and "poetic allegory," before going on to "a detailed exploration of Langland's own allegorical modes" (Aers 2). Lavinia Griffiths looks at Langland's allegory with a focus on the use of language to create personification allegory, uncovering the vast spectrum of allegorical figures that Langland uses through an analysis of the way lexical and grammatical forms are turned into proper names.<sup>39</sup> My analysis is also interested in Langland's use of personification allegory because the allegorical underpinnings behind the personified characters of *Piers Plowman* change the way the magical characters in Lincoln's Inn 150 can be understood. There is one specific and two general means by which the allegory in *Piers Plowman* influences readerly allegoresis and consequently readers' understanding of magical characters in Lincoln's Inn 150.

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<sup>39</sup> See Pamela Raabe, *Imitating God: The Allegory of Faith in Piers Plowman B*, Madeleine Kasten, *In Search of "Kynde Knowynge": Piers Plowman and the Origin of Allegory*, Pietro Cali, *Allegory and Vision in Dante and Langland*, Jason Crawford, *Allegory and Enchantment: An Early Modern Poetics*, Lavinia Griffiths, *Personification in Piers Plowman*, and Jill Mann, *Langland and Allegory*. This is a sample of a large body of work. To this list could also be added most studies of *Piers Plowman* as a whole as well as many theoretical discussions of the genre of allegory as a whole. It is almost impossible to ignore allegory when discussing *Piers Plowman*, just as it is almost impossible to ignore *Piers Plowman* when discussing allegory.

Langland's personifications are central to his text and give readers insight into what it means to be a devout Christian or lead a life of sin. Their centrality is obvious throughout the poem – from the very beginning of Passus I when Holy Church descends to impart her vast knowledge on Will, to the trial of Mede, to the parade of sins, to the point at which the Lincoln's Inn's version of the poem finishes in Passus VIII. Langland's personifications exhibit extremely varied degrees of complexity. Mede, for example, who features in Passi II-IV, is a complex and ambiguous figure.<sup>40</sup> Wrong, on the other hand, who is mentioned during Mede's trial, is a fairly straightforward personification of that adjective (in this case Wrong is depicted as a rapist – IV. 35-37). Much has been said about Langland's diverse personifications (L. Griffiths 26). At a very basic level, however, the personifications in *Piers Plowman* provide a sort of code of behavior that teaches readers how they should behave. A reader should want to emulate the pious Piers, for example, rather than the sinful Gluttony. Langland spends a great deal of time depicting the actions and traits that define the different personifications that inhabit his text. In each of their confessions, for example, the Seven Deadly Sins illuminate the kinds of behavior that characterize their names. Envy reports how he jealously defamed his neighbor "thorgh my false wordes" (V. 77); Covetess describes how he kept the best ales for himself; Gluttony reports passing out from too much drink and awaking only to ask "wher is the bolle?" (V. 204). These negative personifications are contrasted by exemplary figures like Holy Church, Conscience, and Piers himself, all of which personify or typify what it means to lead a devout life. Piers's choice to sow his field before departing on the pilgrimage for truth, for example, exemplifies the importance of good works in religious life. At a basic level then, the personifications in *Piers Plowman* provide a sort of guide or interpretative key that allows readers to recognize and

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<sup>40</sup> Lavinia Griffiths dedicates a chapter to Mede in her *Personification and Piers Plowman*.



understand what makes a person devout or sinful. Because of its close proximity to the other texts in Lincoln's Inn 150, this interpretive guide influences the way in which all the characters in the manuscript can be understood.

If Merlin himself is read in light of the interpretive guide established by *Piers Plowman* his characterization as a good Christian figure is further solidified. At a basic level, Merlin shares much more in common with the religious, righteous guides who feature throughout Langland's allegory than with the personifications of sin. One of the primary concerns, not only of *Piers Plowman* as a whole, but of Piers the Plowman's character more generally is to find and expose religious hypocrisy. Those who merely play a religious role without actual devotion, or those who seek financial gain through their religiosity are lambasted in *Piers Plowman*. The text opens with a condemnation of Friars who preach simply for profit: "prechyng the people for profite of the paunche" (Pr. 56). James Simpson identifies this as Langland's "sharpest satire" because it involves those "whose responsibility is spiritual" (Simpson 30). Merlin also plays a role in his text in identifying and criticizing those spiritual leaders who live hypocritically and profit from their position. En route to Fortigern's palace, for example, Merlin points out the sins of a priest:

'þat ilke preost' he seide þo  
'Þat goþ byfore and syngeþ so  
He was þe far þe child byȝat  
And ȝef he weore bypouȝt of þat  
He scholde his hondes wrynge sore  
And for þat synne sorewe more,  
And now he syngeþ [wiþ] ioye and blis  
As hit neuer hadde beon his' (1381-88)

In this scene Merlin exposes the sexual exploits of the priest who performs the ceremony, emphasising his hidden sin and implicit hypocrisy. This moment is not as vicious a condemnation of religious institutions as that evident in *Piers Plowman*, but it evokes the same sort of moral judgment on a well-established religious figure. Merlin is the moral and righteous figure out to expose hypocrisy and those who take advantage of their position. We see the same thing in his exposure of the Justice who seeks to condemn his mother to death for her impregnation. In addition to accentuating the veracity of her story, Merlin proves to the Justice that he himself was born out of wedlock and therefore has no place persecuting Merlin and his mother. In both cases Merlin acts as a moral judge who exposes the hypocrisy of authority figures based on his own divinely given knowledge.

Merlin's role as teller of truth is another central way in which he connects to the moral guides in *Piers Plowman*. Truth, or trouthe, is a fundamental aspect of Langland's allegory. Holy Church's sermon at the opening of Passus I centers on "truthe." Piers goes on a quest for truth: he intends to "wende with ghou the wey til we fynde treuthe" (VII. 53). As Simpson indicates, truth takes on diverse forms in Langland's text, it can refer, as outlined in the *MED*, to the simple act of speaking truly; to a more abstract concept of the word ("that which is true, real or actual"); and to the sense of truthfulness to "a person, principle or cause" (Simpson 17).<sup>41</sup> Simpson explores the nuances of these different meanings in terms of literary, theological, and social truth, but at a basic level all relate and apply to Merlin. As a prophetic figure, one of Merlin's principal roles is to speak the truth and to expose those who lie. He exposes the real through his unique access to all knowledge.

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<sup>41</sup> Simpson gives a detailed discussion of the different kinds of truth evident in the prologue and Passus I (Simpson 17-35).

This access to truth makes up a fundamental aspect of Merlin's role in this version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. Where Merlin played an active role in establishing Arthur and England in the earlier version of the romance found in Auchinleck, here his entire existence is devoted to relating England's truth. This is most evident in the ending of this text. Merlin's final appearance in this version of the romance comes when Fortigern tries to force him to fight against Uther and Pendragon, but Merlin refuses and disappears. In this act we see his dedication to his own cause, or perhaps to his own religiously determined sense of his role in promoting England and Christianity. He will not bend to those who wish to sway his course but instead stays true to his divinely directed purpose. Instead of losing this truth, Merlin's final act is to seek out the hermit Blaise who records his prophecies:

Al þat Merlyn tolde and seide

In scripture hit was leyde

Of al þe auentures y understone

þat euer schal beo in Engelande (1792-93).

In this moment, Merlin's divinely directed knowledge, his truth, is recorded for posterity. The narrative goes on for another two-hundred lines to tell of Uther and Pendragon's conquest of England and defeat of Fortigern, but Merlin, unlike in the earlier version of the text, is absent. He plays no role in the historical narrative. His story finishes once the breadth of his knowledge is recorded; Uther and Pendragon are left to fight the battles. At the end, then, Merlin's role as finder of truth and imparter of divine knowledge shines supreme. In this version he is, to an extent, elevated above the more mundane daily events taking place in England, and situated instead in the grand narrative of divine truth – of past, present, and future. He finishes as a

spiritual figure: a Christian hero interested in the orchestration of divine knowledge rather than in the establishment of a nation.

Read in the light of the allegorical preoccupations of *Piers Plowman*, then, Merlin is further solidified as a positive Christian figure, dedicated to truth and good works. Certainly, the specific sense is different, but it is a powerful representation. Read allegorically, Merlin becomes an almost Christ-like figure in the romance. He is not absolutely so but is in the grand scheme of its content and context: in the content of the romance he is depicted as a Christian saviour, and in the context of the manuscript he can be understood interpretively as akin to the exemplary allegorical figures of *Piers Plowman*.

The interpretive guide provided by *Piers Plowman*, which uses the personification allegory to guide how a reader understands characters, can be expanded across the entire manuscript to give a clear understanding of all magical characters throughout Lincoln's Inn 150. While Merlin represents an example of a positive figure, negative magical characters also inhabit this compendium. However, even despite the growing fears over magic, it is not their magical abilities that render these characters evil, but rather the immorality they represent. This becomes obvious when they are read through the lens of allegoresis provided by *Piers Plowman*. I begin with two negative examples from *Lybeaus Desconus*, the first romance in the manuscript, in which, unlike in *Merlyn*, the magical characters are villainous. The romance features three magical figures who function as obstacles for Lybeaus on his journey. The first he encounters is "a lady bright as floure / That men calleth la Dame Amoure" (1461-62). Dame Amoure welcomes Lybeaus into her castle, and "profirde him with worde / For-to be hir lorde" (1470-71). Lybeaus ends up staying with this woman for a year and forgetting his own love, Elayne. The text, however, tells us that this is not a wholesome love, but one filled with "traye and tene"

with affliction and harm (1478), and that the lady is not chaste (1476).<sup>42</sup> Part of the reason why Lybeaus is drawn in by Dame Amour, according to the text, is because “the faire lady / Cowthe more of sorcerye” and uses music to enthrall the knight (1485-86). However, this is the only mention of magic associated with Dame Amoure. Her magical abilities are not a fundamental part of her characterization, and in no way make her implicitly evil. What makes her a negative character is the fact that she seduces the knight and keeps him in her castle (although certainly, Lybeaus is equally at fault for this transgression). Her negativity comes from her behaviour rather than from what tool she uses to achieve that end. Read in the light of *Piers Plowman*, Dame Amoure comes to fundamentally inhabit her name. She becomes a straightforward personification of love, or perhaps lust, that draws one away from one’s true purpose. She could (and to a certain extent does) fulfill the same role without possessing any magical abilities. In the context of the manuscript, her negative depiction, meant to test the faith of the hero, comes from the attribute she personifies rather than any magical ability.

So too do the other two magical villains of *Lybeaus Desconus* become evil not because they possess supernatural powers, but because of how they use them. Towards the end of the romance, Lybeaus must overcome two “Clyrkys of nigermansye,” Irayne and Mabon, who have trapped the Lady of Synadon in an enchanted castle (1755-59). Here again, their magic is not the reason for their negative or villainous depiction, instead it is their choice to lock the lady up in the castle until she will “do Mabones will / and yeven him hi[r] right” (1783-84) – until she will turn over her lands to him. Again, beyond the naming of the two men as magical, magic plays a fairly small role in their actual appearance in the romance. Their castle and the enchanted Lady of Synadon hold the more spectacular positions. In fact, rather than using a magical defense to

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<sup>42</sup> James Weldon emphasises that “there is nothing legitimate about their relationship” in his discussion of the women in *Lybeaus Desconus* (Weldon 72).

conquer Lybeaus the magical brothers ride out as knights and fight hand to hand with him.

Lybeaus naturally wins, and the fight finishes with the Lady flying out the window in the form of a dragon to kiss Lybeaus and break her enchantment.<sup>43</sup> This moment and the lady's subsequent speech reveal the evilness of the two characters who have "with maystres of her mouthe, / many man con they schende" and who "thorowe ther chauntement / to a worme they had me went" (2101-04). It is clear from the lady's report that magic specifically has helped the two evil clerks to destroy many men and turn her in to a worm for their own personal gain. However, it is still not the magic, in and of itself, that makes the men evil, instead it is the means for which they use that magic – for greed and for personal gain. In the terms outlined by *Piers Plowman*, they can be compared with a character like Covetous or Greed who destroys others for his or her own personal gain.

Within the interpretive guide provided by *Piers Plowman*, then, understanding and interpreting magical characters would seem to have been extremely straightforward for medieval readers. Good characters behave like the exemplary figures of allegory; evil characters behave like the personifications of sin and treachery. On a basic level, this is the case. Medieval readers were tuned to read allegorically, and therefore likely interpreted the magical characters in the way that *Piers Plowman* – and allegorical thinking generally – encourages them to do. It is, however, a mistake to assume that allegorical thinking stops at this basic level and that these characters can be read in a simplistic way. Like the supernatural spaces of Cotton Nero A. x, many of the magical characters of Lincoln's Inn 150 would seem to be simple, allegorical figures

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<sup>43</sup> James Weldon provides a discussion of this scene in his article "Naked as she was bore': Naked Disenchantment in *Lybeaus Desconus*." He uses this disenchantment scene to discuss medieval conceptions of the nature of women and marital consent. So too does Eve Salisbury discuss this moment in her "*Lybeaus Desconus*: Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine."

when read within their allegorical context; however, like those magical spaces, these characters too are oftentimes ambiguous, complex, and even contrary.

Fortunately, the allegorical guide of the manuscript encourages medieval readers to consider the complexities, ambiguities, and contrarities of these seemingly basic figures. *Piers Plowman* insists on the primacy of allegoresis, and in so doing encourages readers to look beneath all characters inhabiting Lincoln's Inn 150. While the personifications provide a seemingly straightforward template of behavior in the text, the characters of Langland's allegory frequently display a level of complexity that emphasises the idea that individuals, even literary figures, are rarely simplistic. The text insists that a deeper level of interpretation and allegoresis is necessary to get at a character's true meaning. Jill Mann lays out the complexity of Langland's personification allegory: "Langland's personifications do not make up a fixed and limited *dramatis personae*: instead, they are constantly springing into life as a metaphorical verb briefly endows them with a quasi-human activity, and then sinking back into abstract nouns once more" (Mann, "Allegory" 79). It is not always clear in *Piers Plowman* what is a personification, and what is simply a description, a fact that causes modern editors difficulties when it comes to deciding whether or not to capitalize a word.<sup>44</sup> This ambiguity and confusion highlights the fact that within Langland's text few characters are absolutely and simplistically what they seem.

Lavinia Griffith has characterized this ambiguity as indicative of the allegory's polysemy. By polysemy she refers to the way in which "the multiplication of referents is considered part of a deliberate creation of semantic relativity" (L. Griffiths 26). In other words, polysemy refers to the idea that Langland's allegorical characters are intentionally composed of a multitude of meanings. Griffith uses the example of Mede to illuminate this idea and shows

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<sup>44</sup> Wrong, for example, in the moment I mentioned above is capitalized in Schmidt's edition of the text, but not in George Kane's 1960 edition of the A text.

that Mede must be considered not as one simple concept, but rather as referring to a number of different kinds of rewards and punishments that cannot clearly be distinguished from one another. Langland does not personify Mede as one single concept that denotes something positive or negative; instead, she embodies a multiplicity of complex and diverse meanings. She is a polysemeity of meaning. This conception of allegorical figures as polysemeities influences how the magical characters of Lincoln's Inn 150 must be understood in two ways. First, it emphasises the idea that no character – even one who seems easy to categorize as good or evil, or as Christian or demonic – should be taken at face value. An individual is made up of the sum of his or her discursive components and must be understood as such. Second, it suggests that characters can only be understood through close analytical engagement with all of their diverse aspects: through in-depth allegoresis. Mede cannot be simply understood as Mede but must be considered through active reading and interpretation.

Langland himself highlights the importance of observing, reading, analyzing, and understanding in encountering a text. His text stresses that these processes are fundamental to engaging with a piece of literature – that allegoresis is fundamental to reading *Piers Plowman* and literature. Langland's own interest in observation and interpretation as a means of understanding is evident from the beginning of the poem. When Holy Church first meets Will she immediately asks if he "seo thou this people" (I. 5): if he sees the people busy in the field with the Tower of Truth and the Castle of Care looming in the background. The poem opens with its first religious guide directing Will's attention to the allegorical text – the field of fair folk – laid out in front of him. He must "see" or observe the text to begin the process of understanding. Once Will has laid his eyes on the text, he asks "What is this to mene" (I. 11). He asks for help interpreting that which he has observed. Holy Church goes on to describe what the tower on the



hill is, what is within, and what must be learned from that sight. From the outset, Langland's text situates understanding alongside the act of observing and interpreting. This extends to reading and interpreting. Not only does the allegorical nature of the world Will encounters directly connect observation with reading, but Griffith has argued that the ambiguity of Langland's text as a whole makes reading and interpreting a fundamental aspect of discovering the true meaning of the text. "We learn how to deal" she suggests, "with Langland's discourse" and its inherent ambiguities and polysemeity "in the process of reading" (L. Griffiths 10). The complexity of Langland's allegory means that readers must read and interpret in order to understand the true meaning of the text.

This may seem obvious, but it is key to the way in which Langland's text influences the reader's encounter with this manuscript as whole. His emphasis on interpretation and even on allegoresis applies not only to *Piers Plowman* but to its companions in Lincoln's Inn 150. If all characters, even those that seem straightforwardly characterized, are ambiguous, then one must observe, or read, a text and consider what it means before gaining true understanding. *Piers Plowman* presents a mode of reading and interpreting that asks readers to consider not only the behavioral code outlined in the allegory but also each character's ambiguity and polysemeity. Reading in the way suggested by *Piers Plowman* changes the way in which all characters throughout the manuscript are understood.

