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‘And God seith...’: Representations of Divine Speech and Personal Relationship to God in Middle English Literature
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Summary

This thesis aims to analyse the diegetic representation of divine discourse, in particular, the reported speech of God in Middle English literature. It focuses on the narratorial stance of key texts towards such representations of divine speech, critically reflecting on the role that the points-of-view of both the embedded narrator and – more subtly – the implied author play in the mediation of such speech; furthermore, the operations of such speech are analysed to ascertain their purpose in relation to the ‘sentence’ of the whole text. The major finding of the thesis is that divine speech is presented, implicitly and explicitly, as the central medium by which God establishes and maintains His friendship with man.

The acknowledgement of the ‘homeliness’ or intimacy of a personal God permeates the narratorial stance towards divine speech in the mystical writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe; the recastings of biblical narratives of the Pearl-poet; and the visionary fiction of Langland’s Piers Plowman. However, the narratorial stance towards God and, thus, divine discourse is a more complicated matter in Chaucer’s eclectic oeuvre; he chooses to restrict the representation of divine speech to the unadorned biblical translations of the Parson’s Tale.

The thesis addresses four principal narratorial stances towards divine speech: i) the report of divine speech as authentic visionary experience; ii) the poetic amplification of divine speech in biblical narratives as an expression of faith; iii) the poetic fabulation of divine speech as an expression of visionary and vatic auctoritas; and iv) the humble and unassuming restriction of the report of divine speech to either silence or the strict translation of such speech taken only from sacred scripture.

The study of divine speech is placed in its historical and cultural context, especially in relation to the history of ideas. The rise of religious writing in the vernacular is addressed, and there is attention paid to the culture of affective piety as it produced a humanised idea and image of Christ; this emphasis placed on the Incarnation opens the way to the fabulation of divine speech as a communicative expression of divine love.
Finally, throughout the thesis issues concerning the limits of thought and language arise in relation to the intellection and expression of God's transcendent and ineffable nature. Those writers who affirm Christ's humanity continue to trust in the friendship of God and the possibility of personal relation with Him that may be expressed in speech, reported or fabulated; on the other hand, Chaucer, overwhelmed by the Boethian idea of an omnipotent Being, complicated by his employment of ventriloquised narrators, struggles to relate personally to such a distant or even apparently absent God. Nevertheless, even though he stops short of fabulating divine speech, he faithfully accepts and affirms the infallible authority of the Bible, turning, in the end, to its promise of the one sure way to God.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my supervisor Prof. V.J. Scattergood in supplying many valuable suggestions, ideas and criticisms in the writing of this thesis, and, above all, for seeing me through to the finish line. I wish to acknowledge also the excellent suggestions, ideas, criticisms and, especially, encouragement of Dr Helen Cooney who assisted me, in particular, in the preparation of the Introduction by which I transferred from the MLitt to the PhD register. I am grateful to Dr Felicity Cable, Charlie Solan and Rory Loughnane who all read and commented on various parts of the thesis. Finally, I thank Dr Sinéad Connors who read and commented on parts of the thesis and helped in the delicate technical matter of compiling its various sections into one whole document. Naturally, all errors and faults remaining in this work are wholly my own.
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Preface

St Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224 – 1274) had this to say concerning the art of writing Introductions:

...in writing an Introduction one has three objects in view: first to gain the reader's good will; secondly, to dispose him to learn; thirdly, to win his attention. The first object one achieves by showing the reader the value of the knowledge in question; the second by exploring the plan and divisions of the treatise; the third by warning him of its difficulties (Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima, Book I, Lecture I, n.2).¹

The present writer, considering that he could do a lot worse than taking Aquinas as his authority in this matter, has elected to follow the above outlined formula in the writing of this introductory preface. Consequently, in order to gain the reader's good will I propose to show him the very great value of considering the central question of God's talking in Middle English literature. This thesis will not be a critical analysis of God's lexis, syntax, or semantics in Middle English;² rather, it will pose and try to answer the specifically literary theoretical question of what it means to represent God speaking Middle English

¹ Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima, trans. Kenelm Foster and Silvester Humphries and intro. Ralph McInerny (Notre Dame, Indiana: Dumb Ox Books, 1994). In this thesis I present a reference to the title and section or page number of primary texts in parenthesis after each quotation (as above), and the full reference is given in a footnote to the first such quotation; the reader should note that all subsequent quotations are taken from this edition unless otherwise stated. All references to secondary texts are given in footnotes; I give full bibliographical detail in the first reference, but all subsequent ones are abbreviated.

² On the point of God's style, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) writes in the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus that 'God has no particular style in speaking, but according to the learning and capacity of the prophet he is cultivated, compressed, severe, untutored, prolix or obscure', quoted in Anthony Kenny, A New History of Western Philosophy: The Rise of Modern Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 64. Spinoza's attitude is not medieval, of course; but the notion that the prophet or vatic poet is duplex causa efficiens or one element of a dual efficient cause of divine discourse is a closely related medieval idea, and its influence on the narratorial stance towards and representation of divine speech will be seen throughout the thesis. For an explication of the concept of 'duplex causa efficiens' see A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375, Revised Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 198-99.
with reference to a range of Middle English literary texts and their interpretation. How does such a decision reflect on the idea of divine speech and its relation to the Word or Logos? Is such representation an act of unsurpassed artistic hubris, or is it constitutive of a subtle and sophisticated understanding by medieval writers of the metaphysical links between Logos, language, and reality? And what does such a decision imply about the author’s self-presented personal stance towards God (bearing in mind the difficulty of inferring the intention of the implied author)?

Accordingly, the thesis will seek to contribute to the relatively new field of academic literature, only now establishing itself in medieval studies, which focuses on the question of the relationship between language and reality in the Middle Ages. Jesse M. Gellrich’s *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages* and Eric Jager’s *The Tempter’s Voice* are the seminal, foundational texts in this growing area of study; most recently John M. Fyler has contributed to the discussion with his *Language and the Declining World*. But this thesis seeks to move the discussion forward significantly by examining the actual apotheosis of the issue: it will consider the links between divine language, speech, and reality, for all three are bound up in the central Christian concept of the Word as it was conceived in Middle English literature, and it will seek to ground the exploration of these inter-related elements in the context of the late-medieval inclination towards a more humanised and personalised conception of God.

In *The Meaning of Life*, Terry Eagleton raises the following intriguing question: ‘Could the word ‘meaning’ in the phrase ‘the meaning of life’ have something like the sense it does in the ‘what someone intends to signify’ category? Surely not, unless (for example) you believe that life is the utterance of God, a sign of discourse in which he is trying to communicate something significant to us.’ In the thirteenth century St Bonaventure asserts exactly this; however, he qualifies the claim by proposing that the discourse is mediated in two different but complementary ways, that is, by ‘two books,

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one written within \textit{[scriptus intus]}, and that is [inscribed by] God's eternal Art and Wisdom; the other is written without \textit{[scriptus foris]}, and that is the sensible world.' (\textit{The Works of Bonaventure}, vol. 2, p. 101 [translator's brackets])\textsuperscript{5} Bonaventure was, of course, an intellectual disciple and exponent of St Augustine, and his opinion concerning an interior and exterior divine discourse naturally follows his master's lead.

Augustine affirms the operation of divine discourse throughout his work; that is, he believed in an ongoing communication by God to man although the human interpretation of 'divine discourse in life' is complicated by the deleterious epistemological consequences of the Fall. Eric Jager succinctly presents his position, thus: 'Augustine perceived life after the Fall as a continual struggle in the confusing and often frustrating realm of signs...[where]...humans possessed only traces of God in the form of signs that are inextricably part of the temporal and corporeal order of Creation itself.'\textsuperscript{6} In \textit{De doctrina christiana} or \textit{On Christian Teaching}, in particular, Augustine dwells on the difficult and complicated business of drawing distinctions between things – both temporal and corporeal – and signs – both literal and figurative – as they each relate to God when he argues: 'Someone who attends to and worships a thing which is meaningful is a slave to a sign. But the person who attends to or worships a useful sign, one divinely instituted, and does realize its force and significance, does not worship a thing which is only apparent and transitory but rather the thing to which all such things are to be related.' (III.30; pp. 74-75)\textsuperscript{7} In other words, there are divinely instituted signs in the world, and to read them aright is to read them in relation to the that to which all things are to be related, namely, God. What, though, is the nature of the relation to God?

After the Fall humans have been exiled, in effect, to a \textit{regio dissimilitudinis} or region of dissimilitude where all signs may only bespeak or gesture towards the ineffable or God.\textsuperscript{8} The relation of things to signs and of things and signs to God, therefore, is

\textsuperscript{6} Jager, \textit{The Tempter's Voice}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{8} Augustine borrows the phrase, 'region of unlikeness', in \textit{Confessions}, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) VII, x; p. 123, from Plotinus (\textit{Enneads}, 1.8.13.15 f.) who himself had appropriated it from Plato (\textit{Statesman}, 273d), the
neither a closed-systemic ontological nor semiotic order. Why is this so? Augustine, following Plotinus, asserts: ‘But the further away from you things are, the more unlike you they become’ (Confessions, XII, vii; p. 249). Ontological distance ineluctably entails ontological difference. This, indeed, is why he views the created world as a region of unlikeness. There is a yawning gap between God and things, and, thus, between God and signs; in other words, God exists outside both the created world of things and the circle of semiosis.9 God, nevertheless, seeks to bridge this ontological and semiotic gap; on the one hand, God enters history as the Word incarnate or Christ, and, on the other, after Christ’s ascension into Heaven, God continues to speak to His exiled creature by gratuitously raising man’s intellect by rapture and illumination. Augustine records his own experience of such illumination, thus: ‘I found myself far from you “in the region of dissimilarity”, and heard as it were your voice from on high’ (Confessions, VII, x; pp. 123-24). Despite the Fall and its consequences, then, Augustine affirms by dint of both experience and argument that there is divinely intended meaning to be discovered in the things and signs of the world which through the soul bespeak their author whose Word utters them into existence.

In Augustine’s view and in the view of those medieval thinkers – like Bonaventure – who follow him, then, God creates the world and concomitantly works significance into it. God, however, is neither a thing nor a sign, for God as free Creator necessarily transcends the contingent ontological and semiotic orders. God, nevertheless, is the ground of things and signs, for without God there would be neither things nor signs. They, therefore, bespeak God; that they are shows or gestures towards their ground. God, conversely, speaks through them in the world in conjunction with the enraptured intellect. Hence, despite the above-outlined hermeneutic difficulties attendant on the Fall, divine discourse fills the world and drives its intellection by rational beings.

Note how in Augustine’s phrase above he hears God’s voice ‘as it were...from on high’. Augustine’s presentation of God’s voice and implied speech is figurative; indeed, author of the Allegory of the Cave (Republic, 514a–520a) that views this world as but an imperfect copy of a higher true reality. See Jager, The Tempter’s Voice, p. 52.

his affirmation of divine discourse in life mediated by things and signs is equally figurative. In his reflection on the illocutionary phrase, 'Fiat lux', uttered by God in Genesis, Augustine in De Genesi ad Litteram or On the Literal Meaning of Genesis asks a series of questions that lead him to embrace a figurative and intellectual idea of divine speech:

And how did God say, *Let there be light*? Was this in time or in the eternity of His Word? If this was spoken in time, it was certainly subject to change. How then could we conceive of God saying it except by means of a creature? For He Himself is unchangeable...And was there the material sound of a voice when God said, *Let there be light*, as there was when He said, *Thou art my beloved Son*?...And, if so, what was the language of this voice when God said, *Let there be light*? There did not yet exist the variety of tongues, which arose later when the tower was built after the flood. What then was the one and only language by which God said, *Let there be light*? Who was intended to hear and understand it, and to whom was it directed? But perhaps this is an absurdly material way of thinking and speculating on the matter. What then shall we say? Is it the intellectual idea signified by the sound of the voice, in the words, *Let there be light*, that is meant here by the voice of God, rather than the material sound? And does this belong to the Divine Word...? (1:21)

Clearly, Augustine's conception of divine discourse is metaphorical; in other words, his theory does not deal with cases of God talking to man by way of human language. Augustine does not ignore this topic, however; rather, he treats of it in some detail in his exposition of the biblical book of Genesis. Before touching on this, however, it is necessary to assess his attitude to the Word of God.

In his Tractates on the Gospel of St John, Augustine dwells on the significance of the Gospel's opening: 'But let us see what advantage it is that these words have sounded, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. We also uttered words when we spoke. Was it such a word that was with God? Did not those

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words which we uttered sound and pass away? Did God's Word, then, sound and come to an end?" (1.8) Augustine reflects on the sense of the term 'verbuni' in the text; does it signify words like those in human speech? He continues: 'Do not...imagine, as it were, some paltry thing when you hear, the Word, nor suppose it to be words such as you hear them every day— he spoke such words, such words he uttered, such words you tell me; for by constant repetition the term word has become, so to speak, worthless. And when you hear, In the beginning was the Word, lest you should imagine something worthless, such as you have been accustomed to think of when you were wont to listen to human words, hearken to what you must think of: The Word was God' (1.10). Augustine, then, emphatically distinguishes the sense of God's Word from human words.

So much for Augustine's treatment of the nature of 'literal' divine speech. What was a later medieval thinker's position on the question? Anthony Kenny notes that Aquinas accepts that God 'on occasion...use[s] human language to communicate with mankind.' On the other hand, God despite His intellect is not, in Aquinas's view, a language-user like human beings. In his Commentary on the Gospel of St John, he examines the meaning of 'verbum' in the Gospel's opening. He argues:

It is clear...that it is necessary to have a word in any intellectual nature, for it is of the very nature of understanding that the intellect in understanding should form something. Now what is formed is called a word, and so it follows that in every being which understands there must be a word. However, intellectual natures are of three kinds: human, angelic and divine; and so there are three kinds of words. The human word, about which it is said in the Psalm (13:1): "The fool said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The angelic word, about which it is said in Zechariah (1:9), and in many places in Sacred Scripture, "And the angel said to me." The third is the divine word, of which Genesis (1:3) says, "And God said, 'Let there be light.'" So when the Evangelist says, In the beginning was the Word, we cannot understand this as a human or angelic word, because both these words have been made since

man and angel have a cause and principle of their existence and operation, and the word of a man or an angel cannot exist before they do. The word the Evangelist had in mind he shows by saying that this word was not made, since all things were made by it. Therefore, the word about which John speaks here is the Word of God. (1.25)\(^\text{14}\)

Aquinas, thus, asserts that God \textit{qua} intellectual being operates according to a word; however, that word is only analogous to human (and angelic) words. In essence, it is quite different because identical to God’s wholly simple being. Hence, when God deigns to use human language, it is reasonable to conclude that His use of such contingent language, in Aquinas’s view, is gratuitous, that is, freely contingent on God’s own unconstrained move to communicate with his creature mediated in line with man’s linguistic and rational nature.

This brief exploration of the theological backcloth to the topic of divine speech amply shows its depth and complexity; above all, it emphasises the centrality of divine discourse to the medieval mind. The aim of this thesis, then, is to investigate representations of divine speech in two principal forms of Middle English literature, that is, prose and poetry, so as to uncover the rationale, implicit or explicit, behind any \textit{intentio auctoris} or \textit{intentio operis} in portraying God as speaking outside the canonical confines of the sacred scriptures of His Bible, that is, the very \textit{Verbum Dei}, or Word of God.\(^\text{15}\) While the focus of the thesis will be overwhelmingly literary, the concept of ‘God Talking’, its central subject, is an inescapably theological concept, that is, the concept of


\(^{15}\) For an explanation of \textit{intentio operis}, the intention of the text, see Eco, The Limits of Interpretation, pp. 44-63 and Eco, Interpretation and Overinterpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 64-66. The canonical confines of the Word of God in the Middle Ages were the sacred scriptures compiled in the Vulgate Bible, St Jerome’s late fourth and early fifth-century translation from the Ancient Hebrew and Greek into vulgar Latin, the common spoken tongue of the Roman Empire; hence, its title, \textit{Editio vulgata}, the People’s Edition. This version was the officially sanctioned Bible text of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, and, although a translation, it was considered to be theopneustic, that is, to contain the very words of God Himself written through the agency of His servant Jerome in the medium of an inspired Latin text. See p. 9 below for Aquinas’s view of God as the author of sacred scripture.
the self-enunciating Word, and the relation of man to such divine discourse is equally
theological in essence. Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.), known to the medievals simply as ‘the
Philosopher’, in his system of First Philosophy or Theology had a very solipsistic and
curious conception of a God who engaged in noesis noeseos, or self-contemplative
thought, but the concept of the Word that the medievals themselves had was more than
that of a God who talked only of Himself to Himself, for the order of the Word possesses
a super-abundance of perfection that overflows into the conative act of creation, where
God goes beyond announcing His own existence to Himself, but through the Word
pronounces in a unique illocutionary act the existence of all creation, including rational
beings to whom He gives the intellective power to recognise His existence, if not His
essence. God’s Word is, thus, central to the order of His creation, which itself amounts
to His self-expression and self-recognition.

For the medieval Christian, Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, that is, the Word
made flesh, at once Son of Man and Son of God, expresses and achieves the astonishing
central message of the New Testament, that is, the Good News of the Gospels, by

16 Dante, a pupil of both the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella who lauded Aristotle
and the Franciscans of Santa Croce who loathed him, refers to him as ‘il Filosofo’
throughout the Convivio, and ‘il maestro di color che sanno’, ‘the master of those who
know’, in the Commedia, Inferno IV 131. All quotations from the Commedia are taken
from Dante Alighieri, Commedia con il commento di Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi
(Bologna: Zanichelli, 2001); the translations of Inferno and Purgatorio are taken from
Durling and Martinez, eds. The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno and
Purgatorio (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 and 2003) and those
of Paradiso are taken from Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy: Paradiso, trans. John

17 Concerning divine thought Aristotle in the Metaphysics XII 9, 1074b33-34 writes: ‘[I]t
must be itself that thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking
is a thinking on thinking’, in The Complete Works of Aristotle, ed. Jonathan Barnes,
revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); all individual works of
Aristotle are quoted from this edition.

18 See Brian Davies who writes that ‘a presiding thesis of Aquinas is that, though we can
know that God exists (an est), we cannot know what God is (quid est)’ in Davies, The
explanation of Aquinas’s distinction between existence and essence see Anthony

19 One should not, of course, commit the error of pantheism by identifying God with His
creation, that is, although creation is indeed an expression of the Logos, the Logos as
transcendent cause remains prior, both logically and ontologically, to its material effect.
fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament in the atonement or reconciliation of man with God, the creature with his Creator, by acting as the bridge between creature, creation, and Creator: ‘sic enim dilexit Deus mundum ut filium suum unigenitum daret ut omnis qui credit in eum non pereat sed habeat vitam aeternam’, ‘For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish; but may have life everlasting’; (John 3:16)\(^{20}\) while, significantly, His words on earth are recorded as His Eternal Word to man in the text of the New Testament, for, as St Paul writes in 2 Tim. 3:16: ‘omnis scriptura divinitis inspirata’, ‘All scripture, [is] inspired of God’; and, therefore, Augustine writes in *On Christian Teaching*: the words of scripture ‘were not produced by human labour, but poured from the divine mind with both wisdom and eloquence’ (114); and later Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* writes: ‘auctor sacrae scripturae est Deus’, ‘God is the author of holy scripture’ (I.I.10).\(^{21}\) The Word, therefore, can be said to exist as (a) an eternal metaphysical principle: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1); (b) the archetype of creation: ‘All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made’ (John 1:3); (c) an historical man: ‘And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14); and, finally, (d) a sacred discourse or text in the record of Christ’s words on earth: ‘For he whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God’ (John 3:34). Note that the latter two categories by which the Word may be understood operate in relation to man. God becomes man in order to save man, and God speaks to man in order that man choose to be saved by returning his Creator’s love.\(^{22}\) Hence, the discussion of divine speech in this thesis looks, on the one hand, to God and, on the other, to man’s relationship to God.


\(^{22}\) Nicholas Watson writes of the Incarnation: ‘In medieval Christian thought, this event was momentous both in practice and in theory; in practice, because it transformed the effects of the fall on humankind; in theory, because it revealed something definitive about
All four ontological modes of the Word’s existence have major implications for any sophisticated artist in the Middle Ages who wanted to represent such a centrally crucial concept in action in a literary or textual mode. On the one hand, not even Dante (1265 – 1321), arguably the greatest poet of the period, ever dared to represent God speaking outside the bounds of the sacred scriptures of the Bible though he dared much else in his audacious depiction of the order of the Word, that is, its ontological hierarchy, in his momentous *Commedia*, a work that magnificently captures the Gothic Zeitgeist, that is, the logocentric spirit of the High Middle Ages. On the other, concerning the particular position of Middle English literature with reference to the wider cultural and intellectual context of Gothic and Scholastic Europe, J. A. Burrow writes: ‘Middle English literature occupies a rather modest place in this brave new world, as beneficiary rather than as contributor. English was at this time an insular language which few foreigners could speak or understand; and our writings seem to have excited little curiosity abroad.’ How, then, can intellectually sophisticated Middle English texts, whose cultured authors looked enviously to the continent and Italy as a cosmopolitan centre, justify their apparent eccentricity in going one further than the famous Florentine by depicting God speaking the vulgar tongue of a tiny number of people from an island nation in a remote corner of Christendom?

What does it mean to represent God speaking in a vulgar tongue? Surely His dignity would demand that He speak, if He is to speak at all, in Latin, or one of the other two sacred languages, Hebrew or Greek. Chaucer (c. 1342 – 1400), arguably the greatest author writing in the Middle English vernacular, apparently agreed with Dante; nowhere in his extant work does he fabulate divine speech, that is, represent God speaking extra-scripturally in either Latin or Middle English. Nor is there the suggestion

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24 See Dante’s *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia* for his discussion of the relative merits of the languages of *grammatica*, e.g., Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, versus the languages of the people, for instance, Tuscan, and the various other dialects of Italy.
that he did so in any work that is now lost to us. Why the reticence on his part to portray God cataphatically or indicatively in his work when his contemporary and – some would say – equal the master-anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x, the author of two texts, *Patience* and *Cleanness*, in which God speaks in Middle English and utters words that go beyond the ‘matter’ of the biblical episodes those poems amplify, is not in the least bit chary about such a portrayal? Could it be that the question of representing or fabulating God in literature never occurred to Chaucer, or was it that he had very good, cogent, reasons for choosing not to do so? Perhaps, indeed, there were certain aesthetic or doctrinal reasons that persuaded him to omit such representations of God? All of these questions will be thoroughly dealt with and some answers will be suggested in chapter 4 of this thesis.

Leaving aside the case of Chaucer, what about those diverse Middle English authors who actually did choose to represent God as speaking in their texts – how sophisticated or otherwise were they? To what degree are those literary texts theologically self-reflexive and their authors self-aware concerning the complex issues involved in representing God speaking not only outside the Bible, but in Middle English too? The answer, unsurprisingly, will be variable as the texts themselves exhibit varying degrees of awareness and reflexiveness depending on the education and temper of their authors. This thesis seeks to examine on a case by case basis which texts, if any, contain a justification original to those texts and their representations; which texts offer an intertextual justification; and which naively represent God speaking without any qualification or justification whatsoever.

One final issue that plays an important part in the analysis of those texts that represent divine speech, and already alluded to above, is the role the narrator plays in mediating such speech. It may be that the implied author of any one text is aware of the complex theological problems involved in talking of and representing God, but if as in the case of so-called mystics like Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, the implied author is to be identified with the narrator who claims to report actual divine speech, then the question of narratorial stance towards such reports is raised; likewise, in the case of fabulated divine speech, the relation of the narrator whether he is to be identified with the implied author or is ventriloquised immediately raises the question of how such
personalised mediation of divine speech or narratorial stance impacts on its report, representation and, of course, meaning. The examination of the texts, thus, will incorporate consideration of the relation between narrator and implied author, and, in the case of Chaucer, among ventriloquised narrator, reporting narrator and implied author. It will be seen, thus, how the complexity of abstract natural theology is mitigated in the personal relation of certain authors and narrators to God.

Indeed, there was a growth of personal relationship with God in the late Middle Ages that had a number of different causes: firstly, there was the impetus given to the increase of lay religious interest in the promulgations of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215 (or Lateran IV). Pope Innocent III demanded that the clergy and, thus, the laity understand their faith, and in canons 9-11 specifically ordered that the Bishop appoint men able to preach the word of God, and that a master or theologian be made available gratis to each metropolitan to instruct in all that was relevant to the _cura animarum_ or care of souls. In England, a series of bishops, beginning with Richard Poore, Bishop of Salisbury, began the process of ensuring that the English clergy were sufficiently educated to successfully carry out their new pastoral duties. The summation of their efforts crystalised in Archbishop John Pecham’s Council of Lambeth Constitutions, 1281, in which Pecham outlined a catechetical syllabus of seven subjects that each parish priest was to expound to his parishoners four times a year. The effect of all of this pastoral concern for the catechesis of the ‘lewed’ resulted in an explosion of vernacular religious literature aimed at the instructing clergy and the increasingly knowledgeable laity.

Furthermore, the meditative practices and religious cultural impact of the spiritual phenomenon known as affective piety or spirituality also influenced the lay engagement with God. The practitioner of affective piety works to develop an emotional investment in the worship of God through the person of Christ, responding, in particular, to His

humanity. St Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) is sometimes credited with the inception of the movement in the affective devotions of his *Oratiorum sive Meditationes*; but he simply built on the older monastic practice of *lectio divina* that centred on the *lectio* or reading of, *ruminatio* or rumination on, *oratio* or praying from and *contemplatio* or contemplation of the Word through the narrative episodes of Christ’s life told in the scriptures. Anselm recommended that the meditant focus on episodes such as the nativity or the passion and imaginatively amplify them to bring out their affective resonances, leading to a deeper love for God. His practice was developed by later contemplatives such as St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) in, especially, his *Sermones super Canticum Canticorum*; Hugh (1096-1141) and Richard of St Victor (d. 1173) in their theologies of contemplation; Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) in his *De Institutione Inclusarum* and its Passion meditation; and St Bonaventure (1221-1274) in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.27 Furthermore, the mention of Bonaventure raises the question of the role the Friars played in promulgating a humanised and affective view of Christ, particularly, in the genre of *vitae Christi*, of which the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* is the prime example.28 Of it John Fleming writes:

This text – and especially those portions of it dealing with the Passion narrative, which circulated independently – exercised a large influence on both visual and literary representations of the Christ-life in the fourteenth century. Its author presents with striking vivacity scenes (such as, for example, Christ’s flagellation) in which the scriptural text is greatly augmented by felt or observed experience. Indeed for many of the meditations – especially those dealing with Christ’s infancy, for which the canonical scriptural text is particularly parsimonious –


imagination and the observation of daily life entirely replace the authority of any written text. 

Ultimately, then, the high culture of contemplatives such as Anselm and mendicants such as Bonaventure was disseminated throughout the broader religious culture so that it may even be traced to the experiences of a fifteenth-century Norfolk housewife like Margery Kempe. Nevertheless, the growth in religious culture and the concomitant humanisation of God were centred on the Incarnate word or the figure of Christ, and, thus, stopped short of humanising God the Father who was regarded as pure spirit; this key distinction is sometimes observed and sometimes not by the texts discussed in this thesis.

Having adhered to Aquinas’s instructions in relation to showing the reader the value of the knowledge that this thesis will present, I now wish to dispose him to learn by exploring its plan and divisions, for as Geoffrey de Vinsauf (fl. 1200) writes in his highly influential and widely taught manual of rhetoric, the Poetria Nova:

> If a man has a house to build, his impetuous hand does not rush into action. The measuring line of his mind first lays out the work, and he mentally outlines the successive steps in a definite order. The mind’s hand shapes the entire house before the body’s hand builds it. Its mode of being is archetypal before it is actual. Poetic art may see in this analogy the law to be given to poets...As a prudent workman, construct the whole fabric within the mind’s citadel; let it exist in the mind before it is on the lips (16-17).

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30 See pp. 18-20 below for more on the dissemination of ‘lered’ culture among the ‘lewed’.


> For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
> Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
> With rakel bond, but he wol bide a stounde,
> And sende his hertes line out fro withinne
> Aldirfirst his purpos for to wynne (1 1065-69).

The thesis begins with an introductory chapter divided into three major parts. The first part will trace the history of the Idea of the *Logos, Verbum*, or Word, in the Western European philosophical and theological traditions in order to illustrate and emphasize its central importance to the *Weltanschauung*, or General Metaphysic, of the sophisticated medieval mind. The history will begin, as so much else does in European intellectual history, in Ancient Greece by examining the Pre-Socratic origins of the idea through the various inflections given it by subsequent thinkers and their respective schools to the central Christian use made of the concept in St John’s Gospel, and beyond to Neo-Platonic, Patristic, and, finally, Augustine’s authoritative permutations, transformations, and interpretations of the term. I do not go beyond Augustine in this history because to alter a famous phrase of A. N. Whitehead’s in relation to the influence of Plato on philosophy, all subsequent medieval theology amounts to a series of footnotes to his work.\(^{32}\)

The second part of the Introduction will focus on logocentric theology in the Greek and Latin traditions as it pertains to man’s capacity to know or talk intelligibly about God. This section will draw an epistemological distinction between Aristotelian cataphatic, *via positiva*, and Neo-Platonic apophatic, *via negativa*, theology investigating them separately as competing theological attitudes to knowing and representing God through language or, indeed, any other rational medium. Any sophisticated or ‘lered’ medieval author would have been aware of this division of perspective in theology and would have had to have made his choice before beginning any work that included in it any representation of God. Or he could compromise between the two positions as Dante did in the *Commedia* when he ends his great epic poem with an ecstatic vision of the Trinity, centring on the hypostatic union of the human and divine natures in Christ, but he is unable to articulate it in language, suggesting, thus, that although he knows God in the Beatific vision, it is an intellectual experience that cannot be successfully communicated in post-lapsarian or fallen human language.\(^{33}\)

The third and final division of the Introduction treats of the recent literary critical concept of vernacular theology in Middle English, which Nicholas Watson presents as a

\(^{32}\) See p. 29 below for Whitehead’s original quote.

\(^{33}\) See *Paradiso*, XXXIII.
special type of theology, arguing that the medium in which the theology is articulated affects its substance, or, in other words, theology in Latin is different from theology written in English because each language reflects a linguistically coloured metaphysics. I shall refute this usage of the term and argue instead for an understanding of vernacular religious writing illuminated by an informed understanding of the essential differences between the art of poetry and the science of *sacra doctrina* or medieval, academic theology.

The three sections of the Introduction, then, focus primarily on matters of philosophy and theology. It could be asked why there should be so much coverage of ostensibly non-literary matters in what is supposed to be a literary thesis. The answer, however, is that it is simply anachronistic as well as a category mistake to rashly apply the modern term 'literature', together with all of its Romantic and Post-Romantic poetic and aesthetic allusions and associations, to the medieval texts this thesis will consider. Hence, J. A. Burrow cautions: 'The reader of Middle English literature...has to recognize that his authors would not normally have thought of their works as representing any special or privileged literary mode of discourse'. Medieval poetry, thus, is not a matter of *belles lettres* or *littérarité*; rather, it is an *ars* or art that traces its origins deep in the legacy of ancient rhetoric, which was communicated to the Middle Ages via Horace's *Ars poetica* and the Pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, both of which were authoritatively synthesised in Geoffrey de Vinsauf's seminal *Poetria Nova*, so medieval authors like Langland, Chaucer and the *Pearl*-poet espouse and practise a poetics that considered the arts of poetry and rhetoric as one and the same, the ultimate aim of which is to achieve eloquence in the service of truth.

The ancient orators divided rhetoric into three types: i) forensic, ii) deliberative, and iii) epideictic; and the ancient poets identified poetry with the latter type, that is, the form properly concerned with praise and blame. They had, furthermore, before them Aristotle's definition of rhetoric in the *Rhetorich* to guide them in their poetics; for

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34 See also *English Language Notes* 44:1 which devotes a section to articles in the field of vernacular theology, most of which refer to Watson's formulation of the category.
35 *Medieval Writers and Their Work*, p. 16.
Aristotle there defined rhetoric as dealing with the presentation of a case under three headings: i) logical, ii) emotional, and iii) stylistic. The inclusion of logic in the medieval conception of poetry meant that medieval poets saw themselves as presenting a case, as arguing a point, and as such they were concerned not merely with emotion and style, but also with ideas, validity of argument and consistency of beliefs. This does not mean, of course, that medieval poets were logicians in disguise, but simply that logic, learned as part of the poet's education in the trivium, played an important part in creating the arguments involved in the complex exploration of ideas and beliefs in medieval poetry. Hence, there is a strong intellectual and logical content to medieval poetic texts, so that, for instance, Chaucer can ironically make an argument concerning the difficult philosophical and theological problems of Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will the central ideas of an apparently unsophisticated and throwaway genre, the Beast Fable that is the Nun's Priest's Tale.

Medieval poetry, thus, is first and foremost a poetry of ideas, and in an age that proclaimed the Logos of St John's Gospel to be the chief Idea and paradigm of reality, it becomes fundamentally necessary to examine first the underlying metaphysics, be it ontological or epistemological, of the Word before considering the poetry that tries to creatively explore and represent it in as logical a fashion as any philosophical or theological disputatio, quodlibet or summa might do. This is why matters of philosophy and theology are so crucial to this literary thesis.

To what extent, however, can a medieval author be presumed to be familiar with the sophisticated academic traditions of philosophy and theology of the High Middle Ages? To begin with, it is, more often than not, utterly impossible to empirically determine a medieval author's education by reference to life, grammar school, or university records, for even in the case of Chaucer, the most documented English author to be considered in this thesis, the scant biographical records extant do not cover the particulars of his education; so concerning the question as to whether Chaucer had a university education, historian Nicholas Orme writes: 'The tradition that [Chaucer] attended Oxford himself cannot be traced back earlier than the mid-sixteenth century and

37 The tripartite division of the Rhetoric treats of logic, emotion and style in Books I, II and III, respectively. See Introduction, section 3 below.
is unproven. Derek Pearsall too doubts that Chaucer was a university-trained man; indeed, he suggests that Chaucer’s education was in the court, that is, ‘the wide-ranging but only partly formal education that boys received in the household of a great magnate’. Concerning the educational backgrounds of the anonymous authors whose works are discussed in this thesis, there can be no conclusive historical judgements; for we do not know who the Pearl-poet was; we are barely certain of Langland’s name; and we do not know Julian of Norwich’s birth name or whether she was even from Norwich originally. Hence, when it comes to determining the extent to which this or that particular author was educated or otherwise, familiar with philosophy and theology or otherwise, the literary critic can only infer the answer from the specific literary texts to hand. According to this methodology, therefore, it can be said with confidence Piers Plowman implies that Langland had close knowledge of fourteenth-century theological debates as well as the formal, academic format of the university disputatio, and, hence, that he had either privately read records of theological debate, or discussed the matter with learned friars or secular professors, or even publicly attended some live questiones at Oxford or Cambridge. The critics’s reasoning here, however, is inductive, so the conclusion must remain a hypothesis, more or less likely, but it remains the best that can be achieved given the lack of extant historical sources.