The magical characters throughout Lincoln's Inn 150 are no longer read as reflective of positive or negative depictions of humanity. Their ambiguities and complexities become a fundamental part of how they must be understood, and the medieval reader must engage in a close process of reading, observing, and interpreting to get at their true meaning. One magical character in particular shows the nuance and ambiguity that complicates a straightforward

allegorical reading. Neptanabus features in the early parts of the romance *Kyng Alisaunder*, the third and longest item in Lincoln's Inn 150.<sup>45</sup> Neptanabus is an exiled king who flees to the city of his enemy and ends up falling in love with and impregnating that king's wife, Olimpias, with Alisaunder. Neptanabus manages to gain access to and mastery over Olimpias through extensive magical skills that the text recounts in detail. Not only does Neptanabus have the ability to send prophetic dreams to those he wishes, but he can also change his own form as he chooses – much like Merlin himself. At first glance, it seems unquestionable that Neptanabus is an evil character. The poet calls him “malicious” almost immediately (line 74), and the means by which he tricks his way into Olimpias's bed are despicable: he tells her that she will conceive a child with a god and then impersonates that god.<sup>46</sup> When Alisaunder kills him after hearing slanderous rumours that Neptanabus is his father, the poet writes “þus eyndid Neptanabus / soþ is in al þyng / Of eouel lif comuþ eouel eyndyn” (747-49). An evil man comes to an evil end.

If the depiction of Neptanabus is considered in light of *Piers Plowman*'s polysemous allegory, however, the depiction becomes less concrete. Good and bad deeds render Neptanabus's portrayal complex. On the one hand, it is clearly sinful in the text to commit adultery, however, Olimpias's husband, Phillip, is also reportedly about to cast her off. As she says “whan my lord is comen home / ... he wol away me dryue / and take him aneowe wyue” (304-306). While this does not excuse Neptanabus from his sin, it makes the act somewhat less despicable in the grand narrative of the text. Later, when Phillip seeks to persecute Olimpias for her impregnation, Neptanabus is the one who saves her with his magic. Finally, the thing that

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<sup>45</sup> For an account of this romance and its various surviving manuscripts, see the companion volume to G. V. Smithers's EETS edition of 1952. All quotations are from Smithers's transcription of Lincoln's Inn 150. See also David Ashurst's “Alexander Literature in English and Scots” (Ashurst 263-67).

<sup>46</sup> Christine Chism discusses Olimpias's characterization in this text and the positive and negative aspects of her relationship with Neptanabus in “Winning Women in Two Middle English Alexander Poem” (Chism 23-28).

steers much of Neptanabus's behavior in the text is his foreknowledge that the queen will bear the great Alexander. As he tells her,

Yhaue by ȝete on þe akyng  
þat schal beo Phelippes maisterlyng  
He schal conqueren mony kyng riche  
In eorþe no worþ him non yliche (396-400).

Despite the adultery used to create the child, the child is to grow up to great purpose. As Helen Phillips notes, Alexander was presented in medieval romance "as a model chivalric knight and King – wise, clement, and a mighty conqueror" (Phillips 20). As one of the nine worthies, he was an exemplary figure in medieval literary culture, destined to fulfill great deeds.<sup>47</sup> In this light, Neptanabus's act becomes less selfish and more about the creation of a remarkable king.

Neptanabus continues to play an important role in the development of this great king as his tutor and guide. He teaches Alisaunder fundamental truths:

þe cours of sunne and monne  
and al þyng þat was to done  
By þe steorres and by þe firament  
He him tauȝt verrament (708-11)

In this romance set in pre-Christian times, this seems an almost spiritual role. He imparts divine knowledge on this king ensuring his success and prosperity – in much the same way Merlin does with Arthur in the version of the romance *Of Arthour and of Merlin* found in Auchinleck. By the time that Alisaunder begins conquering the world, Neptanabus is turned in to an almost martyr figure. While Alisaunder waits in Tripoli to conquer his next land, he finds an idol and hears

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<sup>47</sup> Helen Phillips discusses the degree to which Alexander was revered and his place in the nine worthies in her section on the Alisaunder romances in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England* (Phillips 20-22).

“þeo bysschop of þat londe” tell how it was erected by the great Neptanabus (1520-44). The bishop’s description sings the magician’s praise; he furthermore reveals that Alisaunder was not, in fact, fathered by Neptanabus, but is Phillip’s legitimate heir (1548-59). In this light Neptanabus’s crimes become less heinous and his death more tragic. He is rendered in a polysemy of characterization as a somewhat misunderstood figure whose primary role was as prophet and teacher. He is no way absolutely good, but, in the same way as Mede, ambiguous. Just as *Piers Plowman*, the romance emphasises that goodness and evil take multifaceted forms and must be considered in order to be understood. In this case, I think, it is left up to the reader to determine the exact nature of this character and what lessons should be learned from him.

If, then, the magical characters of Lincoln’s Inn 150 are situated and read within their manuscript context, and with one of the primary modes of literary interpretation of the time in mind, their depiction becomes more nuanced and complex but also extremely revelatory. The language of allegory and of personification in *Piers Plowman* establishes a literary precedent through which the complexities and nuances of magical characters arise and through which a reader can gain a deeper understanding of their natures. The reader is encouraged by the interpretive complexity of *Piers Plowman* to read beyond the surface meaning of a character’s portrayal. Magical characters become not so much about their magical abilities, but rather about what they represent on a larger, allegorical scale. They can be positive figures, like Piers, or negative figures, like Greed, or they can remain ambiguous, like Mede, emphasising that individuals are not always intrinsically good or bad. Understanding the depiction of magical characters within the manuscript community thus becomes an act of reading, comprehending, and interpreting. Through such an act, the medieval reader gains a deeper understanding of how these characters fit within the larger Christian framework into which they are drawn.

I finished the last section of this chapter by suggesting that the allegorical reading of magical spaces provides another means of access to the nature of the divine in a secular setting while simultaneously showing that such access is impossible. I would like to conclude this section by returning to this idea and suggesting that allegorical understandings of magical characters work in a similar fashion. The personifications in *Piers Plowman* give readers a sense of how religious ideals and concepts of sin can manifest themselves in character form. This effect extends not only through Langland's text but throughout Lincoln's Inn 150. Magical characters are brought within the interpretive guide established by *Piers Plowman*, and readers are given a different and nuanced sense of how piety and sin manifest themselves in different kinds of characters. Like magical spaces, which are linked to concepts of heaven and hell and represent different versions of those divine spaces on earth, magical characters represent different manifestations of religiosity on earth. Merlin can be read as a Christ figure, while Yrayne and Mabon from *Lybeaus Desconus* can be read as demonic figures – not because of their magical abilities, but because of their imprisonment of an innocent character in a hellish space.

What is more, the complexity of the magical characters relates more closely to the way in which humans and Christian goodness operate in the real world. Certainly, few readers of this manuscript, either medieval or modern, could claim to be unambiguously good or entirely evil and few could claim to know people who hold such status. Individuals are complex, contrary, and ambiguous and oftentimes require a great deal of observation and interpretation before a true understanding of their nature can be gleaned. The magical characters of Lincoln's Inn 150 show how individuals can embody this complexity and yet still be accounted for within allegorical thought. Readers can see how abstract concepts like powerful and dangerous sin, or devotion to

truth and good works, can manifest themselves in diverse, secular ways. Like the depiction of magical spaces, the depiction of magical characters, and the readerly allegoresis established by the nature of the manuscript community and medieval interpretive forms, enhance engagement with and a differently nuanced understanding of the nature of Christianity. Readers can take delight in ruminating over the fascinating nuances of these characters and in unpacking their true nature – or perhaps in accepting that sometimes no true nature can be found.

The ambiguities and complexities that arise through the allegorical reading of these two manuscripts further reveal the appeal of magic as a literary form. In showing how magical characters are validated through a representational relationship with their Christian counterparts in their manuscript context, my second chapter necessarily reduced magical figures to the essential characteristics they share with religious figures. In emphasising their religiosity and equating them with important religious figures, it put aside much of what makes magical characters so very intriguing – their ambiguity. This allegorical analysis of magical characters brings the complexities of these individuals to the foreground again. I would suggest that part of the appeal of the literary magician across literary history is their unpredictability. One can never know for certain how Morgan le Faye, Merlin, or Severus Snape is going to use their remarkable powers – whether they will work for good or ill. They are not bound by a religious moral code, and even though they typically work within that code, they are free to stray at will. There is some inherent draw in a character who not only can perform astounding supernatural feats but also is not unequivocally good or evil. It is exciting for a reader to follow such a character, waiting to see the use to which he or she might put his or her remarkable abilities. Even though these characters almost always work for good, their very potential for problematics brings readers back to them again and again.

## *Conclusion*

This chapter has established that in both Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln's Inn 150 Christian allegory provides a literary precedent, or an interpretive guide, through which the secular supernatural characters and spaces could have been understood. The celestial city and hellish enclosures of *Pearl*, *Patience*, and *Cleanness* provide a representational foundation that fosters an allegorical, Christian understanding of the paradisal and hellish spaces of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Similarly, the allegorical personifications of *Piers Plowman* provide a Christian template through which the potentially problematic magical characters of Lincoln's Inn 150 can be understood. At a basic level, this allegorical link brings magical forms (both spaces and characters) within a Christian framework, rendering them either lawful or demonic depending not on their magical nature but rather on their purpose or intentions. Rendering them within a Christian allegorical framework makes their magic acceptable to readers, even in this period of increased anxiety over the potential dangers and heretical underpinnings of magic. Literary magic remains closely bound with Christianity in the reading culture of the Middle Ages and becomes further solidified as a legitimate and lawful component of literature.

I noted at the outset of this chapter that allegory and the supernatural are often linked in contemporary scholarship because both provide literary access to concepts and ideas that are beyond everyday forms. Allegory takes abstract ideas like sin or piety and renders them in human form. So too, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, does medieval literary magic take somewhat abstract religious concepts and manifest them in secular form, consequently providing a different means of access to the divine. In many ways, literary magic and allegory are parallel; both depict that which is beyond the everyday in literary form. As a short coda to

this chapter, I would like to suggest now that they are also linked in their very functionality – in how they work exegetically.

Allegory and magic in Cotton Nero A. x and in Lincoln's Inn 150 are all about interpretation and understanding. This is perhaps an obvious statement about allegory, which as a literary form, insists on the importance of reading, interpretation, and allegoresis. It is also, however, true of magic in these two manuscripts. Magic in both Cotton Nero A. x and Lincoln's Inn 150 typically takes the form of interpretation. Merlin in *Merlyn*, for example, does not conjure any fire-breathing dragons or raise any storms.<sup>48</sup> All his magic involves interpretation and the conveyance of knowledge. Throughout the text, he identifies the lies people tell and points to the truth behind them – he tells the justice how he was begotten and the true parentage of another child. His most impressive display of power in the manuscript comes when he interprets the meaning of the two dragons who emerge to fight from beneath Fortigern's castle. In this version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, Merlin's most notable magical skill is his ability to interpret, understand, and communicate knowledge that no one else can access. The same is true of Neptanabus in *Kyng Alisaunder*. His magic tends to take the form of literary interpretation; he creates dreams for Olimpias and her husband and interprets them. He also possesses foreknowledge of Alisaunder's destiny which he shares with Olimpias.

Even after Neptanabus dies the link between magic and interpretation continues in this text. When Alisaunder seeks marvels during his world conquests, one of the most impressive is a prophetic tree in India which reveals Alisaunder's destiny to him (5560-652). Here again, the supernatural takes the form of conveying knowledge and producing understanding. Even Daniel in *Cleanness* proves his supernatural abilities through reading and interpreting the divine

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<sup>48</sup> He does do this in the version found in Auchinleck.



handwriting on the wall of Baltazar's palace. Daniel is known for his "derne coninges" (1611) and because he is "of sapyence...ful, soþes to schawe" (1626): he is renowned for his secret arts of truth telling, his wisdom and his ability to show the truth. His role is to interpret writing that no one else can. In the text, he not only reads the writing, but provides Baltazar with a lengthy interpretation or description of its meaning. Here again, supernatural power (in this case sacred, supernatural power), takes the form of reading, understanding, and interpretation. Even the Green Knight – as much as his appearance and ability to live without a head are spectacular magical moments in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* – functions primarily as a reader and interpreter of behavior. His role is in large part about understanding and interpreting Gawain's behavior so as to shame Arthur's court. The most impressive supernatural moments in both manuscripts appear when something incomprehensible is interpreted by a supernatural character. Literary magic in these manuscripts is less about creating flashes of light or earth-shaking tempests, and more about understanding and communicating that which seems incomprehensible.

In this form, medieval literary magic is just like allegory. It takes something incomprehensible or inaccessible and explains it in a clear, relatable way. It makes knowledge that is accessible only to a select few – to those with magical powers and extensive skills, or to those well versed in Christian doctrine – and makes it available to everyone – to the other characters in the texts, as well as to those audience members reading or listening to the tale. There is indeed something marvelous about the ability to read, comprehend, and communicate an abstract idea. As simplistic as personification allegory can seem to readers today, medieval allegory serves that very purpose. It prioritizes understanding and interpretation above all else (above plot and character, for example) and seeks to make clear complex ideas in the simplest,

most relatable forms. Perhaps magic can be seen in the same way. In its prominent place in the popular literature of the Middle Ages, magic seeks to make plain the incomprehensible and the inaccessible. It brings heaven and hell, and saviors and demons, down to earthly, secular forms in unique and engaging ways, not only for the purposes of entertainment, but also to show the multifaceted, complex reach of the Christian supernatural and of Christianity itself. Like allegory necessarily walks with allegoresis, magic necessarily walks with and inspires exegetical and interpretive reflection. It entertains, but it also insists we think more deeply about the structures and meanings behind its wonders. It retains this purpose today and remains compelling in its ability to inspire reflection alongside wonder.

## **Chapter Four: The Magic of the Manuscript**

### ***Introduction***

The material support that allowed medieval readers to encounter a text is the final component of medieval literary culture that ensures the establishment of magic as an acceptable literary device. Alongside typical poetics, characterizations, and interpretive practices, the manuscript plays a vital role in the medieval reading experience, and this final chapter argues that the material object through which medieval literature was consumed not only further contributes to the Christianization of literary magic, but also reveals the degree to which magic and the supernatural are deeply ingrained in medieval attitudes towards reading and the power of the book. These attitudes and these reading practices help ensure magic's survival into the modern day.

Books published today are rarely venerated as unique or important objects. Most are simple objects important for the stories, pictures, or instructions that they contain. Certain volumes may be important to an individual or household as a family heirloom or edition with

emotional or sentimental value, but most are transitory and disposable, valued for what they contain rather than as objects themselves. In the reading culture of the Middle Ages, however, a physical book was a prized possession valued as much for the object itself as for the material contained within. Books were expensive and difficult to make, requiring much skill and time. They were often valued in a household as a primary source of education and entertainment. Books sometimes even took on a kind of supernatural significance. This is most obvious in the great weight Bibles and other religious volumes carried. Eyal Poleg in *Approaching the Bible in Medieval England* notes numerous examples where Bibles and other religious texts were used as talisman. He describes how Irish codices were used to defend against snake bites, how gospels were buried beneath the cornerstone of Peterborough Abbey in 1272, and how the *textus* of St Mildred supernaturally caused a man to lose his sight (Poleg 60). In each case the books were valued not for what they contained but rather for their status as symbolic objects able to influence the natural course of events.

Manuscripts that can inspire supernatural change or provide an individual with magical powers have always fascinated the academic community and wider public. Today, witchcraft museums draw visitors with promises of ancient copies of texts containing uncanny symbols, pentangles, and apparent instructions on how to perform magical spells. Every few years (usually around Halloween) the CBC reports on the work and findings of various members of the *Societas Magicas*, highlighting discoveries of texts that focus on summoning ghosts or demons.<sup>1</sup> Movies like *The Ninth Gate* feature scholar characters and tempt audiences with promises of occult magic performed through the aid of rare books of magic. Medieval magical books play a central role in Susanna Clark's bestselling novel *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* which

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the article "U of S Professor Investigates History of Black Magic," published October 31, 2014. *The Current* did a feature that same year.

centers around two magicians living in 19<sup>th</sup> century London. The physical book or manuscript normally plays a central role in these portrayals. However, as most scholars of medieval magic will confirm, books that provide concrete instructions on how to perform magical rituals are rare prior to the early modern period. The few that do survive present complex astrological or theological discussions and would not fit the modern conception of a book of magic.<sup>2</sup> Medieval manuscripts providing detailed instructions on how to summon demons or cast spells are something of a fiction of the modern age.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that a book itself could be magical, however, is not. As noted above, religious books especially carried supernatural significance both for what they contained and for their status as symbolic objects. This chapter will furthermore suggest that the supernatural significance of a manuscript object in the Middle Ages extends beyond specifically religious volumes to include the secular, romance book. Secular books too can materially impact the lives of those they touch and can themselves be seen as magical objects, just not in the way contemporary readers expect. As this dissertation has shown throughout, the supernatural is deeply ingrained in the medieval reading experience – in common phrases and characters as well as in standard modes of interpretation. It is also ingrained in the very book itself: in its content and in the way in which the physical object interacts with the reader. Through a comparative analysis of the magical objects that appear throughout medieval literature and the object through

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Klassen's book *The Transformation of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* addresses the manuscript culture of magical books in late medieval and early modern periods dealing mostly with astrological images, which "were not intended as – and did not claim to be – natural magic" (Klassen 3). He also looks at how ritual magic, which lacks a stable textual tradition, was transformed and popularized in the late medieval and early modern period. So too does Richard Kieckhefer note in his *Magic in the Middle Ages* that the sources he relies on are not books of magic, as such, but rather contain "elements of what we can call magic" (Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* 3).

<sup>3</sup> Even the Anglo-Saxon charms described by Bill Griffiths in *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* differ greatly from modern conceptions.

which the medieval reader encounters medieval literature, this chapter posits an understanding of the medieval manuscript as a kind of magical object.