In a more general way, a comprehensive argument may be made concerning the medieval author’s putative knowledge of aspects of medieval intellectual matters, both philosophical and theological. Janet Coleman, thus, writes concerning the High Middle Ages:

As the unity and centralized power of the church located at Rome became a reality for the geographical area bounded by the Atlantic, the Baltic and the Mediterranean, the scholasticism of the schools penetrated beyond the academic

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walls to affect the teachings of the myriad of local churches and, consequently, reached to the bottom of the social hierarchy, the unlettered populace.\footnote{Janet Coleman, \textit{English Literature in History 1350-1400: Medieval Readers and Writers} (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p. 14.} By virtue of this trickle-down model of the medieval culture of ideas, one begins to see how even the dictated text of the confessed illiterate or, more strictly, \textit{illiterata} Margery Kempe may nevertheless contain, by simple intellectual osmosis, some if not all fundamental ideas of academic theology, albeit even if in her case these ideas are filtered through the unconscious of an author whose intentions are other than the theologians who first developed or shaped those ideas decades or centuries before.\footnote{Ibid., p. 232.} In this context, the key social nexus of the period, the Church, provides the cultural matrix, its institutions, personnel and discursive practices, by which the most sophisticated ideas of philosophy and theology are disseminated from the top down, from the centre to the margins of medieval society and literature. Indeed, as Coleman attests: ‘There was...great interest in the topics of scholastic theological dispute outside university circles’.\footnote{Jacqueline Jenkins notes a distinction between being able to read and write Latin and English, arguing that Margery almost inevitably would have been able to read some English: ‘not only is it probable that Margery Kempe was able to read English, but...her presentation of herself as the illiterate (non-reading) ‘Margery’ is a deliberate self-construction.’ From ‘Reading and the \textit{Book of Margery Kempe}, A \textit{Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe}, eds John H. Arnold and Katharine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), p. 113. If Jenkins is right, then Margery may have acquired some of her ideas via her own reading of vernacular religious texts; however, my general point concerning the trickle-down or spread of ideas from the \textit{literati} to the \textit{illiterati} – including Margery – remains unaffected.} There is, therefore, the strong possibility that the diverse authors of the vernacular poetic texts that will be considered in this thesis, insofar as they were treating of religious matter in the popular formats of poetry, prose or drama, were doing so in a context where both author and audience might be assumed to share an awareness of the philosophical and theological fundamentals.

Having outlined the formal, intellectual, and linguistic background to representations of divine speech in Middle English literature, that is to say, the prevailing cultural and intellectual climate surrounding this vexed question during the period in question, the main body of the thesis will consist of four chapters concentrating on those
texts germane to the subject in question. The texts to be investigated will be arranged logically according to their respective relation to the authority of the Word, that is, according to their claims to represent divinely inspired fact or mere fiction in relation to their treatment of God and His speech.

The first chapter concentrates, therefore, on mystical writing in Middle English, in particular, Julian of Norwich’s *A Revelation of Love* and Margery Kempe’s *The Book of Margery Kempe*. The writings of the other canonical Middle-English mystics, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, are not considered here, for they do not contain any new representations of divine speech. Mystical writing claims the direct authority of the living Word, and purports to supplement the Word of God as reported in the Bible. The Church, for this reason, has always been wary of mystics and their alleged authority, as what they report often comes into conflict with the teachings of its *Magisterium* and, hence, with its own authority which rests on the Word of God as contained in the Bible. In this way, the mystical writings of Julian and Margery present a perfect starting point to any discussion of the significance of claiming that God speaks outside the Bible and the report and representation of such speech.

The second chapter will focus on Bible translations that offer representations of divine speech as they appear in the literary texts of the master-anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x, including *Cleanness*, *Patience* and *Pearl*. The criticism of these texts raises such questions as, for instance: how faithful a translation of the Book of Jonah is *Patience*, and how does it relate to the dominant translation theory of the time, that is, how does it relate to Jerome’s theoretical dichotomy between *verbum e verbo*, word for word, as opposed to *sensum de sensu*, sense for sense, translation? It will be shown that

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44 The genre of *discretio spirituum* or the discretion of spirits arose precisely in order to distinguish authentic revelations from false ones. For a discussion roughly contemporary with Julian and Margery see *The Chastising of God’s Children and the Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, eds Joyce Bazire and E. Colledge, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), pp. 173-82. See also Jean de Gerson, *De probatione spirituum* for a Latin example of the genre by one its most influential proponents.

45 Jerome himself thought that one should not translate ‘*verbum e verbo sed sensum exprimere de sensu*’, in *Select Letters of St Jerome*, trans. F. A. Wright, Loeb Classical Library, 262 (London: Heinemann, London, 1933), 57.5; and in this he was following the
the alliterative poet is not anxious about his vernacular’s ability to deal with the divine because he boldly expands his source texts in order to amplify their *sententiae* or meanings. He is not concerned, in the least, to offer faithful vulgar translations; rather, his purpose in his verse homilies is to stoke the faith of the reader by appealing to his imagination, moving him to adopt an ethical attitude that will bring him closer to God. Finally, this chapter will explore the question of how the biblical authority behind these translations impacts on their presentation of God speaking in Middle English.

The third chapter concentrates on *Piers Plowman* which incorporates the full range of inflections of divine discourse as outlined above on p. 9. Langland inscribes Latin quotations from the scriptures and their translations, sometimes macaronically, in his text; he also amplifies episodes of scriptural divine speech, drawing out their implicatures, elucidating their ‘sentences’. Moreover and most importantly, he fabulates divine speech, that is, he fashions such speech fictionally, attributing it variously to a number of *figurae* of God, and then, unambiguously, to Christ and the Holy Spirit. Langland’s use of divine speech, thus, is the boldest poetic use of such discourse so far discussed. The chief aim of the chapter will be to illustrate the tensions between poetic creativity and the demands of Truth as these are represented in the speaking figure of God or Christ.

The fourth and final chapter will treat of strict scriptural translation, on the one hand, and silence, on the other; that is, in modern terms, the serious structuralist silence of Dante and the playful post-structuralist silence of Chaucer in the non-representation of God’s speech in their respective literary texts. Dante in his confident topography of the metaphysical realms of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* seems to espouse an Aristotelian *via positiva* in his poetics while Chaucer, who is more sceptical about the effective representation of the divine, appears to deliberately avoid or evade divine speech in his art. How is it, then, that both authors, coming from opposite points of view on language and theology, apparently agree as to the ultimate ineffability of the Word in art? Chaucer, it will shown, might have fabulated divine speech at certain key moments

authority of Horace who had cautioned: ‘do not try to render the original word-for-word like a slavish translator’, *Ars poetica*, in *Epistles, Book II; and, Epistle to the Pisones* (‘*Ars poetica*’), ed. Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 133.
in his texts, as Langland does, but he eschews such representation until the Parson’s Tale which, however, restricts the representation of divine speech to the translation *verbum e verbo* of sacred scripture. Additionally, both poets have a lot to say about their own mother tongues and their decision to write learned poetry in the vernacular as opposed to the established, literary Latin, and the intersection of such reflection with questions concerning the representation of God speaking in the vulgar tongue will be addressed too.

The question may arise as to why there is no treatment of medieval drama, those mystery and morality plays such as *Abraham and Isaac* or *Everyman* that represent Deus or God and His divine speech. The drama is excluded from consideration because it is a form of literature that is not narrated; it turns on mimesis whereas those texts discussed in this thesis all involve diegesis. The distinction is important because the diegetic representation of divine speech involves an inscribed narratorial stance towards that speech, and it will be shown that those texts that represent such speech inscribe a narratorial stance that emphasises the personal relation of the narrator to God; the drama lacks this device, for such a relation would be supplied by the audience, and there are, naturally, no recordings of contemporary performances to canvas such reception. Finally, there are a small number of lyrics that include a narratorial stance towards their representations of divine speech, but as Charlotte Clutterbuck observes:

...in the lyrics the sense of individuality is muted: there is no sense of the Mediator’s personality, no sense of individual sins, doubts or struggles. These lyrics do not confront the individual anguish or psychic disintegration or the anguish of a particular historical period, but present traditional images for Everyman to contemplate. However, Everyman cannot encounter God in the way that an individual might, because he has no real self to surrender to God.46

Since, then, the conventional supersedes the personal in these lyrics, I eschew them in favour of the more substantial texts that construct and offer individualised personal narratorial stances to the relation to God and divine speech.

Returning for the final time to Aquinas’s plan for Introductions, I wish now to win the reader’s attention by warning him of the particular difficulties of the task ahead,

for the subject-matter under investigation in this thesis: the key concept of the Logos, the quintessence of God talking; and how that concept was expressed and understood in the philosophy, theology, and literature of the Middle Ages, presents an immense and daunting challenge.

The philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff in his recent book, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks*, notes the common attribution of speech to God, but also that 'it has received little attention from philosophers. In no anthology or textbook on philosophy of religion will you find a section on divine discourse. The philosopher who wants to discuss it doesn’t have many conversation partners.' Furthermore, concerning the medieval period, he states that ‘one also doesn’t find any medieval philosopher devoting a section in his philosophical theology to the topic of God speaking.’ Similarly to Wolterstorff’s situation, I have found a wealth of attributions of speech to God in Middle English literature, but also that it has received little attention from critics; indeed, there is not, to my knowledge, in the field of Middle English literary criticism one single article or book devoted to the topic. Consequently, my research of the topic has proceeded in the absence of conversation partners. Furthermore, there is no explicit tract or discussion of the topic in contemporary medieval literary theory or criticism; and, thus, my discussion of the topic is based on either collected isolated comments, as in the case of my discussion of Augustine and Aquinas above pp. 3-7, for instance, or by dint of inferences concerning the general implicature of texts as will be the case regarding the reading of the texts considered in the four chapters of this thesis. In this regard, then, I am opening up a new topic of discussion in medieval literary criticism, and am open to all the benefits and difficulties that attend such virgin analysis.

In reality, any answers uncovered, and all conclusions reached, will be provisional and subject to constant revision in the light of new evidence and deepening wisdom. One must, then, necessarily agree with Plato (429 – 347 B.C.) when, concerning the communication of perfect knowledge, he wrote:

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48 Ibid., p. 9.
Accounts of what is stable and fixed and transparent to understanding are themselves stable and unshifting...On the other hand, accounts we give of that which has been formed to be like that reality, since they are accounts of what is a likeness, are themselves likely, and stand in proportion to previous accounts...Don’t be surprised then...if it turns out repeatedly that we won’t be able to produce accounts on a great many subjects...that are completely consistent and accurate. Instead, if we can come up with accounts no less likely than any, we ought to be content...So we should accept the likely tale in these matters. It behooves us not to look for anything beyond this (Timaeus, 29b-d).49

Plato’s greatest pupil, Aristotle, after reading this late passage, was moved to reflect on the difficulties of acquiring precise knowledge about created things. On this account it is salutary to recall what he has to say concerning this issue in the Nicomachean Ethics when he writes:

Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of; for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions...We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premisses to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premisses of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better (Nicomachean Ethics, I 3, 1094b13-22).50

Just as the study of ethics and politics is unsusceptible to precise demonstration, so it is with all literary theory and criticism, as most of the theory and criticism of the last fifty years has been at pains to point out, for there is an ineradicable core of imprecision that

49 Complete Works, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1997); all individual works of Plato are quoted from this edition. The Timaeus, which survived into the Middle Ages in a partial Latin translation by Cicero together with a later Neo-Platonist Christian commentary by Chalcidius, was well-known to medieval intellectuals; in the case of Chaucer, however, who in the General Prologue writes: ‘Eek Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede / The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede’ (I 741-42), and, again, in The Manciple’s Tale: ‘The wise Plato seith, as ye may rede, / The word moot nede accorde with the dede. / If men shall telle proprely a thyng, / The word moot cosyn be to the werkyng’ (IX 207-10), echoing the above-quoted passage from the Timaeus, nevertheless, derives the reference in all likelihood from Boethius, De consolatione philosophiae, III pr.12.
50 See also Metaphysics, II 3, 995a1-20.
lies at the heart of all the subjects of the Arts and Humanities. If one were to express this in medieval or indeed orthodox Christian terms, it would be said to signify the inescapable, fallen condition of mankind. I would hope that the truth of this thesis, however relative it must be, will nevertheless be more than just a 'likely tale', and that it will achieve a rough approximation to the truthful interpretation of the literary texts it will examine. In the final analysis, however, it will remain for the reader to decide just how successful the subsequent account is in reconstructing, firstly, the medieval understanding of the truth behind the relation of language to reality, then, how the two are unified in the Transcendental Signified of the Logos, incorporating the consideration of man's relation to Christ, and, finally, how all of this is manifested in a number of key Middle English literary texts of the High Middle Ages.
Introduction I

De Verbo: The History of a Western Idea

This first section of this Introduction traces the history of the idea of the Logos, Verbum, or Word in the Western European philosophical and theological traditions in order to illustrate and emphasize its central importance to the Weltanschauung or General Metaphysic of the medieval mind as well as, ultimately, its connection to representations of divine speech in Middle English that this thesis examines. This particular presentation reflects the personal interpretative synthesis of the present writer, but it is always predicated on the historical facts as they have been preserved and transmitted, often in haphazard fashion, over the course of millennia. It is in the very nature of the historiography of an idea that the resulting history will be coloured by its specific context, here the exploration of the connection between the Logos and medieval representations of divine speech, as well as the more general subjective concerns of its author. Bearing this important proviso in mind, the exploration of the origins of the Logos as a Western idea will begin in Ancient Greece.

From the Ancient Greek, λόγος may be variously translated as: word; speech; tale; discourse; language; notion; theory; rational account; definition; reason; reasoning; ratio; proportion; and/or calculation. As a purely philosophical concept, however, it received its first recorded metaphysical or quasi-theological usage in the works and thought of the sixth-century BC Presocratic philosopher and sage Heraclitus, and so it is with him that this history of the Logos begins. His book On Nature, now extant only in fragments, supposedly began with these words quoted by more than one ancient author:

Of this account forever men prove uncomprehending, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For although all things come about in accordance

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2 By a strange symmetry of history, Heraclitus composed his foundational work on the Logos in his hometown of Ephesus just as the Evangelist would do almost six hundred years later in St John’s Gospel.
with this account, they are like tiros as they try words and deeds of the sort which I expound as I divide each thing according to nature and say how it is.\(^3\)

Concerning the semantic intension and extension of Heraclitus’s logos, translated above by Jonathan Barnes as ‘account’, W. K. C. Guthrie has written that it seems to be:

...at the same time the word he utters, the truth which it contains, and the external reality which he conceives himself to be describing, and to which he gave the name fire.\(^4\)

Logos, then, represents the underlying rational order or pattern that governs reality (‘all things come about in accordance with this account’). Thus the logos, or divine account, reconcile within itself the apparent flux of the cosmos\(^5\), for as Heraclitus later writes:

‘Listening not to me but to the account, it is wise to agree that all things are one’ (DK 22 B 50 and EGP 50) and again: ‘They do not comprehend how, in differing, it [i.e., the logos] agrees with itself—a back-turning harmony, like that of a bow and a lyre’ (DK 22 B 51 and EGP 50). In this way, he enshrines the Logos as the supreme rational principle of his metaphysics, for it amounts to the explanation, both paradigmatic and causal, of all that is, but its essence remains mysterious, for nowhere does he deign to give a full account of its numinous nature because by virtue of that very numinosity ‘forever men prove uncomprehending’.

Heraclitus’s Logos, the divine fire of reason, ought not to be identified as a personal God, for this principle, although suffusing all that is, especially man’s reason, remains forever wholly impersonal. In its unity, rationality, impersonality, and transcendence of opposites, the Logos of Heraclitus echoes the One of Parmenides.

\(^3\) For the original Ancient Greek see Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, eds H. Diels and W. Kranz, tenth edition (Berlin, 1952), 22 B 1. This translation is taken from J. Barnes, Early Greek Philosophy, revised edition (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 49. All subsequent quotations of the Presocratic fragments are taken from Early Greek Philosophy, hereafter EGP, and include the Diels-Kranz, hereafter DK, reference.


\(^5\) Famously, Heraclitus is remembered for asserting πάντα ἑξί, everything fluxes, but F. C. Copleston cautions that this statement is probably not his own, and ‘does not represent the kernel of his philosophic thought, though it does indeed represent an important aspect of his doctrine’. See F. C. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Volume 1: Greece and Rome (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 39.
Although they were contemporaries, it is a matter of scholarly dispute as to who influenced whom, or whether, indeed, either influenced the other at all.\textsuperscript{6} Whatever the truth of the matter, it is indisputable, however, that general parallels operate between the metaphysics of the two thinkers even if they differ in the individual details of their respective philosophical systems.

The etymology of the word logos, coming from the verb λέγειν, to speak or to say, shows how it represents above all the spoken word uttered in rational discourse, and it is from this conception of the term that English has derived both the word and idea of logic. Thus, by a process of logic, Parmenides in his \textit{On Nature} reveals in ‘The Way of Truth’\textsuperscript{7} the underlying rational order of reality, the true unity of the apparent many in the One:

One story, one road, now
Is left: that it is. And on this there are signs
Aplenty that, being, it is ungenerated and indestructible,
Whole, of one kind and unwavering, and complete.
Nor was it ever, nor will it be, since now it is, all together,
One, continuous (DK 28 B 8.1-6 and \textit{EGP} 82).

So, although he does not explicitly identify the One with the Logos, the two ideas are nevertheless implicitly intertwined, for the true nature of the One is revealed by the logos, ‘one story’ or true discourse, of ‘The Way of Truth’. In this way, the logos inexorably reveals the transcendent identity of the multifarious phenomena with the singularity of the numinous One.

The metaphysical bridge between the Word of Heraclitus and the One of Parmenides may be crossed by way of Anaxagoras, whose novel fifth-century theory of ‘Nous’, or thought, as the guiding rational principle in the physical universe was seized upon by the young Socrates, at least if we are to believe Plato’s account of this in the

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According to which Socrates was very excited by Anaxagoras’s postulate that Nous lay behind the order of the cosmos when he wrote in his *Physics*:

Thought is something limitless and independent, and it has been mixed with no thing but is alone by itself...For it is the finest of all things and the purest, and it possesses all knowledge about everything, and it has the greatest strength. And thought has power over all those things, both great and small, which possess soul. And thought had power over the whole revolution, so that it revolved in the first place...And thought knows everything which is mingling and separating off and dissociating. And what was to be and what was and what now is and what will be – all this thought arranged...(DK 59 B 12 and *EGP* 190-91).

But he was disappointed at the elder philosopher’s subsequent refusal or inability to fully develop the idea. Socrates’s greatest pupil, however, readily took up this challenge.

Plato is often hailed the father of Western philosophy, and, indeed, A. N. Whitehead famously wrote that the European philosophical tradition amounted to ‘a series of footnotes to Plato’, but it would be wrong to suggest that he invented the subject *ex nihilo*. This unfolding history of the Logos has demonstrated, *a fortiori*, plenty of philosophical precedents for Plato’s subsequent syncretic system. Indeed, Plato’s metaphysics of the Idea of the Good in the *Republic* and the later but related Demiurge of the *Timaeus* can be seen to be consequent on a dialectical synthesis of the most pregnant metaphysical concepts of his philosophical forbearers: Heraclitus, Parmenides and Anaxagoras. Plato initiates this harmonising process when the impersonal and supreme Ideas of the so-called Middle Dialogues, that is, the Good of the *Republic* and Beauty in the *Symposium*, are problematised on account of their very impersonality in the later *Sophist* where the Eleatic Stranger asks:

> [A]re we going to be convinced that it’s true that change, life, soul, and intelligence are not present in that which wholly is, and that it neither lives nor thinks, but stays changeless, solemn, and holy, without any understanding? (*Sophist*, 248e)

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8 See *Phaedo*, 97BC and 98BC.

In the *Timaeus*, 'that which wholly is' is identified as 'the maker and father of this universe' (*Timaeus*, 28c), or the Demiurge, for he establishes the cosmos by bringing order out of chaos, unlike the God of the Old Testament who creates by divine fiat and *ex nihilo*. And why does the Demiurge order the cosmos? The reason is that:

He was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so, being free of jealousy, he wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible (*Timaeus*, 29e).

Later still, the newly personal supreme Good is identified in the *Parmenides*, *Laws* and the famous lost lecture *On the Good* as the One, that is, the fundamental ground of being in the universe. So in the period of Plato's later critical reassessment of the Theory of Ideas and concomitant system of the Middle Dialogues, *mutatis mutandis*, we see Parmenides’s One producing Anaxagoras’s Nous that looks to Heraclitus’s Logos in its eternal creation of the cosmos. At this point one begins to see lines of thought coalescing which would later receive their ultimate theological expression and transformation in that key New Testament text of the Middle Ages, St John’s Gospel.

While the Platonic thread will be picked up again later, it is now necessary to turn to the philosophical developments of Aristotle and the Stoics in the sphere of the continuing conception of Logos and the increasingly related idea of monotheism for the Greeks. In Book II of the *Physics* and Books I to III of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is concerned to point out that although other thinkers have discovered the Material, Efficient, and Formal causes of things, he alone has corrected, completed, and perfected the analysis by introducing the concept of the Final cause. In Book VIII of the *Physics* and Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, he identifies God as the Unmoved Mover, ‘a mover which moves without being moved’ (*Metaphysics* XII 7, 1072a25), the ultimate cause of change, so that God acts not as the efficient cause of motion in the physical universe, but as the final cause, an object of love,10 or ontological goal, of all being in the world. Indeed, according to Aristotle, man's happiness, *eudaemonia*, is inextricably bound up with this conception of the perfection of God, for God as the perfect rational substance, that is, pure rational act or thought thinking itself,11 exists as the ultimate contemplative

10 See *Metaphysics*, XII 7, 1072b3-4.
11 See ibid., XII 9, 1074b33-34.
goal of man's active intellect. Thus, the contemplation of God, or First Philosophy, amounts to the closest, though inherently unsustainable, state to Christian beatitude in the Aristotelian system. Aristotle's key innovation in the treatment of God, therefore, concerns the idea of final causality, which was missing from earlier metaphysical accounts of the ultimate principle of the universe.

The Stoics of the Hellenistic period: Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus, who were largely concerned with ethics and logic, nevertheless synthesised the novel Aristotelian conception of teleology with the older physics of Heraclitus in their cosmology and allied metaphysics. They identified, therefore, the Logos with God, and concerning this identification F. C. Copleston writes:

God...ο Λόγος, is the Active Principle which contains within itself the active forms of all the things that are to be, these forms being the λόγοι σπερματιχωί. These active forms – but material – are as it were 'seeds,' through the activity of which individual things come into being as the world develops, or rather they are seeds which unfold themselves in the forms of individual things. The Logos, or divine fire of reason, therefore, acts both as the formal cause of the world, by way of fate, and the final cause, by way of destiny, for the cosmos has arisen out of divine fire and will return to it. This conception of the Logos is inherently deterministic, materialistic and pantheistic.

For a more transcendent view of the Logos we must turn to the first-century AD Jewish-Hellenistic scholar and philosopher, Philo of Alexandria. Philo was both aware of and had read all of the above thinkers in the great library of Alexandria, and by working on and synthesising their respective theories in conjunction with the exegesis of the Jewish sacred scriptures he arrived at the conclusion that the Logos of Greek philosophy

12 Concerning Cleanthes, the second head of the Stoa, see Kenny, A New History of Western Philosophy, Volume 1: Ancient Philosophy, pp. 98 and 105 where he writes: 'Cleanthes wrote a hymn to Zeus, later quoted by St Paul in a sermon in Athens, which exalted the Stoic active principle in terms that were appropriate enough for Judaeo-Christian monotheism', and 'St Paul, preaching the gospel in Athens, held a debate with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers...[in which he] undertook to show the philosophers the god whom they worshipped in ignorance'. See Acts 17:27-9.

13 F. C. Copleston, A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome, p. 389. He additionally notes that: 'The conception of λόγοι σπερματιχωί is found in Neo-Platonism and in St. Augustine, under the name of rationes seminales' in ibid., p. 389.
could be allegorically identified with the Old Testament Wisdom of Yahweh. The Logos acts as an intermediary being between God and the material cosmos, and Copleston writes:

The Logos is spoken of as the first-born of God, being…definitely inferior to God and is to be placed in the rank of ὁ πρῶτος γενεύω, which includes many other beings besides the Logos, even if the latter has the primacy…This Logos is an incorporeal substance, the immaterial Word of God or Voice of God; but, in so far as it is conceived as really distinct from God, it is conceived as subordinate to God, as God’s instrument.¹⁴

In this respect, the Philonic Logos, a generated being of the utterly transcendent One God, is not identical with the Word of John’s Gospel, which is itself God. Nor, again, given the Platonic and Neo-Pythagorean background to the Philonic conception of the Logos could one ever conceive of its becoming incarnate. So although the Philonic Logos is substantially different to the Johannine conception of the Word, nevertheless it prepares the final, non-Christian pathway to the great Prologue to John’s Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1).

The Logos of the Johannine Gospel marks a new departure in the history of Western thought, for this Logos is identified with the Christ, ‘Verbum caro factum est’, ‘And the Word was made flesh’ (John 1:14). But why does John call Christ the Word? The answer lies in the opening to Genesis, which the Prologue to John’s Gospel both cites and recalls: ‘In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram’, ‘In the beginning God created heaven, and earth’ (Genesis 1:1), where the text powerfully connects the act of creation with the divine speech act: ‘dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux’, ‘And God said: Be light made. And light was made’ (Genesis 1:3). Note too that the first words spoken by God relate to the creation of light while in John’s Gospel the Word is described as the Light shining in the darkness: ‘et lux in tenebris lucet’ (John 1:5). As the illocutionary acts of God’s creating commands are enunciated, so is the Word, who is His ‘unigenitus Filius’, ‘the only begotten Son’ (John 1:18). The Son is God’s Word to all creation, and thus the archetype of all creation, for creation is both of Him and through

Him as John’s Prologue makes clear: ‘omnia per ipsum facta sunt et sine ipso factum est nihil’, ‘All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made’ (John 1:3). So it is that the generative Word of God is fundamentally linked to creation, that is, to the cosmos or rationally ordered universe.

John’s Gospel enunciates the revelation or apocalypse that the Logos of pagan natural theology has become the Word made Flesh of Christian revealed theology in the historical person of Jesus Christ. It is a moment of unparalleled epiphany in the history of Western Ideas. Indeed, it is the point of ideational constellation, the synthesis of microcosm with macrocosm, and the reconciliation of God with Man in the death and resurrection of the God-Man, both Son of God and Son of Man, Jesus Christ. And it is His Word to Man: ‘Dii estis’, ‘you are gods’ (John 10:34), that promises to conquer the Fall and its consequences – ontological, moral and linguistic – at the end of time in the eternal resurrection of the flesh, that is, the apotheosis of the Anthropos or immortal Man.

How did later scriptural exegetes and theologians interpret this momentous presentation of the Word? This is a question that the remainder of this section of the Introduction will attempt to answer. But first it is necessary to turn to one last pagan philosopher before exclusively concentrating on Christian interpretations of the Word, and that philosopher is Plotinus, whose influential synthesis of the thought of Plato and Aristotle, known as Neo-Platonism, made him the exponent of the last great philosophical system of the pagan Ancient World.

Plotinus, in his Enneads, identified the One or God as absolutely transcendent; it is beyond all thought and all being, ineffable and incomprehensible:

> The nature of the One, as the begetter of all things, is none of them. It is therefore not a determinate being, is without quality and quantity, and is neither intellect nor soul; it is not in motion nor yet at rest; not in place, not in time, but ‘self-contained, unique in form’ – or rather, formless, existing before all form, before movement, before rest; for these are the attributes of Being, which make it manifold (Enneads, VI 9.iii 39).

All quotations from the Enneads are taken from The Neoplatonists: A Reader, ed. John Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999).
The whole of creation exists solely by virtue of a continuous yet serried emanation of being from the One, which nevertheless leaves it untouched, unmoved, and undiminished, for as Plotinus writes:

The source is not fragmented into the universe; for its fragmentation would destroy the whole, which could no longer come to be if there did not remain by itself, distinct from it, its source (Enneads, III 8.x).

The One 'perfect in seeking nothing, possessing nothing and needing nothing, overflows and creates a new reality by its superabundance' (Enneads, V 2.i) that unfolds in a series of hypostases, or intelligible levels of reality, the first of which is Nous or Logos, which corresponds to the Demiurge of the Timaeus and contains the Platonic Ideas, and the third is Pneuma or Soul, which corresponds to the World-Soul of the Timaeus and acts to create the world according to the archetypes contained in the Logos. It is important to emphasise that this apparent trinity does not equate to the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, for Plotinus’s hypostases are inherently hierarchical whereas the Holy Trinity exists as three equal divine persons in one God.¹⁶

Concerning the generation of Nous or Intellect and Soul, Plotinus has the following to say:

[T]he One that is always perfect begets eternally, and its offspring is less than itself...And next to it in greatness, and second, is Intellect, and Intellect is higher than all things, because all else is subsequent to it; Soul is a formative power and activity of Intellect, just as Intellect is of the One (Enneads, V 1.vi 30).

The nature of Nous is to be ‘filled with forms for contemplation’ and to ‘behold...them by a light granted, like the forms, by the Good’ (Enneads, VI 7.xvi 10), or One. Etienne Gilson elucidates it, thus:

Unlike the One, the Intellect is the self-subsisting knowledge of all that is intelligible...Conceived as an eternally subsisting cognition of all that which is intelligible, the Intellect...is, by definition, the locus of all the Ideas. They are in him as a multiple intelligible unity; they are eternally sharing in the fecundity

¹⁶ The transcendence of the One and the inherent hierarchy of the hypostases in the Neo-Platonic system could lead Christian Neo-Platonists like Pseudo-Dionysius to stray very near heresy when trying to explicate in Neo-Platonist terms the doctrine of the Trinity.
which he himself owes to the fecundity of the One; in short the Intellect is big with all that multiplicity of individual and distinct beings which eternally flow from him.\(^7\)

In relation specifically to the Soul, Plotinus writes:

Soul is 'the principle of motion', the self-moved cause of movement in the world, and source of life to ensouled body, while itself essentially life, and therefore life eternally (Enneads, IV 7.ix).

In addition, the World-Soul is divided in two; the higher soul is unchanging and looks towards the logoi in the Nous whereas the lower soul, which is equivalent to Nature, creates the world according to the Λόγοι σπερματικοί, logoi spermatikoi - borrowed from the Stoics - which participate via the πρῶτοι λόγοι, protoi logoi, of the higher soul in the λόγοι contained within the Nous.\(^8\)

Plotinus from his early twenties had been for eleven years a student of the Middle Platonist master Ammonius Saccas at Alexandria, that great crossroads of East and West and cosmopolitan centre of learning in the Ancient World, but he was not his old teacher's only gifted pupil, for he could count among his schoolfellows Origen, who would later succeed Clement as head of the Christian school in that same city. Like Clement before him, Origen sought to establish a link between the truths of Greek philosophy, especially those discovered by the Platonists, and the Truth as revealed in the person and mission of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Clement had emphasised in his Exhortation to the Greeks that the truths discovered by Plato, whom he especially admired, had been sourced from the sacred scriptures of the Hebrews, that is, Plato had reformulated revealed truth in philosophical terms, and so revealed truth remained prior but complementary to Platonic philosophy. Origen, likewise, argued that philosophy was valuable as a preparation, though never a substitution, for theology, for God had created man as a rational being whose rationality was predicated on the Divine Word or Logos, which enlightens every man coming into the world.\(^9\) Indeed, he was the first Christian theologian to positively identify the One, Intellect and Soul of Middle Platonism with the

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\(^9\) See John 1:9.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit of the Christian Holy Trinity. In particular, he interpreted the Word of John’s Gospel to be the Logos, the medium of creation, which contains the Ideas or eternal patterns of creation in the Divine Mind. Origen was the first Church Father to present a systematic synthesis of philosophy and theology in order to form a consistent intellectual Christian worldview. Despite this achievement, his authority would soon be superseded by an intellectual colossus whose thought and writings came to tower over the entire Middle Ages and beyond, that is, Augustine (354-430).

Aside from Jesus and St Paul, perhaps, Augustine exercised the single greatest influence on the development and content of medieval thought. In fact, his authority was so great that his understanding of the nature of the Logos and its relation to pagan philosophy proved steadfastly resistant to any further modification for the following millennium, and so it is with his definitive interpretation of the Word that this first section of the Introduction will conclude.

Augustine, in his *Confessions*, the equivalent of an Ancient and Medieval bestseller, described how the ‘books of the Platonists’ prepared the way for his faith in the revelation of the Gospels:

There I read, not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made’...Further, ‘he was in this world, and the world was made by him, and the world did not know him’. But that ‘he came to his own and his own did not receive him; but as many as received him, to them he gave the power to become sons of God by believing in his name’, that I did not read there. Again I read there that the Word, God, is ‘born not of the flesh, nor of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God’. But that ‘the word was made flesh and dwelt among us’, I did not read there (*Confessions*, VII.ix.13-14).

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20 These were the texts of Plotinus and his disciple, editor, and biographer Porphyry translated from Greek into Latin by Marius Victorinus, a Roman convert to Christianity. Augustine, whose Greek was self-confessedly poor, probably never read any texts by Plato himself.
It is worth quoting this passage in full, for it highlights what Augustine thought was the point of departure of Christian revelation from pagan philosophy, that is, the revealed truth of the Gospels that the ‘Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us’ (John 1:14). It was essential, indeed, that he go beyond the Platonist philosophers, for although he had found precise analogies for certain Christian doctrines in their books, the one thing he never found was the doctrine of the incarnation. This was a startling revelation that would prove crucial to the medieval authors who came after him. What, then, did he think was the nature of the Word or Logos?

Like Origen before him, Augustine followed the Neoplatonists in placing the Ideas or eternal archetypes of creation in the Divine Mind, which he identified with the Word or Logos. He called these germinal forms or principles the *rationes seminales*, and it is in these that God created all things in the beginning. F. C. Copleston explains Augustine’s conception of the *rationes seminales*:

In Ecclesiasticus it is asserted ‘that God created all things together’ [XVIII, I], whereas in Genesis we are presented with the picture of successive acts of creation on six consecutive days. Moreover, experience shows that new things are constantly coming into being. Augustine wishes, therefore, to harmonise the assertion that God created all things in the beginning with the evident fact that new things are constantly being produced. And his solution of the problem is the theory that the things which came into being after the original creation of the world by God were present from the start in the form of invisible latent potentialities which are actualised only in the course of time.

In this way, it is evident how Augustine’s formulation of the *rationes seminales*, a purely philosophical idea, is subservient to the primary hermeneutical, and ultimately theological, aim of harmonising the truth of God’s Word as it is expressed in sacred scripture. In other words, he habitually uses philosophical ideas to clarify theology, for he maintains that the fundamental logical principle of non-contradiction holds for the Word

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of God too, but when he seeks to interpret and harmonise the scriptures, philosophical ideas and methods serve the theology, not vice versa.

In Book XI of the *Confessions*, Augustine discusses the philosophical concepts of time and eternity, but he does so by beginning at the Beginning by virtue of an acute explication of Genesis in the light of the St John’s Gospel and the Apocalypse of the New Testament. In this he reveals that the communicative medium, or language, of intuited intellection 'speak[s] a truth which is neither Hebrew nor Greek nor Latin nor any barbarian tongue and which uses neither mouth nor tongue as instruments and utters no audible syllables' (*Confessions*, XI.iii). In Augustinian epistemology this intuited intellection amounts to the direct illumination of the human soul by the divine light of the Word, that is, Christ the *lux mundi*. Concerning this light he writes:

> What is this light which shines right through me and strikes my heart without hurting?...Wisdom, wisdom it is which shines right through me cutting a path through the cloudiness...(*Confessions*, XI.ix).

Thus the Word transcends fallen, human language, but it, nonetheless, actively communicates truth by way of interior illumination or intuition.

The creation of all things begins by the utterance of the Word through the medium of Divine Speech: ‘you spoke and they were made, and by your word you made them’ (*Confessions*, XI.v). The utterance of the Word at the Beginning was not, however, temporal; rather, as he writes:

> That word is spoken eternally. It is not the case that what was being said comes to an end, and something else is then said, so that everything is uttered in a succession with a conclusion, but everything is said in the simultaneity of eternity...No element of your word yields place or succeeds to something else, since it is truly immortal and eternal. And so by the Word coeternal with yourself, you say all that you say in simultaneity and eternity, and whatever you say will come about does come about. You do not cause it to exist other than by speaking. Yet not all that you cause to exist by speaking is made in simultaneity and eternity (*Confessions*, XI.vii).

The Word here is further explicated as the ‘eternal reason where nothing begins or ends...which is also the Beginning in that it also speaks to us’ (*Confessions*, XI.viii), that
is, it speaks to us through the incarnate Christ, whom Augustine wishes to identify with the *principio* of Genesis 1:1 so as to evade the temporal implications of ‘beginning’. The Word remains the medium of creation:

In this Beginning, God, you made heaven and earth, in your Word, in your Son, in your power, in your wisdom, in your truth speaking in a wonderful way and making in a wonderful way...Wisdom is the beginning, and in that beginning you made heaven and earth (*Confessions*, XLIx).

In his *De Trinitate*, Augustine attempts to elucidate the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but he is also concerned in a very un-Neoplatonic way to defend the co-equality of the three divine persons of the Trinity, in particular, the Word or Son with the Father. In Book 15.11.20, he reasons that only the Word was made flesh so that Christ could communicate the truth to humans on a human level. As Mary T. Clark writes: ‘The Word of God entered human history...to incorporate human individuals into his body. Christ will lead them back to the Father who created them, where they will be in eternal life, ‘the glory of God’’. Thus, one can see that Augustine’s formulation and understanding of the Word is not beholden to philosophical ideas; rather, he uses them solely to elucidate his theology of the Word without ever allowing them to constrain his thoughts on the matter.

In conclusion, Augustine’s delicate yet powerful synthesis of pagan philosophy, or natural theology, and Christian revealed theology wielded an unparalleled authority over the writings of all subsequent medieval theologians, so that even the greatest of them, Thomas Aquinas, never sought to contradict Augustine’s views, but rather tried always to harmonise them with his own position. Concerning the Word, however, Augustine’s positive formulation of that central concept proved definitive for the Middle Ages.

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II

God-talk: The Epistemology of the Word

The specific metaphysical emphasis of the first section of this Introduction was ontological, that is, it was concerned with being; it described the positive attempts by a succession of great thinkers, both pagan and Christian, to clarify the conceptual content of the idea of the Logos. This second section will focus exclusively on matters epistemological, that is, matters of knowing relating to the intelligibility of the Word or God given the constraints of a limited and limiting (in philosophical terms) or fallen and fallible (in Christian terms) human reason. The aim, therefore, is to outline the tradition of major arguments, both pagan and Christian, philosophical and theological, concerning the knowability of the Logos as a divine principle or God.

It may seem mistaken to treat of the epistemology or knowability of a thing subsequent to having explored its essential nature or ontology. This is an erroneous assumption, however, since in terms of strict logic one can only investigate the knowability of a concept once one has fully defined it. Hence, for instance, one cannot question the knowability of God until one first grasps the very concept of who or what God is, that is, one must first possess the concept of God, with whatever content, before one can begin to ponder the knowability or epistemology of the referent. It is striking to note here that in the famous Ontological Argument of his Proslogion,24 St Anselm (1033-1109 A.D.) uses the logical necessity of this fact to prove the existence of God. He argues that the very idea of God as quid quo nihil maius cogitari possit, ‘that than which nothing greater can be thought’, proves His existence because ‘that than which nothing greater can be thought’ is perfect, and existence is a perfection; hence if God lacked existence, then one could conceive of something more perfect again, but God is ‘that than which nothing greater can be thought’, so God exists. Hence, the a priori concept of God and its

24 The original title of the Proslogion was to have been Fides quarens intellectum, Faith Seeking Understanding. This throws into relief Anselm’s dictum credo ut intellegam, ‘I believe in order that I may understand’, which asserts primacy of belief or faith over understanding or reason, as well as the logical necessity to embrace the concept before testing its referentiality.
*a posteriori* knowability prove God’s existence, so the knowability of a concept is always *a posteriori* to the concept itself. It is entirely reasonable and, in fact, essential, therefore, to investigate the epistemology of the Logos only after one has explored its ontology.

In the history of western thought, the first recorded thinker to question the rationality of human conceptions of God was the sixth-century Greek peripatetic poet and Presocratic philosopher, Xenophanes of Colophon (c.580-c.480 B.C.). Xenophanes roundly criticised Homer and Hesiod, the twin educators of the Greek-speaking world, for their misleading and mistaken contributions to traditional religious notions:

Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods everything
Which among men is shameful and blameworthy –
Theft and adultery and mutual deception (DK 21 B 11 and *EGP* 42).

Against this human and scandalous view of the divine, Xenophanes, the first of a long line of western thinkers to argue for philosophical monotheism, asserted that god is one, incorporeal, and wholly dissimilar to man:

There is one god, greatest among gods and men,
Similar to mortals neither in shape nor in thought (DK B23 and *EGP* 42).

He further criticises the facile anthropomorphic theology of the poets of his time when he writes:

But mortals think that gods are born,
And have clothes and speech and shape like their own (DK B 14 and *EGP* 43).

And he extrapolates and tightens this argument by a *reductio ad absurdum*:

But if cows and horses or lions had hands
And drew with their hands and made things men make,
Then horses would draw the forms of gods like horses,
Cows like cows,
And each would make their bodies
Similar in shape to their own (DK B 15 and *EGP* 43).

He argues, thus, that man has not been made *in imago dei*, in the image of God; rather man has made God, or the gods, *in imago hominis*, in the image of man; and, indeed, animals would do likewise did they but possess reason. In logical terms, Xenophanes’s attack on the facile anthropomorphosis of God points out the disanalogy between God
and mortal creatures, so that any attempt to see the one in terms of the other is clearly mistaken. Almost two millennia later, however, St Thomas Aquinas was to point out, by way of refining Xenophanes's extreme anti-anthropomorphic stance that: 'Incorporeal things, of which there are no images, are known by us by means of their relation to sensible bodies of which there are images...And so when we understand something about incorporeal things, we have to have recourse to the images of bodies, although there are no images of incorporeal things themselves' (*Summa Theologica* I.84.7). Aquinas, thus, acknowledges how the mind cannot escape the limits of sense perception, but his argument for analogy in relation to representations of the divine through language and image does not, however, licence the rash anthropomorphises of the poets that Xenophanes so excoriated.

In later philosophical tradition, Xenophanes acquired a reputation for scepticism, and his following argument appears to support this:

And the clear truth no man has seen nor will anyone
Know concerning the gods and about all the things of which I speak;
For even if I should actually manage to say what is the case,
Nevertheless he himself does not know it; but belief is found over all (DK B 34 and *EGP* 41).

On the other hand, he writes in more confident mood:

Not at first did the gods reveal all things to mortals,
But in time, by inquiring, they make better discoveries (DK B 18 and *EGP* 42).

This necessarily implies that one could only make 'better discoveries' were there an objective state of affairs in the world against which to measure the relative merit of the results of any scientific or philosophic inquiry. Hence, the claim that 'in time, by inquiring' mortals can 'make better discoveries' asserts that over the course of time thinkers linked by a tradition may be able to approach a more and more refined and concomitantly better known rational account of the Logos. In effect, Xenophanes is the first philosopher to draw the distinction – outlined above – between true belief and knowledge, a distinction that would have great influence on the following philosophical and later Christian theological tradition. The point as it relates to the Logos or God suggests that one must draw a distinction between, on the one hand, what one asserts of
the Logos and *happens* to be true, that is, true belief, as opposed to, on the other, what one asserts of the Logos and *knows* to be true, that is, knowledge. Thus, Xenophanes draws the principal philosophical and theological boundaries for the argument concerning God’s knowability or epistemology for millennia to come.

Protagoras of Abdera (c.490-c.420 B.C.), the next significant thinker in the history of the epistemology of theology, was not considered by the tradition to be a philosopher *per se*, but rather a sophist, that is, a travelling sage who charged his politically ambitious aristocratic clients handsome sums in order to be tutored in *apevris*, virtue or excellence. In the surviving opening fragment of his theological work, *On the Gods*, he infamously asserts:

> Concerning the gods, I am not in a position to know either that they exist, or that they do not exist; for there are many obstacles in the way of such knowledge, notably the intrinsic obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life.^^

No more of the work than this survives, but we know that the rest of it was of such a tenor that he was accused of atheism and run out of Athens. Be that as it may, a close reading of the opening lines reveals that Protagoras merely repeats what Xenophanes already asserted concerning the division between true belief and certain knowledge. Thus Protagoras expresses not atheism, but rather agnosticism concerning the existence or otherwise of the gods. As an agnostic he points out that he does not possess *gnosis*, certain knowledge, of the gods, so he suspends judgement and remains sceptical on the matter. This scepticism is further bolstered by his equally famous dictum: 'Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not'.^25^ This saying, taken from his treatise entitled *Truth*, or *The Overthrowers*, asserts deep epistemological relativism combined with radical cognitive scepticism. The epistemological relativism inherent in the position of ‘man being the measure’ harmonises with Xenophanes’s earlier refutation of anthropomorphic theology, but its radical cognitive scepticism denies the possibility of his assertion of philosophical monotheism, for such an assertion will always fall foul of being unable to transcend a self-referential, almost solipsistic, human perspective. Hence, on this account, knowledge

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^26^ Ibid., p. 3.
is impossible and all belief is subjective, so there is not even the possibility of true belief, for there is no objective standard outside of man’s measure by which any belief can be adjudged true. At this point, no matter the clarity of any concept of Logos or God, there is no way of judging whether the concept expresses true belief or not because the bridge between subjective belief and objective knowledge has been destroyed.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.), a younger contemporary of Protagoras, in his philosophical elenctic or examination sought to explore the boundary between mere δόξα, doxos, opinion or belief, and certain επιστήμη, epistēmē, or knowledge. His characteristic method was to cross-examine diverse interlocutors on various subjects in which they claimed to possess special expertise or knowledge, so by pressing them for a general definition of virtue, courage, friendship or whatever else was under discussion, he would invariably expose inconsistencies among their presuppositions, so that the elenchus usually ended in aporia, a state of helplessness or puzzlement. Despite the damning verdict of his non-philosophical Athenian contemporaries, who sentenced him to death for asking too many questions and leading the youth astray, Socrates’s dialectic is not about destroying conventions and asserting agnosticism; rather, the exposure of ignorance is preparatory to building up knowledge or wisdom on sound, logically consistent foundations. This, at least, was the way Plato remembered and portrayed his late master in his early Dialogues; by the middle Dialogues, however, he begins to develop his own original solutions to the crucial problem of bridging the aporetic gap between subjective opinion and objective knowledge.

Platonic philosophy, despite being the West’s most influential intellectual project, is not an undisputed monolithic system of thought. There have been, and there continue to be, many and diverse interpretations of the Platonic Dialogues. This lack of agreement on what Plato ‘really thought’ stems from the form and intent of these dramatic dialogues, in which he never appears as a character nor speaks in his own authorial voice. Rather, these texts were written both to illustrate the philosophical method par excellence of the Academy, that is, dialectic, and to stimulate the reader or listener to engage in that same dialectical activity himself. Necessarily, then, they refrain from offering any definitive statement of Plato’s own ideas, which would have been more suited to the genre of philosophical treatise that was current in the same period. Presumably, those
who wanted to know the master's own position would have attended his lectures or asked him in person afterwards. When Plato died in 347 B.C., those options vanished, and the long process and history of interpreting the extant texts began.

In the Ancient World there were two traditions of reading Plato: the earlier tradition of the Sceptical Academy, and the later, non-localised, Platonist tradition, which some critics further subdivide into Middle and Neo-Platonists. Sceptical Academics interpreted the *Dialogues* in an aporetic manner, and they argued that Plato believed that nothing could be known for certain, so no definite doctrines are to be found in the published texts. Middle and Neo-Platonists, on the other hand, argued that the *Dialogues* offered definite doctrines, so they began a dogmatic approach to interpreting the extant texts, whereby they are thought to expound a systematic positive philosophy. No more will be said about the sceptical interpretation, for it died out not long after the closure of the Academy subsequent to Sulla's savage sack of Athens in 86 B.C. It was the dogmatic exposition of the Middle Platonists and the later developments of the Neo-Platonists that were to have the most influence on medieval thought and, in particular, epistemology.

What, then, according to the dogmatists, was Plato's solution to the apparent epistemological impasse between mere opinion and certain knowledge? *Theaetetus* demonstrates that true knowledge cannot be equated with either sense perception or true belief. True knowledge is knowledge of the universal, for universals do not change; rather, they are fixed and capable of being grasped in clear, scientific definition. This suggests the question: how does one move from sense perception concerning particulars in the material world to true knowledge of the universal? The solution comes in *Republic* where Plato offers the simile of the line (*Republic*, 509d-511e). The schema of the line illustrates the continuum from ignorance to knowledge in terms of δοξα, opinion, and ἐπιστήμη, knowledge. Opinion and knowledge are differentiated according to the ontological status of their respective objects, so opinion is said to be concerned with ἐικόνες, copies or images, while knowledge is concerned with ἀρχαί, originals or archetypes. The famous Allegory of the Cave in the seventh book of *Republic* (514a-518d) further clarifies this theory of knowledge where the prisoner's escape from the cave of shadows to the world of light outside signifies the philosopher's progressive ascent from mere opinion concerning images to true knowledge concerning archetypes.
Hence, Plato’s insistence on education, whereby the young may be gradually led away from this unreal world of shadow and error to behold the real world of eternal, true values and, ultimately, the Idea of the Good itself.

Plato’s interest in epistemology, however, is not simply confined to answering questions concerning what we can know, that is, to define the limits of our knowledge; he is also concerned to answer the question of how we know, that is, to describe the psychological process of knowing. Hence it is necessary to be aware of how in Plato’s thought a doctrine of the psychology of knowing within the knower coexists with and complements the bare theory of knowledge already outlined. Thus, in the earlier *Meno*, he had already set about defining education or learning as *anamnesis*, the reminiscence or recovery of pre-existent knowledge in the soul. Socrates is here made to say:

As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only – a process men call learning – discovering everything else for himself...for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection (*Meno*, 81c-d).

Later in *Phaedo*, Plato’s psychological doctrine of anamnesis is explicitly linked to the theory of knowledge outlined in *Republic* when Socrates is made to argue:

[W]hen the soul makes use of the body to investigate something, be it through hearing or seeing or some other sense…it is dragged by the body to things that are never the same, and the soul itself strays and is confused and dizzy, as if it were drunk, in so far as it is in contact with that kind of thing…But when the soul investigates by itself it passes into a realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging, and being akin to this, it always stays with it whenever it is by itself and can do so; it ceases to stray and remains in the same state as it is in

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27 Aside from Cicero’s incomplete Latin translation of *Timaeus* complemented by Chalcidius’s later Neo-Platonic commentary, the only other authoritative Platonic texts available to the medievals were translations of *Phaedo* and *Meno*, made in Sicily, and available from about 1160 A.D.
touch with things of the same kind, and its experience then is what is called wisdom (Phaedo, 79c-d).

The clarification and most succint statement of this doctrine as well as the most influential in the Middle Ages, known to Chaucer,\(^{28}\) Dante and other authors to be considered in later chapters of this thesis, is to be found in a passage of Timaeus that has special relevance for any artist or writer engaged in representing reality, in particular, and by extension, the supreme reality of the Logos or God:

[T]his world is an image of something. Now in every subject it is of utmost importance to begin at the natural beginning, and so, on the subject of an image and its model, we must make the following specification: the accounts we give of things have the same character as the subjects they set forth. So accounts of what is stable and fixed and transparent to understanding are themselves stable and unshifting. We must do our very best to make these accounts as irrefutable and invincible as any account may be. On the other hand, accounts we give of that which has been formed to be like that reality, since they are accounts of what is a likeness, are themselves likely, and stand in proportion to the previous accounts...(Timaeus, 29b-c).

Hence, according to this argument of Timaeus, the challenge for the medieval writer who chose to represent God talking would be to render those words in a 'stable', 'fixed', and 'transparent' fashion, that is, according to an 'account as irrefutable and invincible as any account may be'. Such an account could only be supplied in terms of an Adamic language that would have the same form as the Logos or Mind of God, so each noun in it would express the essence of the very thing it denoted.

Although Plato's complementary accounts concerning the epistemological limits and psychological processes of knowing were very influential in the Middle Ages, his was not the only theory of knowledge to impress itself upon the mindset of thoughtful medieval writers. Aristotle shared Plato's faith in human reason, but he gradually became disenchanted with the Idealism of the Academy, so he began to develop a totally different metaphysics and, thus, concomitant epistemology to that of his master; these

\(^{28}\) Compare Chaucer's: 'Eek Plato seith, whoso kan him rede, / The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede' (General Prologue, I 741-2).
revolutionary views were rediscovered and became everywhere known in the Latin West from translations made first from the Arabic and later from the original Greek in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

'All men by nature desire to know' (Metaphysics, 980a25), so begins the famous first line of the Metaphysics, and as Aristotle argues elsewhere: ‘Nature does nothing in vain’ (Physics, 198b10-199b33), so that if man possesses a natural desire for knowledge, then it is reasonable to expect that nature has provided him with the intellectual means of satisfying that desire; any other assumption would be monstrous. Nevertheless, despite all men’s natural desire to know and the concomitant naturally provided ability to satisfy it, there still remain different degrees of knowledge. Like Plato, Aristotle uses the technical term ἐπιστήμη to designate scientific knowledge, that is, the kind of knowledge that is fixed, stable and necessarily so. Unlike Plato, however, knowledge for the resolutely empiricist Aristotle begins with perception,²⁹ but as with Plato in Theaetetus it is explicitly denied that perception amounts to knowledge. Thus, concerning the psychological process of knowing, he writes:

All animals…have an innate capacity to make discriminations, which is called perception; and if perception is present in them, in some animals the percept is retained and in others it is not. Now for those in which it is not retained…there is no knowledge outside perception. But for some perceivers it is possible to hold the percept in their minds; and when many such things have come about there is a further difference, and some animals, from the retention of such things, come to possess a general account, while others do not. Thus from perception there comes memory, as we call it; and from memory (when it occurs often in connection with the same thing) experience – for memories that are many in number form a single experience; and from experience, or from the whole universal that has come to rest in the mind,…there comes a principle of skill and of knowledge (Posterior Analytics, 99b35-100a9).

There is evidently a great divide here between the Platonic and Aristotelian psychological processes of intellection because Plato tries to explain how it is we can know the

²⁹ Nihil in intellectum quod nisi prius in sensu, ‘there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses’, as the standard scholastic tag puts it.
universal in the super-celestial realm of the Ideas while discounting the material world of sense perception whereas Aristotle is concerned to explain the process of intellection by way of perception and experience of the material world. Aristotle’s significant move to ground the acquisition of knowledge in perception reflects his basic ontology which holds that although universal forms exist, they exist in the material world by inhering in matter while acting at the same time as the organising principle or paradigm of any particular parcel of matter. In such a world the mind can have had no previous existence or knowledge of the universals or forms, so it begins its existence as a tabula rasa, a blank slate, and the universals are individually abstracted from particular experience as described above.

When the ‘whole universal...has come to rest in the mind,’ one possesses knowledge, but for Aristotle fulfilling the sufficient conditions of scientific knowledge requires the capacity to state causes and give explanations. Thus, in order to achieve a scientific understanding of something one must possess knowledge of the four causes: material, formal, efficient and final.\textsuperscript{30} Once the knower understands things according to the causes, that knowledge, in order to be considered truly scientific, must then be capable of being expressed according to an axiomatic system of inferential deductions, that is, syllogisms. The Posterior Analytics states that there are three types of science: i) poetical or productive, ii) practical and iii) theoretical. The last concerns subjects whose merit lies in possessing knowledge for knowledge’s sake, for example, logic, mathematics, and most crucially of all what the Metaphysics calls First Philosophy, for this last exalted subject presents that form of knowledge most worthy of the name of wisdom. First Philosophy renders knowledge not just of causes in general but of the First Cause in particular, that is, God, and so it may be glossed reasonably as theology. This First Cause is, on the one hand, difficult to know because it is furthest from the particulars of material experience, but it is, on the other, the best known because it is the most abstract and least complex thing in itself as well as the most authoritative because it is absolutely fundamental to all existence and, thus, knowledge. Indeed, the characteristic activity of Aristotle’s God, as noted in the Preface to this thesis, is not, of course,

\textsuperscript{30} See Physics 194b23-195a3 for Aristotle’s brief exposition of the pivotal doctrine of the four causes.
physical, for He is immaterial; rather, it is mental, and this mental activity constitutes thinking, and this thinking must be of that which is best; and that which is best is God. Thus, the object of His thinking and His knowledge is Himself. In the Middle Ages, Aquinas in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* interpreted Aristotle’s God’s knowledge of Himself as being not a mere solipsistic self-consciousness; rather, it is by knowing Himself as First Cause that He knows too the created world: ‘Nec tamen sequitur quod omnia alia a se ei sunt ignota; nam intelligendo se intelligit omnia alia’, ‘It does not follow, however, that all things different from Himself are not known by Him; for by understanding Himself He knows all other things’ (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Bk 12 lect. xi ).

Thus, it is in the practice of First Philosophy or contemplation of the First Cause or God, that is, the science of the divine, that Aristotle believes the summit of human happiness exists:

> [T]he activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative; and of human activities, therefore, that which is most akin to this must be most of the nature of happiness...Happiness extends, then, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not accidentally, but in virtue of the contemplation; for this in itself is precious. Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178b20-30).

Although Aristotle admits it is impossible for mortal creatures to maintain such contemplation of the divine for long periods of time, he still holds that the summit of man’s perfection as a rational animal concerns the practice of the highest faculty of his soul, that is, the contemplative intellect, which he claims in a famous passage of *De anima* to be immortal or divine:

> And in fact thought, as we have described it, is what it is by virtue of becoming all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making all things...Thought in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity...When separated it is alone just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal (*De anima*, 430a15-25).

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Aristotle, thus, makes great and historically influential claims for man’s ability to use the divine part of his soul to contemplate the highest truths of God and the world.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once wrote: ‘Every man is born an Arisotelian or a Platonist. They are two classes of men, besides which it is impossible to conceive a third.’ Had Coleridge sufficient knowledge of the thought of St Augustine, however, he may have been forced to revise his bold dichotomy as at worst false or at best somewhat premature and misleading. At first blush, one might be tempted to call Augustine a Platonist, for he certainly takes up and develops Neo-Platonic ideas and themes throughout his philosophy, but on greater familiarity with his oeuvre one is forced to admit that his use of classical philosophy, be it Platonic or Peripatetic in origin, is always ruled by his overarching concern to explicate a specifically Christian and, thus, biblical conception of God and the created world. It was Augustine, not Anselm, who was the first to assert crede ut intellegas, ‘believe in order that you understand.’

Ever after Augustine’s famous garden conversion in Milan in 386 A.D., philosophy was to become the handmaiden to theology, the queen of the sciences. Thus, although he accepts the Neo-Platonic ontology concerning the nature of universals and their location in the Logos or Divine Mind (see section 1 of this Introduction), he makes the Johannine scriptural identification of the Logos with Christ thereby necessitating the development of an entirely new epistemology in which Christ or God is now both the ultimate object and source of knowledge. This notion that the Logos or Word actively participates in the psychological process of human knowing would have been entirely anathema to Plotinus and his later Neo-Platonic disciples, who always stressed the transcendence of God over mere human concerns. Augustine, who was very much aware of the post-lapsarian condition of the world as well as the nature of a personal God who

32 Quoted in Kenny, A Brief History of Western Philosophy, p. 57.
34 See Confessions Bk VIII for the autobiographical account of his conversion.
out of *caritas*, love, becomes incarnate in order to redeem His fallen creation, that is, sinful man, does not share either Plato or Aristotle’s sunny faith in unaided human reason, and this contrasting pessimistic position was to have an incalculable influence on the thought of medieval writers for whom the Fall loomed large in their deliberation concerning the representative limits of post-lapsarian and post-Babelian language while considering the question of whether or not to represent God and His speech in their poetry.

Before his conversion, Augustine was tempted to become an Academic sceptic, that is, to accept a form of scepticism that denies any possibility of objective knowledge. This phase did not survive his conversion, but it is arguable that his tendency towards such a pessimistic epistemology might have in some way foreshadowed or impelled the epistemology of divine illumination that he later developed, which minimises the ability of the soul to know on the strength of mere human reason. In fact, Augustine nowhere renders a definitive account of his theory of divine illumination while the theory as it presents itself throughout his works has been interpreted diversely by both philosophers and theologians ever since.¹⁵ In the *City of God*, concerning the difference between the knowledge of creator and creature he writes:

Now the knowledge of the creature is a kind of twilight, compared with the knowledge of the Creator; and then comes the daylight and the morning, when that knowledge is linked with the praise and love of the creator; and it never declines into night, so long as the Creator is not deprived of his creature’s love...The creature’s knowledge, left to itself, is, we might say, in faded colours, compared with the knowledge that comes when it is known in the Wisdom of God, in that art, as it were, by which it was created (XI, 7).³⁶

Here we readily see the identification of divine light with knowledge, and the perfection of that knowledge in the creature when it is allied to a love of the creator. Later in the

¹⁵ In the Middle Ages, the theory of divine illumination was accepted by Henry of Ghent, minimized by Aquinas, interpreted in such a way as to be effectively rejected by Ockham, explicitly rejected by Duns Scotus, but ignored by none. Its fortune among more aesthetically and literary minded artists and writers was a different matter, however.  
same work Augustine considers the manner in which immaterial angelic substances acquire knowledge:

> These holy angels, to be sure, do not learn about God by spoken words, but by the actual presence of the unchanging Truth, that is by his only-begotten Word, by the Father Himself, and by his Holy Spirit...And they have better knowledge of the created world there, in God's wisdom...and consequently in that wisdom they know themselves better than in themselves...For they were made, and they are different from their Creator; and therefore they know themselves in him by a daylight knowledge; and in themselves...by a kind of twilight knowledge (*City of God*, XI, 29).

Thus, all objective angelic knowledge is known in the Word of God, and when this knowledge is referred: 'to the praise and worship of the Creator, then there is the light as of morning sunshine in the minds of those who contemplate [it]' (*City of God*, XI, 29).

In effect, Augustine substitutes his theory of divine illumination for the untenable – as he sees it – Platonic theory of reminiscence, which was unacceptable to Christian sensibilities because of its reliance on a claim for the pre-existence of the soul; for divine illumination enables the knower not only to know eternal truths but also to judge things in relation to the standards of the *rationes seminales* located in the Logos. The theme of light and illumination goes back to Plato when in *Republic* he speaks of the Good as that which: 'is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, [which] produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and that in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding' (*Republic*, 517c). But Augustine synthesises this Platonic idea with the revelation of the Johannine Prologue concerning the light that enlightens: 'every man who comes into the world' (John 1:9). Etienne Gilson points out that Augustine's epistemology of divine illumination has the curious circular effect of both proving God's existence and being proved by the supremely intelligible and self-subsisting truth of Himself:

> [Augustine's] God is the intelligible sun whose light shines upon human reason and enables it to know truth; he is the inner master who teaches man from within; his eternal and unchangeable ideas are the supreme rules whose influence submits our reason to the necessity of divine truth...Granting that truth is superhuman and
divine in its own right, the bare fact that man knows truth conclusively proves the existence of God.\(^{37}\)

In conclusion, this second section of the Introduction has covered three major epistemologies or modes of knowing God, all of which were accessible to the medieval writer: Plato was known chiefly via his *Timaeus*; Aristotle was everywhere known to all medieval writers simply as the Philosopher; and Augustine possessed the supreme standing of being the most authoritative theologian of the period. Variations on these models occur in the work of Anselm and Aquinas among others, but any significant variations will be discussed as they occur with reference to the various literary texts under discussion. The most interesting consequence of the study of these theories will be to see which of them impact the most on the central concern of this thesis, that is, the representation of God talking, as the Platonic and Augustinian theories are the products of powerful minds steeped in a strong sense of the rhetorical power of language and mystic Idealism whereas Aristotle’s account is much more commonsensical and empirically oriented. In the light of these epistemologies, the particular temper of any medieval writer will soon reveal itself as either empirically or Idealistically inclined, and this too will influence the question of representing God talking in Middle English literature.

Vernacular Religious Writing: Theology or Poetry?

In sections 1 and 2 of this Introduction, I have expounded and elucidated the classical and Patristic underpinnings of medieval, academic *sacra doctrina* or theology according to the most pertinent and influential of the Greek philosophers and Church Fathers, especially in relation to the metaphysics concerning ontological and epistemological theories of the Logos. These metaphysical doctrines were demonstrated to have been given their definitive treatment, effective synthesis and ultimate, authoritative expression for the whole Latin Middle Ages in the major philosophical and theological works of St Augustine. Later medieval theologians like St Anselm, St Albertus Magnus, St Bonaventure and St Thomas Aquinas all considered themselves to be the intellectual heirs of an authoritative tradition of rational thought stretching back to the earliest natural theology of the Ancient Greeks but which since then had been gloriously illuminated and radically transformed by the light of the revealed Word of God in the Bible. The Word of God or Christ Himself is equated with Truth in the New Testament, so the ultimate object of *sacra doctrina*, that is, the theology of the Word, is Truth.

St Thomas, in his commentary on chapter 2 of Boethius’s *De Trinitate*, however, considers the difference between philosophy and theology:

So there exist two theologies or divine sciences: in one divine things are not the subject-matter of the science but beginnings of the subject-matter, and this theology philosophers pursue and also call metaphysics; in the other divine things are considered for themselves as subject-matter of the science, and this theology is the one taught us in holy scripture (*Expositio super Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, 2, q. 5, a. 4).  

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38 In particular, it has been shown how his *Confessiones, De doctrina christiana, De trinitate* and *De civitate dei* were central to medieval, logocentric thought.  
And later, in the *Summa Theologica*, he makes explicit the epistemological difference in kind between the two sciences while maintaining their essential complementarity:

> There is no reason why another science should not treat of the very same objects, as known by the light of divine revelation, which the philosophical sciences treat of according as they are knowable by the light of natural reason. Hence the theology which belongs to sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is a part of philosophy (I.1.1).

Hence, in the scholastic tradition of medieval academic theology, philosophy and theology are considered complementary sciences, for they share the same ultimate object, Truth; that is, in the case of philosophy, the unaided rational discovery and understanding of Truth and in the case of theology, the rational elucidation and understanding of revealed Truth.\(^{41}\)

In the course of introducing Aquinas's systematic distinction between philosophy and theology, Ralph McInerny and John O'Callaghan argue the following concerning the definition and nature of theological discourse:

> [T]he discourse of the theologian is ultimately driven back to starting points or principles that are held to be true on the basis of faith, that is, the truths that are authoritatively conveyed by the Bible. Some believers reflect on these truths and see other truths implied by them, spell out their interrelations and defend them against the accusation of being nonsense. Theological discourse looks like any other discourse and is, needless to say, governed by the common principles of thought and being, but it is characterized formally by the fact that its arguments and analyses are truth-bearing only for one who accepts Scriptural revelation as true. This provides a formal test for deciding whether a piece of discourse is philosophical or theological. If it relies only on truths anyone can be expected to know about the world, and if it offers to lead to new truths on the basis of such truths, and only on that basis, then it is philosophical discourse. On the other hand, discourse whose cogency — not formal, but substantive — depends upon our accepting as true such claims as that there are three persons in one divine nature,

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\(^{41}\) Hence, St Thomas in his *Summa Contra Gentiles* uses philosophy alone, that is, unaided human reason, to logically prove to the non-Christian that Christ is the Truth.
that our salvation was effected by the sacrifice of Jesus, that Jesus is one person but two natures, one human, one divine, and the like, is theological discourse. Any appeal to an authoritative scriptural source as the necessary nexus in an argument is thereby other than philosophical discourse.42

F. C. Copleston articulates this idea in another form when he writes: 'If we start with Christian faith and explore its content and implications, we are thinking as theologians.'43

In conjunction with this, Eileen Sweeney writes concerning the use of scripture in scholastic theology:

The way in which scripture is cited is somewhat different from the way Aristotle or even church authorities like Augustine are used. First, scripture is a language in which these authors are thoroughly fluent. They cite scripture from memory, almost proverbially. Further, when scripture is cited in argumentative forms like the disputation, most often it does not carry the weight of the argument. Either scripture is cited in opposing arguments on one side or the other, in which case scripture passages seem to articulate a limit or boundary the opposing view seems to transgress. But the positions or arguments articulated pro or con on a given question are not the final word but something the master may accept or reject, which will require an interpretation of the passage from scripture which accepts, rejects, or qualifies its relevance and apparent position on the question. When scripture is cited in the master's own answer, it functions as a support for something for which independent arguments are given. Scripture is also sometimes used to give a position moral and spiritual weight, to reiterate the moral and spiritual center of a writer's thought. It thus can act as an almost existential reminder of why these arguments matter and what is at stake in them.44

McInerny and O'Callaghan and Sweeney clarify, then, the distinction between

43 F. C. Copleston, A History of Medieval Philosophy, p. 182.
philosophical discourse and theological discourse, on the one hand, and between argument and scriptural authority, on the other. Clearly, therefore, in deciding the use of scriptural propositions or citations in any particular text, the question must be raised as to exactly its function: does it provide the starting point and foundation for theological discourse, or does it delimit such discourse? These questions may only be answered on the basis of close reading of this or that text, but it remains salutary to be critically aware of the complexity of the matter.