While manuscripts have structured my entire discussion of literary magic, my focus here is specifically on the manuscript as object. The physical manuscript was a vital component of the medieval reading experience, fundamentally shaping the way in which literature was read and understood. Martha Dana Rust's *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* highlights the interpretive impact created by the combination of the manuscript object and text on a reader's creation of literary meaning. Rust repurposes Stephen G. Nichols' term "manuscript matrix,"<sup>4</sup> to refer to the space created by an interaction between a manuscript and a reader during which the reader's imagination creates interpretive understanding. She describes this interpretive space as follows:

The manuscript matrix is an imagined, virtual dimension in which physical form and linguistic content function in dialectical reciprocity: a space in which words and pages, "colours" of rhetoric and colors of ink, fictional characters and alphabetical characters, covers of books and veils of allegory function together in one overarching, category-crossing metasystem of signs. (Rust 9)

The manuscript matrix is an interpretive space built in the mind of the reader, as he or she interacts with a manuscript, through the combination of physical and literary form. It is within this space that literary understanding occurs.

Rust identifies three "preconditions" of the manuscript matrix. The first is "involved reading" which "entails the capacity to visualize and transport oneself into the abstract,

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<sup>4</sup> As Rust notes, Nichols first uses the term in his introduction to the "New Philology" issue of *Speculum* in 1990 – a vitally important critical journal for the conjoined development of manuscript and literary study (Rust 9). Nichols revisits this term in his "Technologies of the Manuscript Matrix."

intellectual world of a text – an imaginary world evoked by language.” The second, “codicological consciousness,” “entails an eye well-versed in the semiotics of the book as a material object.” The third, “double literacy,” “enables a synthesis of the mental realms of texts and the physical dimension of the book,” or, in other words, an ability to both read and see (Rust 16–17). So, a manuscript matrix is a space created between a reader and a manuscript in which the reader creates literary meaning both through imaginative engagement with the textual world presented in the texts (the one populated with saints, or knights, or dragons, or visions of hell – whatever the case may be), and the world presented physically on the page (the one populated with ink, letters, words, marginalia, images, and so on). The reader both *reads* a manuscript and *sees* a manuscript, and his or her understanding is fundamentally determined by both processes. The uniqueness of medieval manuscripts makes this particularly important to the medieval encounter with a literary text, and so Rust’s theory of the interpretive impact of simultaneously seeing and reading fostered by the medieval manuscript forms the critical foundation of this chapter. The chapter looks first at how the physical structure of a manuscript impacts the depiction of the supernatural contained within: how the reader *sees* the manuscript and the interpretive consequences. It then looks at how the textual content of a manuscript – what the reader *reads* in the manuscript – reflects on the nature of literary magic presented in the compendium. Both contribute to my conceptualization of the manuscript object as a kind of magical object with which I finish the chapter.

While Rust’s work makes use of what have long been seen as highly literary texts (Chaucer, Gower, etc.), and manuscripts that are replete with evocative images and illuminations, my analysis centers on a collection of popular as opposed to literary texts found in an extremely plain compendium. A quarto, paper manuscript of relatively small size, British

Library, Cotton MS Caligula A. ii contains no illuminations and features a series of popular texts.<sup>5</sup> It measures 225 by 180 mm and contains 210 folios. The script appears in single or double columns on the page and the number of lines per page varies according to the text. It was formerly identified as British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian D. viii, but was, at some point before the 1654 Cotton catalogue, bound together with Cotton Vespasian D. xxi at which point it received its current shelf mark (J. J. Thompson 171). This chapter, following the work of all other scholars of the manuscript, only considers the first half of what is now Cotton Caligula A. ii (fols. 1-141), the original Vespasian D. viii. This manuscript, composed c. 1450,<sup>6</sup> contains thirty-nine items, eight of which are romances. Much of its fame today comes from the inclusion of three romances thought to have been composed by Thomas Chestre – *Octavian*, *Lybeaus Desconus*, and *Sir Launfal* – of which *Octavian* and *Sir Launfal* survive only in this compendium. In addition to the romances, the manuscript contains a miscellany of texts: some of Lydgate's short poems, a series of saints' lives, allegorical visions of heaven and hell, didactic religious texts as well as advice poems.<sup>7</sup> It was compiled by a single scribe thought to be from the south-east, or south-east Midland area, whose careful planning and ordering of the texts is evident in the meticulous way in which lines are organized on pages. The manuscript has been identified as a household manuscript, and is particularly evocative in its highly personal nature, evident, as I discuss later, in the kinds of texts featured within.

Alongside its evocative content, the manuscript also presents several problems that must be addressed before I proceed. First, even though the manuscript has long been recognized as “an

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<sup>5</sup> For descriptions of the manuscript see Guddat-Figge 169-172; the introduction to McSparran's edition of *Octovian Imperator* (McSparran 10-13); and the introduction Mills's edition of *Lybeaus Desconus* (Mills, *Lybeaus* 1-2).

<sup>6</sup> Based on the date of composition of Lydgate's “Nightengale” and a chronicle entry on Henry IV, the date 1446-1460 is generally accepted (Mills, *Lybeaus* 1; McSparran 13).

<sup>7</sup> Denise C. White provides a list of all the items contained within in *BL Cotton Caligula Aii, Manuscript Context, the Theme of Obedience, and a Diplomatic Transcription Edition* (White 3-4).



important witness to the manner in which ‘mixed’ collections of Middle English metrical romances continued to circulate among certain fifteenth century readers” (J. J. Thompson 171), little work has been done on the volume as a whole. To my knowledge, the only complete study of both the text and contents of the manuscript is a doctoral dissertation by Denise C. White from Georgia State University.<sup>8</sup> While the individual texts have garnered much academic interest, little work has been done on the whole volume – especially when compared with something like Auchinleck or Cotton Nero A. x, both of which have inspired a great deal scholarship. Secondly, the makeup of the volume itself presents something of a quandary.

Like so many manuscripts that passed through the hands of Robert Cotton, the manuscript has been tampered with to the point that its original form is difficult to determine.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly true in the ordering of the texts. The leaves have been cut out of their original binding and mounted on paper strips in modern binding. All traces of catchwords and signatures are gone, and the booklet structure and order of the manuscript seem lost. John J. Thompson in “Looking Behind the Book: MS Cotton Caligula A.ii, part 1, and the Experience of its Texts” attempts to reconstruct the original quire structure through analysis of the watermarks evident on the four different stocks of paper used in the manuscript. His findings suggest that while there are certainly texts missing from the manuscript (it finishes incomplete, for example) the quire

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<sup>8</sup> As part of her dissertation, White includes a transcription of the entirety of the manuscript, which has been an invaluable resource in the preparation of this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham discuss the kinds of damage often done to medieval manuscripts in *An Introduction to Manuscript Studies*. They discuss Cotton and Matthew Parker’s unique brand of altering manuscripts (Clemens and Graham 108-16). For a history of Cotton’s library and collection, including a discussion of his role as librarian, which often included the binding together of disparate texts and the rearranging of manuscripts see Colin C. Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*. He estimates that only half of the manuscripts from Cotton’s collection remain in their original order (Tite 45). See James P. Carley and Colin C. Tite, “Sir Robert Cotton as Collector of Manuscripts and the Question of Dismemberment,” for an example of “the process by which Sir Robert Cotton created new compilations from older manuscripts” (Carley and Tite 99).

structure verifies the ordering of texts currently evident in the manuscript.<sup>10</sup> Murray J. Evans similarly identifies “composite blocks of items in Cotton Caligula A. ii.” evident in the decorative wash of red or yellow applied to the pages (M. J. Evans 70). Evans uses the evidence of the wash to argue for generic groupings of texts within the manuscript and like Thompson, his evidence supports the current structure of the manuscript. Therefore, while it is by no means certain that the texts contained within the manuscript survive in their original order, until new evidence comes to light and without a strong argument to suggest a different order, I proceed with my analysis of the texts in the order in which they survive.<sup>11</sup>

I have chosen this manuscript, in part, because it sits at an interesting historical moment in the trajectory of societal attitudes towards magic sketched in this dissertation. Cotton Caligula A. ii is dated to the mid-fifteenth century. As the latest of the manuscripts discussed in this dissertation, it was produced at a time when magic was most prominently becoming a topic of concern and even fear in medieval society. This period has been identified by both Wolfgang Behringer and Richard Kieckhefer as one of the most important periods of witch-hunts in Europe that in many ways anticipated the witch crazes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Behringer’s chronology of witch hunts places the first massive witch hunts in Europe around 1427, and in western Europe around 1480 (Behringer xii).<sup>12</sup> Kieckhefer contextualizes this growth in the persecution of magic as stemming directly from the increase in social fear surrounding the idea of magic and its link to heresy that appeared in the early fifteenth century. He identifies this as the fourth phase of witch persecutions, and the one that is “in virtually every

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas provides a longer discussion of the manuscript’s construction in his chapter and also outlines the proposed quire structure (Thompson 174-78).

<sup>11</sup> There are numerous cases where two texts appear on the same folio or where a new text begins on a verso. In these situations, my analysis can be far more certain.

<sup>12</sup> According to Behringer’s chronology the initial witch hunts occurred principally in Savoy, Dauphiné, and Valais. They become endemic in western Europe in 1480 (Behringer xii).

way the most important.” Trials were particularly fierce around the time this manuscript was compiled, and “during the intervening years the rate of persecution remains higher than it had been in any previous period.” While these trials were mostly, but not entirely, limited to the continent, Kieckhefer identifies a “correlation between judicial and literary developments” and particularly to the production of Johan Nider’s *Formicarius* “an extended and non-technical account of devil-worship” and precursor to the later fifteenth century *Malleus maleficarum* (Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials* 23). So too does Michael D. Bailey begin his study *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* at the year 1430 with Nider’s text and suggest that the figure and fear of the witch first appeared in the early 1400s (Bailey 2).<sup>13</sup> The period in which this manuscript was produced was one that saw the highest concern over magic and its potential demonic nature in the various periods that have been studied in this dissertation. It is important to keep such concerns in mind, particularly in light of the extremely positive portrayal of magic evident in the manuscript. The texts and manuscript present an even more positive, unified, and Christian version of magic than any yet seen throughout this dissertation. Indeed, within the confines of the manuscript matrix created by Cotton Caligula A. ii, distinctions between the sacred and secular supernatural fade and a singular, Christian version of the supernatural arises.

In the coming sections, I use Rust’s concept of the manuscript matrix to argue that the physicality of the book – the connections and interpretations guided by the *mise-en-page* and structure of the manuscript – as well as the content of the texts themselves reveal an additional way that literary magic is created and authorized in the reading culture of the Middle English

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<sup>13</sup> Heidi Breuer’s literary analysis of the witch further supports this point. As she writes, “it is well documented that religious, scientific, and (to a certain extent) popular thinking about magic coalesced during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries into a firm belief that all magic – and in witchcraft in particular – derived from demonic parts” (Breuer 98).

period. The analysis of the physical structure of the manuscript in the first section affirms the degree to which sacred and secular supernatural are blended both in the context and content of the entire manuscript volume. It goes so far as to suggest that in this volume there is little distinction between sacred and secular supernatural – instead a single, unified version of the supernatural is apparent. The second section turns to the broader interpretive implications behind the connection between the manuscript and magic. It suggests that the reader's engagement with the manuscript volume mirrors the role magical objects take in the texts themselves, presenting a positive and powerful purpose behind both literary magic and the material form in which it was presented. It argues that the power granted to characters who possess magical objects in the manuscript's texts is mirrored in the similar impact the manuscript compendium as a whole has on the reader. Reading becomes a means of attaining power, and the manuscript, which facilitates reading, becomes wondrous in its ability to grant that power. I conclude by reiterating the extent to which magic is bound within the very foundation – from structure, to content, to purpose – of the medieval manuscript and medieval literary culture and ruminate upon the degree to which literary magic is connected with literature itself.

In so doing, this chapter considers the final way in which the medieval reading experience shapes literary magic. Having already explored how the poetic structures, character types, and modes of interpretation common to medieval literary culture solidify a Christian understanding of literary magic in the Middle Ages, this chapter turns to the physical apparatus through which literature was read. It considers how medieval literature as a whole – as manifested in the medium through which it was consumed – not only reinforces a Christian version of literary magic, but also reveals the degree to which magic reflects the nature of that reading experience. Reading literary magic directly against the medieval manuscript form not

only reinforces the Christian representational structures within which magic continues to operate, despite increasing fears over witchcraft in society, but shows that magic as a literary device bears striking resemblance to the nature and impact of literature itself. Read in this light, it becomes obvious why magic has always been and continues to be such an endemic part of literary and popular culture. Its appeal swells beyond the entertainment value of extraordinary individuals and events to reach the same human impetus that makes stories and narrative a fundamental component of everyday life. Its appeal reaches our most basic functions and desires.

### ***Seeing: Magical Manuscript Structures***

Sight is the first means of access to any text. Before a reader delves into the opening lines of a piece of literature the form of the book, the font, the cover images, even the paper begin to shape his or her encounter with that text. As the epigraph to Andrew Taylor's *Textual Situations* reads, "no text exists outside of the support that enables it to be read" (qtd. in Taylor 1).<sup>14</sup> A text cannot be fully understood without its physical context. This is especially relevant to medieval literature which originally presented each and every text in unique form. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, the unique medium through which medieval literature was read fundamentally impacts the way magic as a literary form must be understood. The manuscript form contributes to the way in which literary magic was read by allowing representational relationships between the sacred and secular to develop in the mind of the reader or listener. The physicality of the manuscript form further contributes to this process.

More so than any other compendium discussed in this dissertation, Cotton Caligula A. ii is likely to have been seen as well as read. I would like to begin by suggesting that Cotton

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<sup>14</sup> The quotation comes from Robert Chartier's "Texts, Printing, Reading," in *The New Culture History*, edited by Lynn Huntly. It appears frequently in studies of medieval manuscripts and the medieval reading experience.

Caligula A. ii's typological identity as a personal book suggests that it was, in fact, read in hand. In their opening to *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, Stephen Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel suggest that "the codex can have a typological identity that affects the way we read and understand the texts it presents" (Nichols and Wenzel 2). Cotton Caligula A. ii's typological identity comes, in part, from its status as a personal object. When I say personal, I mean a book meant to be carried about and read by an individual with texts that catered to the tastes of a specific person or household. I do not suggest that the manuscript was never used in a public setting, or that it was not used to provide a text for a listening audience to enjoy, which would certainly be untrue. What I do suggest, however, is that a vital part of Cotton Caligula A. ii's typological identity is its personalized nature. Its size, shape, and contents suggest that it was produced in a personal setting to be enjoyed in a personal way. This statement may seem problematic to many scholars of medieval literature who have always rightly asserted that medieval texts were read aloud to listening audiences and should be considered as a public rather than a personal experience.<sup>15</sup> While it is impossible to know for certain whether a manuscript was encountered visually or not, the individualized structure and contents of Cotton Caligula A. ii suggest that it was enjoyed privately.

Its personal nature is indicated by both its structure and contents. Cotton Caligula A. ii is a small book. It measures only 225 by 180 mm: smaller than a standard piece of printer paper. It is also, as it survives, fairly thin: consisting of only 139 folios. In other words, it is ideally suited for individual reading; it is small, easy to handle and sits comfortably in the hands or lap of a

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Taylor reiterates the idea that "silent reading cannot be assumed" in *Textual Situations*. He stresses the history of scholarship on "the oral aspects of medieval works" as well as the close connection between literature and performance during the medieval period (Taylor 20). J. A. Burrow has even gone so far as to compare the medieval manuscript to the score of a musical, meant to be performed with special attention paid to its auditory qualities (Burrow, *Medieval Writers* 47). Both underline the idea that even those reading alone read aloud or muttered to themselves. I addressed this debate further in my introduction.

reader.<sup>16</sup> This is a significant difference from a manuscript like Auchinleck, which being more than double the size, is not easy to carry around or read in hand. Cotton Caligula A. ii also differs from Auchinleck significantly because it was compiled and written by a single hand. While a single editorial presence governed Auchinleck, five or six different scribes contributed to its construction, and it was a commercial production thought to have been made by an editor for a buyer.<sup>17</sup> Cotton Caligula A. ii, on the other hand, was written by just one person and reflects an individual taste and identity. This is another difference from other manuscripts studied here. Lincoln's Inn 150, for example, was also copied by a single scribe; however, the nature of the texts within does not reflect a unique taste to the same degree. The texts of Lincoln's Inn 150 are all popular narratives still thought, even after the discarding of the "minstrel book" theory, to have been used for public performance.<sup>18</sup> While the intricacies of the texts themselves and the emendations the scribe made in Lincoln's Inn 150 hint at its individual identity, the choice of texts does not provide a great deal of personal information beyond the fact that the compiler wanted to include texts popular with a large audience. Cotton Caligula A. ii, on the other hand, exhibits a range of more personal texts. The most obvious are the medical recipes that have been copied by a later owner onto the blank fol. 13v. In its life, the manuscript functioned as an individualized resource for a person or household, and texts were added to suit his or her or its individual needs. One can hardly imagine reading medical recipes aloud to an audience, so this later addition highlights the use of this book in personal space.

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<sup>16</sup> Erik Kwakkel makes a similar argument about the use to which holster books and other small, portable books were put in "Cultural Residue in Medieval Manuscripts." He connects the dimensions of the pages and thickness of the books directly to the status of these small books as personal, portable objects (Kwakkel 70–73).

<sup>17</sup> For a complete description see Chapter One.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Three, as well as Horobin and Wiggin, "Reconsidering Lincoln's Inn MS 150."