Just as the object of the academic sciences of philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages was Truth, so too was Truth the object of medieval, secular literature. As stated in the Preface, the medieval literary author equated the art of poetry to the art of rhetoric; and logic formed an integral part of rhetoric, so that when he arranged his ‘matter’ according to the rhetorical process of dispositio, he was obliged to consider the particular forms and figures of valid arguments that would guarantee that the ‘sentence’ articulated by the literary work would be wholly consistent with the Truth. The ultimate authority for this, perhaps, surprising view of rhetoric lies with Aristotle who in his Rhetoric states: ‘the technical study of rhetoric is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Now persuasion is a sort of proof (since we are most persuaded when we consider a thing to have been proved); the orator’s proofs are enthymemes, and an enthymeme is a sort of deduction...’ (I i, 1355a4-8). In the Rhetoric, Aristotle defines the art as being concerned with the presentation of a case under the headings of logic, emotion and language or style; he connects the first and last headings in the following statement: ‘In making a speech you must study three items: first, the means of producing persuasion; secondly, the language; thirdly, the proper arrangement of the various parts of the speech’ (III i, 1403b5-9). Hence, an ideal of medieval rhetoric is to produce a work that combines logic, language and form in a harmonious whole. In fact, it is only by ensuring that the dispositio of his work is consistent throughout that the medieval author can be certain that his work will be beautiful according to the aesthetic criterion of consonantia, that is, harmony or proportion; for beauty too is related to Truth. Indeed,

45 See the Preface above.
46 The three principles of medieval aesthetics were integritas, consonantia and claritas, that is, wholeness, harmony, and radiance. See Summa Theologica, I.39.8 where St
St Thomas in the *Summa Theologica* argues that: ‘Beauty consists of due proportion, for the senses delight in well-proportioned things’ (*Summa Theologica*, I.5.4); but he views this proportion as having a moral value, for it accords with the rational order and law of the Logos. Umberto Eco, thus, elucidates Aquinas’s moral, logocentric aesthetic by explaining that proportion amounts to: ‘the correct relationship between the intelligence and the object that the intelligence comprehends. In other words, proportion becomes a metaphysical principle that explains the unity of the cosmos itself.’

Hence, both the rules of poetic composition and the goal of literary beauty combine to contribute to the medieval secular author’s concern to write works that will be both internally consistent and consonant with the Truth.

When a medieval secular author, then, decides to represent God speaking in that author’s own vernacular, vulgar tongue rather than the divinely-authorised, sacred languages of the Bible, that is, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, he will have two main concerns: i) to argue or ensure that the content of God’s speech is consistent with the tradition of *sacra doctrina* or theology of the Truth and ii) to argue or suggest, explicitly or implicitly, that his vulgar tongue is indeed worthy of the articulation of divine speech. In the case of the specific Middle English literary texts and authors that will be dealt with in the body of this thesis, that is, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, the Master-Anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x, Langland and Chaucer the object will be to judge what attitude each individual text or author or group of texts or authors has to reveal in relation to these two primary concerns. There is, however, one last category of vernacular, medieval writing to consider before beginning the critical analysis and interpretation of specific Middle-English texts, and that category of writing in the last decade has come to be labelled ‘vernacular theology’.

Thomas writes: ‘Three qualities are required for Beauty. In the first place integrity or perfection: since incomplete things, precisely because they are such, are deformed. Due proportion or harmony among the parts is also required. Finally clarity or splendour: in fact we describe things whose colours are clear and brilliant as beautiful.’

Nicholas Watson, the literary critic most associated with the term ‘vernacular theology’, in his article ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’ first outlines his understanding of its usage as being that of a 'catchall, which in principle could include any kind of writing, sermon or play that communicates theological information to an audience'. Hence, his critical formulation of ‘vernacular theology’ as a category of ‘any kind of writing...that communicates theological information’ is obviously germane to the ‘writings’ under discussion in this thesis, for the written discourse of a Julian of Norwich, a Langland or the Pearl-poet may, indeed, be considered to be theological because their writing is grounded in the propositions of scripture and/or mystical experience; and since their texts are written in the vernacular rather than Latin, they may be considered examples of vernacular theology. Watson, however, further argues that: ‘The word ‘theology’ focuses our attention on the specifically intellectual content of vernacular religious texts that are often treated with condescension (especially in relation to Latin texts).’ His account of his chosen term ‘vernacular theology’, however, does not, in fact, take account of the normal meaning of the word ‘theology’ in relation to the Middle Ages. Theology in the medieval context was precisely the tradition of sacra doctrina, as outlined above; hence, it did not simply relate to some vague sense of ‘intellectual content’ concerning the nature of God. Indeed, Watson does not even clearly outline what he takes either ‘intellectual content’ or ‘theological information’ to consist of; but it must mean some sophisticated or conceptual attitude or thinking in relation to God. This in itself, however, is not impressive or systematic enough to warrant the term theology when considered in the light of the academic tradition of the science of sacra doctrina.


50 Ibid., 823, n.4.
In his article, 'Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England', Watson argues: ‘Not only do vernacular texts derive material from an array of Latin systems of thought, they generate their own systems – to the extent that I propose we abandon our patronizing uses of terms like popular to describe these texts, and speak instead of vernacular theology.’ Here he now asserts the systematic nature of the thinking of vernacular religious writings by stating that they ‘generate their own systems’ of thought, but nowhere does he offer a clear statement of what that means. On the one hand, thus, he asserts that texts which he considers examples of vernacular theology appropriate systems of thought from academic theology, but even the most cursory examination of the kinds of writing he means, that is, Julian of Norwich’s A Revelation of Love and Margery Kempe’s Book, denies this possibility. The kinds of vernacular writings whose prestige he wishes to raise simply do not operate according to the formal, systematic models of academic theology, and this is especially the case the more literary the supposed examples of vernacular theology are. And, on the other hand, he offers no elucidation of what systems of thought vernacular texts themselves generate. The result is that the concept of ‘vernacular theology’ as used by Watson is unsatisfactorily vague.

In his chapter on ‘The Middle English Mystics’ in The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, Watson makes the following astonishing claim: ‘Langland should probably be seen as the first theologian whose allegiances...have been transferred from Latin to English to the point that he thinks creatively in the vernacular.’ Normally, it would be viewed as stating the obvious, but it must now be said that Langland is a poet; he is certainly not a theologian, and had he been one, he would never have chosen to articulate his theology in the form of an allegorical, dream-vision poem. Watson, unfortunately, does not stop to adequately define his terms, or clearly consider just what it was to be a theologian in the Middle Ages, or convincingly argue why it is – pace almost every literary critic who has ever written on Langland – that he may be legitimately considered just as much a theologian as either Augustine or Aquinas were.

Later, in the same chapter, Watson suggests that ‘the poems of the Pearl manuscript’, including, presumably, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, may be considered along with *Piers Plowman* as further examples of vernacular theology. This bizarre notion further demonstrates the absurd tendentiousness of the doubtful claims of ‘vernacular theology’.

In ‘Visions of Inclusion’, Watson asserts that: ‘Langland can be said to dissent from standard salvation theologies precisely because [he is] not writing in Latin’. This controversial claim is illuminated by his subsequent startling statement that: ‘all theology is language specific’. He seems to mean by this that particular languages will necessarily lead to particular theologies, or that the form of the language itself will determine the nature of the related theology. This ostensibly post-structuralist and perspectivalist position appears to rely on the highly controversial Sapir-Whorf or linguistic relativity hypothesis of language that states that the structure of our language in large measure affects the way we perceive the world. David Crystal explains: ‘The ‘Sapir-Whorf hypothesis’...combines two principles. The first is known as linguistic determinism: it states that language determines the way we think. The second follows from this, and is known as linguistic relativity: it states that the distinctions encoded in one language are not found in any other language.’ In Watson’s case, then, it appears that he is suggesting that the structure of a particular language will affect the theology one can produce through and by virtue of that language; but this notion of linguistic relativity has been largely rejected by modern linguists. Crystal asserts that ‘in its strongest form it is unlikely to have any adherents now. The fact that successful translations between languages can be made is a major argument against it, as is the fact that the conceptual uniqueness of a language like Hopi can nonetheless be explained using English.’ Furthermore, the assertion that the particular language used in theology would in some way impact on the nature of the theology produced is a thoroughly

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53 Ibid., p. 565.
55 Ibid., 171.
unmedieval one because the tradition of *sacra doctrina* self-consciously incorporates insights originally articulated in Greek without any anxiety as to related, relativistic linguistic incongruities. The point, however, is that the premisses of medieval academic theology are taken from the Bible, but they are axiomatised according to a system of deductive inferences following the order of scientific knowledge as schematised by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics*.\(^{58}\) Hence, the form of medieval academic theology reflects the non-linguistic order of the categories of logic, so Watson's claim that 'theology is language specific' is both rejected and refuted by the very nature of the science of *sacra doctrina*.

Indeed, Chaucer in *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* emphatically asserts the non-linguistic nature of the diverse categories of logic in relation to the *quadrivium* science of astronomy when he writes:

> But natheles suffise to the these trewe conclusions in Englissh as wel as sufficith to these noble clerkes Grekes these same conclusions in Grek; and to Arabians in Arabik, and to Jewes in Ebrew, and to Latyn folk in Latyn...And God woot that in alle these langages and in many moo han these conclusions ben suffisantely lerned and taught, and yit by diverse reules; right as diverse pathes leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome (*A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, Prologue 28-40).

In this respect, Chaucer argues, *pace* Watson and, for the matter of that, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, that reason allows men of diverse, particular languages to arrive at universal truths, for although the particular modes or 'reules' of reasoning may themselves be diverse, Greeks, Arabs, Jews, Latins and English will all ultimately arrive at the same true conclusions, for the consistency of true conclusions is guaranteed by the rationality of Truth, that is, the Logos. Aquinas asserts this same idea concerning the transcendence of reason at the beginning of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, a work of natural as opposed to revealed theology designed to rationally persuade the Muslim or pagan of the truth of the Catholic faith, when he writes:

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\(^{58}\) The Latin *Organon*, the collection of Aristotle's logical works taught in the medieval *trivium* as the whole of logic, was completed c. 1120 with the inclusion of James of Venice's translation of the *Posterior Analytics* which thereafter had such an important influence on the medieval conception of *scientia* or scientific knowledge.
Muslims and pagans do not agree with us accepting the authority of any Scripture we might use in refuting them...Hence we must have recourse to natural reason, to which all men are forced to assent (1.2).^59

Reason in the Middle Ages is, thus, decisively asserted as the mode of universal discourse, for to the medieval mind, reason transcends language and culture in its sure discovery of universal and certain Truth.

Finally, Watson, in his article ‘Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God’, articulates his distaste for the reading of vernacular religious writing, ‘as though it were no more than a collection of simplified versions of theological ideas whose real home continued to be Latin’.^60 This is precisely to deny the habitual usage of theological ideas in vernacular literary writings of medieval secular poets from Dante through Langland, Chaucer and the master-anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x right through to Gavin Douglas writing at the end of the fifteenth-century. These secular poets who treated of religious subjects or rather religious matter in their secular, vernacular poems viewed the store of academic theology as just one more source for their _inventio_ or gathering of suitable ‘matter’ for their literary productions. In the _dispositio_ or arrangement of their matter, they strove to articulate sentences consistent with Truth, for their serious intention was ever to reflect the logocentric world of nature and ideas around them. Watson, in his usage of so-called ‘vernacular theology’ has completely missed the point that in the Middle Ages poetry is _never_ theology, even if it articulates sentences consonant with theology; rather, the two disciplines, the art of poetry and the science of theology, are both subordinate to the claims of the Word, and their disparate approaches to the selfsame Word are conditioned, not by the linguistic relativity of the vernacular languages versus Latin, but by the nature of their diverse methodologies and intentions.

Watson is right, of course, to suggest that religious writing in Middle English ought to be considered in the light of the broad intellectual culture of late-medieval England, especially where that culture intersects with the contested status of vernacular writing; but he is wrong, however, to promulgate the usage of a supposedly technical


term, 'vernacular theology', in order to raise the prestige of the subset of vernacular religious writing in English medieval literature, for this term has now been shown to be too vague, on the one hand, and too ambiguous, on the other, especially when his usage of it has lead him to confuse the *ars* or art of poetry with the *scientia* or science of *sacra doctrina*. Ultimately, 'vernacular theology' is but a chimera, a fabulous beast of the medieval bestiary, whose existence is affirmed by wish-fulfillment alone.

Finally, as noted above, the notion of 'vernacular theology' as defined by Watson supposes that the medium of such discourse, for instance, in the case of the Middle English mystics, English, affects the kind of theology the text entails or presents; and such theology differs in kind to theology produced in Latin in the Scholastic manner. Chaucer does not seem to accept such a notion; what about someone, however, who writes of visionary experience that puports to reveal the nature of God; do such writers themselves acknowledge such a difference? Julian of Norwich throughout her *A Revelation of Love* is concerned to assert and argue for its essential orthodoxy with respect to its message. Hence, in her thirty-fourth chapter, she addresses the relation of the 'prevites which [Christ] shewed openly in this revelation' (*A Revelation of Love*, 34.3-4) to the 'preching and teching of holy church' (*RL*, 34.11). Might they be contradictory? Julian thinks not, for she argues:

God shewde fulle gret plesance that he hath in alle men and women that mightly and mekely and wisely take the preching and the teching of holy church. For he it is, holy church. He is the grounde, he is the substance, he is the teching, he is the techer, he is the ende, and he is the mede wherfore every kinde soule traveleth. And this is knowen and shall be knowen to ech soule to which the holy gost declareth it (*RL*, 34.12-16).

Julian, thus, accepts no difference between the origin of her visions and revelation and the ground of the Church's preaching and teaching; the 'sentence' of both is one. In the final chapter of *A Revelation of Love* Julian records the words spoken in her spiritual understanding fifteen years after her original deathbed visionary experiences and

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revelation; she is told: "What, woldest thou wit thy lordes mening in this thing? Wit it wele, love was his mening. Who shewed it the? Love. What shewid he the? Love. Wherfore shewed he it the? For love..."

(RL, 86.13-15). Consequently, she affirms: 'Thus was I lemed that love was oure lordes mening' (RL, 86.16-17). The notion that God's meaning is love comes from the New Testament, of course, and, in particular, 1 John 4:16, 'Deus caritas est', 'God is love.' If every detail of the series of visions of Julian's revelation is grounded in this principle of love just as in scripture, then it follows that the text's implicit claim is for its essential concord with scripture. All the propositions of A Revelation of Love are to be taken in harmony with the preaching and teaching of the Church which are based on scripture; any contradiction inferred is mistaken because unintended, for if God is Love, and God's intention is love, then all that God reveals must be necessarily in harmony with His intention. Julian, at least, does not claim any difference between the implied 'theology' of her text and that of the Church. This is not to say that there are no such contradictions, but that remains to be proven.

So much, then, for 'vernacular theology'. If the texts under discussion in this thesis are not, then, examples of 'vernacular theology', what are they? In the case of Julian of Norwich, she reports her visionary experience, and offers commentary on it; this self-exegesis seeks to clarify the meaning of her text, not to engage in the independent production of sacra doctrina. Margery Kempe, moreover, stops far short of analysing her own Book; rather, she dictates it in haphazard fashion without the conscious attitude of one doing theology. In the case of the remaining texts under investigation, they must be regarded as poetic texts, products of an ars poetica, that is, literary in the modern sense, rhetorical in the medieval. As poetic texts, their authors composed them according to the key rhetorical processes of inventio and dispositio. As discussed above, the author in the process of inventio discovered suitable matter for his composition; and sections 1 and 2 of this Introduction have provided not only the intellectual context but also the philosophical or theological matter of many of the sophisticated, thoughtful literary texts under discussion in this thesis. The author then arranged his collected 'matter' in the dispositio according to the order of reason, so his 'sentence' is consistent with the scriptural text if he is producing a version of a biblical narrative, or that it accords with Truth if he is fabulating discourse concerning God. This thesis, then, will examine the
literary texts in question not as examples of theology, but as poetic texts which include religious, philosophical and theological 'matter' arranged in 'sentence' according to the order of the Logos.

The wide variety of literary texts this thesis will consider reflect the diversity in Middle English that Chaucer concernedly notes while considering both the copying and reception of his *Troilus and Criseyde*:

And for ther is so gret diversite  
In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,  
So prey I God that non myswrite the,  
Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;  
And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,  
That thow be understonde, God I beseche! (V 1793-98)

Despite this 'gret diversite / In Englissh' and the slipperiness of language it connotes, Chaucer’s prayer to God that his poem be understood wherever it be read, implies conviction in a Transcendental Signified, lying beyond the provisionality of fallen language, but which guarantees meaning and Truth. Hence, Chaucer’s acknowledgement of the inherent difficulties of language does not deny the possibility of certain knowledge with God’s help.

In conclusion, the three sections of this Introduction have gestured towards the universal intention or *Weltanschauung* that lies beneath and must inform any attempt to offer a rationale for representing divine speech in Middle-English literary texts. There is, indeed, diversity among the texts to be considered, but that diversity is resolved by the nature of the Logos itself. As Augustine writes:

And so by the Word coeternal with yourself, you say all that you say in simultaneity and eternity, and whatever you say will come about does come about. You do not cause it to exist other than by speaking (*Confessions*, 11, 7).

The self-enunciating Word creates the world; the Word, thus, constitutes the pattern or paradigm of all reality, so every word is a sign of the Word, and all words, all writing, ultimately point to the Word. In this respect, all discourse is a representation of Divine Speech, for whatever is, exists solely and ultimately as a function, and by virtue, of God talking.
Enunciating the Word: Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe

‘I know a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven.

And I know such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth):

That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter.’

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe are exceptional among the group of five so-called medieval English mystics, for they are the only two who represent divine speech in their respective texts. They are not the only mystics tout court to ever report and represent the experience of divine discourse, of course, for there is a distinct and long series of such representations to be found in the broader Christian visionary and mystical tradition.¹ St Francis’s report of divine speech and its enthusiastic reception, for instance, testify to the fact that medieval Christians and by extension the Church accepted that divine discourse was not necessarily confined to the canonical limits of the Bible, and Francis’s example would have been famous for all five medieval English mystics.² Julian and Margery, however, depart radically from the theory, implicit and explicit, of contemplative practice and experience disseminated by their insular forebearers and contemporaries Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and the anonymous Cloud-author; the differences between the


² Other continental mystics who claimed to experience instances of divine speech include Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380); they recorded them in the Scivias, Liber Celestis and Dialogo, respectively. See Wolfgang Riehle, The Middle English Mystics, trans. Bernard Standring (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 24-33 for a discussion of the interrelation between continental and English mysticism; see also Marion Glasscoe, English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith (London and New York: Longman, 1993), pp. 37-47.
female and male mystics reinforce the remarkable distinctiveness of the experience and record of divine discourse in the former that emphasises, above all, the person of Christ and His friendship with his chosen intimates. Margery in her Book relates an episode that occurred while on pilgrimage in the Holy Land; she and her group of fellow pilgrims were being guided from site to site by Franciscan friars when 'on of the frerys askyd on of hir felawshep yyf that wer the woman of Inglond the which, thei had herd seyd, spak wyth God' (The Book of Margery Kempe, ll. 2390-92; my italics). No such story could be told of the male English mystics. Julian and Margery’s claims to visionary experiences, however, including divine locutions, and their records of those selfsame experiences insistently raise the question of their specific warrant and justification, that is: how legitimate or authentic are those experiences. Hence, before turning to a close reading and critical analysis of divine speech in Julian’s A Revelation of Love and Margery’s Book, it is crucially important to discuss two substantial matters that significantly bear on the deep context or backcloth of the two mystics’ respective representations of divine speech: i) the nature and status of Christian visionary experience; and ii) the nature and status of divine locutions in such visionary experience.

In On the Literal Meaning of Genesis, Augustine authoritatively delineates a tripartite division in the perceptual modes of contemplation: i) bodily sight; ii) imaginative sight; and iii) intellectual sight:

Hence let us call the first kind of vision corporeal, because it is perceived through the body and presented to the senses of the body. The second will be spiritual, for whatever is not a body, and yet is something, is rightly called spirit: and certainly the image of an absent body, though it resembles a body, is not itself a body any more than is the act of vision by which it is perceived. The third kind will be intellectual, from the word intellect (XLII, 186).

He privileges the final mode as superior: ‘For spiritual vision is more excellent than corporeal, and intellectual is more excellent than spiritual’ (XLII, 213); and he associates it with the goal of contemplative practice, that is, unio mystica or mystical union with the Godhead. Augustine’s categorisation and ranking of these perceptual modes became authoritative, and served to drive a wedge between visionary and mystical experience to

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the detriment of the former’s relative prestige. Aquinas, thus, acknowledges the hierarchy in the *Summa Theologica*: ‘Now it is clear that a manifestation of divine truth which derives from a bare contemplation of the truth itself is more effective than that which derives from images of bodily things. Sheer contemplation is in fact nearer to the vision of heaven, according to which truth is gazed upon in the essence of God’ (*Summa Theologica*, I.II.45.75).\(^4\) Augustine’s conception of contemplative mystical experience is strongly influenced by Plotinus’s accounts of the flight of the alone to the Alone in the *Enneads* (and, of course, Aquinas’s is strongly influenced by Augustine’s). Augustine, however, differing somewhat from Plotinus’s impersonal view of *unio mystica*, anatomised the fundamental nature of human life in terms of a deep *personal* longing for God; as he wrote in the *Confessions*, ‘Our heart is restless until it rests in you, O Lord’ (*Confessions*, 1,1).

The aim of any contemplative or mystic is to satisfy this deep-seated longing for God by dint of intellectual or spiritual practices that will effect a transitory union with God here and now in advance of the eternal Beatific Vision. Broadly, there are two well-defined traditions or paths that work towards this union: i) the fourfold monastic path of *sacra pagina* or *lectio divina* predicated on *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio*;\(^5\) and ii) the classical threefold path of purgation, illumination and union. These traditions, their stages and processes, were variously theorized by a series of Latin theologians including such major figures as St Anselm, St Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh and Richard of St Victor, Aelred of Rievaulx and St Bonaventure.\(^6\) In effect, then, Julian and Margery’s hermeneutic framework for understanding their experiences is ultimately the product of an eclectic mix of monastic, continental and insular styles of spiritual theory and practice.

It is not the purpose of this thesis, however, to delineate the precise debts of the medieval English mystics to these traditions and their thinkers, but it is salutary to bear in mind that the English mystics do work within a pre-established framework, and that the divide between what is considered clerical or lay, ‘lered’ or ‘lewed’, blurs in the face of the

\(^4\) See the Introduction, section 2 on the Platonic tradition of intellectual vision.


\(^6\) See the Preface for the connection of these men to the rise of affective piety or spirituality.
vernacular appropriation of ideas from the broader Christian and, thus, Latin encyclopaedia.

Turning to the second matter broached above, that is, the question concerning the nature and status of divine speech in visionary experience, St Gregory the Great in his *Moralia in Lob* Book 28, chapter 2 discusses the nature of such locutions. Firstly, he asserts that God *does* speak. Then he sorts such locutions into two categories: i) God speaking Himself, and ii) God speaking by intermediary. Later Gregory's authority was appropriated by spiritual directors seeking to authenticate and justify the visionary experiences of their spiritual charges. Alphonse of Pecha or Alfonso de Jaén, the spiritual director of St Bridget of Sweden, represents such a one; he composed the *Epistola solitarii ad reges*, a treatise of the *discretio spirituum* genre (later developed further by Jean Gerson), that seeks to justify the legitimacy of Bridget’s visionary’s experiences. It was translated into Middle English sometime in the early fifteenth century (although the work had already been circulating by way of a late-fourteenth-century compilation in Middle English). In it he quotes Gregory concerning the nature of divine locutions:

...oure lord spekis be him self or be an aungil creature wordes are schapen to vs. But whan god spekis be himself alonly streinkthe of inwardly inspiracoun to vs is openyd. And whan god spekis be him self he spekis of his word with ought wordes and sillablis the hert is taught for his inwardly vertu is knowen be asertyn leftyng vp...(The Middle English Epistola solitarii ad reges of Alfonso of Jaén, London, British Library, MS Cotton Julius Fii, fol. 252r: 2-6).

Note that Alphonse asserts that God does speak, and it is implied that he speaks outside the Bible; and that he either speaks by intermediary, or ‘be him self’. When he speaks by himself, such speech may only be experienced by the auditor by virtue of an intellectual inspiration and rapture, ‘asertyn leftyng vp’. Note too that God does not speak by ‘wordes and sillablis’, implying some sort of spiritual rather than physical speech, or, in other

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7 Rosalynn Voaden in *God’s Words, Women’s Voices* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), p. 40, defines the genre of *discretio spirituum* as: ‘a discourse which provided both a vocabulary to articulate visionary experience and a set of criteria to evaluate the vision and the visionary.’

words, if God speaks, then His speaking is speech like ours by analogy only. The Chastising of God's Children, a late-fourteenth-century compilation that inter alia treats of the dangers of visionary experience borrows from Alphonse, and again quotes Gregory, thus: 'whanne [God] spekith to us by himsilf, thanne is the hert enformed and taught of his worde, withoute any worde or sillable...also the speche of God inward to us is rather made or do thanne herd' (The Chastising of God's Children, p. 172). Thus, Julian and Margery's intellectual context encompasses the possibility of experiencing divine speech as one facet of mystical experience.

Moreover, the Augustinian canon Walter Hilton, whose works were known to Margery and, possibly, to Julian, in the second Book of his popular Scale of Perfection discusses the quality of divine locutions in the intellectual contemplation of Christ:

The privei vois of Jhesu is ful trewe, and it maketh a soule trewe. Ther is no feynynge in it, ne fantasie, ne pride, ne ypocrisie, but softenesse, mekenesse, pees, love, and charité, and it is ful of lif and of grace. And therfore whanne it sowneth in a soule it is of so greet myght sumtyme, that the soule sodenly leith of hande al that there is - praiynge, spekynge, redynge, or thenkynge in manere biffer seid, and al maner bodili werk - and lesteth therto fulli, herende, perceyvande in reste and in love the swete stevene of this goostli vois, as it were ravesched fro the mynde of alle ertheli thynges (The Scale of Perfection, II.44). It is Hilton's remarkable focus on Jesus as heaven, the goal of the human soul, which supports the concept of locution as part of the experience of mystical union with God. The hypostatic union of human and divine nature in Jesus forms the bridge from God to

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9 Margery mentions having had 'Hyltons boke' (BMK, 1257; and again 4820) read to her. Of these references Barry Windeatt judges: 'By 'Hyltons boke' Kempe is likely to mean The Scale of Perfection of Walter Hilton...although there are no evident verbal reminiscences in the Book', in The Book of Margery Kempe, p. 10. Jonathan Hughes argues that Hilton directly influenced Julian in Jonathan Hughes, Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1988), p. 213. Denise N. Baker, however, argues that neither knew the work of the other, and, indeed, that their works are essentially contrary in Denise N. Baker, 'The Image of God: Contrasting Configurations in Julian of Norwich’s Showings and Walter Hilton’s Scale of Perfection', Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 35-60.  

man, so communication between both is possible. Additionally, the experience of divine speech need not be tied to *lectio divina*:

And this feelynge is ofte tyme withoute special biholdynge of Holi Writte, ne but with fewe wordes formed in the herte; not but thus among fallen in swete wordes acordyng to the feelynge, eithir lovende or wondrende, or othirwise sounnende as the herte liketh (*The Scale of Perfection, II.44*).

This represents a departure from the mainstream of monastic spirituality in the English tradition, for Hilton’s overarching view is that union with God is ultimately a gratuitous effect of grace. Finally, Hilton identifies the illuminations that enlighten the soul through grace as ‘the spekynges of Jhesu and the sight of goostli thynges’ (*The Scale of Perfection, II.44*). His acceptance of divine speech, his emphasis on the ‘privei vois of Jhesu’ and identification of spiritual illumination with ‘the spekynges of Jhesu’, thus, all authoritatively authenticate the experience and record of divine locution in Julian and Margery’s texts.

Clearly, then, the possiblity of divine locutions was entertained by the medievals, and there was some sense of certain distinctions to be drawn concerning such locutions both as to their cause and the manner of their perception. Alphonse in his defence of Bridget worked to ally the phenomenon of divine speech with Augustine’s idea of intellectual vision or contemplation; in this way, the experience of divine speech is implied to be higher than that or corporeal or spiritual visions; Hilton also presents it as a form of experience allied to mystical rapture by the grace of Christ. Hence, Julian and Margery’s experiences of divine speech do not contradict the traditions of visionary and mystical experience that informed their worldview, and could even have been viewed by their learned medieval contemporaries as instances of high intellectual vision and contemplation.

Having established, then, that the bare fact of Julian and Margery’s experiences of divine speech do not fall outside the horizon of expectation of their learned and spiritual cultures, I turn now to the analysis of such speech in their respective texts. I will examine the nature of their reception of such speech: how do they experience it; what is its order; and how do they record and represent it? What is of most interest is the implied meaning of such speech and the stance both take towards it.
Julian of Norwich: A Revelation of Love

In his recent book, Julian of Norwich: Visionary or Mystic?, Kevin J. Magill takes issue with three of Julian’s most influential critics, Denys Turner, Grace Jantzen and Nicholas Watson; he argues that all three privilege Julian’s categorisation as a mystic to the detriment of her status as a visionary. He seeks, instead, to emphasise and explore ‘The pictorial quality of the Showings of Love, the sights, sounds and colour of the visionary sequence’.¹¹ His corrective focus on the visual element of Julian’s text, however, equally ignores another salient yet also neglected aspect of her work, namely, her experience of divine locutions, words formed in her understanding. As she herself notes, her experience is perceived according to three modes: bodily sight, words formed in her understanding and ghostly sight.¹² Magill’s work admirably elucidates her visual perceptual modes of the intelllection of God, but my work will complement and correct his narrow focus by emphasising the concomitant importance of the words formed in her understanding, that is, those divine locutions.

In chapter two of A Revelation of Love, Julian reveals three fervent desires that she petitioned God to fulfil some unspecified time prior to her illness of May 1373: ‘The first was mind of the passion. The secund was bodily sicknes. The thurde was to have of Godes gifte thre woundes’ (RL, 2.3-4). She expands on the first desire, thus: ‘I desired a bodely sight, wherin I might have more knowinge of the bodily paines of our saviour, and of the compassion of our lady, and of all of his true lovers that were living that time and saw his paines...Other sight nor shewing of God desired I never none til whan the soule were departed from the body’ (RL, 2.10-14). At this point, then, there is no mention of any process beyond the purely visual, and even that mode of perception is materially limited to corporeal vision or ‘bodely sight’; indeed, her expectations are predicated on meditative practices of ruminatio that might lead to an affective engagement with central

¹² See A Revelation of Love, 9.24-25.
scriptural episodes such as the Nativity and Passion.\textsuperscript{13} Clearly, in any case, Julian's horizon of expectations prior to undergoing her series of showings does not encompass an articulated desire to experience divine discourse.

Julian's first showing, one of sixteen that combine to communicate an overall revelation, immediately presents itself according to three modes of perception, and these modes operate throughout the whole revelation. The modes are discrete yet complementary, and their object, 'Gods mening' (\textit{RL}, 9.23), is unitary. The modes, Julian writes, operate: 'by bodily sight, and by worde formede in my understonding, and by gostely sight' (\textit{RL}, 9.24-25). Here one notes the informing influence of Augustine's theory of visionary experience and Gregory's curt theory of divine discourse; nevertheless, there is a puzzle concerning both the nature and status of divine discourse in Julian's perception of those 'worde[s] formede in [her] understonding', for her representations of divine speech and their interpretation go beyond the bounds of any information, prescriptions or warrant to be gleaned from patristic exegesis.

Julian declares that God shows her 'without any meane' (\textit{RL}, 4.5) a bodily sight of the wounded and bleeding Christ crowned with thorns; her claim, thus, is for direct divine illumination. (This epistemic modality is precisely that of Augustine's theory of divine illumination.)\textsuperscript{14} Since, then, God shows her a vision 'without any meane', she marvels at how 'homely' (\textit{RL}, 4.15) or familiar God should be with her. The notion of God's 'homeliness', his equality and intimacy with human beings, his creatures, is a key ground of Julian's visionary experience and dependent revelatory text. In chapter 7, for instance, Julian draws comfort from the first vision, for 'that oure good lorde, that is so reverent and dredfulle, is so homely and so curteyse' (\textit{RL}, 7.25-26). She develops the intimacy of the God-given vision, thus:

This bodely exsample was shewde so high that this mannes hart might be ravished and almost forget himselfe for joy of this grete homelyhede. Thus it fareth by oure lorde Jhesu and by us. For sothly it is most joy that may be, as to my sight, that he that is highest and mightiest, nobliest and wurthiest, is lowest and mekest, hamliest and curtysest (\textit{RL}, 7.33-38).

\textsuperscript{13} See Preface p. 13.
\textsuperscript{14} See Introduction, section 2.
It is later in chapter 54 that the metaphysical reasons for God’s intimacy with man are revealed; Julian states:

Our soule is made to be Goddes wonning; and the wonning of oure soule is God, which is unmade...And I sawe no difference between God and oure substance, but as it were all God. And yet my understanding toke that oure substance is in God: that is to sey, that God is God and oure substance is a creature in God. For the almighty truth of the trinite is oure fader, for he made us and kepeth us in him. And the depe wisdome of the trinite is our moder, in whom we are all beclosed. And the hye goodnesse of the trinite is our lord, and in him we are beclosed and he in us. We are beclosed in the fader, and we are beclosed in the son, and we are beclosed in the holy gost. And the fader is beclosed in us, the son beclosed in us, and the holy gost is beclosed in us (RL, 54.8-21).

This striking emphasis on God’s closeness to His creatures permeates the text; however, Julian qualifies who in this life may experience such ‘homelyhede’: ‘But this marvelous homelyhede may no man know in this life, but if he have it by specialle shewing of oure lorde, or of gret plenty of grace inwardly given of the holy gost. But faith and beleve with charite deserve the mede, and so it is had by grace’ (RL, 7.45-48). In other words, God favours whom He will, but these are invariably his true lovers, namely those who fervently practise the theological virtues. Such closeness between rational beings naturally necessitates and nurtures communication. First, the nascent line of communication proceeds visually by bodily sight of the crowning with thorns, followed by a ‘ghostly [sight] in bodily likenes’ (RL, 4.25) of the Virgin Mary in her youth. This second mode of perception corresponds to Augustine’s second classification of visionary experience, the imaginative mode of spiritual vision. In the following chapter 5 of A Revelation of Love, the communication will proceed, for the first time by locution or linguistic mode; however, the exact epistemic status of this locution is puzzling.