This seemingly personal choice of texts extends beyond those added in by a later hand. The texts that make up the original manuscript also appear to have been chosen to suit the individual needs of a person or family. A look at the contents of the manuscript and the kinds of texts contained within reveals something of the tastes of the person who put together this manuscript, or the person for whom it was put together. First, the compiler of the manuscript seems particularly keen on stories that feature animals. Most of the romances, two of the three saints' lives, and some of the longest short poems contain animals. *Sir Eglamour*, *Octavian*, *The Chevalier Assigne*, the legends of St Jerome and St Eustache, *The Chorle*, *The Nightengale*, all feature children taken by animals, loyal animals who serve as faithful companions, or dialogues with birds. Second, there are a great many very direct and personal advice poems scattered throughout the manuscript featuring topics on everything from *The Pestilence*, to appropriate confessions, to proper table manners. First-person narrative style tends to feature in these poems and the manuscript possesses an unusually large number of texts that literally speak to the reader, offering advice in a direct, individualized way.

The individualized nature of the manuscript can be seen even within the texts themselves. A particularly interesting example appears in the presentation of Lydgate's advice poem *Stans puer ad mensam*, which appears early on in the manuscript. This poem survives in a number of manuscripts and provides advice to a boy about how to behave at the table. The exemplar in Cotton Caligula A. ii is unique, however, because the compiler has expanded it. Lydgate's original is only fourteen stanzas long, but Cotton Caligula A. ii's version is twenty-four. The compiler of Cotton Caligula A. ii has extended the poem by fusing part of Lydgate's *Dietary* to *Stans puer*.<sup>19</sup> While it is possible to argue that these two poems simply come one after another,

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<sup>19</sup> For edited editions of these two poems and the lists of surviving manuscripts see *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, edited by Henry Noble MacCracken: *The Dietary*, 1. xv, 2. 702-07; *Stans Puer*, 1. xxviii, and 2. 739-44.



the layout suggests the scribe intended them to be read as one. Unlike every other text in the manuscript, there is no break or indication that a new text starts when the dietary begins; it continues on in the same style and format as the original poem.<sup>20</sup> The compiler seems to have decided that *Stans Puer* did not provide enough material and therefore needed to be augmented.

What is more, the compiler does not append all of the *Dietary*, instead, he chose to add only certain parts to *Stans Puer*. He leaves out most of the text that concerns actual diet (advice about what one should and should not eat) and instead focuses on those stanzas that address behavior both at the table and in society. He even adds a stanza on idleness sideways in the margins of the final folio, 16v. This tells the reader, in part: “Of sleuth on morn and sloverynge ydelnesse / delrych of all vyse ys chef porteres / voyde all dronkew lyerys and lechours” (fol. 16v, ed. White 215).<sup>21</sup> Behavior and the avoidance of sloth and lechery were of such import to the compiler that he upset his typically very neatly organized *mise-en-page* to ensure the stanza on such behavior had a place in the manuscript.<sup>22</sup> The addition almost seems to suggest that a certain need of the household or perhaps, a certain vice of the household (or of a member of the household), necessitated the addition of this stanza. Far from simply including the entire contents of an exemplar, this scribe added and amended the texts he encountered to suit his own personal needs. In fact, I would argue that this manuscript as a whole was compiled very specifically to suit the needs (both entertainment and educational) of a child. The number of texts featuring

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<sup>20</sup> I discuss the scribe’s neat and structured *mise-en-page* further down.

<sup>21</sup> All references to Cotton Caligula A. ii refer to the transcription prepared by Denise C. White. For ease of reference, I cite the relevant folio number and page number in her edition.

<sup>22</sup> The stanza on idleness does appear in the original poem as edited by Henry Noble MacCracken. However, the scribe seems to have skipped it in copying and gone back to add it in. The original omission could be due to scribal error such as eye skip (on which see Clemens and Graham 35), but considering the number of other missing stanzas it seems significant that the scribe decided to add just this particular one back in.

young children and animals,<sup>23</sup> as well as the specific and didactic nature of many of the advice poems suggest that this manuscript could be seen as an early example of a book for children.<sup>24</sup>

In any case, there can be no doubt that the manuscript was compiled in a very specific and individualized way and with specific themes in mind. It is a book made to suit a person, or a household, and its identity is shaped in part by that status. The personal nature of the book affirms its use by an individual and, consequently, a direct visual engagement with the texts. In other words, its personal identity implies that a reader could create a manuscript matrix in encountering this codex because it is likely that he or she engaged both with the texts and the physical object. Having established that this was a book likely to be both seen and read, I now turn to the impact a visual encounter with the manuscript has on the understanding of literary magic found within.

Sight is the first of two processes involved in the creation of the manuscript matrix – wherein interpretive links are built in the mind of a reader encountering a manuscript. A reader begins to establish interpretive understanding the moment he or she sees a manuscript object. Seeing the manuscript object is the first step in understanding that object, and a reader's visual encounter with even the plainest of manuscripts fundamentally shapes his or her understanding of the compendium in its entirety, from its texts, to its characters, to its literary devices. The importance of interacting visually with a manuscript has long been established by scholars of illuminated manuscripts. The number of critical works addressing the elaborate *mise-en-page* of

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<sup>23</sup> I have already mentioned the number of texts that contain animals, but there are also an unusually large number of texts that feature children – either as children of the heroes of the romance, or heroes of their own tales. *Sir Isumbras*, *Octavian*, and *Sir Eglamour*, for example, all feature the children of the heroes. *The Chevalier Assigne* too features seven children who age only to eleven years old. The hero of this tale is one of these children.

<sup>24</sup> Nicholas Orme's *Medieval Children* discusses medieval children's literature, which is as yet a relatively unstudied area of children's literature, due in large part to the lack of surviving material. Orme mentions many of the texts contained in this manuscript as ones that may have been enjoyed by children (Orme 274-304). I hope in future to make this argument at length.

spectacularly illuminated manuscripts testifies to the import of the physical object.<sup>25</sup> The combination of text and image inherent to the medieval reading experience in many ways defines our understanding of medieval manuscript culture. The support, however, is just as important in those manuscripts that do not feature elaborate images – in those manuscripts that simply present words on a page. Cotton Caligula A. ii is a plain manuscript; it has no illuminations and few marginal markings. Even without elaborate images, however, the object still impacts a reader's understanding of a text. As Rust suggests, the page's visual impact extends beyond illuminations, to “the semantics of a text itself as an image – as a picture of writing” (Rust 19). In other words, every aspect of the page is a fundamental part of the reader's interpretive interaction with a manuscript and a text, and, the page itself guides the reader towards specific understanding.

The structure, *mise-en-page*, and layout of the script of Cotton Caligula A. ii reveal that it was compiled to make meaning in a very specific way. The structure of the whole book, the *mise-en-page* of the folios, and the marks in the margins provide readers with clues about how the book is intended to be read and understood. M. B. Parkes's “The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book” fundamentally changed the way in which medieval manuscripts were understood by assigning intentionality to the way in which they were compiled and to the way in which the scribe guided reading through interventions on the page. His chapter principally concerns religious and academic texts that often feature a complex *mise-en-page* with glosses, headings, and other guides to reading. However, he extends his argument to “well-produced copies of vernacular texts” and suggests that the concepts of

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Scott McKendrick, *Royal Manuscripts: The Genius of Illumination*, Christopher de Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, Janet Blackhouse, *The Illuminated Manuscript*, Sandra Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment: Rereadings of Knighthood in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes*, Sophie Page, *Magic in Medieval Manuscripts*. This list is in no way comprehensive, but includes examples of general studies, a study of a collection, a study of an author's manuscripts, and a study of a topic featured in diverse manuscripts.

*ordinatio* and *compilatio* influenced the production of manuscript forms leading “to much greater sophistication in the production of books” (Parkes 64). Parkes’s discussion of evidence of *ordinatio* and *compilatio* in vernacular texts concerns one of the most elaborately produced vernacular manuscripts from the medieval period – the Ellesmere manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*. However, it is equally applicable to a manuscript like Cotton Caligula A. ii which also shows evidence of careful organization and compilation meant to guide interpretation.

In his discussion, Parkes identifies a few indicators of thoughtful *ordinatio* and *compilatio*, most of which are evident in Cotton Caligula A. ii. The indications include the underlining of proper names, listing of sources in the margins, initials and pictures, rubrics, running titles, rhyme brackets, and colours as guides. He also suggests that these different forms do not necessarily need to have been added by the original scribe, but can be put in place by later readers (Parkes 64–66). All of these devices are meant to guide the reader and influence the way in which the text makes meaning, and most of them appear in Cotton Caligula A. ii. Most obvious is the neatly organized layout of each individual page. The scribe has carefully organized the number of lines included on a page to ensure texts start at the top of a new page, and typically even at the top of a new recto. He also varies between double columns and single columns and clearly put a great deal of thought into the way in which the text should appear in the manuscript. The scribe’s thought process can be seen at the outset of *Octavian*, which begins on fol. 22v in a single column and shifts after only a few lines to double columns. The scribe must have decided this form was better suited to the narrative style. Titles open almost every text, and running titles typically appear on the verso of each text, ensuring readers always know where they are in the manuscript and that they can easily access the desired text. Although no illuminated initials appear in this plain book, space has been left in several instances for the

addition of a decorated initial, and on a number of folios the first letter of each line throughout a text is coloured with red ink.<sup>26</sup> The space left for decorated initials suggests the scribe may have had higher aspirations for this book that were perhaps not realized – i.e. the initials were never actually decorated. Each of these features of the *mise-en-page* contributes to the overall visual impression made by the manuscript as a whole.

Closer interpretive guides are also provided by the scribe in and amongst the texts themselves.<sup>27</sup> The scribe typically uses a flourish to denote a new stanza, carefully and consistently guiding the reader's understanding of the poetic form and the flow of the narrative. So too does he often provide rhyme brackets, emphasising how the text should be read. These appear in numerous texts including *Susannah*, *Sir Eglamour*, and *Octavian*, but stop with *Sir Launfaul*, in which only the first three lines are bracketed. This choice may indicate an awareness that the reader is probably used to the rhyming format by now and may no longer need this particular guide in the longer, romance texts. The rhyme brackets do appear again later on in complex, short poems. The scribe, for example, once again indicates line breaks and rhyme schemes in an intricately laid out first-person prayer to Jesus found on 70v in which certain lines are set off to the side providing emphasis and slowing the reader's perusal of the poem. In addition to these more stylistic guides, guides to comprehension can be found in a number of places where the scribe provides cues to help the reader navigate a series of religious ideas. In *Ypotys*, for example, on fol. 79vb, when the child lists the seven different versions of heaven, a number is provided in the margin to clearly and easily indicate to the reader which one is being

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the opening of *The Chorle*. The space left for the initial appears on 17r, and the red initials appear throughout.

<sup>27</sup> These marks could be otherwise categorized as textual annotations, on which see Clemens and Graham, although, in their study of mostly Latin manuscripts, they do not mention the kinds of marks in Cotton Caligula A ii. (Clemens and Graham 43-48). The marks emphasising the poetic nature of the text (the stanza marks and rhyme brackets) seem specific to vernacular poetry.

spoken of at a given moment. Such annotations appear in several of the texts present in the manuscript, alongside other marginal marks that emphasise certain points, and guide the reader towards a specific and clear understanding.

While this manuscript at first glance may seem a plain and unimpressive household collection of vernacular texts, the compiler/scribe has taken extensive pains not only in his choice and presentation of texts, but also in ensuring the reader's understanding of each text is facilitated through his or her visual encounter with each page. The care taken, and interpretative choices revealed in the structuring of certain texts further enhance the very personal experience afforded in an encounter with this manuscript. A reader reading *Octavian*, for example, in a modern edition, would have a very different experience from a medieval reader encountering Octavian in this manuscript or even any manuscript.

The markings that I have noted here are in no way unique to this manuscript. As Parkes's study indicates, most are scribal conventions that can be found in diverse manuscripts. That they are conventional, however, in no way detracts from the impact they have on the medieval reading experience and the reader's creation of meaning. In fact, the commonness of these markings shows how greatly the medieval reading experience is enhanced and altered by marks on a page. Texts and understanding are shaped by what appears in the margins. The physical nature of the manuscript, the texts that come before and after, and the *mise-en-page* all impact the reader's understanding. This influence extends to essentially every aspect of each of the texts found within this manuscript volume and opportunities for new modes of interpretation are vast. What interests me most here, however, is how the personal physicality of the manuscript impacts the way in which magic and the supernatural must be understood and interpreted throughout Cotton Caligula A. ii. These seemingly insignificant structural points provide further, important

nuance to the manuscript's creation and reader's understanding of the supernatural across the compendium.

The physical features of the manuscript all contribute to its Christianization of literary magic. This is first evident in the ordering of the texts which conflates the sacred and secular and asks that readers consider one in light of the other. The transition from *Susannah* to *Eglamour*, in the manuscript, for example, fuses the biblical story with the romance and necessarily invites interpretation of the events of the romance in light of the precedent established in the religious text. So too do the religious poems by Lydgate that follow after the romance of *Lybeaus Desconus* ask readers to reflect back on the romance in light of the message about death and faith provided in *O mors quam amara et mormoria tua*.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the poems by Lydgate, *Quinque Ulnra* and *Quinque Gaudia*, as well as the legends of *Jerome* and *Eustace* that follow the romance *Isumbras* conflate sacred and secular interpretation.<sup>29</sup> How do the lions that inhabit the saint's lives, reflect back on the animals that populate *Isumbras*? The structural confluences of the manuscript as a whole necessarily encourage readers, as they engage with the manuscript, read the poetic structures, come to know the character types, and engage in exegesis, to conflate and reflect on the ways in which the secular supernatural can be understood in terms of the sacred. As this process has already been outlined in the previous three chapters I do not dwell further on it here. I want instead to consider the influence of other physical attributes of the manuscript form.

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<sup>28</sup> *Lybeaus* finishes on fol. 57r, and on the back of that folio the religious poem by Lydgate appears. It is followed by a series of other religious poems.

<sup>29</sup> The final texts in the manuscript all follow one another in their original order as can be ascertained by the fact that each finishes and continues on a subsequent recto/verso. *Quinque Ulnra* follows *Isumbras* on the subsequent verso, as *Jerome* follows *Quinque Gaudia*.

The visual structure of the lines and annotations build further links between the sacred and secular supernatural. In the very first text of the manuscript as it survives today, the Christian supernatural is highlighted in the way in which the scribe has lineated and annotated the text. *Susannah* is an alliterative poem from the book of Daniel that tells of a woman falsely accused of adultery and threatened with death.<sup>30</sup> The version found in Cotton Caligula A. ii is missing the first 104 lines of the text but is one of the most intricately laid out poems in the manuscript. The original poem was composed in thirteen-line alliterative stanzas rhyming ababababcbdddc. The scribe of Cotton Caligula A. ii follows this structure and uses brackets to indicate which lines rhyme with which. Each pair of “a”s is marked off together as are each pair of “b”s. The triplet rhyme (the three “d”s) is blocked off and the two “c”s are similarly connected through brackets.<sup>31</sup> The scribe has also chosen to place the ninth and thirteenth lines of each stanza (the “c” rhymes) to the right of the main text, outside of the initial set of rhymed brackets. Lines nine and thirteen are the shortest in the stanza form and already typically serve emphatic or explanatory purposes. Their placement outside of the main body of lineation, however, serves to render their emphatic purpose even more powerful. They highlight a specific moment in the poem – typically those lines they sit beside – changing the interpretive force and influencing the reader’s encounter with the text.

While diverse moments in the poem are highlighted through this unique structuring, on the final folio of the text, each of these offset lines highlights the presence and marvelousness of the supernatural. The final stanzas of the story tell how Susannah is falsely accused of adultery, how the prophet Daniel steps in to defend her, and how an angel appears with a burning sword to

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<sup>30</sup> For a description of the text, which survives in five manuscripts, including one in the Vernon Manuscript, see Russell A. Peck, editor, “The Pistil of Swete Susan.” See also Alice Miskimin, editor, *Susannah: An Alliterative Poem of the Fourteenth Century*.

<sup>31</sup> For a clearer understanding of what this looks like, see the example provided below.



reaffirm her innocence and punish her accusers. The angel's appearance is highlighted and rendered particularly marvelous through the lineation and annotations on the page. The stanza where the angel appears is copied below. It begins with Daniel challenging the accusers' claim:<sup>32</sup>

Thow seyst þu segh Sussanis synne in þy sight  
Tell me now tryforly under what tre  
He swere both myche god þt most ys of might  
Under a syne sothly my self I he se  
Now þu lvest in þy hed be heven upon hyght  
An angell wt naked swerde þe nyzes full ne  
He hath branndest þt bronde and burnysched full bright  
To merke þe at medyll in messe in two or in thre  
Thow brekest goddess commandement  
To sle such an innocent  
Wyth any fals jugement.  
(fol. 5r; ed. White 193)

The diagram illustrates the lineation and annotations on the manuscript page. Brackets are used to group lines: lines 1-4 are grouped together, lines 5-8 are grouped together, and lines 9-12 are grouped together. The annotation 'No lees' is placed to the right of the bracket for lines 5-8, and 'Un dewly on dees' is placed to the right of the bracket for lines 9-12.

<sup>32</sup> I have attempted to mimic the layout as it appears on the manuscript page here by indicating which lines are connected through brackets and showing where lines nine and thirteen appear. See below also for an image of the page from the manuscript.