God shows Julian ‘a little thing the quantity of an hazelnot’ (RL, 5.7); she puzzles over it, training the eye of her understanding on it, and thinks: “What may this be?” And it was answered generally thus: “It is all that is made’” (RL, 5.9-10). In the notes to his edition of A Revelation of Love, Nicholas Watson identifies the responding locution as
produced by ‘intuition, not by a general speaker’. I disagree, however, because it may be the case that a general speaker, in this case, God, is communicating by the intermediary intellectual faculty of intuition. (This is especially cogent, of course, if one considers the background epistemology to incorporate some notion of Augustinian psychological illumination.) All of Julian’s visionary experiences take place in her soul, so to speak, but they are not the result of any effort of her own; that is, her own psychological faculties are not the efficient causes of the experiences, for, as noted above, the experiences are ‘by specialle shewing of our lorde’ (RL, 7.46). In so far, then, as she passively undergoes these experiences, it is not satisfactory to identify the answering locution as being produced by intuition tout court, for the origin of such intuition if the proposition, ‘It is all that is made’, be true, must be divine; that is, this locution is an example of God speaking to Julian by the intermediary psychological faculty of intuition. God is the ultimate efficient cause of the intuition, so the locution represents covert divine discourse. Julian’s gradual induction to divine discourse proceeds by such discrete, cumulative stages, ultimately moving towards and blossoming in full dialogue, as shall be seen.

In the second vision, Julian sees the discolouration of the suffering Christ’s face; but the vision presents itself ‘darkely’ (RL, 10.8), so she reports desiring ‘mor bodely light to have seen more clerly’ (RL, 10.8-9). Concerning this desire, she reports a response: ‘And I was answerede in my reson: “If God will shew thee more, he shal be thy light. Thee nedeth none but him’” (RL, 10.9-10). That she presents this response, ‘I was answerede’, in the passive voice implies its extra-mental origin. As in the case, then, of the earlier intuition, ‘It is all that is made’, this new speech amounts to another instance of covert divine discourse, operating by way of the rational faculty, and fittingly so, given the speech’s conditional logic. In chapter 19, Julian regarding the vision of the dying Christ, perceives, as she says, ‘a profer in my reason, as it had ben frendely, saide to me: “Loke uppe to heven to his father”’ (RL, 19.4-5). If one follows the editorial punctuation of Watson and Jenkins, the origin of this proposition, ‘a profer in my reason, as it had ben frendely, said to me’, is obscure. On the other hand, if one follows the alternative punctuation of Marion Glasscoe’s edition, ‘a profir in my reason as it had be frendly seyd

15 The Writings of Julian of Norwich, p. 138, n. 10.
to me', the injunction to look up to the Father in heaven can be read as a benign one, figuring Julian’s dawning recognition that Jesus is looking up at heaven and, therefore, that He is her heaven; and so she writes:

Thus was I lemed to chese Jhesu for my heven, whom I saw only in paine at that time. Me liked no nother heven than Jhesu, which shalle be my blisse when I come ther. And this hath ever be a comfort to me, that I chose Jhesu to be my heven, by his grace, in alle this time of passion and sorow (RL, 19.12-15).

Julian in the third vision sees ‘God in a pointe’ (RL, 11.1). He is revealed as being ‘in al thing...[and]...he doth alle that is done’ (RL, 11.2-3). In other words, everything that is is a function of God; God is First Cause. Julian sums up the vision by attributing an expositional speech to God:

And all this shewed he full blissefully, meaning thus: “See, I am God. See, I am in all thing. See, I do all thing. See, I never lefte my handes of my workes, ne never shalle without ende. See, I lede all thing to the end that I ordaine it to, fro without beginning, by the same might, wisdom, and love that I made it with. How shoulde any thing be amisse?” (RL, 11.42-46)

The fabulated speech constitutes an interpretation of the foregoing vision, translating, as Watson notes, the ‘shewing’ into ‘meaning’. No such attributed speech is included in the earlier, shorter text; it is, thus, the fruit of long meditation. It crystalizes the vision’s essential ‘sentence’, modulating from one aspect of divine discourse, vision, to another, voiced locution, authorising it emphatically and memorably by the powerful vehicle of

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17 The Writings of Julian of Norwich, 164, n. 42: ‘The speech that follows is a crystallization of the revelation and the chapter that describes it, “seeing” translated into “meaning.” This mode of exposition by attributed speech is derived from medieval biblical exegesis and is common in A Revelation, often tending to diminish the distance between revelation and exposition.’ MED offers a number of senses of the verb, ‘menen’, including: 1 (a) ‘To intend to convey (sth.), mean’; and 3 (a) ‘To say (sth.), to speak’. In the context of Julian’s use of the term in RL, 11.42 and elsewhere, arguably, sense 1 (a) applies. See MED s.v. ‘menen’ < http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED27327 > [accessed: 15th April 2009].
the diegetic representation of divine speech. Furthermore, it marks another advanced stage on the way to full-blown representation of authentic divine locutions.\footnote{Compare Christ's expositional speech in \textit{Piers Plowman} Passus XVIII; this attributed speech also goes to the heart of the 'sentence' of that text. See chapter 3.}

The first representation of authentic divine speech comes in the fifth vision. Julian opens chapter 13, thus:

And after, or God shewed any wordes, he sufferde me to beholde him a conveniable time, and all that I had seen, and all the understanding that was therin, as the simpilnes of the soule might take it. Then he, without voys and opening of lippes, formed in my soule these wordes: "Herewith is the feende overcome" (\textit{RL}, 13.1-5).

Note the verb, 'shewed', predicated of God's verbal communication; the 'wordes' that God 'shewed' are grounded in Julian's graced contemplation of Him; they are bound up with the visionary, mystical experience, and as such, they are comparable vehicles of revelation to visions of physical or ghostly sight. There is a period of preparation before God Himself speaks to His creature, before her soul and intellect are ready to bear the direct impression of divine discourse. Note too that the voiceless and non-physical locution of words formed in the soul matches both those of her intuition and reason and, most interestingly, those authorised by St Gregory who had been quoted in the \textit{Chastising of God's Children}, thus: 'whanne [God] spekith to us by himsilf, thanne is the hert enformed and taught of his worde, withoute any worde or sillable...also the speche of God inward to us is rather made or do thanne herd' (\textit{The Chastising of God's Children}, p. 172). Julian's reported locutions, however, are not indirectly mediated by intuition or reason, and they are not 'withoute any worde or sillable', for she plainly perceives words that she is able to report in precise verbal form, that is, 'Herewith is the feende overcome.' Finally, note that the speech is in English. God does not speak to his creature in a prestige language like Hebrew, Greek or Latin; rather, He speaks in the vernacular, the vulgar or mother tongue known to his interlocutor intimately.

Julian immediately comments on the speech, explaining its reference, thus: 'This worde saide our lorde mening his blessed passion, as he shewed before' (\textit{RL}, 13.5-6). In reflecting on the reported locution, Julian moves from 'shewed' and 'formed' to 'saide'
as her chosen conception of the delivery of God’s words. Furthermore, the interpretation reveals Christ as the speaker, ‘oure lorde’ rather than God the Father. Hence, the communication between creature and Creator proceeds by way of the human nature of God incarnate who moves to speak to His beloved creature in an intimate and intelligible fashion; this highlights the Christocentric modality of divine discourse in Julian’s experience and text. The speech itself, she elucidates, is Christ’s explanation of the fourth vision of His streaming blood, and so He teaches the significance of His paschal blood sacrifice, ‘Herewith is the feende overcome.’ He speaks, then, in order to clarify the import of the prior visionary experiences. He does not wish to be misconstrued; His first speech, thus, is motivated by commentary, didactic concern.

Christ speaks again to Julian in the sixth vision, but this time without didactic intent. Julian reports the experience: ‘After this, oure lorde saide: “I thanke the of thy servys and of thy travelle and namely of thy youthe”’ (RL, 14.1-2). He commends Julian for her devotion, thus, proving His ‘curteyse’ and proffering a social channel of reciprocity between God and man. The speech is followed by Julian’s soul’s rapture into heaven: ‘And in this, my understanding was lifted uppe into heven, wher I saw our lorde God as a lorde in his owne house, which lorde hath called alle his derewurthy frendes to a solempne fest’ (RL, 14.2-4). The thanks offered in the speech are, thus, accompanied by a reward, a foretaste of beatitude in which Christ fills his heaven with ‘joy and mirth, himselfe endlesly to glad and solace his derewurthy frendes, fulle homely and fulle curtesly, with mervelous melody of endelesse love, in awne blissed chere. Which glorious chere of the godhede fulfilleth alle heven of joy and blisse’ (RL, 14.6-9).

In chapter seventeen, developing the eighth vision of Christ’s lingering, agonized death on the cross, Julian is minded of Christ’s speech as recorded in scripture: ‘sitio’, ‘I thirst’ (John 19:28). She writes: ‘And in this drying was brought to my minde this worde that Crist said: “I thirst.” For I sawe in Crist a doubille thurst: on bodely, and another gostly. This worde was shewed for the bodily thurste, and for the gostely thurst was shewed as I shalle sey after’ (RL, 17.1-4). Christ’s speech is brought to her mind such that she remembers it from scripture, but it is translated into English; in her vision, He speaks in English as he does in his two earlier original speeches. Christ’s words are of perennial interest; although these words were uttered in the past, they do not fade in
importance. All divine speech resonates with authority, demanding continued attention and remembrance. Julian recognises two significances for Christ’s self-acknowledged thirst; on the one hand, there is the physical thirst, and, on the other, a spiritual thirst. Christ’s speech, thus, is polysemous, signifying more than the literal sense. God’s discourse demands interpretation, and the devout reader or auditor of His words will meditate on them to divine their deep sentence, and this, of course, is what Julian has done for years in the wake of her 1373 deathbed limit-experience.

The ninth vision of three heavens and the Trinity introduces for the first time a dialogue between Julian and Christ:

Than saide oure good lorde, asking: “Arte thou well apaied that I suffered for thee?” I saide: “Ye, good lorde, gramercy. Ye, good lorde, blessed mot thow be.” Then saide Jhesu, our good lord: “If thou art apaide, I am apaide. It is a joy, a blisse, an endlesse liking to me that ever I sufferd passion for the. And if I might suffer more, I wolde suffer more” (RL, 22.1-5).

This dialogue further proves Julian’s claim to God’s intimacy as she and Christ become interlocutors. Jesus addresses Julian in the familiar ‘thou’ form, and she responds in similar fashion although she twice addresses him as ‘good lorde’. She does not address him as ‘Jhesu’ in dialogue, but does report his response to her by reference to his personal name. The overall effect of this first piece of dialogue is one of familiar friendship, nevertheless, qualified by Julian’s proper awe for her saviour.

In the course of the same chapter, she dwells on and interprets Christ’s speech with respect to the concomitant vision. In the vision of the first heaven, Julian beholds the pleasure God the Father takes in Christ’s redeeming passion; hence, she judges: ‘We be his [that is, Jesus’s] blisse, we be his mede, we be his wurshipe, we be his crowne’ (RL, 22.17-18). She continues:

This that I sey is so grete blisse to Jhesu that he setteth at naught all his traveyle and his harde passion, and his cruelle and shamfulle deth. And in these wordes – “If I might suffer more, I wolde suffer more” – I saw sothly that as often as he might die, as often as he wolde, and love shulde never let him have rest tille he had done it (RL, 22.19-23).
Once again, then, she teases out the sentence beneath the sense of Christ’s words, for of themselves they invite reflection.\(^{19}\) Not only this, but Julian’s meditation on His words produces a creative paraphrase and interpretation whereby she attributes to Him a speech of explication: “Than meneth he thus: “How shulde it than be that I shulde not for thy love do all that I might? Which deed greveth me nought, sethen that I wolde for thy love die so often, having no regard to my harde paines”’ \(^{(RL, 22.34-36)}\). Her attribution of this speech – that crystallizes the ‘sentence’ of the original – to Christ serves to show the freedom with which she can treat the later interpretation of her visionary experience. She works on its elements, its matter over the years, and produces an interpretative commentary that works to frame and, above all, amplify the bare record of the original experience.\(^{20}\)

The report of divine speech in \textit{A Revelation of Love} is never merely casual; rather, it is always understood to be brimming with meaning. The conclusion to chapter 23 serves to illustrate the fine degree to which every precise word of Christ’s speech in the ninth vision has been pored over to expound fully its significance. Christ said to Julian, “It is a joy, a blisse, an endlesse liking to me that ever I sufferd passion for the”, and she dwells on the importance of the adverb ‘ever’:

Think also wisely of the gretnesse of this worde: “Ever.” For in that was shewed an high knowing of love that he hath in our salvation, with manifolde joyes that folowen of the passion of Crist. One is that he joyeth that he hath done it in dede, and he shalle no more suffer. That other is that he hath therwith brought us from endlesse paines of helle. Another is that he brought us up into heven and made us for to be his crowne and his endlesse blisse \(^{(RL, 23.35-40)}\).\[
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Julian’s concern for each of Christ’s words entails a concomitant concern for the preservation of the precise verbal form of Christ’s locutions in her text. If each word bears such significance, then she is bound to reproduce the speech as accurately as her memory allows. Indeed, when she concludes her account of the sixteen visions, she insists that she has reproduced faithfully the specific words uttered by Christ in the

\(^{19}\) Contrast Margery’s treatment of Christ’s words; she does not ruminate on them in the manner of Julian.

\(^{20}\) Note, this interpretative paraphrase of attributed speech does not appear in the corresponding section of the earlier short text, \textit{Vision} 12.
The tenth vision reveals to Julian’s understanding, by the vehicle of Christ’s cloven heart, glimpsed spiritually through the wound in His side, ‘in part, the blessed godhede’ (RL, 24.8); its essence transcends her understanding, so its nature is revealed by virtue of its effect, ‘the endlesse love that was without beginning, and is, and shal be ever.’ (RL, 24.9-10) Julian reports Christ’s words that accompany the spiritual vision:

And with this, oure good lorde saide full blissefully, “Lo, how I loved the,” as if he had saide: “My darling, behold and see thy lorde, thy God, that is thy maker and thy endlesse joy. See thin owne brother, thy savioure. My childe, behold and see what liking and blisse I have in thy salvation, and for my love enjoye with me” (RL, 24.11-14).

Once again, then, she amplifies the authentic locution by expanding, elaborating and elucidating it, attributing its interpretative, analytic paraphrase to Christ himself. She interprets the effect of the Godhead, love, in terms of intimacy; thus, she imagines Christ meaning to address her as ‘My darling’, connoting, perhaps, an inkling of romantic or erotic relationship; however, the contiguity of such terms like ‘brother’ and ‘My childe’, implying Christ’s fatherly or sibling relation to Julian, provide, rather, a familial connotation to the address, ‘My darling’. Julian further expands the original locution:

And also, to more understanding: this blessed worde was saide, “Lo, how I loved thee,” as if he had saide: “Behold and see that I loved thee so much, or that I died for thee, that I wolde die for the. And now I have died for the, and sufferd wilfully that I may. And now is all my bitter paine and alle my harde traveyle turned to endlesse joy and blisse to me and to the. How shulde it now be that thou shuldest anything pray me that liketh me, but if I shulde fulle gladly grante it the? For my liking is thine holinesse and thy endlesse joy and blisse with me” (RL, 24.15-21).

Clearly, the interpretative depth of each of Christ’s locutions runs deep in Julian’s meditative reading and rumination; each locution bears a plenitude of manifold meaning, demanding close reading and exegesis. And, of course, again and again, the ‘sentence’ of such speech signifies God’s closeness to His creation and special creature, man.
Thus far, each instance of divine speech has been analysed in turn as it is sequentially presented in the text. The analysis has revealed a definite scheme to the representations of such speech. Julian’s visionary experiences begin with visual images of ‘bodily sight’ that are subsequently followed by ‘words formed in the understanding’. Initially, these words present themselves by dint of intuition and reason, Julian’s own intellectual faculties; but then they are formed without intermediary, and she perceives their non-physical utterance by Christ. Finally, she engages Christ in dialogue, reciprocally addressing him in the same familiar terms that he addresses her; and developing this familiarity, she interprets his speeches to the point of attributing expositional paraphrases to Him. These kinds of divine locution represent the major types of the sixteen visions that comprise the whole revelation. For the remainder of this section, I will concentrate on analysing only those remaining instances of divine speech that enhance or qualify the overall understanding of Julian’s conception and representation of such discourse.

In the twelfth vision, Julian beholds Christ ‘more glorified as to my sight than I saw him before’ (RL, 26.1-2). She emphasises that He is the ‘fullhede of joye: homely and curteys and blisseful and very life’ (RL, 26.3-4). This reminds the reader of the ‘homely’ nature of Christ despite His transcendence. In His glorified state, Christ speaks, and Julian reports:

> Often times oure lorde Jhesu saide: “I it am, I it am. I it am that is highest. I it am that thou lovest. I it am that thou likest. I it am that thou servest. I it am that thou longest. I it am that thou desirest. I it am that thou meneste. I it am that is alle. I it am that holy church precheth the and teche thin. I it am that shewde me ere to the” (RL, 26.4-8).

Of course, the twelve repetitions, the anaphora of the phrase, ‘I it am’, recall and amplify God’s identification of Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14, ‘ego sum qui sum’, ‘I am who am’ although the Middle English phrase, ‘I it am’, meaning, ‘It’s me’, is more ‘homely’ and reassuring than the austere profundity of the Latin, ‘ego sum qui sum’. There are also here echoes of Isaiah 43:11, ‘ego sum ego sum Dominus et non est absque me salvator’, ‘I am, I am the Lord: and there is no saviour besides me’; and Isaiah 43:25 ‘ego sum ego sum ipse qui deleo inquitates tuas propter me et peccatorum tuorum non recordabor’, ‘I
am, I am he that blot out thy iniquities for my own sake, and I will not remember thy sins.' These scriptural self-identifications by God go to the heart of the mystery of His essence and nature. The Douay-Rheims 1609 gloss of Exodus 3:14, openly grounded in the theology of St John Damascene and St Thomas Aquinas, confirms this view:

Onlie God eternally is without beginning, ending, limitation, dependence, or mutation, consisting only of himselfe, and al other things are of him. Therefore this name, Qui est, He Which Is, is most proper to God, not determining anie maner, but indeterminately signifying al maners of being, for so it importeth the very infinite immensitie of Gods substance. S. Damascen, li.i.5.12, Orthodoxa fidei. S. Tho. p.i.q.13.a.11.21

Julian says that Christ repeated these phrases ‘Often times’; their multiplication emphasises their subject, the concentrated, superabundant self-affirmation of self-subsistent but communicating Being.

Having reported this revelatory speech of Christ’s, Julian in a state of hitherto unoccasioned aporia, confesses:

The nomber of words passeth my wittes and my understanding and alle my mightes, for they were in the highest, as to my sight. For therin is comprehended I can not telle what. But the joy that I saw in the shewing of them passeth alle that hart can think or soule may desire. And therfore these wordes be not declared here. But every man, after the grace that God geveth him in understanding and loving receive them in our lorde mening (RL, 26.8-13).

This qualifies the foregoing represented speech by invoking the inexpressibility topos. If the ‘nomber of words’ surpasses the ordinary psychological capacities, then one can be sure that not all those words uttered by Christ are recorded. The presented speech represents a sample of those words uttered ‘in the highest’. Furthermore, departing from her practice in previous chapters, Julian decides not to ‘declare’ or expound the recorded words on account of their subtle difficulty, at least at this stage of the text. She returns to them later in chapters 59 and 60 in the light of later visions. At this point, though, she

21 The holie Bible faithfully translated into English, out of the authentical Latin. Diligently conferred with Hebrew, GREEKE, and other editions in divers languages. With arguments of the bookes, and chapters: annotations, tables: and other helps...By the English College of Doway, trans. Gregory Martin (Douay: 1609-10).
invites her reader to read them, ruminate on them and interpret them ‘in our lordes mening’; Christ’s words, thus, are meant to be heard by more than Julian alone. They are intended to be heard by a wider audience, and their interpretation lies open to that audience too; yet that interpretation is to be delimited by ‘our lordes mening’, that is, intentio or intent. Christ as auctor determines the ‘sentence’ of his spoken text. Perhaps, Julian conceives of contemporary or future readers divining greater depths from Christ’s words than even she has the grace to discover; her intention to share those words and invite wider interpretation, then, implies a belief that they ought to become part of the tradition of God’s ongoing friendship with man and His continuing self-disclosure to man through perennial divine discourse. In any case, this speech of Christ’s marks the limits of linguistic intellection for human understanding. Only God can meaningfully utter the phrase, ‘I it am’, but the full significance of this eludes the finite intellect of a contingent being who can never say ‘I it am’ without qualification.

Theological mystery too informs the revelation of the thirteenth vision. Julian puzzles anxiously over the troubling existence and horrific nature of sin. She wonders why God in His prescience allowed it. In her anguished state of aporia, she yearns for nothing less than a theodicy:

This stering was mekille to forsaken, and nevertheless morning and sorow I made therfore withoute reson and discretion. But Jhesu, that in this vision enformed me of alle that me neded, answered by this worde and saide: “Sinne is behovely, but alle shalle be wele, and alle shalle be wele, and alle maner of thinge shalle be wel” (RL, 27.7-11).

Christ’s theodicy states that sin is necessary or fitting although without further explanation. (There may be a connection to the Easter Liturgy’s Exultet hymn’s attitude to the Fall: ‘O felix culpa, O necessarium peccatum Ade’, ‘O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam.’) The key response, however, and the foundation of the theodicy amounts to His thrice repeated promise, ‘alle shalle be wele’. Of the grammar of this phrase, Watson notes: “‘Shall’ implies necessity at least as strongly as futurity.” I would add that the phrase has illocutionary force; in other words, its utterance effects its intentionality as the Word articulates in time a timeless actuality. Hence, in chapter 32 Christ assuages

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22 The Writings of Julian of Norwich, p. 208.
Julian’s incredulity concerning the logical impossibility that all should be well: “That that is unpossible to the is not unpossible to me. I shalle save my worde in alle thing, and I shall make althing wele” (RL, 32.41-42). God keeps His promises, and is to be trusted.

What is the perlocutionary effect of the specific promise that all will or must be well? Julian reflects:

Theyse wordes were shewde fulle tenderly, shewing no maner of blame to me, ne none to none that shalle be safe. Than were it a gret unkindnesse of me to blame or wonder on God for my sinne, sithen he blameth not me for sinne. And in thyse same wordes, I saw an high, mervelous previte hid in God, which privite he shalle openly make knowne to us in heven. In which knowing we shalle verely se the cause why he sufferde sinne to come, in which sight we shalle endlessly have joye (RL, 27.29-36).

Their effect, then, is to suspend anxious questioning, to alleviate doubt, by effecting a serene equanimity that rests in the assurance of God’s Word; in other words, the perlocutionary effect actualises in the augmentation and bolstering of faith. Thus, when Christ assures Julian that what is impossible for her is not so for Him, as noted above, she faithfully concludes: ‘And in this was I taught by the grace of God that I shuld stedfastly holde me in the faith as I had before understond, and therwith that I shulde stonde and sadly beleve that alle maner thing shall be welle’ (RL, 32.43-45).

In the final four visions, there is increasing dialogue between Julian and Christ. Julian’s role is to ask theological questions; Christ’s to answer either by explanation or by affirmation of some consoling proposition. The roles are those of pupil and master. Julian

23 In speech act theory the perlocutionary act refers to the effect made on the addressee. Simon Blackburn in the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 273 defines it as: ‘An action performed by speech only if certain effects are generated, as persuading, ridiculing, or frightening someone. Perlocutionary acts thereby contrast with locutionary and illocutionary acts, which are performed independently of whether the utterance has its intended effects, or indeed any effects at all.’ Anthony Kenny adroitly summarises the distinctions between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts: ‘Suppose someone says to me “Shoot her!” The locutionary act is defined by specifying the sense of ‘shoot’ and the reference of ‘her’. The illocutionary act is one of ordering, or urging, etc. The perlocutionary act (which takes place only if the illocutionary act achieves its goal) would be described by, for example, “He made me shoot her”.’ In A New History of Western Philosophy, Vol. IV: Philosophy in the Modern World (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), p. 91.
makes this explicit when she considers the reasons behind God’s gracious visions and revelation, and she asserts that ‘he is the teching, he is the techer’ (RL, 34.14). God speaks and teaches in order that ‘we may knowe him and love him and cleve to him’ (RL, 34.8-9). The visions constitute an invitation to beatitude; they are transitory, and do not compare to the authentic process; thus, Julian contrasts the nature of her experience to that of genuine beatitude:

And than shall we alle come into oure lorde, ourselfe clerely knowing and God fulsomly having; and we endlesly be alle had in God, him verely seyeng and fulsomly feling, and him gostly hering, and him delectably smelting, and him swetly swelwning. And than shall we se God face to face, homely and fulsomly...For thus may no man se God and live after, that is to sey, in this dedely life. But whan he of his special grace will shewe him here, he strengtheneth the creature aboven the selfe, and he mesureth the shewing after his awne wille, as it is profitable for the tym (RL, 43.40-47).

There is a gap between transient experience of God in time that mitigates the possibility of offering any full rational account of His nature or the experience of His effects. The ‘gostly hering’ of His Words now contrasts to that in beatitude; thus, in chapter 26 Julian admitted of Christ’s locutions that ‘The nomber of words passeth my wittes and my understanding and alle my mightes, for they were in the highest, as to my sight’ (RL, 26.8-9).

Christ’s final words spoken to Julian come as a coda at the conclusion of the sixteenth and ultimate vision. His homeliness derives from his intimacy with the human soul.24 Julian sees by dint of spiritual vision the soul as a citadel or city in the middle of her heart, and in its midst, she sees Christ who ‘sitteth in the soule even righte in peas and rest, and he ruleth and yemeth heven and erth and all that is’ (RL, 68.7-8). She elaborates, interpretatively, that ‘The place that Jhesu taketh in oure soule he shall never remove it withouten ende, as to my sight, for in us is his homeliest home and his endless wonning’ (RL, 68.12-13). In the context of the punning intimacy of Christ’s ‘homeliest home’ in the human soul, He confirms in speech the authenticity of the whole revelation. Echoing the introduction of Christ’s first words spoken in propria persona, Julian records:

24 See p. 84 above.
And when I had behold this with avisement, then shewed oure good lorde wordes fulle mekely, without voice and without opening of lippes, right as he had done afore, and saide full swetely: “Wit now wele, it was no raving that thou saw today. But take it and beleve it, and kepe thee therin, and comfort thee therwith, and trust thee therto, and thou shalt not be overcome” (RL, 68.43-47).

Jesus is once again identified as ‘oure good lorde’, and He speaks voicelessly and without opening of lips as in A Revelation of Love, 13.3-4. The quality of the delivery of the speech, its humility and sweetness, connote the close friendship of God with His creature; the words console and promise comfort. The imperatives are not threatening, but instruct in order to bring both Julian and her readers faith, confidence and security. She herself decides:

Theyse last wordes were saide for lerning of full tru sekernesse, that it is oure lorde Jhesu that shewed me alle. And right as in the furst worde that oure good lorde shewde, mening his blessed passion – “Herewith is the fende overcome” – right so he saide in the last worde with full tru sekernesse, mening us alle: “Thou shalt not be overcome” (RL, 68.47-51).

She notes the concatenation of Christ’s words of his first and last uttered speech. The circularity or circumscription of the utterances connotes the unity of their ‘sentence’ and by extension the unity of the whole revelation; this, indeed, is the coherent intentio of ‘our lordes mening’.

Although the experience and its showings have been deeply personal to Julian, and have been a sign of her favour and intimacy with Christ, the relevance of the revelation is not merely personal; thus, she continues: ‘And alle this lerning and this tru comfort, it is generalle to alle mine evencristen, as it is afore saide, and so is Gods wil’ (RL, 68.51-53). If the tone of the final speech was gentle and sweet, at first, she qualifies its concluding clause: ‘And this worde, “Thou shalt not be overcom,” was saide fulle sharply and full mightly for sekernesse and comfort against all tribulations that may come’ (RL, 68.54-55). The final phrase rings out its illocutionary force; it breaks free of the preceding implied hypothetical clauses and syntax; that is, if you do this and this, then you will not be overcome. Rather, Christ’s final utterance crystallises the ‘sentence’ of universal salvation, namely, that all should be well; its illocutionary force effects a
guarantee, and so it rings out 'fulle sharply and full mighty'. Julian, nevertheless, ponders on what Christ does not say: 'He saide not, “Thou shalt not be tempestid, thou shalt not be traveyled, thou shalle not be dissesed,” but he saide, “Thou shalt not be overcom.”' She reads between the lines of his verbalised text, critically reflecting on the full implicature of its 'sentence'. The theodicy of the whole text turns on cleaving in faith to God’s promise despite the per accidens miseries of mortal life. Julian conceives the fittingness of Christ’s final words in such faith-filled terms; hence, she concludes:

God wille that we take hede at this worde, and that we be ever mighty in seker trust, in wele and wo. For he loveth us and liketh us, and so wille he that we love him and like him and mightely trust in him, and all shalle be welle. And sone after all was close, and I saw no more (RL, 68.57-60).

Reflecting again on the authenticity of her experiences and the whole revelation, she binds herself to Christ’s words of promise: ‘he lefte me his owne blessed worde in tru understanding, bidding me fulle mightily that I shulde beleve it, and so I do. Blessed mot he be! I beleve that he is oure savioure that shewed it, and that it is in the faith that he shewde. And therfore I beleve it, ever joyeng’ (RL, 70.4-7). Clearly and resoundingly, then, the divine speech of her visionary experience serves to confirm the authenticity of the revelation.

Christ’s words and, thus, the representation of such divine speech are essential to the ‘sentence’ of the message communicated by Julian’s individual visionary experiences and total revelation; and, thus, as noted above, Julian insists that she has represented them faithfully: ‘for the words, I have saide them right as oure lorde shewde them me’ (RL, 73.4). Christ assumes the roles of teacher, counsellor, friend and family relation, be it father, mother or sibling; He reveals his closeness to his creature, and the most fitting epitome of such closeness comes in the conversational dialogue of God and creature as reciprocal interlocutors. All his roles are subsumed in that of caring friendship; thus, Julian asserts that God is man’s ‘highest sovereyn frende. This blessede frend is Jesu’ (RL, 76.21); indeed, he is ‘oure everlasting frende’ (RL, 76.37). Speech constitutes the key medium of revelation in the visions, for it is through speech that Christ explains the significance of the matter of the visions. He answers Julian’s questions, and, thus, guides

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25 See pp. 82-83 above.
the direction of her own meditation on and interpretation of the visions. She notes this, and extends Christ's tuition and concern beyond her own case: 'oure precious lover helpeth us with gostely lighte and tru teching on diverse manner within and withoute, whereby that we may know him' (RL, 70.26-27). The text Julian produces to record and represent her visionary experiences is designed to be more than a mere history, a mere piece of life-writing; rather, the whole book is constructed to be 'performed' by its prospective readers: 'This boke is begonne by Goddes gifte and his grace, but it is not yet performed, as to my sight...For truly I saw and understode in oure lorde mening that he shewde it for he will it knownen more than it is' (RL, 86.1-7). Christ's words are intended for and, thus, directed to all. Hence, divine discourse proceeds and directs human beings perennially by virtue of its 'homely' operations and its intimate address.

Finally, the illocutionary force of Christ's connected promises that all should be well and that none should be overcome amounts to the deep 'sentence' of the revelation. Fifteen years subsequent to the revelation, Julian records that she received a supplementary communication mediated by spiritual understanding: "'What, woldest thou wit thy lorde mening in this thing? Wit it wele, love was his mening. Who shewed it the? Love. What shewid he the? Love. Wherfore shewed he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou shalt wit more in the same. But thou shalt never wit therin other withouten ende'" (RL, 86.13-16). The ground of the promises is love, for, of course, 'Deus caritas est', 'God is Love' (1 John 4:16). Love gives rise to these promises, and they by turn are the grounds of every other locution and image presented in the whole text of the revelation. They both describe and effect their meaning and reference. These illocuted words, 'alle shall be wele' and 'thou shalt not be overcom', are elevated to the hypostatic status of the Word itself, that is, the eternal divine locution, thus, representing the astonishing apotheosis of visionary-mediated and textually represented divine speech.

The Book of Margery Kempe: 'Divine Dalyawns'

Julian of Norwich's A Revelation of Love is a text whose 'matter' is disposed according to the series and division of sixteen visions that comprise the whole revelation; they form

26 Compare Piers Plowman: B-text, I 86.
the core of the text while the remainder amounts to introduction, interpretative commentary and conclusion; its schematic construction, then, relates closely to the salient order of the revelation. Margery Kempe’s Book, by contrast, baldly eschews any such chronological or even logical order other than that provided by her provisional memory. Thus, in the proem to her Book – written after an initial shorter one, but placed before it in the sole extant manuscript (British Library MS Additional 61823) – she admits frankly:

Thys boke is not wretyn in orydr, every thyng aftyr other as it wer don, but lych as the mater cam to the creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn, for it was so long er it was wretyn that sche had forgetyn the tyme and orydr whan thynlys befellyn. And therfor sche dede no thing wryten but that sche knew ryght wel for very trewth (BMK, 134-39).

To offer an early instance of such disordered disposition, chapter 21 records a conversation with Christ when Margery was pregnant, but this follows the record of the chastity agreement with her husband related in chapter 11; the episode, thus, is narrated out of chronological order. Consequently, and, indeed, by contrast to Julian’s representations in A Revelation of Love, the order of the representation of divine speech in Margery’s Book becomes difficult to assess in terms of some inherent scheme; rather, its representation is contingent on the visionary episodes that Margery remembers in the order that she does, and all is qualified by a frank admission of disorder. Note, nevertheless, that she insists that ‘sche dede no thing wryten but that sche knew ryght wel for very trewth’; hence, despite the vagaries of memory, overall, she clearly claims certitude for those episodes that she does dictate to be recorded by her priestly scribe.27

She also records Christ’s affirmation that He speaks through her, ‘“thei that heryn the,

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27 It is extremely difficult to discuss with confidence the degree to which Margery’s scribe may have edited her work, lightly or heavily, without recourse to some standard against which to determine any changes made to her oral dictation, and no such standard exists. For an argument for the importance of the scribe see John C. Hirsch, ‘Author and Scribe in The Book of Margery Kempe’, Medium Aevum, 44 (1975), 145-50. On the other hand, for an argument that the scribe is a literary trope functioning to provide authority in the Book see Lynn Staley, ‘The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe’, Speculum, 66 (1991), 820-38.
thei heryn the voys of God” (BMK, 702; and see pp. 99-100 below), that everything she says, therefore, is a function of divine discourse; thus, the implicature is that the Book that Margery dictates represents the mediated but theopneustic Word of God. On the other hand, she later openly admits just how seriously poor memory affects her accurate recall of divine speech: ‘Yyf on of hir confessowrys come to hir whan sche ros up newly fro hir contemplacyon or ellys fro hir meditacyon, sche cowde a telde hym meche thyng of the dalyawnce that owr Lord dalyid to hir sowle, and in a schort tyme aftyr sche had foryetyn the most party therof and ny every deel’ (BMK, 6796-801). As so often with Margery, she and her text express many contradictions.