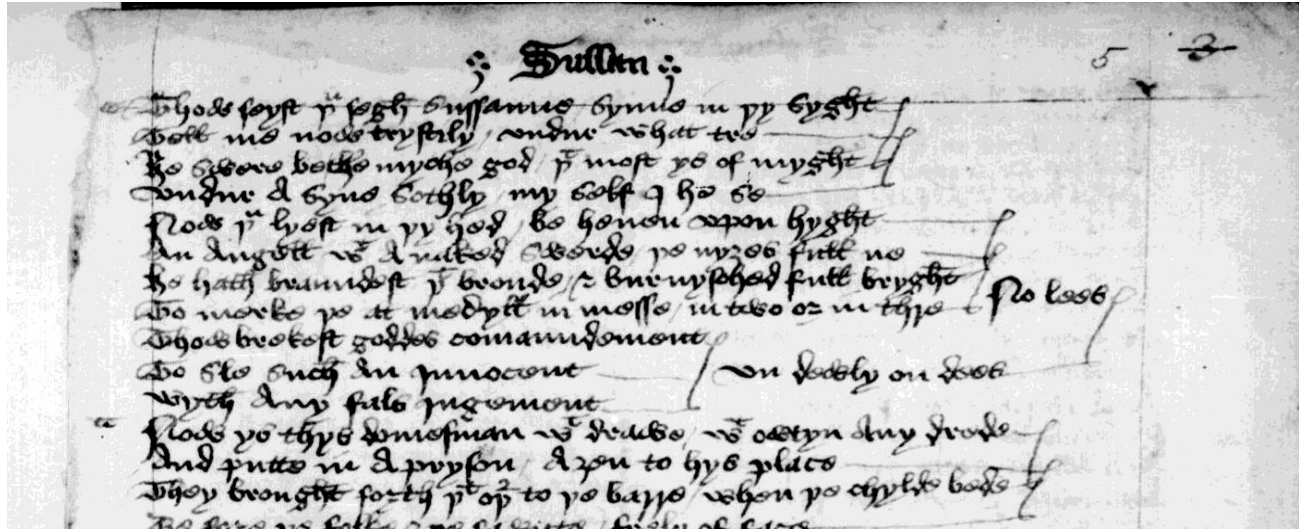


Figure 1: The top of fol. 5r from BL, MS Cotton Caligula A. ii.

The offsetting of lines nine and thirteen changes the way in which the text is read. Instead of following the entire stanza and modifying the story accordingly, the lines seem to modify just that which is bracketed off. So, in the first instance, line nine, the emphatic statement that this is “no lees” or no lie, modifies just those lines that refer to the appearance of the angel with a burning sword. Already an emphatic truth claim common in depictions of the supernatural, the layout of the page serves to emphasise, even further, that this supernatural occurrence is no lie, but rather a wondrous, if somewhat hard to believe, instance of divine intervention. The second offset line (line thirteen) also emphasises the impact of that appearance and the validity of the angel’s power, reiterating the heinousness of an accusation against an innocent person from a position of power – “un dewly on dees” or unduly on the dais.

As the page goes on, the structure continues to emphasise the angel’s divine intervention and punishment of those who falsely accuse Susan. Daniel describes the final act of the angel, which is also offset:

I see an angell stande	}	
to take þe dome of ȝor hande		To brytyn ȝow bathe
Wyth bronnand bronde		

(fol. 5r, ed. White 193).

The angel's final act is to punish the guilty with burning sword. The structure of the culminating lines of the second last stanza of the page further emphasises not only this supernatural intervention, but also the supernatural object (the "bronnand bronde") and the righteousness of this intervention. As the reader's eyes skip over the lines of the text, the emphatic line, placed off to the side necessarily stands out, reaffirming the simultaneous truthfulness, wonderfulness, and righteousness of the supernatural sword in the text. While the placement of these lines and the offsetting of certain lines is to some extent incidental to the scribe's choice of structure, the intricate structuring and page design brings to the foreground this aspect of the text, and this structuring impacts the way in which the supernatural in the texts that follow *Susannah* must be understood. The emphasis on the angel's intervention and the burning sword becomes even more noteworthy when another supernatural object appears in a structural mirror in the subsequent pages.

*Eglamour of Artois* follows *Susannah* in the manuscript, and, in its similar evocation of a supernatural sword, provides an example of how the structure of a manuscript can help blend the sacred and secular supernatural. *Eglamour* would have followed *Susannah* in the original form of the manuscript, evident in the fact that it begins on the verso of *Susannah*'s final folio. *Eglamour of Artois* tells the story of two lovers, Eglamour and Cristabel, separated by an unsupportive father who requests that Eglamour perform three seemingly impossible tasks to win the hand of

his daughter.<sup>33</sup> It exhibits many similarities to the story of *Susannah*, including the motif of the falsely accused and persecuted woman<sup>34</sup> – Cristabel is eventually put into a rudderless boat by her father – and various magical objects, including a supernatural sword. The sword mirrors the one seen in *Susannah*. Cristabell describes the sword as follows:

Also a good swerde I schall zeve þe  
Sent pole fond it in þe grekes see  
Of egge syche knowe I none  
Þr was nevr helm made of stele  
And þu have happe to hit hym wele  
Butt hyt woll thorowȝ gone (fol. 7ra, ed. White 197).

This astounding sword, which can cut through anything or anyone, has biblical origins, having been found by St Paul in the “greke see.” Eglamour uses the sword throughout the romance to perform his feats and to defeat many great evils, including a murderous boar who kills sixty people a day, and a “wykked worme” who has been terrorizing a kingdom (fol. 9va, ed. White 202). Because of where and how it appears in the manuscript, Eglamour’s sword mirrors the angelic sword of *Susannah*. The passage quoted above, wherein the sword is first described, appears on fol. 7r, separated by just one folio from the angel’s sword in *Susannah*. It also appears at the top of the folio, in almost exactly the same spot as the sword first mentioned in *Susannah*. As a result, in their physical space on the manuscript page, the two items are mirrored. In turning the pages, the reader encounters first a sword rendered emphatically supernatural and righteous by the *mise-en-page* framing its appearance. Then, just two pages later, another sword appears in

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<sup>33</sup> For a complete introduction to the romance, which survives in six manuscripts, see the edition edited by Harriet Hudson in *Four Middle English Romances* (Hudson 97-100).

<sup>34</sup> Helen Cooper identifies “Women on Trial” as one of the eight primary memes of romance in *The English Romance in Time*.

the exact same position on the manuscript page. While Eglamour's sword does not reside in the same elaborate manuscript structure as the angel's sword, its appearance in such close proximity builds a link between the two items. The two supernatural items, which are already linked in their origins in a biblical setting and in their functions, become even more closely connected in the way in which the reader encounters them on the manuscript page. In the simple parallel siting of the two related objects a relationship is created that might not otherwise be apparent. In their physical relationship, the sword from the secular romance can take on attributes of the sword from the biblical narrative. In the reader's encounter with the physical manuscript, the sacred and secular supernatural conflate.

Similar conflations of the sacred and secular supernatural appear throughout the manuscript. Marginalia and textual layout help bring magic within a Christian frame in the romance *Sir Launfal*, for example. Thought to have been composed by Thomas Chestre sometime in the late fourteenth century, *Sir Launfal*, based on Marie de France's *Lanval*, tells the story of a knight of King Arthur's court who is taken in hand by a powerful fairy Tryamour.<sup>35</sup> Tryamour is an influential force in this romance, providing extensive wealth and status for her lover and acting, at the end, as a sort of arbiter of justice over the King's court, and particularly of Guinevere's behavior. For a long time, there was a great deal of scholarly interest in *Sir Launfal*'s and especially in Tryamour's pagan heritage and Celtic roots.<sup>36</sup> At the same time the romance and its fairy were often dismissed as overly simplistic, immoral, and uninteresting.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For a complete introduction see the version edited by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Laskaya and Salisbury 201-09). Cotton Caligula A. ii preserves the only surviving copy of the romance.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Roger Sherman Loomis, "Morgain La Fee and the Celtic Goddesses" who links Tryamour with the Irish goddess Macha (R. S. Loomis, "Morgain La Fee" 191-92). See also B. K. Martin's "Sir Launfal and the Folktale" where he questions the validity of those Celtic roots, but still links Tryamour (and the fairies of *Sir Gawain*, and *Sir Orfeo*) to otherworldly creatures from folktales.

<sup>37</sup> B. K. Martin's "Sir Launfal and the Folktale" is an example of a scholarly work that takes this approach (Martin 199-200).

While Tryamour has more recently been rescued from this simplistic and somewhat unfair reading, she still does not garner a great deal of individual attention.<sup>38</sup> She is, however, a key example of the way in which magical women are made positive in medieval romance. Like the magical and pseudo-magical women of the Auchinleck manuscript, Tryamour is made into a positive Christian figure within her romance. Helen Cooper briefly brings out this idea in *The English Romance in Time* by suggesting that the way Tryamour is described connects her with the Virgin Mary: “both Lambewell and Launfal speak of their mistress in terms normally reserved for the Blessed Virgin” (Cooper 183). This is evident in the supernatural women of Auchinleck and applies absolutely to Tryamour. So too do the other factors identified in my second chapter that render magical and pseudo-magical women Christian.<sup>39</sup> In Cotton Caligula A. ii, however, her Christian righteousness is further enhanced by her physical situation in the manuscript compendium.

In this case marginalia brings Tryamour within a Christian ethos by evoking a different, Christian way of interpreting her and her power. Cotton Caligula A. ii does not contain a great deal of marginalia, beyond the reading guides (stanza marks, rhyme brackets), provided by the original scribe.<sup>40</sup> The marginal markings in Cotton Caligula A. ii are in no way as extensive as those discussed, for example, in Michael Camille’s *Image on the Edge*.<sup>41</sup> Some scholars, even those who seek to reinforce the importance of simple marginalia, would certainly discount the

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<sup>38</sup> She appears commonly in complete studies of the Breton lay or romance, and also in studies of fairies in romance – such as those by Helen Cooper and James Wade. Individual analyses of her character are somewhat rarer. Amy N. Vines does dedicate a chapter of her *Women’s Power in Late Medieval Romance* to Tryamour as patroness in *Sir Launfal*.

<sup>39</sup> For a detailed discussion of how supernatural women are validated through representational relationships with holy women see the section on Supernatural Women in Auchinleck in Chapter Two.

<sup>40</sup> This may not always have been the case but was perhaps caused by the extensive trimming the manuscript has undergone over the course of its life.

<sup>41</sup> Camille’s *Image on the Edge* provides an evocative discussion of “the cultural space of the margins” as peopled by monstrous, delightful, and baffling illustrations (Camille 9). No such illustrations appear in Cotton Caligula A. ii as it survives today.

importance of Cotton Caligula's marginalia or write them off as small, insignificant doodles or pen marks.<sup>42</sup> There are, however, a few surviving instances of marginal markings that, despite their utter simplicity, contribute to the overall constitution of the manuscript matrix, helping to blend the sacred and the secular supernatural.

One such marking appears in *Sir Launfal*. On the verso of fol. 39v, in the bottom margin in ink light enough to be almost indiscernible on the British Library's microfilm copy of the manuscript (it is far more visible in the flesh), there appears a small cross. This is not an elaborate or decorated cross; it consists simply of a horizontal and diagonal line and probably took the hand that added it the briefest of seconds to scratch out. One could easily pass by this mark as insignificant; however, it appears at several other points in the manuscript. The most significant iteration is in the version of Lydgate's *The Nygthyngale*. There, two similar crosses surround the line that describes the angels who "fell don for pride to helle with lucifere" (fol. 60v, ed. White 303). In this instance, the crosses mark a moment of particular import to whomever added them. The moment reasserts the consequences of sin and stresses the importance of shirking pride and temptation. The markings flag the line and ask any other readers who encounter the manuscript to take note, perhaps to stop and consider the implications of the angels' fall from heaven. The cross shape of the mark too, implies that the line might be considered in light of its relevance to Christ and Christianity. Stephen G. Nichols might refer to such markings as "image particles:" that is, "visual elements or details corresponding to aspects of the narrative that suggest an emphasis or reading in the poetry we might not have seen without

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<sup>42</sup> Andrew Taylor discusses the scholarly tendency to dismiss marginalia as insignificant or simply a source of entertainment (Taylor 55). He also discusses the relationship between the extensive marginalia and text in BL MS Royal 10. E. 4 (Taylor 151-67). Rust's *Manuscript Matrix* also takes into account very simple instances of marginalia, especially in her discussion of Middle English abeces (ABC poems). Neither discusses margins as plain as Cotton Caligula's.

the image” (Nichols, “The Image” 19). This subtle marking suggests or highlights a certain feature or reading of a text and ensures those who encounter the manuscript pause at that moment.

This interpretative impact extends to *Sir Launfal*. In that instance, the cross does not mark out a specific line in the text, but rather appears at the bottom of the page, at some remove from the actual text. The page on which it occurs depicts Launfal’s departure from Tryamour and Guinevere’s attempt to seduce him. In other words, it occurs when Launfal’s faith to his fairy mistress is about to be tested, and, I would argue, asks the reader – not in any intentional way but simply in the fact of its presence – to similarly consider the Christian implications of the moment. How can the gifts Launfal receives through Tryamour’s magic, his removal from and return to the court, and his inability to keep his promise to his lady, be interpreted within a Christian light? Could this testing of Launfal’s faith to his fairy mistress be an allegory for Christian faith? Could Guinevere’s interference not simply test his love, but test his Christian loyalty more generally? Does the text, in fact, provide a larger, allegorical message about the necessity of belief in the face of a difficult circumstance, and the consequences that might occur if one’s belief falters?<sup>43</sup> This simple marginal mark opens an interpretive door in the reader’s understanding of the text, and perhaps widens his or her interpretation of Tryamour, Launfal, and the magic that binds them. The marginal mark helps to bring the character and the text as a whole, with all its fairy magic and justice, within a Christian ethos.

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<sup>43</sup> The mid-twentieth century saw an explosion of interest in symbolic and allegorical interpretations of medieval literature, including romance forms. I evoke this tradition only to consider the implications of a potential for a Christian interpretation of magic. D. W. Robertson Jr.’s “The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens: a Topical Approach through Symbolism and Allegory” and “Some Medieval Literary Terminology, with Special Reference to Chretien de Troyes” are two important, early examples. See also Morton W. Bloomfield, “Symbolism in Medieval Literature,” Erich Auerbach, “Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature,” and Jean Misrahi, “Symbolism and Allegory in Arthurian Romance.”



There is one other instance in the text where a similar structural aspect of the manuscript layout brings Tryamour within a Christian representational frame and in so doing validates her and her magic. The famous ending of the text, where Tryamour saves Launfal and blinds Guinevere, is a moment of righteous justice wherein Tryamour acts in the same way as the heavenly avenger of *Susannah*, coming in all her supernatural glory to take revenge on a person in a position of power who falsely accused someone beneath her.<sup>44</sup> The final column of the text in the manuscript, fol. 42va, depicts the moment when Tryamour and Launfal ride out of the court and off to her fairy land. This final column appears directly beside an evocation of Christ and Mary on the manuscript page, and the proximity connects Tryamour and her act with one of Christian righteousness. A glance across the opening lines of texts in the two columns at the top of fol. 42v, appears as follows:

Be lady lep an hyr palfray

Jhu crys our savyour

And bad hem alle have good day

And hys modyr þt swete flowr

Sche nold no lengere a byde

Helpe hem at her need

(fol. 42v, ed. White 267)

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<sup>44</sup> Helen Cooper agrees that this moment restores “moral equilibrium” to the text but goes on to suggest that fairy justice can be unreliable (Cooper 200). Tory Vandeventer Pearman in “Refiguring Disability: Deviance, Blinding, and the Supernatural in Thomas Chestre’s *Sir Launfal*” also highlights Tryamour’s “status as an agent of justice” in her discussion of how Gwenivere’s blinding challenges “common medieval notions of femaleness, femininity, and disability” (Vandeventer Pearman 131–32). See also Dinah Hazell, “The Blinding of Gwennere: Thomas Chestre as Social Critic.”

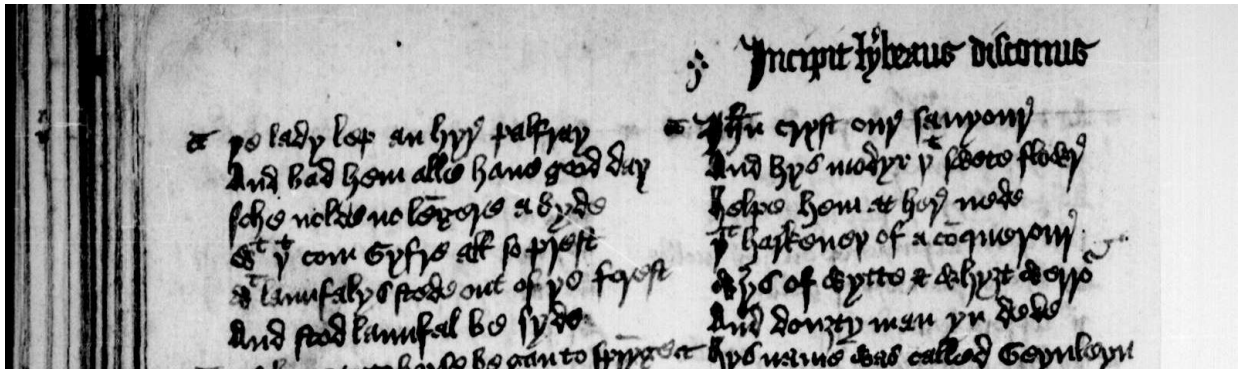


Figure 2: Fol. 42v, BL Cotton Caligula A. ii.

The first column depicts Tryamour helping Sir Launfal; the second is the opening of *Lybeaus Desconus*, which begins with an evocation of Christ and his mother who “helpe hem at her nede,” who helps those in need. In this layout, this final appearance of “pe lady” (Tryamour) is linked directly with Christ’s “modyr” both of whom are helpers of those in need.

The structural proximity of the lines describing the two women places them physically and interpretively side by side. It builds a connection between the two and enhances the interpretive possibilities surrounding them. It is physical and inspired only by a cursory glance across the page, but the nature of the manuscript compendium, which links texts so closely together, helps to establish those connections within the manuscript matrix. Perhaps as a reader pauses to take in the page as a whole, his or her eyes might skip from the lady to the mother and establish the connection between the two. The way in which the two texts are presented make possible such an event and consequential connection. The scribe’s organizational structure functions in a material, physical way, to conflate two powerful, supernatural women, and consequently to blend the sacred and secular supernatural.