Margery’s first mention of the different categories of her visionary and mystical experiences comes in the context of a characteristically defensive lament for her victimisation by those who do not credit the authenticity of her visions or who are appalled and irritated by her loud displays of affective piety; thus, due to the attacks made on her, she claims:

...the mor slawnder and repref that sche sufferyd, the mor sche incresyd in grace and in devocyon of holy medytacyon, of hy contemplacyon, and of wonderful spechys and dalyawns whech owr Lord spak and dalyid to her sowle, techyng hyr how sche schuld be despysed for his lofe, how sche schuld han pacyens, settyng all hyr trost, alle hyr lofe, and alle hyr affecyon in hym only (BMK, 50-55).

The ‘wonderful spechys and dalyawns whech owr Lord spak and dalyid to her sowle’ are affirmed here without mention of any image-based visions. She does, indeed, experience such image-based visions but never in isolation from some form of located discourse. Arguably, this emphasises the singular importance of divine speech in her experiences by contrast, for instance, to Julian whose experiences are on some occasions only visual in nature, as in her first four visions, and, thus, the categories of bodily and ghostly sight figure prominently in her introductory categorisation of her experiences into those of ‘bodily sight...worde formede in...understanding, and...gostely sight’ (RL, 9.24-25). Margery’s Book’s chapter 86 consists entirely of Christ speaking, commending and justifying her conduct; divine speech, therefore, takes an undeniably and remarkably prominent place in the nature of her experiences.
Furthermore, Margery's use of the term 'dalyawns' to indicate the nature of her locutionary experiences of God implies an immediate intimacy of reciprocal communication. The connection between 'dalyawns' and intimacy can be illustrated with reference to one of Margery's anecdotes: while on pilgrimage in Assisi she speaks to an English Franciscan about her visionary experiences, explaining to him 'how owyr Lord dalyed to hir sowle in a maner of spekyng' (BMK, 2577-8); she reports that he responded that 'he had nevyr herd of non sweche in this worlde levyn, for to be so homly wyth God be lofe and homly dalyawnce as sche was' (BMK, 2579-81). The MED defines the verb 'dalien', according to two major divisions of sense, with one subdivision of the first, thus: '1. (a) To converse politely, leisurely or intimately; talk, chat, jest; ~wordes, exchange pleasantries, chat; (b) to speak in a serious, edifying, or solemn manner, commune; ~to, with. 2. To engage in amorous exchanges, flirt; to embrace.'

To illustrate the senses of 1 (a) and (b), MED offers quotations from Margery's Book; indeed, while only one quotation is taken from it to illustrate the first subsense, four are taken to illustrate the second. Interestingly, no quotations are taken from Margery's Book to illustrate the second, erotic sense of 'dalien' although, of course, this cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that the word is never used in this fashion in the text. The quotation used to illustrate sense 1 (a) is: 'Be than that thei had restyd hem a while & dalyid wyth the good wyf of the hows'; this refers to an everyday, non-mystical context. Of the four quotations used to illustrate sense 1 (b) all except the last belong to mystical contexts, thus: 'Sche teld hym how sum-tyme the Fader of Hevyn dalyid to hir sowle as pleynly and as veryly as o frend spekith to a-another be bodyly spech'; 'The Qwen of Mercy Goddys Moder, dalyed to the sowle of this creatur, seyyng “My derworthy dowtyr, I bryng the sykyr tydyngs [etc.]”'; ‘& so their dalyed in owr Lord a good while & had ful goodly cher’; and ‘The doctour schewyd hir gret cher & dalyid wyth hir as he had don be-for-tyme.’

This raises the question, does the decision by the editors of MED not


29 The references for these quotations may be found in the MED entry in question; the editors of the dictionary have taken the quotations from The Book of Margery Kempe, eds S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 212 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940; repr. 1963).
to include an instance of visionary dialogue to illustrate sense 1 (a) imply their opinion that Margery’s use of the term ‘dalyawns’ signifies serious, edifying or solemn speech when related to the locutions of God (and Mary) whereas it means conversation or chat in non-mystical contexts. On the other hand, Margery’s continued emphasis on the intimacy and friendship of Christ as well as the familiar register and nature of some of the presented dialogue implies that sense 1 (a) must apply to, at least, some instances of divine speech too. Margery herself in the proem states that those who were amazed at her affective displays of weeping and sobbing ‘wysten ful lytyl how homly ower Lord was in hyr sowle’; (BMK, 60-61) thus, she emphasises Christ’s intimacy or closeness to her. Indeed, how could it be otherwise when she records that usually ‘sche had iiii owrys of the fornoon in holy spechys and dalyawns wyth owr Lord’ (BMK, 4855-6), and again elsewhere she states: ‘Owr Lord, of hys hy mercy, visityd hir so mech and so plentevowsly wyth hys holy spechys and hys holy dalyawnce, that sche wist not many tymys how the day went. Sche supposyd symtyme of v owrys er vi owrys it had ben the space of an owr’ (BMK, 7254-7). Clearly, therefore, while there was certainly dialogue between Julian and Christ in A Revelation of Love, it would go too far to term it conversation or, especially, chat; by contrast, the distinguishing characteristic of much of Margery’s dialogue with Christ is precisely its conversational register and chatty nature grounded in ‘how homly ower Lord was in hyr sowle’.

Mention has been made of Margery’s ostentatious cryings; she herself notes their cause and effect, thus: ‘whel sche was kept wyth swche holy spechys and dalyawns, sche schuld so wepyn and sobbyn that many men wer gretly awondyr’ (BMK, 58-59). A perlocutionary effect, then, of God’s ‘holy spechys and dalyawns’ is the affective expression of tears and loud crying. Among the medieval English mystics, this affective phenomenon is unique to Margery although it has its expression among certain continental mystics, especially, Mary of Oignies (1167-1213) and Angela of Foligno (1248-1309). This, however, is not the only effect of the experience of divine locutions; for she equally affirms: ‘Of this maner speche and dalyawnce sche was mad mythy and strong in the lofe of owr Lord, and gretly stabelyd in hir feith and encresyd in mekenes and charite wyth other good vertuys’ (BMK, 7236-8). Hence, although divine speech can
prompt an affective display, on the one hand, from its addressee; on the other, it can have intellectual and ethical impact too.

Moreover, that impact is not limited to the original addressee of divine speech, for while she was first dictating her Book, Margery records how Christ appeared to her, and gave the entire project his blessing: ‘‘...to do writyn the grace that I have schewyd to the, plesith me ryght meche, and he that writith bothe...schulde ye not plesyn me mor than ye don wyth yowr writyng, for, dowtyr, be this boke many a man schal be turnyd to me and beleyn therin’’ (BMK, 7283-8). Indeed, this mirrors the rationale for Julian’s A Revelation of Love.30 The Word is to be disseminated abroad in the form of a ‘boke’ in order that its sentence work on its readers’ souls, changing their lives. The intention is affective and moral; divine speech operates to change lives, drawing the auditor and the reader to God.

So much, then, for the proem. Margery opens her Book proper with an account of her first visionary experience which occurred around the age of twenty. It took place subsequent to the difficult pregnancy and birth of her first child when she fell so ill that she feared for her life: ‘And aftyr that sche had conceyved, sche was labowred wyth grett accessys tyl the chyld was born and than, what for labowr sche had in chyldyng and for sekenesse goyng befom, sche dyspered of hyr lyfe, wenyng sche mygth not levyn’ (BMK, 177-80). In the midst of temptation and the abjuring of her faith, Christ appeared to her:

...in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most bewtyvows, and most amyable that evyr myght be seen wyth mannys eye, clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke, syttyng upon hir beddys syde, lokyng upon hir wyth so blyssyd a chere that sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyritys, seyd to hir thes wordys: ‘Dowtyr, why hast thow forsakyn me, and I forsoke nevyr the?’ (BMK, 227-32)

The claim that Christ appeared ‘most amyable that evyr myght be seen wyth mannys eye’ implies that this vision is physical in nature, but it is unclear, at this stage, whether the words Christ speaks are uttered with voice and lips, that is, physically, or whether they are uttered voicelessly and without lips, that is, by words formed in the understanding or intellectual soul, as in Julian’s visions. In chapters 7 and 8, Margery records that ‘Ower Lord Jhesu Crist seyd to hir mende’ (BMK, 609) and ‘Cryst seyd to hir mende’ (BMK, 30 See pp. 90-91 above.
both these locutions imply the spiritual kind of speech Julian experienced in her visions and the kinds of speech that Alphonse of Pecha, the author of the *Chastising of God’s Children*, and Walter Hilton recognise. On the other hand, in chapter 41 Margery describes the physical quality of Christ’s ‘melydiows voys, swettest of alle savowrys, softly sowndyng in her sowle’ (*BMK*, 3235-6); and in chapter 53, she records how on one occasion while lying in bed one night she ‘herd wyth hir bodily erys a lowde voys clepyng: “Margery”’ (*BMK*, 4380-1), followed by Christ speaking to her. Her overall presentation of divine speech, thus, lacks consistency, varying from episode to episode; sometimes it is physical, and sometimes not. Returning to the analysis of the above-quoted passage, Christ’s question to Margery is offered in familiar and familial relationship terms; he addresses her as ‘Dowtyr’ and uses the ‘thow’ form, and this, of course, connotes his ‘homly’ intimacy with her that she mentioned in the proem. Subsequent to his question, Christ ascends from Margery’s bedside into heaven: ‘And anoon, as he had seyd thes wordys, sche saw veryly how the eyr openyd as brygth as ony levyn, and he stey up into the eyr, not ryght hastyli and qwykly, but fayr and esly, that sche myght wel beholdyn hym in the eyr tyl it was closyd ageyn’ (*BMK*, 233-36). Although the later hallmark of her experience of divine speech is to be that of ‘dalyawns’, the initial contact is non-dialogical, for Margery is not yet in a spiritually competent position to engage reciprocally Christ in meaningful dialogue. She must first attend to her moral character, changing the nature of her life. The *Book*, therefore, implies the importance of virtue and correct ethical stance in man’s dialogue with God.

Margery details her many struggles to reform her life in chapters 2 to 4 of the *Book*; then on the final Friday of Advent, praying and weeping in a chapel for her sins, Christ transports her spirit in ecstasy, and speaks to her for the second time. She reports that ‘owyr mercyful Lord Cryst Jhesu, blyssyd mot he be, ravsched hir spyrtyt and seyd onto hir: ‘Dowtyr, why wepest thow so sor? I am comyn to the, Jhesu Cryst, that deyd on the crosse sufferyng byttyr peynes and passyons for the. I, the same God, foryefe the thi synnes to the utterest poynt’ (*BMK*, 494-98). Once again, Christ addresses Margery as ‘Dowtyr’, and continues to do so throughout his long speech (which runs for thirty-five lines in *BMK*, 496-530). Margery reports no contextual images from the rapture; rather,
its entire content is verbal. Christ identifies himself, forgives Margery her sins, and assures her of salvation. He continues: “Therfore I bydde the and comawnd the, boldly clepe me Jhesus, thi love, for I am thi love and schal be thi love wythowtyn ende’’ (BMK, 504-5). The imperative commands intimacy; Christ bids Margery address Him in familiar first-name terms, but she does not yet engage him in ‘dalyawns’. The remainder of the speech consists of a series of positive and negative commandments: he bids her not to wear a hairshirt, for he says he ‘schal yive [her] an hayr in [her] hert that schal lyke me mych bettyr’ (BMK, 507-8); he forbids her the eating of meat; he predicts her persecutions, but he assures her that he shall never forsake her in the face of earthly or supernatural adversity. Significantly, he bids her to limit the quantity of her rote-prayers: “And, dowtyr, I wyl thow leve thi byddyng of many bedys and thynk swych thowtys as I wyl putt in thi mend. I schal yeveyn the leve to byddyn tyl sex of the cloke to sey what thow wyld. Than schalt thow ly stylle and speke to me be thowt, and I schal yeve to the hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon’’ (BMK, 523-27). The implicature is that rote­-praying would impede genuine communication with God; furthermore, speech with God is to proceed in silence, in thought, in meditation and contemplation; it will involve intellectual and spiritual faculties beyond those of formulaic prayer. Finally, Christ instructs Margery to go to a spiritual director, “and schew hym my prevyteys and my cownselys whech I schewe to the, and werk aftyr hys cownsel, for my spyrit schal speke in hym to the’’ (BMK, 528-30). It is interesting that Christ requires someone else to guide Margery in relation to the visions he is providing her; of course, her attachment to a spiritual director proves the authenticity of the visions according to the contemporary criteria and standards that emphasise the importance of such a discriminating guide.32 Furthermore, the imperative to seek instruction entails the broadcasting of the visions; thus, the speech and meaning of the visions are to be disseminated and opened to

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32 See the Chastising of God’s Children, p. 178, which illustrates the importance of a spiritual director by the example of St Bridget: ‘Ther may no man be disceyved that lyveth under doom and ensample of elder and dicreet men. Of this ye han ensample of that hooli ladi, seint and princesse, Seint Bride: as longe as she lyvede, yonge and oold, she lyvede ever undir obedience and techyng of hooli clerkis and vertuouse and discreet elder men’. See, however, Rosalynn Voaden who argues that ‘the process whereby Margery seeks authority is...complex and problematic’, in God’s Words, Women’s Voices, pp. 122-32.
interpretation. Finally, Christ’s statement that he will speak in and through the spiritual director to Margery implies an instructional dialogue by proxy that, furthermore, implies the many and pervasive modes of divine discourse operated by God in the course of the text. On the other hand, once again illustrating the inconsistency of the text, Christ later assures Margery that ‘‘Ther is no clerk in al this world that can, dowtyr, leryn the bettyr than I can do’’ (BMK, 5301-2).

In response to Christ’s instruction, Margery does make time for meditative stillness. This marks the first instance of communication and visionary experience in the production of which she co-operates. She records that ‘sche seyd to ower Lord Jhesu Crist: “Jhesu, what schal I thynke?”, Ower Lord Jhesu answeryd to hir mende: “Dowtyr, thynke on my modyr, for sche is cause of alle the grace that thow hast”’ (BMK, 543-46). Margery then becomes immersed in a vision of the Nativity of Christ where she converses with St Anne and Mary, all of whom continue Christ’s practice of addressing her as ‘dowtyr’. The most salient difference between Margery’s visionary experiences and those of Julian’s is the degree to which Margery is active in them; she engages devotionally and socially with the persons presented, and even participates in the action, the history of the stories, organising the lodgings for the Holy Family in Bethelem, procuring their food and clothes and linen for the baby. This degree of active involvement or agency in the episodes of scripture goes far beyond anything instanced in Julian’s visionary experiences.33

In chapter 10 Margery reports how she ‘was mevyd in hir sowle to vysyten certeyn places for gostly helth’ (BMK, 689-90); her inclination is confirmed by Christ: ‘And than owyr Lord Cryst Jhesu seyd to hir: “My servawntyts desyryn gretly to se the”’ (BMK, 694-5). Christ’s speech affirms and strengthens her initial desire to travel throughout the country on pilgrimages. Warm receptions in certain of these places make

33 Margery’s active involvement in the visions, however, is not original; rather, it is authorised by instructional texts such as the Meditationes Vitae Christi or Meditations on the Life of Christ that recommends that one: ‘beg His mother to offer to let you hold Him a while. Pick Him up and hold Him in your arms...Then return Him to the mother and watch attentively as she cares for Him...and remain to help her if you can’, in Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illuminated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century, eds I. Ragusa and R. B. Green (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 38-9.
her fearful of ‘veynglory’ (BMK, 697). Christ, however, allays her fears of vanity and pride: ‘“Drede the not, dowtyr, I schal take veynglory fro the. For thei that worship the, thei worship me; thei that despysen the, thei despysen me, and I schal chastysen hem therfor. I am in the, and thow in me. And thei that heryn the, thei heryn the voys of God”’ (BMK, 699-702). This remarkable speech meant to mitigate pride confirms that she is a prophet or intermediary for divine discourse. When Christ says, ‘thei that worship the, thei worship me’, he implies that people’s worship of Margery, or the honour they pay to her, is like that accorded the saints, that is, *dulia*; moreover, the respect they pay her is channelled to God as *latria*, that is, the worship due only to God; the overall implicature, then, is that Margery is a living saint, a conduit to God. And this is confirmed implicitly when Christ says, ‘I am in the, and thow in me’, echoing John 14:20, ‘ ego sum in Patre meo et vos in me et ego in vobis’, ‘I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’; it is also confirmed explicitly later when Christ appears to Margery in the Holy Land, and promises: ‘“Dowtyr, I schal makyn al the werld to wondryn of the, and many men and many woman schal spekyn of me for lofe of the, and worshepyn me in the”’ (BMK, 2395-7). Of course, the most salient part of the speech is that when Christ says, ‘thei that heryn the, thei heryn the voys of God’, for this broaches yet another facet to the divine discourse represented in the text; everything Margery says, including her dictated *Book*, amounts, by this statement, to be a form of divine speech. Towards the end of the *Book* Christ reveals to Margery the scope of divine discourse: ‘“And I telle the trewly, dowtyr, every good thowt and every good desyr that thu hast in thi sowle is the *speche of God*, al yf it be so that thu her me not spekyn to the sumtyme as I do sumtyme to thi cler undirstonding”’ (BMK, 6901-4; my italics). Hence, Margery’s life-writing, her record of her experiences is a record of a kind of divine speech and silence, charting the virtue and vice of her living towards God. Her life is spoken by God, and her *Book* of her life is spoken by God; there is nothing beyond divine discourse.

Christ discusses divine silence in one of his tutelary and consolatory appearances to Margery, explaining the reason for certain abeyances of visionary and affective experience and consequent lack of divine discourse:

“And, thow I wythdrawe sumtyme the felyng of grace fro the eyther of spech er of wepyng, drede the not therof, for I am an hyd God in the, that thu schuldyst have
no veynglory, and that thu schuldyst knowyn wele thow mayst not han terys ne
swych dalyawns but whan God wyl send hem the, for it arn the fre yyfts of God
wythowten thi meryte, and he may yeve hem whom he wyl and don the no
wrong” (BMK, 965-71).

This speech emphasises the importance of God’s will in determining divine discourse,
and visionary and locutionary experiences. When Christ says, ‘I am an hyd God in the’,
there is an allusion to Isaiah 45:15, ‘vere tu es Deus absconditus’, ‘verily thou art a
hidden God’; the passage and its scriptural allusion imply the utter transcendence of God
and the inscrutability of His intention. Yet at the end of the speech Christ affirms his
closeness to Margery by acknowledging how she becomes a ‘very dowtyr to me and a
modyr also, a syster, a wyfe, and a spowse’ (BMK, 991-2). Hence, although God may be
‘hyd’, in one sense, that absence is balanced by an intimacy that issues in the ‘dalyawns’
proper to human being together; in other words, God is transcendent but also gregarious,
or such, at least, is the implicature of Margery’s experiences and Book.

In chapter 17, Margery bidden by Christ to go to the Vicar of St Stephen’s,
Norwich, reveals to him, in accordance with Christ’s instructions, the nature of her
visions’ ‘prevytes and...cownselys’ (BMK, 1217-8). Obediently, she makes the journey,
salutes the vicar in the church, and receives his audience; subsequently, she ‘schewyd
hym all the wordys whech God had revelyd to hyr in hyr sowl[e]’ (BMK, 1231-2). She
then describes in detail the nature of her locutionary experiences:

Sche teld hym how sumtyme the Fadyr of hevyn dalyd to hir sowle as pleylyn and
as veryly as o frend spekyth to another be bodyly spech. Sumtyme the Secunde
Persone in Trinity, sumtyme alle thre Personys in Trinity and o substawns in
Godhede, dalyid to hir sowle and informyd hir in hir feyth and in hys lofe how
sche schuld lofe hym, worshepyn hym, and dredyn hym...Sumtyme owyr Lady
spak to hir mend. [Sumtyjme Seynt Peter, sumtyme Seynt Powyl, sumtym Seynt
Kateryn, er what seynt in hevyn sche had devocyon to, aperyd to hir sowle and
tawt hir how sche schuld lovyn owyr Lord and how sche schuld plesyn hym. Her

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34 Christ repeats the substance of this speech towards the end of the Book when he once
again claims “‘I am as an hyd God in thi sowle’” (BMK, 6905).
dalyawns was so swet, so holy, and so devowt, that this creatur myt not oftyntymes beryn it... (BMK, 1251-67).

Margery’s multiplication of locutions implies a polyphony of voices which, nonetheless, harmonise in the intention of instructing her to greater love of God, for they all operate in subservient relation to the ‘grace of the Holy Gost, to whom it longyth to enspyr wher he wyl. And thow hys voys be herd, it is not wyst of the werld fro when it comyth er whedyr it goth’ (BMK, 1280-83). This, then, the divinely inspired augmentation of the love of God, appears to be the foundational motivation of all the operations of divine speech in the *Book*. One voice among the polyphony is unexpected, perhaps; at least, its presence exceeds the horizon of expectations set by Julian’s *A Revelation of Love*, for never in her visionary experiences does she report God the Father speaking to her, never mind conversing with her ‘as veryly as o frend spekyl:th to another be bodily spech’. Indeed, one infers that such an experience would be beyond the bounds of her ordered mystical revelation, for all its divine speech is uttered by Christ. Margery’s experience of God the Father speaking to her represents the highpoint of her mystical experience.

While in Rome in the Church of the Santi Apostoli, Margery undergoes a *unio mystica* with the Godhead; this is the one and only episode represented in the *Book* where God the Father speaks to her, and the opening of the speech and subsequent dialogue is represented, accordingly:

...the Fadyr of Hevyn seyd to hir: “Dowtyr, I am wel plesyd wyth the, in-as-muche as thu belevyst in alle the sacramentys of holy chirche and in al feyth that longith therto, and specialy for that thu belevyst in manhode of my sone and for the gret compassyon that thu hast of hys bittyr Passyon.” Also the Fadyr seyd to this creatur: “Dowtyr, I wil han the weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn the my prevyteys and my cownselys, for thu schalt wonyn wyth me wythowtyn ende” (BMK, 2811-18).

The opening of this speech, ‘Dowtyr, I am wel plesyd wyth the’, recalls God the Father’s only recorded episodes of speech in the Gospels; the first is mediated by the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove, and this is recorded in Matthew 3:16-17, thus, ‘baptizatus autem confestim ascendit de aqua et ecce aperti sunt ei caeli et vidit Spiritum Dei descendentem sicut columbam venientem super se / et ecce vox de caelis dicens hic
est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi conplacui’, ‘and Jesus being baptized, forthwith came out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened to him: and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon him. / And behold a voice from heaven, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’; but in Matthew 17:5 recording the Transfiguration of Christ, God the Father speaks as a ‘hyd God’ yet in persona propria, thus, ‘adhoc eo loquente ecce nubes lucida obumbravit eos et ecce vox de nube dicens hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi bene conplacuit ipsum audite’, ‘And as he was yet speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.’35 Is the echo coincidental, or does it deliberately recall the Gospel as intertext? Arguably, it is the latter because the process and nature of unio mystica is a kind of transient transfiguration, so the conjunction of God the Father speaking for the first and only time in the Book, echoing His repeated speech of the Baptism and Transfiguration in the Gospels is certainly significant, and intended to be noted as such.

Just as the apostles were overwhelmed by the experience of Christ’s transfiguration, so too is Margery overwhelmed by the experience of the Godhead. She records her response to the notion of a mystical marriage to the Godhead: ‘Than the creatur kept sylens in hir sowle and answeryd not therto, for sche was ful sor aferd of the Godhed’ (BMK, 2819-21). This exceeding fear contradicts her earlier claim that the ‘Fadyr of hevyn dalieid to hir sowle...as o frend spekyth to another’; friends do not fear each other. Christ intervenes, however, allaying Margery’s fear, and the mystical marriage goes ahead; God the Father weds Margery with these words:

“I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowlar, for richar, for powerar, so that thu be buxom and bonyr to do what I byd the do. For, dowtyr, ther was neyvr childe so buxom to the modyr as I schal be to the, bothe in wel and in wo, to help the and comfort the. And therto I make the suyrte” (BMK, 2853-7).

The chaste hierogamy results in a profusion of ‘bothe gostly and bodily comfortys’ (BMK, 2863), including the physical sight of ‘many white thyngys flying al abowte hir on every syde...And many tymes sche was aferde what thei myth be’ (BMK, 2874-81).

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35 The Baptism episode is recorded also in Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22; the Transfiguration episode is recorded also in Mark 9:6, Luke 9:35 and 2 Peter 1:17.
assuage her fear, Christ explains that they are angels about her, and that she should take it as a “‘tokeyn...[and]...beleve it is God that spekyth in the, for wherso God is, hevyn is, and wher that God is, ther be many awngelys, and God is in the and thu art in hym” (BMK, 2884-6). Later Christ explains how pleasing it is to speak to her or, rather, in her, thus, “‘And yyf thu knew, dowtyr, how meche thu plesyst me whan thu suffyrst me wilfully to spekyn in the, thu schuldist nevyr do otherwise...thu schuldist not plesyn me so wel as thu dost whan thu art in silens and sufferyst me to speke in thy sowle’” (BMK, 2916-23). In effect, the whole episode of the mystical marriage to the Godhead and the subsequent confirmation of the authenticity and importance of the experienced divine discourse serve to underline the continuity of and interrelation between the visionary and the mystical in Margery’s experiences and Book. God speaking is the central subject of the text; hence, Margery is pleased to relate the story of the Franciscan in the Holy Land who refers to her reputation as the ‘woman of Inglond the which...spak wyth God’ (BMK, 2392); it is the locutionary aspect of her visionary and mystical experiences that is most salient, and she is the site of divine discourse, so Christ says, “‘thu schuldist not plesyn me so wel as thu dost whan thu art in silens and sufferyst me to speke in thy sowle’”, and, thus, it is most fitting that her unio mystica should be effected by the central illocutionary act of the marriage rite, “‘I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe’”.

Although Margery’s experience of the Godhead involved a relatable experience, in the sense that she was able to recall and record the words God the Father spoke to her and the detail of the ‘ceremony’, she dwells often on the inexpressibility of the kinds of ‘dalyawns’ she experiences in her ecstasies. For instance, of the polyphony of voices she speaks of to the Vicar of St Stephen’s, Norwich, reported above, she admits that ‘Her dalyawns was so swet, so holy, and so devowt, that this creatur myt not oftyntymes beryn it.’ In similar wise, she reports her mystical transport on Mount Calvary, thus: ‘Sche was so ful of holy thowtys and medytacyons and holy contemplacyons in the Passyon of owyr Lord Jhesu Crist, and holy dalyawns that owyr Lord Jhesu Crist dalyed to hir sowle, that sche cowde nevyr expressyn hem aftyr, so hy and so holy thei weryn’ (BMK, 2326-31). And later again she says, ‘It wer in maner unpossibyl to writyn al the holy thowtys, holy spechys, and the hy revelacyons whech owr Lord schewyd unto hir’ (BMK, 4834-36). The sheer plenitude of divine revelation is further emphasised when she says, ‘so had
sche felyng of many mo than be wretyn’ (BMK, 5781). The revelation exceeds her intellectual capacities:

…it weryn so hy abovyn hir bodily wittys that sche myth nevyr expressyn hem wyth hir bodily tunge liche as sche felt hem. Yyf on of hir confessowrys come to hir whan sche ros up newly fro hir contemplacyon or ellys fro hir meditacyon, sche cowde a telde hym meche thyng of the dalyawnce that owr Lord dalyid to hir sowle, and in a schort tyme afyr sche had foryetyn the most party therof and ny every deel (BMK, 6793-801).

Hence, the Book may be regarded as an imperfect synecdoche for the mystical experience she claims she underwent.

Conclusion

In Julian’s A Revelation of Love all of her mystical perceptions, including, naturally, those ‘worde[s] formede in [her] understonding’ (RL, 9.24), are the modes by dint of which she learns ‘Gods mening’ (RL, 9.23) which is Love (RL, 86.13-16). This chapter shows that the linguistic mode of perception or the series of divine locutions she experiences are central vehicles of the whole revelation. There is, furthermore, a definite scheme to the representation of divine speech in the text. Initially, the divine locutions present themselves by virtue of intuition and reason, Julian’s own intellectual faculties; but then they are formed without intermediary, and she perceives their non-physical utterance by Christ. Then she engages Christ in dialogue, reciprocally addressing him in the same familiar terms that he addresses her; and developing this familiarity, she interprets His speeches; she amplifies the authentic locutions by expanding, elaborating and elucidating them, attributing their interpretative, analytic paraphrases to Christ Himself.

When she concludes her account of the sixteen visions, she insists that she has reproduced faithfully the specific words uttered by Christ in the revelation (RL, 73.4). However, sometimes the nature of a showing proved so transcendent that the ‘nomber of words’ surpassed her ability to record them (RL, 26.8-13). She, thus, acknowledges the limit of her merely human understanding and the ultimate apophatic ineffability of God
in Himself. When God in Christ speaks, His speech is human and communicative; when Christ *qua* God speaks of Himself, however, the words strain to express their referent.

The notion of God’s ‘homeliness’, His equality and intimacy with human beings, His creatures, is a key ground of Julian’s visionary experience and dependent revelatory text (*RL*, 7.25-38 and 54.8-21). This ‘homeliness’ entails communication between Creator and creature; God favours speaking with whom He will, but these are invariably His true lovers; hence, the narratorial stance of the text inscribes the loving relation to God as intimately bound to the experience and representation of divine speech. Christ reveals His closeness to His creature in the roles He takes: teacher, counsellor, friend and family relation, and the most fitting epitome of such closeness comes in the conversational dialogue of God and creature as reciprocal interlocutors. All of His discrete roles are subsumed in a circumscribing caring friendship (*RL*, 76.21 and 76.37). Christ’s words are intended for and, thus, directed to all. Hence, divine discourse proceeds and directs human beings perennially by virtue of its ‘homely’ operations and its intimate address (*RL*, 86.1-7).

While there is order to Julian’s visions, and a distinct order to the modalities of the ‘worde[s] formede in [her] understonding’ too, there is a marked absence of such from Margery’s *Book*. She, indeed, is frank on the lack of formal structure in the work; her dictation of her experiences of divine ‘dalyawns’ is contingent on and a function of her provisional memory (*BMK*, 134-39). Furthermore, her presentation of the quality of divine speech lacks consistency, varying from episode to episode; sometimes it is physical, (*BMK*, 609 and 645) and sometimes not (*BMK*, 3235-6 and 4380-1).

The ‘wonderful spechys and dalyawns whech owr Lord spak and dalyid to her sowle’ (*BMK*, 52) are central to her *Book*; they are certainly far more important that any visual experiences she undergoes. Margery’s favoured use of the term ‘dalyawns’ to indicate the nature of her locutionary experiences of Christ implies an immediate intimacy of reciprocal communication between the two interlocutors; her experience is that of a gregarious God.

One major difference in the experience of divine speech between Margery and Julian is the former’s experience of the Godhead speaking with her as one friend to another (*BMK*, 1251-2). Such speech in Julian would be ineffable and, thus,
inexpressible; Margery, on the other hand, boldly affirms its intimacy and reports it (BMK, 2811-18 and 2853-7). Nevertheless, she dwells often on the inexpressibility of the kinds of ‘dalyawns’ she experiences in her ecstasies (BMK, 2326-31 and 4834-36); and this brings her experience of the transcendence of God into line with Julian (RL, 26.8-13).

In transcribing her experiences into a book, Margery receives Christ’s blessing, for He promises that her Book will save souls (BMK, 7283-8); the Book, thus, is to be a medium for God’s message, and so Christ asserts that Margery shall be His voice or prophet (BMK, 702). Hence, the Book is to be understood to be a new scripture, recording Christ’s continuing conversation with His creatures. Her life too is the ‘speche of God’ (BMK, 6903); her life-writing, her record of her experiences is a record of a kind of divine speech and silence, charting the virtue and vice of her living towards God. Her life is spoken by God, and her Book of her life is spoken by God; there is nothing beyond divine discourse.

Both women experience and record divine speech in the vernacular. God speaks, thus, in Middle English. Their experience of God, therefore, is perceived and communicated in a medium known to both the mystic addressee and the model reader of their respective texts. From that point on, however, they mostly part company in the visionary experience of God.

Julian is the interpreter of her revelation, composing it in a hypotactic style that orders the importance of its constituent ‘matter’; but she invites others too to perform her text. She inaugurates a tradition of rumination on and explication of divine discourse. Margery, on the other hand, writes her experiences, yes, to record them, but more so to justify herself. Her Book is a record of and an apologia for her life; her style is paratactic in the addition of episode to episode without apparent design or rationale. She does not reflect on the significance of her experiences; she does not produce critically reflective self-exegesis; rather, she reports how Christ’s instructions directed the course of her life, episode after episode. Julian, by contrast, endeavours to elide herself as the sole privileged addressee of divine discourse; rather, she constructs a narratorial stance that presents her revelation universally to her ‘even Cristen’. Margery’s relation and stance towards divine speech is personal and limited in scope.
Finally, there is one remaining significant point of comparison between Julian and Margery: both visionaries experience divine speech as a key medium of friendship with God through Christ; with one exception – Margery's report of the Godhead speaking – divine speech is both Christogenetic and Christocentric. It serves to bind the auditor, the addressee to God in Christ; it is essentially social in perlocutionary effect. God gregariously speaks to these two mystics in 'homely' fashion in order to draw them and their readers to His friendship.
Recasting Biblical Narratives: *Cleanness, Patience and Pearl*

‘Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice.’ John 18:37

This chapter focuses on recastings of biblical narratives in medieval English literature and the representations of divine speech therein. The specific texts under investigation are *Cleanness, Patience* and *Pearl*. These recastings are more than mere translations; rather, they are radical re-imaginings that offer new, elaborated versions of familiar Bible narratives, known to their audiences by dint of various and diverse other media, including, naturally, sermons or homilies and church art. Derek Pearsall has suggested that the key rhetorical device or ‘governing principle in medieval stylistics’ is *amplificatio* or amplification where ‘a poem essentially provides a theme for amplification, and the prize goes to the man who can go on saying the same thing longest without repeating himself – *varius sit et tamen idem*’; while J. A. Burrow has claimed that the key drive of medieval poetry as a whole is narrative; thus, in his seminal *Ricardian Poetry*, Burrow writes: ‘The Ricardian poet deals in happenings – happenings which he has experienced or dreamed or read or learned about, or simply happenings. In this period of English poetry the voice of narrative prevails...Perhaps no subsequent

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1 I appropriate the term ‘recasting’ from James Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-text*, second, revised edition (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), p. 6; he uses it in relation to *Patience* and *Cleanness* as instances of recastings of biblical narratives.