All of these examples illustrate the degree to which the sacred and secular supernatural are blended in this particular manuscript; indeed, they are blended to the point that they are essentially indistinguishable. The nature of my analysis in this chapter and dissertation as a

whole has necessitated a distinction between the sacred and secular supernatural. I have discussed them with separate terms and considered how one impacts the other. However, the structure of the manuscript reinforces Barbara Newman's sense that this separation is a false one – that the sacred and the secular cannot be distinguished.<sup>45</sup> The ways in which the sacred supernatural influences the secular supernatural, and the conflation rendered by their physical proximity and by the manuscript structure reiterates the degree to which they are blended. This blendedness is apparent in almost every instance of magic that appears in Cotton Caligula A. ii. Romance texts like the *Chevalier Assigne*, for example, blend sacred and secular supernatural to the point that it is difficult to distinguish between the two. In this romance the hero is helped by a wondrous shield that shoots fire and a snake at his opponent. The cross on the shield implies that this is a miraculous occurrence, but it is never categorically identified as such, and blends into the larger supernatural structure of the text, where people become swans through the intervention of a magical chain. *Emaré* too, which features a woman bedecked in fabulous cloth, discusses this cloth and its wearer as ambiguously supernatural. *Emaré* is called “no erpely womon” (fol. 72rb, ed. White 326), or “no erpely thing” (fol. 73rb, ed. White 328), but no one seems to be able to tell whether she is saint, fairy, or fiend. Her persecution, prowess,<sup>5t</sup> and eventual return to power suggest she inhabits all these roles simultaneously, reinforcing the idea that one does not need to be sacredly or secularly supernatural, but can simply be supernatural.

The romances depicted in this later manuscript, as well as its physical structure, embody an approach to the supernatural that does not categorize sacred versus secular. Instead, all supernatural is blended not just in the content of the romances, but in the structure and nature of the compendium as a whole. The manuscript form conflates the sacred and the secular

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<sup>45</sup> As Newman writes in her preface and seeks to show throughout her book, “the sacred was the inclusive whole in which the secular had to establish a niche” (Newman viii).

supernatural and creates in the reader's manuscript matrix an interpretive world where all supernatural resides within the same physical and interpretive space. As the reader handles and sees the physical manuscript, the relationship between all the supernatural grows. As he or she turns the pages, subtle signs including marginalia, lineation, and annotations greet the reader's sight beginning the process of building an interpretive space within which a unified, positive, Christian version of the supernatural resides. When the reader delves into the actual content of the works, these signs shape the understanding of the text strengthening the bond between the sacred and secular supernatural. The manuscript as object reiterates the degree to which a positive Christian vision of magic is inherent to the medieval reading experience. In its very nature, in the way literature was consumed, distinctions between sacred and secular supernatural are torn down and an interpretive world that celebrates magic in all its forms arises. This visual interaction with the manuscript and with the texts contained within is just one piece of the intricate connection shared between the medieval manuscript and supernatural forms. If we turn now to the reader's engagement with the texts – the second aspect of the manuscript matrix – and the similar function shared by magical objects and the manuscript object, the strength of the relationship becomes even clearer.

### ***Reading: Magical Objects and the Manuscript Object***

As I noted at the outset of the previous section, seeing is the first encounter a reader has with a manuscript object and one that is vitally important to the reader's understanding of the texts contained within. This initial interaction, however, is only a precursor to the second, arguably more important, interaction with a manuscript object – reading. It is only when a reader reads a text that the interpretive links built by the physical state of the object manifest themselves into

understanding. In her conceptualization of the manuscript matrix, Rust posits the act of “involved reading” – reading that draws the reader deep within the world of the text – as one of the key processes in the creation of interpretive understanding and of the manuscript matrix. Citing examples from mostly devotional texts, Rust suggests that medieval modes of reading were particularly primed to encourage readers “to virtually inhabit a textual world,” both spiritually and emotionally (12). For Rust, a key component of a medieval reader’s interpretive engagement with a manuscript is a brand of reading that draws him or her deep within the text itself. This process alongside the visual engagement with the text described in my first section is what builds an interpretive space in the mind of the medieval reader and guides his or her understanding of the texts in the manuscript. This contributes, as I discussed in the last section, to the conflation of the sacred and secular supernatural during a reader’s interaction with Cotton Caligula A. ii. I would like in this section, however, to take the idea of “involved reading” beyond just its role in the creation of the manuscript matrix. If the reach of this term is expanded beyond the medieval reader’s close engagement with a text to encompass the impact on the reader garnered by involvement with a literary work, an even deeper role for the supernatural in the manuscript object can be found. If the impact and function of the supernatural objects depicted in manuscript’s texts are compared with the impact and function of the manuscript itself, a similar purpose becomes apparent.

This section argues that Cotton Caligula A. ii is both a compilation of magical objects and itself something of a magical object. In his study *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London*, Arthur Bahr looks at four manuscripts that contain “disparate texts whose assemblage into a larger structure is meaningfully interpretable” (Bahr 3). His interpretive focus centers on medieval London, and he argues that the four manuscripts are

“compilations *from* medieval London that, when assembled and apprehended together, become a compilation *of* medieval London” (Bahr 4). For Bahr, the manuscripts simultaneously denote and reflect the place from which they originated and are a manifestation of that place in and of themselves. They are both *from* and *of* medieval London. I take Bahr’s geographical mode of analysis in this section and apply it to a literary device, arguing that Cotton Caligula A ii is a compilation of magical objects that when “assembled and apprehended together” becomes a magical – or powerful – object in and of itself. The manuscript object mirrors the magical objects of medieval literature, providing knowledge, wealth, and power to the reader. The close relationship I identify between magical objects and manuscript objects further highlights the degree to which the sacred and secular are conflated in this manuscript compendium and in medieval reading culture. It shows that not only the physical structure but also the impact on the reader intricately link the sacred and the secular supernatural. This analysis makes plain that the connection is inherent not only to the way in which medieval literature was read but also to the purposes it served.

Magical or supernatural objects are commonplace in medieval literature. Amanda Hopkins affirms that such objects are “considered a defining element” of the Breton lay (Hopkins 71). They appear throughout romance, in hagiography, and in diverse religious texts. In Auchinleck, for example, a magic ring shared between Floris and Blaunchflour saves the couple from death; magic gloves prevent incest between a mother and a son in *Sir Degare*; a magic mirror betrays Bevis and Josiane to their enemies in *Bevis of Hamptoun*; and a key swallowed for seventeen years by a fish frees Pope Gregory from his penance on a rock. The famous green girdle of Cotton Nero A. x promises to save Gawain’s life in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and the misuse of divine relics results in the downfall of Belshazar in *Cleanness*. Lincoln’s Inn

150 is made marvelous in part by the many wonderful objects Alisaunder encounters during his adventures around the world. While these objects have been studied individually, the broader implications of a series of objects contained within a single manuscript – itself an object – has yet to be analyzed. The supernatural objects of Cotton Caligula A. ii, however, all reflect on a larger theme of the manuscript, powerlessness, and function, in part to reconcile or remedy that theme.

Power and its manifestations have been discussed in many and various ways in scholarly work on medieval romance. Jane Bliss, for example, addresses the power of names in *Naming and Nameless in Medieval Romance*. Amy N. Vines looks at the power of women as patrons in *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance*. Geraldine Heng discusses the power of cannibalism in crusader narratives in her *Empire of Magic*. This topic is particularly common in works that address the relationships between women and men in medieval romance, many of which suggest that women have little power in romance and men possess all the power.<sup>46</sup> Vine's *Women's Power in Late Medieval Romance* and Judith Weiss's "The Power and Weakness of Women in Anglo-Norman Romance" are examples of studies that have rethought and nuanced this approach by positing a different kind of female power.<sup>47</sup> In Cotton Caligula A. ii the theme of powerlessness or loss of power crosses gender divides, impacting the heroes of romance as much as it does the heroines. When I refer to power and powerlessness, I refer not to physical power or mental power, but rather to power within a given social circumstance – to the ability to control

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Rosemarie Deist's *Gender and Power: Counsellors and their Masters in Antiquity and Medieval Courtly Romance*, in which she discusses the power of women as councilors in the romances of mostly Chrétien de Troye. She suggests that while women can hold power through their roles as councilors, the central power belongs to men: "real power in the twelfth century was held by a male elite, an elite "born to rule," which women were not" (Deist 172). For a more historical take, see Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean, editors, *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*.

<sup>47</sup> Vines suggests that women do in fact possess a great deal of power in romance as patrons of the heroes. Weiss analyzes both instances of weakness and of power in Anglo-Norman romance within their social context.

one's own fate through exercising some form of influence.<sup>48</sup> Power in this case is about control over one's self; it is the ability to determine and implement one's own choices and actions and to hold some degree of sway over others. Among the folios of Cotton Caligula A. ii, it is difficult to find.

From the opening folios of the manuscript, the image of the powerless hero/heroine reigns supreme. *Susannah*, the first text of the manuscript, centers around this theme. After refusing to commit adultery, Susannah is accused and arrested by two false men who throw her “in a downgon” to await judgement: “Tyll domes men had dempte þe ded to declare” (fol. 3v, ed. White 190). She is left chained and without food. Emphatic throughout the early pages of the story is the lack of power Susannah has in the situation. Despite her innocence and her goodness, there is nothing she can do to counter the actions the men have taken against her. This does not necessarily denote weakness. In his introduction to “The Pistil of Swete Susan,” Russell Peck asserts that readers “must be especially careful not to confuse Susan's heroism with passivity or weakness” (Peck 76). As Peck emphasises, Susan's passivity, faith, and patience are all part of her heroism in the text. The ability of the men to accuse her, lock her up, and persecute her without cause, however, does indicate her lack of power in her social circumstances. She resides in a society where those in a position of authority can easily overpower and condemn her, and she is powerless to prevent it. She is at the mercy of an unjust social structure. The same theme appears in the next text in the manuscript *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, which similarly features a woman rendered powerless through accusation and persecution. While Elgamour is off fighting a dragon, Cristabell gives birth to a son, and her father consequently exposes both her and her child in rudderless boat: “The erle gaf to god a vowe / Dow3tyr into þe see schalt thowe / In a

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<sup>48</sup> This conceptualization of power ties in to the second definition of power given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “Control or authority over others; dominion, rule; government, command, sway” (“Power, n.1”).



schype alone” (fol. 10ra, ed. White 203). Here again the heroine is powerless to resist the control her father takes over her life, and her consequential fate on the seas. Once in the boat, this powerlessness only increases when her son is taken by a gryphon. Cristabell laments her circumstances: “Then þe lady sayde Allas / That evyr I born was / My chylde ys tane me from” (fol 10rb, ed. White 203). This lament shows the degree to which Cristabell is aware of her powerlessness. As she says, she did not choose to leave her child, but rather had him taken away from her. She has no control of her situation, even though she has moved beyond the clutches of her evil father. All she can do is lament her own existence and her inability to assert control over forces more powerful than herself.

A similar narrative plays out in a large number of other texts in the manuscript: *Emaré*, *Octavian*, *Isumbras*, *Sir Launfal* and *Eustache* all depict women and men rendered powerless by their social circumstance, unjust persecution, or forces more powerful than themselves. In *Emaré*, the heroine is also exposed in a boat by her father after refusing to commit incest. Like Cristabell, Emaré is tossed about on a violent sea: “She was driven wt wynde & rayn / Wt stronge stormes her a gayn... She was driven fro wawe to wawe / She hyd her hede & lay full lowe” (fol 72vb, ed. White 327). The violence of the sea and her total inability to direct her vessel or even see where she is going represents her powerlessness. Emaré is like a leaf floating atop the water, completely without control, driven by forces greater than herself, utterly powerless. Emaré’s powerlessness continues throughout the romance as she is picked up and then set to sea again by the evil mother of the king she marries. *Octavian* presents a similar story with another wife accused of adultery, exposed in the wilderness only to see her children taken by wild animals. *Isumbras*, *Sir Launfal*, and *Eustache* turn their attention to male powerlessness, and in each of these romances the heroes are placed in similar situations to the women described

above. Through loss of fortune, the heroes are cast out into the wilderness and lose all control over their lives, possessions, and often their offspring. Isumbras begins his romance popular, powerful, and proud, and in the first few folios loses his wealth, his wife, and eventually his children, who are taken by wild animals. As he exclaims, “wo is me / I have loste my wife & children iii / And am myself alone” (fol. 132ra, ed. White 442). Poor and alone in the wilderness, he is powerless, rejected even from the society that enables him to assert and define his own power. Throughout the romance he sinks from a position of power and influence to the lowliest (if most devout) palmer begging outside the court of his former wife. Sir Launfal too loses his wealth and status thanks to an unjust and powerful Guinevere and leaves Arthur’s court to wander destitute in the wilderness. *Eustache* similarly depicts a powerful knight in the Saracen court who, on the advice of God disguised as a deer, leaves court only to lose his wife and two sons (the children are taken by a wolf and a lion) and become the “most recche” (fol 138v, ed. White 455). In each case, the suffering of the men is orchestrated by forces more powerful than themselves (God and a corrupt queen), and each becomes utterly powerless in the face of this overwhelming force.

The overwhelming powerlessness found within all these texts derives from a few specific memes identified by Helen Cooper as common to romance narratives - the rudderless boat, accused women, and the return of the rightful heir.<sup>49</sup> While different, each meme subjects the hero or heroine to a situation in which they lose control and power. Individuals are typically exposed in a rudderless boat by a corrupt figure of power, and then, like Emaré, are taken in hand by the forces of nature and/or divinity as represented by the sea. Accused women become subject to powerful, corrupt figures and cannot themselves counter that force. Children stolen by

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<sup>49</sup> See Cooper 106-36, 269-323, and 324-60.

animals (who eventually return as rightful heirs), seem subject to forces of nature, fate, or divinity – to forces that are intangible, supernatural, but ultimately irresistible. The similarity of the memes lies in the fact that in each situation the hero or heroine is rendered powerless by a force more powerful than him or herself and well beyond his or her control. That force is overwhelming, overpowering, sometimes supernatural, and there is little the hero or heroine can do to fight against it. The dangers and consequences of powerlessness against these forces are manifest throughout the texts in the manuscript.

At the same time, the heroes and heroines of these tales must reassert their power or regain control in order to succeed in their narratives. Finding, defining, and asserting power becomes the only way to conquer these seemingly impossible and oftentimes tragic situations. One of the key ways in which powerlessness is overcome in the manuscript is through the use of magical objects. It is a logical counter. If a character is confronted with a force more powerful than him or herself, it makes sense that an object with properties beyond the realm of his or her natural world is one of the only possible counters. In her conception of power, Rosemary Deist suggests that power in the courtly world is tied to “corporeal, physical signs” (Deist 172). She links this kind of power to men only and speaks more of its performative nature. However, magical objects are a different kind of physical sign that can grant power to those who lose it, whether male or female. They function as both physical signs and material objects that elevate characters back into a position of social power. In *Susannah*, for example, the angel appears with burning sword to defend Susannah against the unjust persecution to which she has become subject. While the angel, more than the sword, is what returns Susannah to her former position of power within her society, it is important that the Angel carries the sword at all. The Angel with “þt bronde” that “burnysched full bright” (fol. 5r, ed. White 193), reminds the men who have

accused Susannah of the overwhelming power of God – a force they are entirely unable to counter. The sword, which burns with supernatural light, serves as a visual reinforcement of the power of divinity. Its appearance in the hands of an angel returns power back to the hands of the righteous and puts justice back into the social structure.

The return of power to the heroine modeled in this text by the appearance of the angel and the sword anticipates the use to which magical objects will be put throughout the manuscript. In *Sir Isumbras*, for example, the hero regains his social standing and power because of a magic ring shared between him and his wife. After Isumbras loses his wife, children, and wealth, he becomes a palmer and eventually finds himself at the court of his former wife. While he is taken into the court and begins to regain some of his power in the narrative, it is not until he is reunited with his wife, because of the magic ring, that he once again takes control. When the couple part, as Isumbras describes, “A rynge was broken be twyx us / That no man shulde it ken” (fol. 133vb, ed. White 445). This ring is split as a token between the two of them and no human should be able to mend it again, but, when his wife begins to suspect that the palmer is Isumbras she asks if he has the ring. Then, “She layde to gydr þ partyes tweyne / Hole it wax þe sothe to seyne / Ryzt a monge hem alle” (fol. 133vb, ed. White 445). The ring magically reforms and becomes whole again, acting as a supernatural talisman to Isumbras’s identity and to their partnership.

Immediately thereafter – within the space of a few lines – Isumbras regains total power when he is “Crowned kynge” of “many ruche londes” (fol. 133vb-134ra, ed. White 445-46). The magic ring enables him not only to regain wealth and status, but to reassert control over his own life and his own situation. He has “rekovreth all his care” (fol. 134ra, ed. White 446) and can move on from this position to find his sons and defeat an army of Saracens. In this way, the ring allows

him to reassert his power over his life, his family, and even a kingdom.<sup>50</sup> It is a tangible means of overcoming the supernatural forces that stripped him of his former position, serving as a supernatural sign of Isumbras's right to power.

Similarly, in *Emaré*, a supernatural cloak is the only thing that allows Emaré to hold on to any semblance of power in her life, and it protects her against the overwhelming forces that seek to destroy her. The cloak, spun with the narratives of forbidden lovers, is not always understood as supernatural. It has long been a subject of scholarly interest – indeed the principal focus of scholarly work on *Emaré*.<sup>51</sup> Few studies, however, center on the cloth as magical object, even though, as Margaret Robson points out, certain characters remark on its supernatural qualities (Robson 69). Corinne Saunders dedicates some time to the supernatural qualities of the cloth suggesting that the robe characterizes “the balance between unease and beauty,” making those who encounter Emaré either love or hate her and spreading its “profound aura of the supernatural” over Emaré herself (Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural* 139). As Saunders and Robson have remarked, there is no question in the text that the cloth is supernatural. It is a remarkable object, woven with a variety of precious jewels, and endowed with the mysterious power of “The Emerayle dowghter of hepenes” (fol. 71va, ed. White 325). Precious jewels and stones were often thought to have magical properties in the Middle Ages and are closely linked with the supernatural.<sup>52</sup> This and the mystical power endowed by its eastern origins confirm that

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<sup>50</sup> Raluca L. Radulescu in *Romance and its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England* connects the trials and tribulations of Isumbras, the loss of power and return to power of the hero, as well as the popularity of the romance, to the War of the Roses, and particularly to the depositions of Henry VI in 1461 and 1471 (Radulescu 69–70).

<sup>51</sup> Elizabeth Scala laments the scholarly preoccupation with the cloth in “The Texture of *Emaré*,” even as she suggests the cloth is a romance in and of itself, useful in considering the production and value of this brand of popular literature. Some examples include Mortimer J. Donovan, “Middle English *Emaré* and the Cloth Worthily Wrought”; Ross G. Arthur, “*Emaré*’s Cloak and Audience Response”; Amanda Hopkins, “Veiling the Text: The True Role of the Cloth in *Emaré*”; and Margaret Robson, “Cloaking Desire: Re-reading *Emaré*.”

<sup>52</sup> See Kieckhefer’s chapter on “Magical Objects: Automaton and Gems” in *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* 100–105). Lydgate’s *The Nightengale* in Cotton Caligula A. ii also mentions the perception of stones as possessing magical properties.

the cloak is a marvelous object: “a fairy,” according to the emperor. So too, as Saunders emphasises, is it a key part of the way in which “the romance interweaves magic and miracle” (Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural* 139). Its supernatural qualities are simultaneously magical and Christian. The *mise-en-page* of the manuscript accentuates this through the placement of the cross marking discussed above beside the line “Thys cloth ys rychely dyght” (fol. 72ra, ed. White 326). The marginal cross interweaves further sacred interpretive possibilities into the seemingly secular cloth, rendering its supernatural qualities both sacred and secular.

However, as Saunders notes, the actual supernatural qualities of the cloth are never elaborated. Unlike Isumbras’s ring, it never magically changes shape or makes the wearer invisible. Helen Cooper might include this robe within her category of “magic that doesn’t work” – magic that is mentioned in romance texts but never actually does anything (Cooper 137).<sup>53</sup> However, even though the robe seems to do nothing, its magical qualities actually lie in the way in which it allows Emaré to regain power and social standing after being exiled. Each time Emaré is exposed in a boat, she is wrapped in the cloak, and each time she is found, the first thing remarked upon is the cloak. When Sir Kadore finds her on the shores of Gaul he first notes “A glysteryng þing” in the boat (fol. 73ra, ed White 328). When she is found again after being exposed by her mother-in-law, the merchant who finds her notes that “the cloth on her shon so bright” that “he was aferde of þt sight” (fol. 74ra, ed. White 332). In both situations, the cloak draws her rescuers towards her and makes her remarkable to them, providing an introduction and ensuring her salvation. Its supernatural lure allows her to overcome the forces that would see her dead upon the seas.

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<sup>53</sup> One of the typical features of romance identified by Helen Cooper in *The English Romance in Time* is magic that is mentioned in a text but does not actually work when it is needed.

Once her life is secure, the cloak also provides the means by which she regains power. The cloak is what gains the notice of the king of Gaul. As she serves before him, the king notes that “þe cloth upon her shone so bryȝth / When she was þr y ydyþth / She semed non erthly þyng” (fol. 73rb, ed. White 328). The marvellous garment draws his eyes, enhancing her own beauty and confirming his decision to marry her. This initial attraction, inspired by the cloak, restores Emaré for a time to a position of power and status in the court. It is, however, much more than a “love-charm” that attracts her suitors or enhances her beauty.<sup>54</sup> When she loses power the second time through the ministrations of her jealous mother-in-law, who exposes her in a boat while her husband is away, the robe not only helps to save her life, but also features in the way in which she returns again to a position of power. When she and the king are reunited after many years, the cloak is central to the king’s recognition of her. As the text notes “aȝeyn hem come þe lady gent / In þe robe bright & shene” (fol. 76rb, ed. White 334). No mention is made of facial or physical recognition in this instance, it is the robe that reunites the pair and restores Emaré to her position as queen. While there are many factors that influence Emre’s loss of power and restoration, the robe is central to ensuring not only the preservation of her life, but in allowing her to regain and hold on to power in the social structure of the narrative. The marvelousness of the object and the influence it has on those who see it combat the more-powerful forces that try to render her powerless.

The same is true in *Sir Launfal*. When Launfal is at his lowest, most powerless point, Tryamour takes him in hand and restores his position in Arthur’s court. She does so not through bestowing titles, or lands, but instead through giving him magical objects including a banner that

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<sup>54</sup> Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury call the cloak a love charm in their edition of the romance in *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Laskaya and Salisbury 149-50). Dieter Mehl describes the cloak as an “inseparable attribute” that enhances her beauty and symbolizes her perfections (Mehl 139).

makes the possessor invincible, a wonderful horse, and “an alner” or purse which, “as oft þu putttest þe hond þr inne / A mark of gold þu schalt wyne” (fol. 37va, ed. White 257). These objects restore Launfal to his position at Arthur’s court and give him the love of those in his society. A tournament is even called “For love of syr Launfel” (fol. 38va, ed. White 259), which, thanks to his magical objects, he wins. It is not Launfal’s character, chivalry, or bravery that returns him to his former position of power, but instead his fantastical objects and the wealth they provide. Near the end of the romance, his loss of status coincides with the loss of the objects. Shortly after he betrays Tryamour, he looks “yn hys alner,” in his purse for money and finds “þr nas noon for soþ to say” (fol. 40va, ed. White 263). Just twenty lines later, he is bound and taken away. While Guinevere’s false accusation and persecutions are what cause Launfal’s fall from social grace, the objects shielded him against that and the loss of them means the loss of that social status. The objects and Tryamour’s magic are the only means through which Launfal can overcome the corruptions of the court and maintain his social power. When Tryamour returns for him decked in spectacular things, Launfal is finally able to rise entirely above that society and leave its corruptions behind.

Before moving on to my final and most significant example, I want to briefly mention the role that animals play throughout the manuscript in restoring power to the powerless. While I do not intend to suggest that animals are in any way a kind of object, they often play a similar role in the narrative. What is more, while they are not objects, they often inhabit a kind of objective status in the roles they take on throughout the manuscript. They represent both the overwhelming forces of nature that tear down the control and power of individuals and also the physical means through which that power is restored. Animals remove and return power in *Isumbras*, *Octavian*, *Eglamour*, and the legend of *Eustache*. In each case animals steal the children of the



hero/heroine: Isumbras's sons are stolen by a lion, a leopard, and a unicorn; Octavian's sons are stolen by an ape and a griffon; Eglamour and Cristabell's child is taken by a griffon; and Eustache's children are stolen by a wolf and a lion. The protagonists are powerless to prevent the thefts, and these animals reinforce the inability of these heroes to fight against forces more powerful than themselves – in this case, the forces of nature or perhaps of divinity. However, the animals also often help return the child and consequently the hero to a position of power by becoming companions and helpers. In *Isumbras*, for example, the sons return as knights “upon a lybarde þt opr on a unykorn / The thrydde on a lyone” and help their father defeat the Saracen army with their remarkable companions, ensuring the solidification of his social position (fol. 134ra, ed. White 446). In *Octavian*, the child Octavian is passed amongst various creatures (from the ape, to a lion, to a griffon), until he ends up with a lioness who takes him in, raises him, and becomes his constant companion helping him regain his social standing and prowess in battle. Even in the Legend of *Jerome*, Jerome's ability to tame a lion who becomes his helper is an important part of his power. In each case the assistance of a supernatural animal restores or reaffirms the power of the heroes/heroines and their children. While not magical objects in and of themselves, these animals fulfill a similar role. They represent a supernatural, or more powerful, force outside of the individual that enables that individual to combat the larger forces outside of their control.

My final example from the *Chevalier Assigne* combines the appearance of supernatural animals and supernatural objects to demonstrate what happens when a hero or heroine is unable to access a magical object and so regain power. It provides a contrast to those narratives that show how magical objects help the heroes and heroines re-establish power through depicting the tragedy of one who does not. The romance of the *Chevalier Assigne* tells the story of seven

children born with silver chains around their necks. Their mother is locked away by a jealous stepmother and the children are exposed in the woods and taken in by a hermit. Wanting proof of their deaths, the evil stepmother demands the chains. A servant cuts the chains off six of the children who immediately “flowen up swans,” become swans (fol. 127r, ed. White 432). In this case, the loss of a magical object turns the children into animals. In this romance something as basic as their physical form is tied to a magical object, and through the loss of that object, the children are destined to live out their lives in the form dictated by the supernatural force.

The children regain control only once, thanks to the one brother who maintains his human form, they regain the chains and become human again.<sup>55</sup> However, over the course of the story, one of the chains is destroyed, which means that one of the children is stuck forever in the shape of a swan. At the very end, the poet laments this tragedy:

But on was alwaye a swanne for loss of his Cheyne

Hit was doole for to se þe sorwe þt he made

He bote hym self wt his byll þt all his breste bledde

And all his feyre federed fomedre upon blode (fol. 129v, ed. White 437)

Because he lost his chain, this child must remain as a swan; he is devastated by his fate and bites his breast in sorrow. All who see him lament the tragedy to the extent that “ryche ne pore” can no “lengere loke on hym.” The image of the swan biting his own breast until he bleeds is heartbreaking enough, but the additional knowledge that this is a child exiled from his family and doomed to live his life as a swan makes it all the worse. In this moment, the consequences of not having a magical object that returns an individual to his or her physical form and consequential social standing are made explicit. The loss of the magical object means that this one child, unlike

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<sup>55</sup> The heroic child, Enyas, wins the fight with the assistance of a magical object – a shield.

all the others, has not regained his social status and his power. The other six children are christened and brought into the court. They are named, and as the final line of the narrative states, “þus þe botenyng of god browȝte hem to honde” (fol. 129v, ed. White 437). They are given social status, as represented by their names, and brought into the Christian fold. They are returned to the court to live a life of powerful ease. The swan with no magical object is left to languish, outcast from the court and all society on the water. It is a tragedy, but in this romance, there is no way around it. The magical object is the only means by which the children can regain social status and power over their own lives and physical forms. As such, this romance, which comes near the end of the manuscript, reinforces the point that powerlessness is combated by a magical object, and that if one does not have access to that supernatural object, the consequences are severe.

Despite this tragic culmination of my discussion of magical objects in this manuscript, the overwhelming sense that magical objects can restore power is positive, even hopeful. The implication is that no matter how terrible things seem, something can be found to combat a seemingly overwhelming force. However, the idea that a magical object can solve all your problems is not particularly helpful in real life where magical objects are somewhat hard to come by. I would like to suggest now, however, that in its very function and purpose, the manuscript itself can be seen as taking on the role of a magical object. It is a real and tangible object that allows a person to gain power and status.

There is something magical about reading. Interacting with a manuscript or book means being drawn into another world and another frame of mind that exists outside of your given reality. Even more than this, reading can have a huge impact on how one leads one’s life – providing advice, exemplars, and entertainment. This was recognized in the Middle Ages. In his

introduction to *The Book and the Magic of Reading in the Middle Ages*, Albrecht Classen outlines the elevated power given to the act of reading during the Middle Ages. He suggests that reading carried particular import and that those who could read were “the harbingers of divine knowledge and the carriers of specific human learning” (Classen ix). Here Classen speaks of access to Christian teachings that the ability to read provided; however, in this introduction and in the book as a whole, it is clear that this impact extends to all forms of reading. This power is necessarily linked to the book as object which was admired “as the fundamental instrument of learning” (Classen xxi). Indeed, Classen stresses that “the various poets and artists [discussed in his volume] share the common belief in the book as a representative of true wisdom, as a medium through which to reach the highest form of human enlightenment, and finally as a catalyst for salvation” (Classen xxix). This attitude is apparent in Cotton Caligula A. ii. The text *Carta Ihesu Christi* opens:

Who so wyll evr rede thys boke  
And wt hys gostlye ye þr on loke  
To opr skole dare he not wende  
For to save hs sowle fro þe fende  
Then for to do as þs boke telleth  
For holy wryte for soþ hy spelleth  
Ther for y pry 3ou for charyte  
3e þt þs boke wyll rede or se  
Wt 3or herte & all 3or mynde  
Bereth derworpely þt 3e her fynde  
And fulfylle ht in dede

That 3e now yn þs boke shull rede (fol. 77ra, ed. White 336)

The sentiment expressed in this opening affirms a multitude of things discussed in this chapter. First, it reaffirms the status of the medieval manuscript as something someone will “rede and se” – that is both read and seen. Reading and seeing are equated in the passage as two fundamental components of engagement with “thys boke,” and thus both integral to the way in which “who so wyll” understands its meaning. Next, the passage reinforces the point made by Classen about the power of reading in the Middle Ages not just as a source of knowledge but as a source of salvation. The text stresses that the reader must pay attention to this book so as “to save hs sowle fro þe fende.” Reading and following the instructions provided in “thys boke” lead a person to salvation.

These opening lines are found in several surviving versions<sup>56</sup> of the *Carta Ihesu Christi*, which goes on to give a narrative account of Jesus’s life in the first person, focusing largely on the passion, crucifixion, resurrection, and their larger impacts on humanity. It would consequently be easy to dismiss this opening as referring only to the *Carta*’s particular advice about how to follow the word of God and lead a good religious life. Certainly, if read in isolation, this is the meaning of these early lines. However, because of its situation within the manuscript volume, the expanse and impact of these words swells to touch all the texts contained within “thys boke,” the manuscript book. The implication is that each and every text, the whole volume, should be read “Wt 3or herte & all 3or mynde” to find good advice that the reader should then “fulfylle...in dede.” The book as a whole is more than just a source of entertainment; it is a source of advice, learning, and even salvation. Possessing, looking at, reading, and

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<sup>56</sup> Mary Caroline Spalding in *The Middle English Charters of Christ* gives a comparative rendering of five manuscript versions (Spalding 46-91). Spalding identifies six surviving manuscript versions of the B-text, which is the text found in Cotton Caligula A. ii.

engaging with this book will provide the reader with the knowledge to help him or her achieve salvation. But the impact of the book goes beyond religious life. The advice poems, the romances, the visions of heaven and hell provide nuanced and complete information about how to navigate all of life's challenges. In so doing, the manuscript teaches the medieval reader how not only to lead a good life, but to achieve social power and influence – just like the magical objects discussed above.

Indeed, if a reader engages with this manuscript, he or she can transform his or her own life and gain the skills necessary to succeed in social situations. Social power and influence are in many ways achieved through behavior. Engagement with this manuscript object can teach the reader everything from table manners, to how to avoid the plague, to how to live a religious life. Texts including *Stans Puer ad mensam* and *The Chorle* provide readers with valuable advice about how to manage themselves in social situations and how to navigate society. *Stans Puer* would be a particularly great resource in teaching an individual how to properly eat at a table, advising the reader to “kepe feet & fyngerys & handys styll,” “pyke not þy ose,” and “pare clene thy naylys.” According to the text the recommended appropriate behavior is performed in the interest of impressing “þy sovreyn” and gaining social power and status (fol. 14r, ed. White 210). *The Chorle* teaches the reader to be discerning, to “ȝef not of wisdom to hastely credence / to evry tale nor to evry thing” (fol. 19v, ed. White 221), and to “Desyre...not by no condyscyon / Thyng þt ys unpossyle to recur” (fol. 20r, ed. White 222). The text stresses the importance of not believing everything you hear and of not lusting after that which is impossible. Both these examples help the reader achieve status and power by teaching them how to appropriately navigate their society through proper manners and a discerning, thoughtful mind.

Other texts teach the reader how to lead a good and healthy life. The medical recipes and *The Pestilence*, for example, instruct the reader how to avoid, and in some cases, cure debilitating illness. To avoid the pestilence, one should “use lytyll þt tyme any frute butt hyt be sour frute or newe And ete lytyll or nozt of garlyk onyons or lekes or any such mets for þay bryngen a mon in to unkendely hete” (fol. 65v, ed. White 313). Following this advice should allow the reader to avoid catching the plague and so help ensure that he or she leads a long and healthful life – and remain physically able to procure and hold power. In addition to this general similarity, supernatural objects often directly or indirectly ensure the health and well-being of those who encounter them. Eglamour’s supernatural sword and Launfal’s banner help indirectly to keep the heroes alive, while a relic (Veronica’s veil – imprinted with Christ’s image) heals Vespasian in *The Seege of Jerusalem*. Supernatural objects, like the manuscript object, help keep individuals alive and well.

Finally, as I noted above, the manuscript also attends to the reader’s spiritual wellbeing. Countless texts beyond the *Carta Ihesu Christi* teach the reader how to lead a religious and moral life. *All way fond to say þe Best*, for example, teaches humility and that one should make use of moderate speech. *Ponke God of all* teaches the reader to always thank God no matter what happens and to avoid sin. The visions of *Tundale* and *Owayne Miles* make explicit the torments that await those who fail to lead a devout life, and the eternal pleasures in store for those who follow the path of Christian virtue. Each offers salvation to those who attend to its advice – a wondrous outcome indeed.