2 Richard Newhauser in an essay on the scriptural and devotional sources of the poet, ‘Sources II: Scriptural and Devotional Sources’, *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, eds Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), p. 257 notes that: ‘The Gawain-poet’s clearest and most enduring direct debt is to the text of Scriptures found in the Latin Vulgate’; and he further quantifies the debt to the Vulgate by stating that: ‘three-fifths of *Cleanness* represents a more or less direct rendering of various passages from the Vulgate, while nine-tenths of *Patience* are adapted from the same source.’ Ibid., p. 258. Although focused on the fifteenth century, Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars*, second edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005) gives an account of lay knowledge of Bible narratives through various media that would apply to the late fourteenth-century audience of *Cleanness, Patience* and *Pearl*.

period is so dominated by the narrative voice.' And again he writes: ‘The Ricardian poets were more like men of letters than minstrels; but their literary sophistication is rarely exercised at the expense of the story. They preserve a pristine energy in their narrative, as few poets in the Renaissance or after have been able to do. It will be seen that both drive and style, narrative and amplification, combine in the rationale behind the construction of new vernacular versions of divine speech in the poetic creations of the anonymous medieval master-poet of British Library MS Cotton Nero A.x.

If the Bible’s sacred scriptures provide the raw ‘matter’ for the inventions of the medieval poets, it is worthwhile asking what status those texts had in their culture. What authority was accorded such writing? Richard Swinburne comments on the Church Fathers’ opinion concerning the high authority of the Bible: ‘In their view God was the ultimate author of the Bible, inspiring the human authors to write the biblical books in their own style and with their own limited understanding. Pope Gregory the Great (in the sixth century) described the Bible as ‘God’s letter to his creatures’. Here, indeed, is the full text containing the above quote of Gregory’s:

What is the Sacred Scripture, if not a letter from the all-powerful God to His creatures? Certainly if our excellence lived elsewhere and received a position from an earthly emperor, he could not have peace, could not rest, he could not close his eyes, if he did not have near him knowledge of the contents of the letter. The King of heaven, the Lord of men and angels has written His letters, because you live, and yet, distinguished brother, you disregard to read them with true love. Search therefore, I pray you, to meditate every day on the word of your Creator. Learn to know the heart of God in the letters of God. In that way you will desire

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5 Ibid., p. 52.
6 For a fine essay on the authorship of the four poems of MS Cotton Nero A.x. see Malcolm Andrew, ‘Theories of Authorship’, *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, eds Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 23-33; he concludes: ‘The prospect of a fully convincing authorship test, which could firmly establish whether or not all four poems were written by the same poet, would still seem remote’, in ibid., p. 33.
more the heavenly reality with a greater desire and your soul will be taken with
more passion from an invisible joy. Now the rest will be much greater, if you do
not rest in the love of creatures. That God all-powerful infuse in you the consoling
Spirit, to put in practice these things; that the same Spirit refills your soul from
His presence and refilled, that you may be rendered free.\(^8\)

Since, then, sacred scripture is treated as authored by God, any recasting of that matter
implies both courage and confidence on the part of the prospective poet, placing himself
in the position of ‘improving’ God’s writing. What anxiety of influence may have
overcome these brave artists? Of course, one can also interpret their work not as an
attempt to surpass or improve the Bible, but, rather, to elucidate it and disseminate it to a
wider, interested audience than the elite ‘lered’ or educated who could access it already in
its Vulgate form; thus, A. C. Spearing refers to the implied author or poet of Cleanness
and Patience, in particular, as an ‘expositor of Scripture and preacher of accepted
doctrine’.\(^9\)

In his essay, ‘The Gawain-Poet as a Vernacular Theologian’, Nicholas Watson
outlines the growth of vernacular religious writing that forms the cultural backcloth to the
texts of MS Cotton Nero A.x:

To the extent that all the poems incorporate biblical paraphrase, they can be
situated within a tradition which looks back to narrative poems like Cursor Mundi
and the Northern Homily Cycle (both written c.1300), and alongside a number of
little studied late fourteenth-century expositions of ‘God’s Law’: The Book to A
Mother, The Lyfe of Soule, a work edited as Fourteenth-Century Biblical Versions
and, longest of all, the enormous paraphrase that forms the prologue to the
Wycliffite Bible itself...Pearl, Cleanness and Patience are thus part of a broad

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\(^8\) St. Gregory the Great, Letter to Theodore, doctor of the Emperor, June, 595.
31 <http://catholicscripture.net/enchiridion/gregory.html> [accessed 24\(^{th}\) June 2008]. See
also the Introduction for further discussion of God’s authorship of the Bible.
\(^9\) A. C. Spearing, ‘Poetic Identity’, A Companion to the Gawain-Poet, eds Derek Brewer
contemporary movement in which religious ideas of all kinds were quickly becoming accessible to vernacular readers....

The audience, then, is a key factor in the rationale for the construction of the text; its *operis utilitas* relates closely to the needs of its vernacular readers; but the texts themselves are not merely biblical paraphrases or even verse homilies; rather, they are poems in their own right.

The master-anonymous of the four poems of Cotton Nero A.x wove his chosen biblical episodes and religious ‘matter’ into poetically refined texts; indeed, the editors of *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, in their introduction to the poems remark on the ‘freedom, flair and invention’ of their retellings of scriptural stories. In particular, they comment incisively on how ‘the poet modifies and elaborates his biblical sources, retelling the stories with vivid detail, and encouraging the reader’s emotional engagement in a pattern of identification with and aversion from the main characters.’ And concerning God as one of those main characters, they note how the poet put words into the mouth of God, and marvel at the ‘boldness of a poet who chose to humanize...God’. The poet, then, amplifies and elaborates his biblical sources, pointing certain key details, in order to engage his reader both affectively and intellectually; and it will be shown how the representation of the divine speech of a humanized God plays a crucial role in achieving these goals.

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11 Newhauser identifies the homily as the basic formal structure of *Patience*; he writes: ‘The homily demanded of the preacher merely a retelling of the gospel pericope of the day and the addition of any exegetical or moral lessons he cared to draw from it. Homilies were not highly structured forms and at times contained only the gospel narrative followed by its exegesis’, in ‘Sources II: Scriptural and Devotional Sources’, p. 260. See also Siegfried Wenzel, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 62.
13 Ibid., p. 19.
14 Ibid., p. 19.
There is no critical consensus on the order of composition of the four texts; however, I shall consider the three explicitly religious texts, *Cleanness, Patience* and *Pearl*, according to their disposition of biblical episodes, moving broadly from the recasting of Old Testament to New Testament scriptural matter. I begin, therefore, with *Cleanness*.

*Cleanness*

The principal theme of *Cleanness* is taken from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount as related in Matthew 5:1-11; in it He affirms eight beatitudes, the sixth of which asserts: ‘beati mundo corde quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt’, ‘Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God’ (Matthew 5:8). Crucially, the first instance of represented divine speech in the text, then, is found in the translation and paraphrase of this scriptural verse, thus:

Kryst kydde hit Himself in a carp onez,
Theras He heuened aght happez and hyght hem her medez.
Me mynez on one amonge other, as Mathew recordez,
That thus of clannesse vnclosez a ful cler speche:
‘The hathel clene of his hert hapenez ful fayre,
For he schal loke on oure Lorde with a leue chere’ (*Cleanness*, 23-8).

The poet emphasizes Christ’s ‘carp’ or utterance of the ‘ful cler speche’, and infers from the stated beatitude a conditional proposition, and implies its attribution to Christ: ‘As so saytz, to that syght seche schal he neuer / That any vnclannesse hatz on, auwhere abowte’ (29-30); in other words, if one is unclean, then one shall not be granted the *visio Dei*, that is, the essence of beatitude or salvation. (This kind of paraphrastic interpretation of divine

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15 On the basis of developing style and poetic mastery, A. C. Spearing maintains that *Cleanness* and *Patience* are earlier works, and *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* later ones; see A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 30. Andrew and Waldron, however, emphasise the lack of conclusive evidence and argument for dating the poems consecutively; therefore, they remain agnostic on the question; see *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, pp. 25-26.

16 *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, eds Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, revised, fifth edition (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007); all individual texts by the Master-Anonymous are taken from this edition. I have modernised the letters ‘thorn’ and ‘yogh’ throughout.
speech echoes that habitually practised by Julian in her *A Revelation of Love.*) The licence the poet takes in glossing the sacred text extends to the following treatment of the scriptural episodes that he chooses to amplify by way of illustrating the truth of the Beatitude’s ‘sentence’. The licence taken also implies the narrator’s fittingness for such work. In order to truly expound the text, the narrator must himself be not only ‘lred’, as he explicitly claims: ‘I haue herkened and herde of mony hyghe clerkez, / And als in resounez of ryght red hit myseluen’ (193-4); but he must also be in right moral relation to God in order to elucidate the ‘sentence’ of these texts in conjunction with their divinely-intended meaning. It may be inferred, then, that the narratorial stance towards God, in this text, as again in *Patience*, is that of one who is confident of God’s illumination and grace in the successful achievement of the hermeneutic and poetic task at hand.

On the other hand, it must be noted that nowhere in *Cleanness, Patience* or *Pearl* does God address the narrator personally. Yes, Christ’s promise in the Beatitudes is addressed universally, and so the narrators of *Cleanness* and *Patience* are among its addressees; but they are only indirectly enlightened by the recasting of the divine speech uttered in the biblical narratives adduced to illuminate the ‘sentence’ of the Beatitudes. In the case of the narrator of *Pearl*, he is deliberately and pointedly kept at a distance from God. The Pearl-maiden is his mediatrix or friend at court. It is implied that he receives his contact with God through her intercession in the vision, and when awoken at the poem’s conclusion, he turns to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He is distanced from God, but invited to closer relationship to Him.17 In *Cleanness* and *Patience* God talks only to His chosen, biblical figures like Noah and Abraham, and in *Pearl* he communicates with the beatified Pearl-maiden who intercedes on behalf of her father, expounding Christ’s words that they may bring the dreamer-narrator to warm relationship to God in the Eucharist.

Returning to the analysis of *Cleanness*, after the introduction of the poem’s principal theme, its remainder amounts to a series of *exempla in malo* and one *in bono* (1065-1112) invented or drawn from the Old Testament as to the moral consequences of uncleanness and the confirmation, above all, of God’s displeasure with impurity. The

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ensuing text, therefore, amounts to an interpretative amplification of the sixth beatitude; in other words, the poem as a whole unpacks the 'sentence' of one 'carp' of divine discourse. Furthermore, the origin of the whole text in divine speech proves crucial to the consequent conception and representations of similar such speech later in the text. J. J. Anderson categorizes God speaking in *Cleanness* in terms of a number of clear-cut distinctions: 'He talks to Noah as God the father or creator, to Abraham as the Trinity, and to Lot not in his own person but through his embassy of two angels...In the story of Belshazzar he operates from a greater distance, communicating through his prophet Daniel...'; and these are, indeed, different modes of communication, but these different modes of communication and discrete instances of discourse, nonetheless, amount to different aspects of divine discourse that harmonise as expressions of one 'entente' communicating one 'sentence'; for the 'ful cler' locutionary acts of God are uniform in eternity, and, thus, concordant through time; in other words, the self-enunciating Logos’s eternal act that is apprehended discretely in time by rational beings continuously bespeaks the harmony of its Word and Deed. The unified 'entente' and 'sentence' of divine speech in these texts concerns God’s investment in man; He moves to communicate with His creature, to draw him to Him in 'trawthe' and friendship.

The first episode of sacred history on which the poet draws to illustrate the theme of the Beatitude concerns the Fall of Lucifer; in retelling this story, which is not, of course, an episode related explicitly in the Bible but is influenced by Isaiah 14:12-15, the poet draws on Augustine and other 'mony hyghe clerkez' (193), but goes beyond them – 'Bot neuer yet in no boke breued I herde' (197) – to offer an idiosyncratic representation of God in human terms, including the attribution of motivation and even feeling such as anger to a God who 'wex wod to the wrache for wrath at His hert' (204), such that God is revealed as a being of immense power, but relatable to as a person, nonetheless. When

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19 Think of the relation of Providence to Fate in Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, V.
20 For Augustine’s reflection on the fall of the wicked angels, see the *City of God*, XI. Contrast Chaucer’s short version of the Fall of Lucifer that begins the Monk’s series of seventeen tragedies:

> 'At Lucifer, though he an angel were
> And nat a man, at hym wol I bigynne.

115
God later speaks, thus, *that* He speaks is already grounded in this established personhood, for it is in anger at being unjustly slighted by His last creation, human beings, ‘That the Wyye that al wroght ful wrothly bygynnez’ (280); and the poet continues:

> When He knew vche contre coruppte in hitseluen,
> And vch freke forloyned fro the right wayez,
> Felle temptande tene towched His hert.
> As wyye wo hym withinne, werp to Hymseluen:
> ‘Me forthynkez ful much that euer I mon made,
> Bot I schal delyuer and do away that doten on this molde,
> And fleme out of the folde al that flesch werez,
> Fro the burne to the best, fro bryddez to fyschez;
> Al schal doun and be ded and dryuen out of erthe
> That euer I sette saule inne; and sore hit Me rwez
> That euer I made hem Myself; bot if I may herafter,
> I schal wayte to be war her wrenches to kepe’ (281-92).

The state of affairs that impels this speech and the content of the speech itself are not fabulated by the poet; rather, his source is Genesis 6:5-7: ‘videns autem Deus quod multa hominum esset in terra et cuncta cogitatio cordis intena esset ad malum omni tempore / paenituit eum quod homniem fecisset in terra et tactus dolore cordis intrinsecus / delebo inquit hominem quem creavi a facie terrae ab homine usque ad animantia a reptili usque ad volucres caeli paenitet enim me fecisse eos’, ‘And God seeing that the wickedness of men was great on the earth, and that all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all times, / It repented him that he had made man on the earth. And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, / He said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of

For though Fortune may noon angel dere,
From heigh degree yet fel he for his synne
Doun into helle, where he yet is inne.
O Lucifer, brightest of angels alle,
Now artow Sathanas, that mayst nat twynne
Out of miserie, in which that thou art falle’ (VII 1999-2006). Where the *Cleanness*-poet asserts that ‘Dryghtyn with his dere dom hym [i.e., Lucifer] drof to the abyme’ (214), Chaucer, by contrast, excludes any direct mention of God’s possible role in Lucifer’s fall, so He remains distinctly and impersonally aloof from the tragic action.
the earth, from man even to beasts, from the creeping thing even to the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them.' Where there is only sorrow of heart in the source text, in the retelling there is wrath mixed with woe; the Middle English text, thus, once again implies a more humanized God than the biblical one. Interestingly, Bishop Challoner's revised edition of the Douay-Rheims translation carries an explanatory comment on God’s repentance for creating man in the biblical text; the commentator writes: 'God, who is unchangeable, is not capable of repentance, grief or any other passion.' This emphasis on God's impassivity and, thus, simplicity is influenced by Scholastic theology, and so precisely accords with the authoritative views of the Scholastic theologians whose opinions form part of the Cleaniness-poet’s intellectual backcloth; however, the implicature of God’s personhood is to be found throughout the Bible, and modern theologians such as Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne, emphasizing the biblical representations of God, now argue that God qua person is not simple and is, in fact, capable of change; perhaps, then, the Cleaniness-poet anticipates this type of theistic personalism in his texts. Ad Putter also recognizes the remarkably personalism of the representation of God in the poet’s work, arguing that: ‘an abstract understanding of God’s nature did not suit the Gawain-poet...the Old Testament stories which he used show God not as a remote deity but as one who interacts, often face to face, with human beings. He is like us...in being directly involved in the world, in talking to human beings, warning them, even turning up on their doorstep in person.’

Returning to the narration, in his anger God turns to Noah, launching on a thirty-eight line speech of ‘Wylde wrakful wordez’ (302), informing him of the impending

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21 See also chapter 1, p. 85 for the 1609 Douay’s note on Exodus 3:14, ‘Ego sum qui sum’, which equally points God’s transcendence and impassivity, and is explicitly grounded in the patristic and scholastic theology of John Damascene and Thomas Aquinas, respectively.

22 For an introduction to and commentary on theistic personalism, see Brian Davies, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion, third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 9-14. Davies notes the role the Bible plays in this theological attitude: ‘The Old and New Testaments speak of God as though he were a distinct individual with distinct attributes or properties. And this, say many theistic personalists, is reason enough for dismissing the notion of divine simplicity.’ Ibid., p. 13.

worldwide destruction, commanding him to build the Ark, detailing how precisely to build it, promising him to save him, his wife, their sons and their wives, and, finally, instructing him to fill the vessel with male and female couples of the various clean and unclean animal species – seven pairs of the clean but only one of the unclean species – while stocking it with provisions for all. The poet, thus, closely follows his source Genesis 6:13-22. God moves to communicate with Noah, by way of a series of imperatives that brook no questioning. Why, however, does He choose to communicate with Noah and save him, specifically? It is Noah’s reasonable obedience to God that saves him, and that prompts the ‘forward’ that He makes with him: “‘My forwarde with the I festen on this wyse, / For thou in reysoun hatz rengned and ryghtwys ben euer’” (327-8); here the poet’s particular focus on ‘trawthe’ throughout his thought and œuvre marries splendidly with the scriptural source, Genesis 7:1: ‘enim vidi iustum coram me in generatione hac’, ‘for thee I have seen just before me in this generation’. In his retelling of the Fall of Man, the poet blames the episode on the ‘faut of a freke that fayled in trawthe, / Adam inobedyent’ (236-7). Where Adam disobeyed God’s commands, Noah obeys them. As in the original, Noah’s verbal response to God is not represented in the text; rather, his obedient response actualizes in prompt action in accordance with God’s words and commands: ‘Ful graythely gotz this god man and dos Godez hestes’ (341). Noah’s ‘trawthe’ or loyalty to God goes in some way to repair the deteriorated post-lapsarian relationship between man and God, and so when he completes God’s instructions to the letter, God turns to him, not in anger (although it is ‘dryghly’ (344) or gravely), and enters into dialogue with His creature, thus:

‘Now Noe,’ quoth oure Lorde, ‘art thou al redy? Hatz thou closed thy kyst with clay alle aboute?’
‘Ye, Lorde, with thy leue,’ sayde the lede thenne, ‘Al is wroght at thi worde, as thou me wyt lantez.’
‘Enter in, thenn,’ quoth He... (345-9).

In relation to Cleanness, J. J. Anderson judges that ‘there is no true dialogue between even the virtuous and God. Such exchanges as there are are one-sided: Noah, Abraham,

24 Think especially of the symbolism of the Gawain’s Pentangle, and how taken in its totality it signifies ‘trawthe’ (Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 623-65).
and Lot speak to God only with exaggerated deference, God in his turn speaks condescendingly, and there is no conversation or debate. It is true that none of the characters converse with God as, for instance, Margery Kempe does in her Book, but, on the other hand, the text does not support the notion that God speaks condescendingly to his virtuous creatures. In the above-quoted dialogue between God and Noah, God addresses Noah by name; this dialogue is personal and marked by solicitude for Noah’s wellbeing. It is no longer the relation of strangers; rather, there is the glimmer of friendship that is confirmed after the Flood subsides when ‘Godez glam to hem glod that gladed hem alle, / Bede hem drawe to the dor: delyuer hem He wolde’ (499-500). Now the perlocutionary effect of divine speech is to gladden and encourage its auditor; such speech has become the medium of less hostile relations between creature and Creator. God speaks to Noah, in particular, and the poet introduces the speech: ‘He spakes with that ilke / In comly comfort ful clos and cortays wordez’ (511-2). The intimacy and courtesy of God’s speech imply his friendship with Noah, as does his personal address and promise to him too:

‘Now, Noe, no more nel I neuer wary
Alle the mukel mayny on molde for no mannez synnez,
...
Forthy schal I neuer schende so schortly at ones
As dysstrye al for manez dedez, dayez of this erthe’ (513-20).

This covenant with man, this ‘forward’ affirmed in God’s ‘trawthe’ marks a new relation between both that supports and fosters communication between God and man, and that communication issues in the medium most natural to man, namely, speech.

In the subsequent exemplum excoriating impurity, the poet recasts the narrative matter of Genesis 18, focusing on and amplifying God’s communication with Abraham. As in the Bible, God comes to Abraham in the guise of three strangers, but Abraham immediately recognizes the true identity of his guest, and acts promptly to make Him welcome. Unlike in Noah’s case, it is Abraham who opens the discourse, greeting the

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26 Compare Piers Plowman B-text, XI 320: ‘...and sithen cam Kynde / And nempned me by my name'. See chapter 3, p. 156.
three, and addressing them, thus, ‘Hende Lorde, / Yif euer thy mon vpon molde merit desserued, / Lenge a lyttel with thy lede, I loghly biseche’ (612-4). Note how he addresses the three as one, using the familiar ‘thou’ form of the second-person pronoun. Some lines later, and mirroring the source in Genesis, the poet switches Abraham’s use of the second-person singular pronoun to the plural ‘yow’ form, ‘And I schal wynne Yow wyght of water a lyttel, / And fast aboute schal I fare Your fette wer waschene’ (617-8). The poet, thus, preserves the theologically fecund detail of the source ‘matter’ as it pertains to the Christian dogma of the Trinity, implying a careful concern for the specificity of the source that sensitively limits the kinds of alteration he makes to it while elaborating and amplifying the ‘matter’ in question.27

Having offered the three his hospitality, he receives the positive response, “‘Fare forth,” quoth the Frekez, “and fech as thou seggez; / By bole of this brode tre We byde the here’” (621-2). The second line of their speech is an original addition that draws and points the location of the encounter but also draws attention to God’s patience while he waits for his creature; this emphasizes God’s recognition of the time-bound finitude of His creature who cannot effect his will immediately, but must work physically to make his guest at home. God’s friendly inclination towards His creature is made explicit by the poet as he describes the scene of refreshment: ‘And God as a glad gest mad god chere / That watz fayn of his frende, and his fest praysed’ (641-2). Again, this simile drawn between God and a ‘glad gest’ is original to the poet, developing on the rather more austere account given in Genesis. In effect, the poet’s simile implies God’s intimacy with Abraham, especially when it is implied that He is Abraham’s ‘frende’, and so after the meal, it is fitting that God and Abraham should walk and talk together as friends might; and, thus, Abraham ‘tent Hym with tale and teche Hym the gate’ (676). On the way to Sodom, God, indeed, says to Abraham:

‘How might I hyde Myn hert fro Habraham the trwe,
That I ne dyscouered to his corse My counsayl so dere,
Sythen he is chosen to be chef chyldryn fader,
That so folk schal falle fro to flete alle the worlde,
And vche blod in that burne blessed schal worthe?  

27 See An Introduction to the Gawain-Poet, p. 223.
Me bos telle to that tolk the tene of My wylle,
And alle Myn atlyng to Abraham vnhaspe bilyue' (682-8).

This speech reiterates God's closeness to Abraham, revealing that it is, above all, that closeness that impels God to 'telle to that tolk the tene of My wylle, / And alle Myn atlyng'; and this emphasis on closeness goes beyond the tenor of the source 'matter' in Genesis 18:18-19. Hence, the wellspring of divine speech for the Cleaness-poet is affirmed again to be God's friendship and intimacy with his creature.

The closeness of God and Abraham emboldens the latter to engage the former in a question and answer persuasion dialogue, intended to ascertain the limits of God's mercy. The poet, however, again going beyond the source, characterizes Abraham's address to God as fearful and sighing, awed as he is by God's wrath at the sinful denizens of Sodom and Gomorrah; thus, he delicately and tentatively makes the case for the innocent who might be killed in the destruction of the doomed city. Ad Putter notes how Abraham's bargaining with God: 'suggests the precariousness of man's dealings with this character of God.' He regards Abraham's style as that 'of the groveling courtier who is looking for the prince's favours, and knows he must not push his luck.' God responds positively to Abraham's speech, stating that he would spare the city if only fifty just men lived there, and, moreover and significantly, as He says to Abraham, for "'thy faire speche'" (729). This admission implies the efficacy of prayer by the just man, friendly to God, but it also implies that the end of divine discourse is communicative and responsive to human petition when the human in question lives in God's favour. Yet it is also true to say that God evades offering Abraham a definite answer regarding the fate of the city. Putter writes:

The Gawain-poet's final twist to the bargaining episode leaves Abraham and the audience in no doubt about who is in charge. Abraham, in despair, calls out to God, but receives no assurance...God's reticence communicates what we might

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29 *An Introduction to the Gawain-Poet*, p. 224.
30 Ibid., p. 226.
have known all along, that God is not constrained to enter into a dialogue or negotiation, that the need to bargain is finally one-sided.\(^{31}\)

It is true that Abraham is left in some doubt about the fate of the city, but God does send word to Lot of its impending destruction, and so Abraham’s ‘faire speech’ and ‘trawthe’ may be counted as having had some influence on God’s decision to forewarn and so save his kinsman.

What, however, is the situation of divine discourse in the context of pagan sinfulness? The answer comes in the poet’s recasting of the story of Belshazzar’s Feast.

The poet recounts the background and context to Belshazzar’s Feast by retelling the history of Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Judea. He presents, however, the Persian conqueror’s motivation and success as functions of God’s will; thus, because King Zedekiah neglects his loyalty to God, the latter prompts Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on the Jewish king and state: ‘Forthi oure Fader vpon folde a foman hym wakned; Nabigodenozar nuyed hym swythe’ (1175-6). Hence, God is represented as communicating his will, speaking, in a certain sense, through events. Furthermore, his hostility to Zedekiah is presented in terms of a loss of friendship; thus, the poet argues:

For hade the Fader ben his frende, that hym bifoire kepeth,
Ne neuer trespast to Him in teche of mysseleue, 
To cold wer alle Calde and kythes of Ynde –
Yet take Torkye hem with – her tene hade ben little (1229-32).

Since Zedekiah reneges on his loyalty to God, God withdraws his friendship, and makes it known through the fateful turns of events, underpinned by Providence. If this is God’s response when slighted by a former friend, what is His relation and response to the slight of one who was never his friend; that is, what is His relation to the blaspheming unbeliever who does Him violence, and how does He communicate His response?\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 227.

\(^{32}\) Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*, II.II.13.1 defines blasphemy: ‘The word blasphemy seems to denote the disparagement of some surpassing goodness, especially that of God. Now God, as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom. i*), is the very essence of true goodness. Hence whatever befits God, pertains to His goodness, and whatever does not befit Him, is far removed from the perfection of goodness which is His Essence. Consequently whoever either denies anything befitting God, or affirms anything unbefitting Him, disparages the Divine goodness. Now this may happen in two ways. On the first way it may happen
Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar’s eldest son and heir, defiles the sacred vessels of God’s Holy Temple, taken by his father in victory but always treated with respect by him on the advice of the Prophet Daniel. The poet notes how a lamp-stand from the Temple:

\ldots watrz not wonte in that wone to wast no serges,
Bot in temple of the trauthe trwly to stonde
Bifore the sancta sanctorum ther sothefast Dryghten
Expouned His speche spiritually to special prophetes (1489-92).

This detail is not found in the source account, Daniel 5:1-5, but it emphasizes two important considerations: firstly, the idea that the utterance of divine speech is limited to the confines of a sancta sanctorum, and, secondly, that such speech is expounded non-physically to elite auditors, prophets who mediate God’s communication with the people. Of course, since the sancta sanctorum has been desecrated, God moves to communicate without the destroyed Temple. He expresses his anger in the form of a ‘warnyng’ (1504), by way of a ‘ferly’ (1529):

In the palays pryncipale, vpon the playn wowte,
In contrary of the candelstik, ther clerest hit schyned,
Ther apered a paume, with poyntel in fyngres,
That watrz grisly and gret, and grimly he wrytes;
Non other forme bot a fust faylande the wryste
Pared on the parget, portrayed lettres (1531-6).

Belshazzar is horrified, his eyes riveted on the unfolding marvel:

Ay biholdand the honed til hit hade al grauen
And rasped on the rogh woghe runisch sauez.
When hit the scrypture hade scraped wyth a scrof penne,

merely in respect of the opinion in the intellect; in the second way this opinion is united to a certain detestation in the affections, even as, on the other hand, faith in God is perfected by love of Him. Accordingly this disparagement of the Divine goodness is either in the intellect alone, or in the affections also. If it is in thought only, it is blasphemy of the heart, whereas if it betrays itself outwardly in speech it is blasphemy opposed to confession of faith.’ Dante in the Commedia regards blasphemy as violence against God; for his powerful ecphrasis of the contrapasso punishment of the sin, see Inferno XIV.
As a coltour in clay cerues the forghes,
Thenne hit vanist verayly and voided of syght;
Bot the lettres bileued ful large vpon plaster (1544-9).
The king is baffled at the significance of the ‘runisch sauez’, so he calls ‘his burnes...that were bok-lered’ (1551) to interpret them. They, however, fail to divine the meaning of the words carved into the wall. Finally, by taking the advice of his queen, he sends for the prophet, Daniel. When the prophet arrives, Belshazzar greets him courteously, recognizing his special gift:

…‘Beue sir,’ he sayde,
‘Hit is tolde me bi tulkes that thou trwe were
Profete of that prouynce that prayed my fader,
Ande that thou hazt in thy hert holy connyng,
Of sapyence thi sawle ful, soothes to schawe;
Goddes gost is the geuen that gyes alle thynges,
And thou vnhyles vch hidde that Heuen-Kyng myntes’ (1622-8).
Daniel’s wisdom in reading divine discourse is itself divinely inspired. He tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s blasphemous boast that resulted in his transformation into an unreasoning beast. The poet draws on Daniel 4:27-33 for God’s speech to the proud Persian king that ‘souned in his eres’ (1670):

‘Now Nabugodonozar innoghe hatz spoken,
Now is alle thy pryncipalté past at ones,
And thou, remued fro mannes sunes, on mor most abide
And in wasturne walk and wyth the wylde dowelle’ (1671-4).
The speech informs and effects its intent; it is illocutionary, and communicates God’s absolute power and mastery over all His creatures. However, the fact that God speaks to Nebuchadnezzar, sounding in his ears, raises the question, why does He speak directly to a blaspheming pagan when, otherwise, He speaks only through His prophets in the hallowed interior or sancta sanctorum of His Temple? On one level, of course, the Cleanness-poet includes the episode because he follows his source in the Book of Daniel; however, it may be that the implicature of the text invites the reader to ponder that God talks directly to Nebuchadnezzar because He has chosen him as one of His elect. When
God returns his senses, Nebuchanezzar 'loued that Lorde and leued in trawthe / Hit watz non other then He that hade al in honde' (1703-4). Nebuchadnezzar's recognition that God 'hade al in honde' implies that he has humbled himself before God and in doing so, opens himself to a righteous relation to God. If this is so, then God's speech to Nebuchadnezzar can be harmonised with the idea that God speaks directly only to his friends, namely, those who maintain 'trawthe' with Him and whom, therefore, He saves to be with Him.

Returning to Belshazzar, Daniel interprets the enigmatic script on the wall, 'Mane, Techal, Phares' (1727), prophesying the king's doom. Oddly, the king rewards Daniel for deciphering the script, but learns nothing from it. He is slain that night by the invading Darius. Belshazzar was not a friend of God's; his speech that included the notion that God spoke through Daniel did not contain an authentic admission of his own belief that this was so; rather, he merely reported what others had told him. He had no genuine belief in God, and his blasphemy was, therefore, unpardonable. God spoke to the stranger through the marvel of an enigmatic script, requiring interpretation by a divinely inspired prophet. Thus, the text implies the obscurity of divine discourse to those who are far removed from God's friendship; he does not speak to them, but promises their doom in coded riddles. Belshazzar's moral remove from God is, thus, paralleled by his hermeneutic remove from divine discourse.

**Patience**

In *Cleanness* Nebuchadnezzar learned to love and believe in God through suffering. The poet picks up on this theme again – or, perhaps, it is for the first time – in *Patience*. The poem opens with a recommendation of patience or 'suffraunce' as a virtue in remedy of depression, anger and misfortune. Lines 13-28 present a fairly close translation of Matthew 5:3-10, the Sermon on the Mount, where Christ teaches his followers the eight beatitudes, but unlike the presentation of the sixth beatitude in *Cleanness*, the poet does not present this translation as a representation of divine speech; rather, they are reported indirectly in the voice of the narrator; thus, the narratorial stance bears importantly on the presentation and elaboration of divine speech in the text.
The narrator states his own condition of poverty: ‘I am put to a point that pouerté hatte’ (Patience, 35), and argues that anyone in poverty must suffer much: ‘And theras pouert enpresses, thagh mon pyne think, / Much, maugré his mun, he mot need suffer’ (43-4). Consequently, he resolves to reconcile himself both to patience and poverty: ‘Thus pouerté and pacyence arn nedes playferes. / Sythen I am sette with hem samen, suffer me byhoues’ (45-6). He reinforces this stoical attitude by asking, rhetorically, ‘Yif me be dyght a destine due to haue, / What dowes me the dedayn, other dispit make?’ (49-50); indeed, he reaffirms this by asking rhetorically, again, ‘What graythed me the grychchyng bot grame more seche?’ (53); and this provides the link to the story of Jonah, illustrating by way of scriptural exemplum the folly of defying destiny, of complaining against one’s fate because such fate is, ultimately, a function of Providence, the form of God’s will. Personally invested in the ‘sentence’ of the ensuing narrative, the Patience-narrator recasts the figure of God and His speech in amplified personal terms.

Just as Daniel was His prophet, interpreting His Word to the Persian kings in Cleanness, so Jonah is ‘Jentyle prophete’ (62), elected by God to speak for Him to those with whom He shares no special friendship. The Book of Jonah opens abruptly: ‘Et factum est verbum Domini ad Ionam filium Amathi dicens / surge vade in Nineven civitatem grandem et praedica in ea quia ascendit malitia eius coram me’, ‘Now the word of the Lord came to Jonas the son of Amathi, saying: / Arise, and go to Ninive the great city, and preach in it: for the wickedness thereof is come up before me.’ The Patience-poet amplifies these two verses to include greater consideration of the characters’ psychological states, emphasising motivation and feeling, and this includes yet another humanized portrait of God, extending, naturally, to the representation of divine speech, involving fabulation beyond the letter of scripture. Thus, the poet qualifies God’s initial speech to Jonah in the following terms, ‘Goddes glam to hym glod that hym vnglad made, / With a roghlych rurd rowned in his ere’ (63-4). Note the stark assertion of the perlocutionary effect of God’s speech on Jonah, metrically emphasised by the alliterating stress on the second syllable of ‘vnglad’. Jonah’s uncooperative, negative mood may, therefore, account for the harshness of God’s voice, breathing or whispering roughly in his ear. Although chosen by God, he distances himself from Him, and so the quality of the divine speech he hears echoes that moral distance.
In representing God’s first speech to Jonah, the poet goes beyond his source text, emphasising Jonah’s role as God’s voice and prophet; thus, God says:

‘Rys radly...and rayke forforth euen;
Nym the way to Nynyue wythouten other speche,
And in that cete My saghes soghe alle aboute,
That in that place, at the poyn, I put in thi hert...’ (65-8).