Throughout the volume, diverse texts teach the reader how to lead a good life in all manner of ways. Much of this advice relates directly to how one can achieve a moral lifestyle and salvation in death, and to how one can achieve power and status in society. The implication

is that the person who makes use of this manuscript will be afforded a wealth of knowledge applicable to the betterment of their own situation in life. The knowledge and lessons to be learned can allow the reader to gain or regain power – perhaps to rise from a fallen social position through improved manners, to recover from a debilitating illness from medical advice, or to turn from the path towards damnation to find salvation. In this way, the manuscript book itself mirrors the function of the magical objects found within the volume. The manuscript is the means through which a person can achieve power, and whereas the magical objects depicted in the romance narratives are fantastic and out of reach, this object is present, tangible, and accessible, found in the hands of the person taking in these lessons. The manuscript object can thus be seen as distinctly related to Isumbras’s magic ring, to Emaré’s cloak, and to the Chevalier Assigné’s chain in its ability to provide power to those who encounter it. It is a real-life manifestation of a magical object, making real the possibility of achieving power through a physical thing.

This connection between magical objects and manuscript objects makes plain the import of Rust’s sense of engaged reading with which I opened this section. In a medieval reader’s engagement with a text, and consequential construction of the manuscript matrix, he or she is not only drawn into the world of the text, creating images and interpretations that link secular and sacred versions of the supernatural. She or he also comes to experience and benefit from this conflated version of the supernatural, applying both sacred and secular ideas to his or her own life. Just as it does not matter if Emaré’s cloak is magical or divine, so too does it not particularly matter if the advice given is religious or pertinent to secular matters. All come together through the reader’s engagement with a text, impacting and influencing the life he or she leads. The manuscript compendium is itself something of a marvel. Magic is bound not only in the texts



neatly inscribed on the page, but in a reader's very interaction with the book as a whole. It is a compilation of magical objects and a kind of magical object in and of itself.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has shown the degree to which literary magic is bound up in the very structure of medieval literary culture. It is bound in the fundamentals of the reader's interaction with a manuscript, both its form and its content, and in what the reader may potentially gain from that interaction. This chapter has also shown how inherent the blend of sacred and secular supernatural is to the medieval reading experience. This dissertation has sought to show how four fundamental components of medieval literary culture – the poetic forms, characterizations, modes of interpretation, and material support – allow for a blending of sacred and secular supernatural and a consequential validation of literary magic. More so than any other chapter, however, this chapter has demonstrated just how inherent the link between the sacred and secular supernatural is in medieval literature. It is evident even in the material support that defines the medieval reading experience. Everything from the structure of the manuscript, to the layout of the pages, to the way in which lines of text present themselves to the reader enhances and augments the blending of magical forms. This is made even more obvious through engagement with the texts, which especially in this later period, almost seamlessly blend sacred and secular supernatural, placing magical chains alongside miraculous shields (as in *The Chevaliere Assinge*) with little concern. It is also obvious in the way in which the medieval manuscript object, with its educational, instructional, and entertainment purposes can be linked with magical objects themselves. The connection between all kinds of supernatural is not only built into the very fabric of the texts and the manuscript but is also mirrored in the impact of reading itself.

From this perspective, it is no wonder that literary magic becomes so deeply ingrained in literary history. It is bound into the very structures – both physical and textual – of the literature of the Middle Ages. In this way too it stays well outside of the cultural fears of magic that, as I mentioned in the introduction, were beginning to develop at this point in medieval England. Fear over magic was often deeply seated in a textual tradition (in religious or scholarly works like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, for example), and yet is less evident in the literary tradition. Literary magic is not only made acceptable in its literary forms through its representational relationship with Christianity, but it is also deeply set within the very nature of medieval literature itself. It hides in plain sight, easy to miss, easy to pass by, but a fundamental aspect of the medieval reading experience in both actual and metaphorical ways.

I have stressed throughout this dissertation that literary magic speaks to a fundamental need of readers. It speaks to the desire to know more, to the desire to gain power, to the desire to be entertained, and to the desire to connect the everyday to the miraculous. Fundamentally, the manuscript (and the literature it contains) speaks in exactly the same way. It too serves the ambitions, curiosities, and desires of readers. Read in this way, literary magic can be seen as a kind of metaliterary manifestation of the manuscript form. Literary magic caters to the same desires and whims, even serves the same purpose as the medieval manuscript. Both seek to entertain and to assist those who encounter them. Much of what magic offers to readers is the same as that which literature offers those who consume it. A magic ring offers characters a chance to reform themselves and reassert their power at an appropriate moment in society; a manuscript offers readers the tools to reform their way of living and perhaps find a new meaning to their life. A relic offers a leper a chance to be healthy again; a manuscript gives readers the tools (more or less effective) to avoid contracting leprosy. A burning sword reaffirms Christian

righteousness; knowledge of Christian doctrine gives readers the tools to recognize and protect righteousness. Both literary magic and literature open up new possibilities for readers. Both provide not only new and entertaining experiences, but new ways of understanding and interacting with the world. Reading a manuscript and benefiting from its contents is a powerful act, and its significance is perhaps best mirrored in the transformative weight that magic carries in medieval literary form.

Magic is not only deeply ingrained in the literature of medieval England but representative of its very nature. The portrayals of wonderful characters, of marvelous actions, and of supernatural objects reflect the excitement, the hope, and the potential of humanity. Literature does the same thing. Perhaps literary magic pervades and lives on because it is so fundamentally intertwined with the written word. It becomes as easy to love and accept as the stories we hear every day.

## **Conclusion: Literary Magic Looking Forward**

Medieval literary magic is deeply ingrained in and reflective of the culture of reading that produced it. The stock phrases and poetic structures that characterize Middle English literature are used to create both sacred and secular marvels blending them within one poetic system. The character traits common to Middle English literature, often grounded in biblical origins, bring magical characters within a Christian ethos, making them acceptable heroes. The primary mode of medieval interpretation, allegory, brings magical forms within the realm of Christian understanding. And the structural support that allowed medieval literature to be read reinforces its Christian nature while simultaneously reflecting a similar purpose. Each component of medieval literary culture studied here – poetic forms, character types, modes of interpretation, and material support – bring magic within a Christian ethos no matter the period in which it is produced and no matter the fears over magic prevalent in society during that period. Medieval literary magic reflects larger interest in that which is beyond the everyday, and the deeper implications behind its use hint at why magic remained and remains so very popular. Literary magic in the Middle English period and today reflects some of humanity's deepest desires and

impulses. It reflects the desire to see the divine take material form, to see and experience heaven, hell, demons, and saints in different secular shapes, and to encounter people, places, and things that transcend the realm of everyday experience. Its close association with legitimate, Christian forms in the Middle Ages allows people to enjoy such splendors within the realm of Christian righteousness. Its validation in every area of medieval literary culture ensures the device not only survived but thrived.

The continued presence of literary magic's representational structures beyond the demise of the medieval literary culture and especially of the manuscript compendium reveals the degree to which medieval literary culture helped magic thrive across literary history. The version of literary magic established by medieval literature and the manuscript compendium allowed for magical forms and figures to remain Christian even once the representational relationships between sacred and secular supernatural figures established by manuscript compendia disappeared. In other words, in the age of print, literary magic remained Christian even without its direct representational relationship with the sacred supernatural.

Wynkyn de Worde's sixteenth century printed version of *Of Arthour and of Merlin* is a testament to the longevity and power of Middle English literary magic. In this text Merlin is rendered as a highly Christian figure, even though the manuscript context that brings him within a Christian representational frame in the Middle English period has entirely disappeared. He also remains Christian even at the height of fears and persecution of common magic in medieval England. Keith Thomas, Valerie Flint, and Richard Keickhefer have established that the period leading up to and following the Reformation saw the greatest increase in persecutions of magic and witchcraft. Thomas attributes this change to the fact that where the "magic of the medieval church" had offered protection against malicious magic, the Reformation "disturbed the

situation, by drastically reducing the degree of immunity from witchcraft which could be conveyed by religious faith alone”; this brought on an upsurge in witch persecutions (Thomas 493). Wynkyn de Worde published his edition of *Of Arthour and Merlin* titled *A Lytel Treatyse of ye Byrth and Prophecye of Marlyn* in the years leading up to the Reformation and in a society increasingly fearful of magic. As Jordi Sanchez-Marti verifies in “The Printed History of Middle English Verse Romances” de Worde issued at least three editions of this romance: 1499, 1510, and 1529. While only fragments of the 1499 and 1529 editions survive, a complete copy of the 1510 edition can be found in the Pierpont Morgan Library (Sánchez-Martí 6). Of the two manuscript versions already discussed in this dissertation, this sixteenth century printed text belongs to the same family as the one found in Lincoln’s Inn 150; it is, however, distinct, and as Macrae-Gibson notes, contains lines found nowhere else (Macrae-Gibson 2. 44-45). Like the version found in Lincoln’s Inn 150, it focuses on the early life of Merlin and ends before Arthur enters the scene. In the same way as both manuscript versions of the text studied in this dissertation, it depicts Merlin as a specifically Christian saviour; however, unlike the earlier versions it cannot rely on any immediate textual context to colour Merlin’s depiction. Nevertheless, Merlin continues to thrive in this new format as a Christian saviour. He does so in a few different ways.

The most obvious means through which Merlin maintains his categorization as a Christian saviour is his own textual history. As the number of surviving examples make plain, the romance of *Of Arthur and of Merlin* remained popular from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. As Carol M. Meale agrees popularity was one factor that influenced de Worde’s choice of publication material (Meale, “Caxton, de Worde” 288). This may suggest then, that there was already a reading audience interested in *Of Arthour and of Merlin* and familiar with the story.

Alongside this popularity comes a rich intertextual history that colours Merlin's depiction. His early position alongside characters like Pope Gregory and Piers Plowman may still lie somewhere in the recesses of his own intertextual history, and the establishment of a strikingly religious Merlin, bolstered by his characterization alongside other religious figures, may have had some impact on this later depiction. In other words, the simple fact that Merlin has long been represented as a Christian saviour helped maintain that depiction in later years.

His status as a Christian saviour, however, is further solidified within de Worde's edition itself where many of the representational structures surrounding his depiction as a Christian identified in this dissertation are enhanced. Merlin's mother's impregnation, for example, is depicted as in Lincoln's Inn 150 where she is not made to seem at fault. The blame is placed on "ye fendes encombraunce" (*Marlyn ciiii<sup>r</sup>*). But this version goes even further, emphasising his mother's great sorrow and shame at her impregnation. When she discovers what happened, "She rente her clothes & her here drowe / she wept and made sorowe ynowe" (*Marlyn ciii<sup>r</sup>*) – something she does not do in Lincoln's Inn 150. This extreme grief renders the mother as an even more virtuous figure, deepening the connection between her and the Virgin Mary. Great emphasis too is placed on Merlin's religious upbringing. The baptism scene is given a full page in the text, and the devils lament sorely once Merlin has been christened. His conception and its miraculous nature is, as in Lincoln's Inn 150, compared many times to that of Jesus, and the Justice who hears the case even brings in twelve midwives to testify to the fact that no one but Jesus was born in such a way (*Marlyn cv<sup>r</sup>*). As in Lincoln's Inn 150, Merlin again identifies his role as a messenger of God. He says, "But god hath torned me to good/ And nowe I am at goddes sonde/ For to helpe all this londe" (*Marlyn D.i<sup>r</sup>*). In this version, however, his reach has extended, and he must now help all the land. It is in this last point where de Worde's version of

*Arthour and Merlin* really differs from the earlier manuscript versions. Of all the texts discussed thus far, this version spends the most time accounting for and recounting Merlin's remarkable abilities and emphasising his role in the salvation of the land. Instead of ending the text with the death of Vortigern, de Worde continues all the way up to Uther's final victory, and in so doing illustrates Merlin's role as a disciple of God who must rid England of a tyrannical ruler and establish a good king. And indeed, Merlin uses his powers to help Uther and Pendragon defeat the Saracens. He always appears at exactly the right moment to warn them of planned ambushes (*Marlyn* G.ii<sup>v</sup>); he masterminds their plans, and he ensures that the right brother survives (*Marlyn* G.vii<sup>v</sup>). The romance makes plain that without Merlin, the land would not be saved.

His power and influence and its importance within this version of the romance can best be seen in the woodcut that adorns the cover. In the image covering de Worde's edition, we see Merlin in the foreground, standing over the two kings in a very authoritative pose, evidently instructing them. He looks almost priestly or even Godly: ancient, bearded, robed, holding a scroll, with hand raised as he imparts knowledge on the two kings. De Worde's cover image emphasises that it is Merlin, God's direct messenger on earth, who ensures England's salvation. He is in the literal and figurative foreground as a specifically Christian saviour, using his magic within a Christian context to establish England's place in the world. It is a characterization that renders his demonic origins and demonic powers entirely legitimate, even in the face of growing persecutions of magic.

The transition that Merlin undergoes from manuscript culture to print culture illustrates that magic has been established as a legitimate literary device. In emphasising Merlin's power and influence, alongside his Christian virtuousness, de Worde's printed version shows that Merlin is unquestionably a Christian saviour. This representation must have helped him through



various tumultuous historical periods. Indeed, although his context – both social and textual – changes significantly from the early fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, Merlin maintains and even develops within his role as Christian figure. Even in *The Faerie Queene* where Spenser describes Merlin performing demonic magic – he was “writing straunge characters in the grownd, / With which the stubborne feendes he to his seruice bownd” (III. iii. 14) – he is still represented as an agent of God. Spenser refers to him as “the Prophet” (III. iii. 21). In T. H. White’s Arthurian saga Merlin continues to work as a wise, if bumbling, figure of goodness and righteousness to establish an ideal king of the nation. Even in the recent BBC television series *Merlin* he remains a figure of ultimate goodness using innate powers to work against evil, demonic forces that seek to destroy Arthur and Camelot. His establishment as a Christian figure in the literature of medieval England allowed him to transition from his early manuscript context, to his representation in print, all the way to the twentieth century, as a positive, righteous figure able to wield extraordinary powers for the service of good.

The impact of medieval literary magic extends well beyond medieval figures who have survived into the modern world. The same kinds of Christian structures evident in Merlin’s depiction from the Middle Ages to the early modern period can be seen in his magical descendants today. From Gandalf, to Dumbledore, to Emma Swan, contemporary popular and literary culture is full of magical individuals who still reside within the same kind of Christian representational system. J. R. R. Tolkien’s Gandalf is himself a Christian saviour within the same vein as Merlin. Tolkien’s mythological Middle Earth eschews Christian doctrine, and yet Gandalf’s role is strikingly Christ-like. He is put on Middle Earth for the intended purpose of destroying its greatest and most evil threat – the dark lord Sauron. He resists temptation and spends the narrative using his astounding powers to fight the forces of evil. He is even killed and

reborn in order to continue to work against those forces. References to Christian doctrine are gone, but the same morality and representational structures still underlie everything he does. So too does Dumbledore in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series act as an almost Christ or God-like figure. He too is destined to destroy the great evil threatening the world. He too promotes goodness, kindness, and charity as the cornerstones of all his good works on the earth. He too is sacrificed for the cause, but in the final chapters of the final book, returns in the purgatory Harry enters after his near-death at the hands of Lord Voldemort to offer Harry wisdom and the opportunity to move on (presumably to heaven) or return to earth to complete his appointed task. Even in this book, against which many Evangelical Christians have long protested, Christian morality shapes the magical figures. Finally, even the distinctly non-literary and popular magical characters of ABC's television series *Once Upon a Time* are represented within the same kind of Christian structures. Therein the heroine, Emma Swan, uses her magical abilities to fight against the forces of evil that threaten to overwhelm the town of Storybrook. A kind of Pope Gregory figure, she overcomes fraught and sinful origins to take on that role and save everyone (on many occasions, in many ways, and through many seasons) from evil forces. Literary magic today continues to operate within the same kind of Christian structures.

The Christian version of literary magic established the Middle English period has had enormous reach and pervades today even within a thoroughly secularized society and in thoroughly secularized texts. I opened the first section of this dissertation with a discussion of Northrop Frye's *The Great Code* and his insistence that the Bible has long provided an intertextual code for English literature in the west. As I have shown, this code legitimized literary magic in the Middle English period. Today it continues to provide a moral compass within which magic can operate in popular and literary culture even though the Christian

doctrine that structured medieval life and society has faded. Literary magic allows characters, and through engaging with those characters, readers, to reach for what is beyond the everyday and to expand beyond human capabilities – to achieve almost godlike power. But this does not become scary, or problematic, because the representational structures surrounding literary magic clearly outline what is good and admissible and why – who is the saviour, who is demonic, what is hellish, what is heavenly. Readers and viewers, all consumers of literary and popular culture, are given a clear and familiar moral code within which to enjoy the extraordinariness of magical forms. It remains a comfortable and entertaining device. Far from being contrary to or in conflict with literary magic, Christianity has always and continues to ensure its preservation as a literary form. Religion allowed for and continues to allow for the validation and sustenance of literary magic.

It is the nature of human beings to look for something more than the everyday – to look for something beyond the simple aspects of everyday life. Both religion and literary magic appeal to this desire, albeit in different ways. Religion answers a desire to find a larger purpose in life and in so doing to find something beyond what one sees in the everyday world – to find the reasons and beings that have structured the earth we live on. Literary magic takes that desire and turns it into a source of entertainment. It looks not necessarily to define a human's place and purpose on earth, but instead to explore a human's potential to go above and beyond the everyday in all kinds of different forms. It provides not so much an escape from everyday life as a means of considering what and how humans might rise above and beyond the everyday world. And in so doing, it has provided entertainment and the opportunity for reflection to individuals for many hundreds of years, in all kinds of societies and in all kinds of forms. Literary magic is, in many ways, as universal as the desire to find something more to life.

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