God commands; it is Jonah’s role to be obedient, to depart immediately for Nineveh without further speech, without reply, by substituting his own voice and words for God’s voice and Word. If, however, Jonah’s heart is not in his mission, then how will he utter the words God puts in his heart? The poet states that God’s ‘steuen...stowned his mynde’ (73); Jonah’s heart and mind, therefore, are not prepared to welcome God or God’s will for him, so his whole being recoils from open and co-operative communication with God; in this he contrasts utterly with the ‘trawthe’ of Noah and Abraham as related in Cleaness.

Jonah angrily and rebelliously flees his mission, hoping to escape God’s sight by sailing to Tarsus. Vainly, of course, for God commands the storm to effect His will; thus, the poet writes:

He [that is, God] calde on that ilk crafte He carf with His hondes;
That wakened wel the wrotheloker for wrothely He cleped:
‘Ewrus and Aquiloun that on est sittes
Blowes bothe at My bode vpon blo watteres.’
Thenne watz no tom ther bytwene His tale and her dede (131-5).

There is no corresponding divine speech in the biblical source, Jonah 1:4, which simply states: ‘Dominus autem misit ventum magnum in mari’, ‘But the Lord sent a great wind into the sea’. The Patience-poet, on the other hand, portrays God in human terms, anthropomorphising Him by the attribution of ‘hondes’, for instance, and humanising Him by qualifying his command of the winds as being driven by anger. God’s illocutionary wrath has a concomitant perlocutionary effect on the winds’ response which is as violent as the anger that causes it. Despite this humanisation, the overall effect of the passage is to emphasise the sheer power of divine illocution; for God ‘tale and...dede’ are one, for there can be no slippage between intention, speech act and effect in the
This, indeed, is the God of whom even in the midst of the deadly storm Jonah affirms that He:

‘...wroght alle thynges,
Alle the worlde with the welkyn, the wynde and the sternes,
And alle that wonez ther withinne, at a worde one’ (206-8).

This, then, is the same God who spoke to Noah as Almighty Father in Cleanliness. The mention of God’s creation of the world and all being ‘at a worde one’ goes beyond Jonah’s brief speech in Jonah 1:9, for it draws on the opening of John’s Gospel and its identification of the Word as the creative principle and paradigm of reality, but it does reveal the implied intention of the author who is impressed by and then impresses on the reader the awesome power of the Word and divine speech. Furthermore, this interpolation of New Testament ‘sentence’ in the representation of God and divine discourse in the adaptation of the Book of Jonah enhances the argument that His representation, its aspects and, in particular, the instances of divine speech all recombine in the poet’s understanding of the ‘worde one’ or eternal metaphysical actuality of the Logos.

Having being thrown overboard, Jonah is swallowed by a whale sent by God, and in the guts of the whale, he acknowledges and confesses his sins, promising God:

‘Soberly to do The sacrafyse when I schal saue worthe,
And offer The for my hele a ful hol gyfte,
And halde goud that Thou me hetes: haf here my trauthe’ (334-6).

In the instant that he promises obedience to God, offering his ‘trauthe’, the poet relates God’s immediate response: ‘Thenne oure Fader to the fysch ferslych biddez / That he hym sput spakly vpon spare drye’ (337-8). Once more, the quality of God’s speech is emphasised in the stern command he makes of the whale to loose Jonah. God’s speech orders creation except, of course, in relation to the free will of men, but Jonah, having submitted to God’s will, has now aligned his will with God’s. When Jonah is washed up on the shore, God speaks to him again for the first time since the original speech that the reluctant prophet disobeyed: ‘Thenne a wynde of Goddez worde efte the wyye bruxlez: /

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33 Compare, again, Chaucer’s repeated Platonic statement of the metaphysical status of human language where the modest aim is that the word might be cousin to the deed; see chapter 4.
"Nylt thou neuer to Nuniue bi no kynnez wayez?" (345-6) The upbraiding question is rhetorical, for Jonah has promised his obedience, and, thus, he promptly replies, "Yisse, Lorde...lene me Thy grace / For to go at Thi gre: me gaynez non other" (347-8). God then replies, "Ris, aproche then to prech, lo, the place here. / Lo, My lore is in the loke, lauce hit therinne" (349-50). Finally, God’s teaching rests in Jonah’s contrite and cooperating heart, for, at last, the prophet has opened himself to becoming the voice of God’s Word such that he preaches nothing but the ‘trwe tenor of his teme’ (358), namely, God’s warning to the Ninevites.

Jonah’s preaching and prophesying to the Ninevites results in their taking his message to heart, so that they change their lives, and beg forgiveness and mercy of God. God hears their prayers, and changes His mind about destroying them. Thus, the poet writes: ‘And God thurgh His godnesse forgef as he sayde; / Thagh He other bihyght, withhelde His vengaunce’ (407-8). This raises the question of God’s impassivity and simplicity; did God change His mind as a fallible human being might, or does the humanized representation of God merely reflect familiar human categories of experience that thereby make God more intelligible to man? Chapter 4 of the Book of Jonah and the remainder of Patience address this question as to the seeming subjectivity of God. Of the non-destruction of Nineveh, thus, Jonah complains to God that He has made him a liar:

‘Now, Lorde, lach out my lyf, hit lasts to longe.  
Bed me bilyue my bale-stour and bring me on ende,  
For me were swetter to swelt as swythe, as me thynk,  
Then lede lenger Thi lore that thus me les makez’ (425-8).

God’s response is swift and, again, stern:

The soun of oure Souerayn then swey in his ere,  
That vpbraydes this burne vpon a breme wyse:  
‘Herk, renk, is this ryght so roenkly to wrath  
For any dede that I haf don other demed the yet?’ (429-32)

Jonah is a recalcitrant learner; but God undertakes to offer him one more lesson in the autonomy of His will. He first sends Jonah shade from the sun in the form of a woodbine plant, but then destroys it the following day. Jonah angrily attacks God’s caprice, but God replies, echoing the terms of his last speech:
'Is this ryghtwys, thou renk, alle thy ronk noyse,' 
So wroth for a wodbynde to wax so sone? 
Why art thou so waymot, wyye, for so lyttel?' (490-2)

This prompts a dialogue between the two as Jonah replies: "'Hit is not lyttel...bot lykker to ryght; / I wolde I were of this worlde wrapped in moldez'" (493-4). God's response amounts to an amplification of his speech in the biblical source, Jonah 4:10-11, as well as a magisterial determinatio of Jonah's sceptical questioning of His intention and will. The conclusion of the speech crystallises its sentence:

'Why schulde I wrath wyth hem, sythen wyyez wyl torne, 
And cum and cnawe Me for Kyng and My carpe leue? 
Wer I as hastif as thou heere, were harme lumpen; 
Couthe I not thole bot as thou, ther thryued ful fewe. 
I may not be so malicious and mylde be halden, 
For malyse is noght to mayntyne boute mercy withinne' (518-23).

Again, then, the poet humanises God, imagining Him capable of suffering and bearing it with patience, resulting in ultimate forgiveness for those who eventually align their will to His. It seems, thus, that the text does present God as a person, and as such, He becomes relatable to man; the awkward question of whether God changed His mind on the question of the Ninevite's prophesied destruction, is not definitively addressed by the poet, for it falls outside the range of the 'sentence' of the text. God's concluding speech, however, imaginatively and authoritatively points what is the major theme of the text, that is, the importance of patience or 'suffraunce'. The notion of God's patience brings Him into humanized relation with man; this humanisation prefigures that of the Incarnation of the Word in Christ. Christ's recommendation of patience in the Sermon on the Mount has its correlation and foundation in God's own patience that is also the wellspring of His mercy, and by dint of the latter he makes His enemies His friends.

Pearl

Pearl is a dream-vision that begins as a kind of somnium animale, prompted by the inconsolable grief and plangent despair of its narrator-persona who complains: 'Thagh
kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned, / My wrecched wylle in wo ay wraghte' (Pearl, 55-6); but it ends as a *somnium coeleste* or 'veray avysyoun' (1184), culminating in a stunning and glorious vision of the New Jerusalem. It appropriates biblical matter, as in the detail used to point the ecphrasis of the celestial Jerusalem, but does not amount otherwise to a sustained recasting of biblical narratives as was the case with *Cleanness* and *Patience*. Indeed, one of the key rationales of the dream-vision device was, of course, the freedom it allowed the poet to fantasise original matter not already existing in books. What use the *Pearl*-poet makes of his invented scriptural matter is local to this or that specific concern in relation to the overall 'sentence' and allied disposition of his fantasised matter. Hence, the recasting of the Parable of the Vineyard, taken from Matthew 20:1-16, is employed by the Pearl-maiden as an *exemplum* in order to argue a specific point in her general debate with the sceptical dreamer-narrator although it must be noted that that specific point goes to the heart of the text's dialogical rumination on the economy of beatitude. In *Cleanness* and *Patience* the recastings constitute the poems; by contrast, in *Pearl* the recasting serves and adorns the supervening 'sentence' of the text rather than dominates or constitutes it.

The first reference to divine speech in the text comes when the dreamer-narrator, having been rapt into a vision by divine grace, ‘My goste is gon in Godez grace, / In auenture ther meruaylez meuen’ (63-4), recognizes his Pearl on the opposite bank of a river. He addresses her in astonishment and yearning, unable to conceive being happy unless he is reunited with her, but to cross the stream separating them would be to eschew hope and invite death; therefore, the Pearl-maiden upbraids him for his sceptical empiricism:

‘I halde that jueler lyttel to prayse
That leuez wel that he sez wyth yye,
And much to blame and uncortoyse

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35 The sentential preoccupation of *Cleanness* and *Patience* with their respective beatitudes as moral conditions for an ultimate Beatific Vision marries well with *Pearl*’s focus on the economic relation of moral action to beatitude with respect to God’s grace and justice.
That leuez oure Lorde wolde make a lye,
That lelly hyghte your lyf to rayse,
Thagh Fortune dyd your flesch to dyye.
Ye setten Hys wordez ful westemays
That leuez nothynk bot ye hit syye’ (301-8).

Her speech implicitly emphasises the importance of faith, specifically, trust in God’s promises. To disbelieve His promises is to ‘setten Hys wordez ful westernays’, that is, to discount, to repudiate the integrity or ‘trawthe’ of divine speech. God’s words, the Pearl-maiden affirms, are faithful, and, thus, to be trusted and believed.

When the dreamer-narrator doubts the justice of the Pearl-maiden’s rank in heaven because of her youth at her death, entailing a dearth of good works, she responds by affirming the ‘trawthe’ of God’s Word: “‘al is trawthe that He con dresse, / And He may do nothynk bot ryghf” (495-6). In order to illustrate or prove his ‘trawthe’ with respect to the economy of beatitude, she retells the Parable of the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), and the *Pearl*-poet expands the original sixteen verses of the Gospel into seventy-two lines of poetry. In recasting the parable, he draws attention to the fact that it is Christ who utters it both at the start and conclusion; for instance, when the Maiden commences her retelling of the story, she presents it as reported speech: “‘My regne,” He saytz, “is lyk on hyght / To a lorde that hade a uyne, I wate’” (501-2). In Matthew’s Gospel, by contrast, the parable opens simply: ‘simile est enim regnum caelorum homini patri familias’, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like to an householder’ with no diegetical statement that it is Christ who is speaking. And at the conclusion, Christ is represented pointing to the lesson of the parable, making explicit the connection between the householder of the parable and Himself (which he does not do in the Gospel): “‘Thus schal I,” quoth Kryste, “hit skyfte: / The laste schal be the fyrst that strykez, / And the fyrst the laste...’” (569-71). Once again, then, the fact that the parable is uttered by Christ is emphasised, and its ‘sentence’ is amplified by Christ’s attributed and pointed moralisation, especially as Christ is made to relate the ‘sentence’ of the parable to His own divine praxis.

Returning to the narrative of *Pearl*, the Maiden draws the following conclusion from the parable, contending that her exalted position is wholly legitimate:
'Whether welyngh now I con bygynne –
In euentyde into the vyne I come –
Fyrst of my hyre my Lord con mynne:
I watz payed anon of al and sum’ (581-4).
Unfortunately, the dreamer-narrator does not find the lesson drawn cogent, and so he asserts:

'Me thynk thy tale vnresounable;
Goddez ryght is redy and euermore rert,
Other holy wryt is bot a fable.
In sauter is sayd a verce ouerte
That spekez a poynt determynable:
'Thou quytez vchon as hys desserte,
Thou hyye Kyng ay pertermynable’ (590-6).
He contests her interpretation of the parable because he does not accept that its ‘sentence’ amounts to an explanation of her position; his disjunctive argument that ‘Goddez ryght is redy and euermore rert / Other holy writ is bot a fable’ raises the exegetical question of the consonantia or harmony of sacred scripture, that is, the integritas or unity of the Word, and so the dreamer-narrator cites Psalm 61:12-13 to challenge the Maiden’s reading of Matthew 20:1-16. The two interlocutors become locked into a serious debate where the ultimate ‘trawthe’ of God’s Word is at issue. Once again Christ’s own words become central to the Maiden’s defence of her position when she recalls how people used to bring their children to Jesus to bless them, and how the disciples sent them away, but, as she says:

'Jesus thenne hem sweetly sayde:
"Do way, let chylder vnto Me tyght;
To suche is heuenryche arrayed’” (717-9).
From this speech of Christ’s, she concludes, ‘The innocent is ay saf by ryght’ (720). She then launches on retelling the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, taken from Matthew 13:45-6; this time she presents her parable by dint of paraphrase:

'Ryght [that is, Jesus] con calle to Hym Hys mylde,
And sayde Hys ryche no wyy might wynne
Bot he com hyder ryght as a chylde,
Other ellez neuermore com therinne...’ (721-4).

Her personification of ‘Ryght’ and its heavily implied identification with Jesus serves to answer definitively the doubts of the dreamer-narrator. Her final reference to divine speech by dint of arguing her point comes when she recalls her death and election by the Lamb, another transparent figure of Christ, thus:

‘When I wente fro yor worlde wete
He calde me to Hys bonerté:
“Cum hyder to Me, My lemman swete,
For mote ne spot is non in the’” (761-4).

The Lamb’s speech is not wholly original, for it recalls that of the Song of Songs 4:7-8, ‘tota pulchra es amica mea et macula non est in te’, ‘Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.’ The Maiden wins her argument, for the dreamer-narrator raises no more doubts; however, he does ask to enter the New Jerusalem, which is impossible, as the Maiden explains, but he is allowed a glimpse of the Lamb, and it is this vision of the Lamb that marks the climax of the whole dream-vision. The Lamb is available to the dreamer in the waking world of mortal life, in the form of the transubstantiated bread and wine of the Eucharist. Hence, having woken from his vision, the dreamer-narrator, reconciled to his loss, reconstitutes his life in relation to God. Hence, he can authentically conclude:

To pay the Prince other sete saghte
Hit is ful ethe to the god Krystyin;
For I haf founden Hym, bothe day and naghte,
A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin
...
That in the forme of bred and wyn
The preste vus schewez vch a daye (1201-10).

The Christian in right relation to God experiences God as a ‘frende ful fyin’, and meets his God in the flesh as any friend each day. Pearl’s vision and its ‘sentence’ combine, thus, to affirm that God is present, and He is man’s friend, walking and talking with him ‘bothe day and naghte’. Hence, the ground of divine speech in this text is once again
related to the notion of God’s intimacy with man, his friendship with his loved creature. This idea of amity between man and God even carries over into the ‘secular’ romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Gawain on his quest, alone in the wasteland, seeking an uncertain destination and destiny, finds himself talking with his one sure friend, God: ‘Hade he no fere hot his fole bi frythez and dounez, / Ne no gome hot God bi gate wyth to karp’ (695-6). Of course, it is not implied that God spoke back to Gawain, but the important point is the emphasis on Gawain’s relationship to God. The knight who strives to exemplify the arch virtue of ‘trawthe’, piously does his duty by God, but his piety embraces an intimate familiarity with God, a friendship like that of the communion of man and God celebrated in the conclusion of *Pearl*.

Conclusion

All three religious poems considered in this chapter share the intellectual programme of expositing scripture and doctrine by way of poetic, fictive and figurative narrative poetry. Preliminary to such a programme is the implied claim that the author or poet is qualified for the work; in this case, the qualification requires not only learning but also moral rectitude.³⁶ (The sceptical character of the dreamer-narrator of *Pearl* complicates this picture; see below.) The object of the author’s exposition is the ‘matter’ of divine discourse as inscribed in the sacred scripture of the Vulgate; in particular, his themes derive in each instance from a key speech of Christ’s, be it a beatitude, in the case of *Cleanness* and *Patience*, or a parable (that of the Vineyard in Matthew 20), in the case of *Pearl*. As such, the three texts amount to interpretative elucidations of divine speech, recast linguistically into English, and poetically into the radical re-imaginings and recastings of biblical narrative ‘matter’ into new texts. All of this is done for the sake of an audience who, it is implied, cannot read the original texts in Latin; however, these poems are more than mere biblical paraphrases or verse homilies in the vernacular, for the very acts of creative interpretation and imaginative amplification combine to produce

³⁶ Compare Chaucer’s Parson, and the discussion of his relation to his Tale in chapter 4.
independent artworks whose nature encompasses an inscribed spiritual desire to know and be one with God.\(^{37}\)

Broadly, then, the three texts are products of a Christocentric drive; they tend towards the ‘trawthe’ that Christ’s spoken promises and parables constitute and underwrite. Hence, although Christ does not figure in the narrative episodes that largely comprise *Cleanness*, his speech, namely, that of the sixth beatitude, constitutes and underwrites the ‘sentence’ of those episodes and by extension that of the whole text. Divine speech, thus, plays a key role in these religious texts. The poet appropriates the textual sites of such speech from his scriptural sources, but recasts them, expanding, elaborating and amplifying them to serve both his narrative and his ‘sentence’. If he fabulates divine speech, such fabulation is closely connected to the authoritative scriptural site; all the fabulations immediately imply their justification in connection with the ‘sentence’ of sacred scripture.

Furthermore, the representations of divine speech derive from an especially humanised representation of God in the poet’s texts. In the absence of an Incarnated Word in the Old Testament ‘matter’ of *Cleanness* and *Patience*, the poet chooses to humanize God in order to emphasise His personhood; that personhood receives its fullest expression in Christ. Hence, humanizing God, emphasising His personhood transforms the theocentric Old Testament ‘matter’ into Christocentric prefigurations of the personal relationship that the Christian reader enjoys with God in Christ in the contemporary context. God’s humanization involves the attribution of motivation and feeling, and this displays itself in His speech. Depending, too, on the relation of the interlocutor or auditor, He sounds distant or otherwise. He is friendly to his favourites who are such by dint of their virtue, primarily, centred on their obedience, for they freely and promptly align their wills with His. Human beings are free, but the fulfilment of that freedom seemingly paradoxically lies in submitting one’s free will to God. Noah and Abraham are God’s ideal friends, and Daniel is obedient and in special relation to God as His prophet to the gentiles, the Persian kings, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar; however, Jonah is

\(^{37}\) See Alan Fletcher, ‘*Pearl* and the Limits of History’, *Studies in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts in Honour of John Scattergood*, eds Anne Marie D-Arcy and Alan J. Fletcher (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), pp. 158-60 for a subtle discussion of the relation of *Pearl’s* ‘own voice’ to its sacred and secular sources.
recalcitrant, disobedient and rebellious. Time and again, he needs teaching until he can truly allow God into his heart. His relationship with God is problematic and temperamental; thus, God’s communication with him is harsh and stern in quality.

The social dimension of divine speech in the texts pertains to the narratorial stance of those texts. It is implied that the narrators of *Cleanness* and *Patience* are both in right relation with God, and, thus, that they may interpret and amplify his Word in line with His ‘entente’ and ‘sentence’. The narrator of *Pearl* is a more constructed character; his stance towards God is distorted by his grief; he has forgotten his faith, and the purpose of the vision is to bring him into right relation with God once more. This he will do, it is implied, by communion with God in the Eucharist. It may be, then, that divine speech figures in *Pearl* in translation only, and with little evident amplification, because the attitude of the dreamer-narrator, and, thus, the narratorial stance of the text is closed to such open relation with God. Subsequent to the vision when the dreamer-narrator has reconciled himself to his loss, and affirmed his faith in Christ once more, he realises that God is present to him as a friend both day and night in the Eucharist. The major ‘sentence’ of this poet’s explicitly religious works, then, concerns the presence and operation of God in the world; such a God relates with man in terms man may understand. Hence, he speaks to man, and makes divine discourse present to him in warm trust and friendship.
Piers Plowman: Truth Speaking Love

‘God can never talk about anything but Himself.’ Léon Bloy, commenting on the Bible.¹

John Fleming identifies the centrality of religious subjects to *Piers Plowman*, and it is worth quoting him at length:

...its treatment of explicitly religious subjects is both comprehensive and central. Among its specific religious topics are the salvation of the individual, the nature of the Church, the idea of the religiously just society, the person of Jesus Christ, the Atonement, scriptural authority, and the moral taxonomies of human behaviour, among many others. Nearly every subject of ecclesiological and moral debate current in fourteenth-century England is touched upon, if not extensively treated, in its copious folios. It is generous in its generic allusion, and provides numerous instances of lyric, dramatic and homiletic moments. Yet despite the most intense and continuing critical scrutiny, very little agreement concerning the author and several of his most important religious ideas has emerged by way of consensus.²

A focus, however, on the religious topic of divine speech is new to the critical scrutiny of *Piers Plowman*, and it reveals fresh ‘sentence’ in the poem as well as further emphasising the centrality of religion and the inclination towards God in the text. Mary Clemente Davlin recognizes the radical importance of such divine speech to the text:

The daring of the poet is almost unparalleled in nondramatic literature, not only in claiming experience of God for his protagonist and his title character, but also in creating a voice for God in Christ and thus offering the reader an imaginative yet still mysterious mediated aesthetic experience of God. At the beginning of the poem, God’s position in heaven, above earth and hell, is affirmed and then corrected by the teaching of the incarnation, love’s leap into earth. At the climax of the poem, God’s voice is heard in hell; penetrating its darkness with his light,

he lays claim to all three registers of the universe. By the end God’s actions and the Bible stories, metaphors, analogical language, and instructions by Will’s interlocutors have awakened, in Will and the reader, at least an inchoate concept of a God who is everywhere, present and accessible, true and loving.\(^3\)

She does not, however, reflect critically on the operation of divine speech in the text. This chapter provides that analysis, and of particular interest is Langland’s fabulation of divine speech, for he goes beyond the practice of the master-anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x by attributing speech to God that does not derive from or correlate with scriptural authority. One of the key questions that this chapter addresses, then, is the reason why Langland puts new words into the mouth of God.

Langland’s unstable, discursive and ever-ramifying epic text of man’s relationship with and journey towards God contains many representations of divine speech of different kinds, including copious quotation from the Bible; such quotation includes scriptural verses in untranslated Latin, macaronic Latin-English and English.\(^4\) On the other hand, the text contains a wealth of fabulated divine speech presented indirectly and directly, both in writing (the text of the Pardon) and orally; such speech, however, is almost always presented as spoken by God in the figure of either Truth or Kind or Grace. Hence, God never – except in Passus XVIII – speaks \textit{in persona propria} in the text; usually, rather, He speaks \textit{qua} some significant aspect of His nature.\(^5\) This is fitting for a poem written in the allegorical mode where each substantial term is to be regarded as a vehicle for signifying something else. To have presented divine speech spoken by God \textit{qua} God would have violated the essential epistemic and semiotic modalities of the text. The one significant exception to this general rule comes at the climax of the poem when Christ harrows Hell, speaking words of power and authority, commanding and arguing


\(^5\) The aspectual approach to God and divine discourse was central to the types and character of divine speech discussed in chapter 2.
the Devil into defeat. The termination of the allegorical mode and the entry into sacred history that this episode narrates fits the event in question, for Christ’s triumphant confrontation with and victory over the Devil amounts to an unveiling of the true nature of the significance of the Incarnation and the power of the Word. This episode goes to the heart of God’s love for man, for it marks the confirmation of that love, and it is driven by divine speech, the illocutionary and logical force of the Word in Christ.

The purpose of this chapter on a medieval fabula, fable or overt fiction (that is, a narrative with an invented plot), then, is to outline the poet’s varied representations and, in particular, fabulations of divine speech in Piers Plowman, asking whether their order reveals some deliberate conceptual approach or scheme and, above all, whether the poetic fact of such verbal constructions connotes some deeper purpose or significance than the merely narrative.

When one considers order of any kind in Piers Plowman, C. S. Lewis’s seasoned judgement chastens the seeker of formal coherence in the text; he censures the poet as one who is ‘confused and monotonous, and hardly makes his poetry into a poem’. Stephen Kelly in a recent companion essay to the text notes Lewis’s opinion and affirms: ‘Inconclusiveness, discontinuity, frustration, difficulty – these and other terms characterize contemporary critical discussion of Piers Plowman.’ There are those, of course, who disagree with this pejorative assessment, notably, A. V. C. Schmidt; however, the most reasonable conclusion concerning the text’s structure has to be based on the balanced acknowledgement that there is evidence for the arguments of either critical camp. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the text’s series of discontinuities and

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7 See Paul Strohm, ‘Middle English Narrative Genres’, Genre, 13 (1980), 379-87 where his entry on ‘fable’ states: ‘Based ultimately on the Latin rhetorical term for a narrative with an invented plot, fable retained this sense throughout the period.’
digressions lacks the overt formal coherence of, for instance, the intricate *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or even the fragmentary *Canterbury Tales*. Furthermore, the pejorative estimation of the text’s formal coherence need not merely be a function of personal taste or poetics; arguably, it can be grounded in a critical knowledge of the canon of medieval aesthetics or theory of beauty. The text’s bald eschewal of the medieval aesthetic principles of *consonantia* or harmony and *integritas* or unity, nevertheless, complements both its lack of narrative closure and sentential openendedness. *Piers Plowman*, thus, might be described as a ‘poem unlimited’, for it exceeds formal, aesthetic and sentential limitation. Its discourse challenges and exceeds the normative generic conventions and expectations. The unorthodox nature of the text, then, by contemporary medieval poetic standards, thus, raises the troubling question of whether such a provisional, puzzling text inscribes a considered approach to the representation of divine speech.

Another question relevant to the analysis of divine speech in *Piers Plowman* concerns whether it might be a work of (vernacular) theology. It certainly deals with theological problems and questions, and it works with premises derived from the Bible, working them into arguments for this or that conclusion. Note, for instance, the figure Theology’s defence of Meed by recourse to the scriptural premise, ‘*Dignus est operarius* his hire to have’ (II 123). Thus, the poem regularly incorporates theological discourse

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12 There are medieval open texts, of course, that resist closure while possessing *consonantia* and *integritas*, such as, for instance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or the ‘Nun’s Priest’s Tale’.
14 See Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-text*, pp. 14-16 who argues that Langlandian poetry challenges the authority of the formal characteristics of ‘literature’.
15 See Introduction, section three, for my analysis of the conceptual legitimacy and usefulness of the term ‘vernacular theology’.
16 *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Everyman, 1995). Since the so-called B-text is the one that has by accident of history – Robert Crowley in 1550 decided to print it rather than the other versions he knew – exerted the most influence on the canon of English literature, it is the one that will be discussed in this chapter. All the major instances of divine speech treated in the
into its text. At the same time, the text includes harsh criticism of idle or false theology when both 'thise clerkes and thise lewed' (X 51) speak openly and unwisely of God as though they 'gnawen God with the gorge whanne hir guttes fallen' (X 57). Furthermore, Study expresses her chariness concerning theology:

'Ac Theologie hath tened me ten score tymes:
The moore I muse therinne, the myster it semeth,
And the depper I devyne, the derker me it thynketh' (X 182-84).

In the same passus, Clergy too expresses pessimistic dissatisfaction with theology, thus: "For hadde nevere freke fyn wit the feith to dispute" (X 249). Later Anima in a fit of anti-intellectualism excoriates those who confuse the 'lewed' with sophisticated theology:

'Freres and fele othere maistres that to the lewed men prechen,
Ye moeven materes unmesurables to tellen of the Trinitie,
That oftetymes the lewed peple of hir bileve doute.
Bettre bileven were, by manye doctors, swich techyng,
And tellen men the ten comaundements, and touchen the sevene synnes.' (XV 70-74)

Piers Plowman, of course, deals with 'materes unmesurables', but, presumably, Langland believes the text's treatment of such deep matters by dint of the allegorical mode ensures that the lewed will not 'hir bileve doute.' Hence, while the text may involve theological discourse, it does not celebrate either the freedom or facility of such discourse; rather, it is cautious in its presentation, darkening what is difficult (for instance, discussion of the Trinity in Passus XVI) and elucidating what is essential (for instance, the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins in Passus V), depending on the implied reader of this or that section of the text. Its emphasis, then, on pastoral goals and benefits draws its utilitas into line with the practical goals of Archbishop John Pecham's Council of Lambeth Constitutions of 1281.17 Finally, it may be claimed that the text's most

B-text, nevertheless, are present in the C-text revision, and so the argument concerning the significance of divine speech in the B-text transfers equally to the later revision.

fundamental attitude to theology is firmly grounded in the candid desire and aim for truth, for ‘treuthe is the beste’ (I 85).  

Concomitantly, it is crucial to remember that the medievals categorised literature or poetry under the rubric (pars philosophiae) of ethics. Hence, *Piers Plowman* might be viewed as a rhetorical construct/site whose discourse – be it theological or of any other kind – is orientated principally towards persuading its audience that x or y course of action will lead to salvation. (Such ethics are distinctively Christian, of course.) In Passus XI, thus, Will in dialogue with Lewte declares his desire to disseminate his dream-vision among men in order to correct their behaviour, and Lewte agrees, citing the authority of scripture: “*Non oderis fratres secrete in corde tuo set publice argue illos*” (XI 88); and he strengthens this notion when he asserts: “*Thyng that al the world woot, wherfore sholdestow spare / To reden it in retorik to arate dedly synne?*” (XI 101-2) The text, however, is not only concerned with persuasion to moral action, for it also presents information, thus, connecting its repeated concern for truth and the knowledge of such. The moral and the epistemological, therefore, combine in the fine weave of the poetic whole. How do these key aims or intentions relate to the representations of divine speech in the text?

In the face of such textual diversity and variation among the extant manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*, combined with the dearth of reliable biographical evidence, it is difficult to refer to a single or stable *intentio auctoris*; nevertheless, it might be possible to discuss what Umberto Eco calls the *intentio operis*, that is, a derived intentionality of the poem. The *intentio operis*, in the most general sense, refers to the brake a text’s construction

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18 Of Langland’s use of and attitude to theology, Nicolette Zeeman writes: ‘Although he uses *theologie* in a similar sense to that in which I believe he uses the word *clergie*, the ‘teachings of revelation’, *theologie* is also cognate with the Latin term for the advanced university scholarship of revealed understanding. In other words, *theologie* refers specifically to a learned discipline and an institution in a way that *clergie* does not. *Theologie* is for Langland a term specifically imbued with anxiety about the misuse of scholarly learning.’ Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 130.

places on unlimited semiosis or the infinite generation of meanings; in a particular sense, it refers to this or that conjecture or reading presented as the best one possible for the text in question. There is no claim for one right reading of a text, but there is a claim that there can be wrong readings of texts, and that some readings are better than others.\(^\text{20}\)

The *intentio operis* of *Piers Plowman* invites its engaged reader to the recognition that there is no is/ought disjunction between how things are and how the moral agent ought to act; in other words, certain knowledge of the nature of things necessarily implies how to act. In line with this, the text’s ‘sentence’ or deep meaning in accordance with the Bible is that God is Truth and Love, and that Truth is the finest treasure, and the way to Truth is through and by love, and so Holy Church authoritatively affirms: “‘Whan alle tresors am tried...treuth is the beste. / I do it on Deus caritas to deme the sothe’” (I 85-6). The foundational implicature of this identification of truth and love ramifies throughout the subsequent passus. Thus, the grounds of ontology and morality are shown to be two aspects of the same reality, for being true and living well are, in fact, the same project; indeed, they are aligned and unified in God: “‘For Truthe telleth that love is triacle of hevene’” (I 148). The key question now is: how does divine speech relate to truth and love? What role does it play in the overall project of the poem? It will be argued that it provides the bridge or synthesis between the two hypostases of Truth and Love. The Word constitutes that which is the case, that is, Truth, but the Word becomes incarnate in order to communicate its loving message to mankind:

For Truthe telleth that love is triacle of hevene:

... And alle his werkes he wroughte with love as hym liste,

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\(^{20}\) For an explication of Eco’s notion of *intentio operis*, see Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 44-63 and Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 64-66. In the latter, for instance, he writes: ‘A text is a device conceived in order to produce its model reader...Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a model reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the model reader consists in figuring out a model author that is not the empirical one and that, in the end, coincides with the intention of the text. Thus, more than a parameter to use in order to validate the interpretation, the text is an object that the interpretation builds up in the course of the circular effort of validating itself on the basis of what it makes up as its result.’ Ibid., p. 64.
And lered it Moyses for the leveste thyng and moost lik to hevene,
And also the plante of pees, moost precious of vertues:
For hevene myghte nat holden it, so was it hevy of hymselfe,
Til it hadde of the erthe eten his fille.
And whan it hadde of this folde flessh and blood taken,
Was nevere leef upon lynde lighter therafter,
And portatif and persaunt as the point of a nedle,
That myghte noon armure it lette ne none heighe walles (I 148-58).

The Incarnation is the result of a superabundance of love, and, as Holy Church argues, it
is by love that man comes to Truth:

‘Love is leche of lif and next Oure Lord selve,
And also the graithe gate that goth into hevene.
Forthi I seye as I seide er by sighte of thise textes:
Whan alle tresors ben tried, Treuthe is the beste’ (I 204-7).

It will be shown that divine speech plays a key role in persuading man to love and, thus,
truth.

That reality and action are one is the core ‘sentence’ of the text; however, that
‘sentence’ must be inferred and because the text is unlimited, it is a ‘sentence’ whose
meaning is approximated with every rereading by each reader. On the surface of the text,
in the narrative and among its polyphony of voices, there is a continuing general dialectic
between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, namely, between Truth or that which is the case and Love or
that which ought to be done. The dialectic may be considered to operate across an
apparent gap between knowledge and action or even between the intentional states of
belief or desire and action. This gap is conative; it is a function of liber arbitrio or free
will. Will the subject-narrator of the text represents the free will of all humankind; the
poem that derives from his universal person, Piers Plowman, is a poem unlimited
because its intentio is realised in collaboration with the intentio lectoris; in other words,
its ‘sentence’ is remade and actualised by each of its readers in their respective life-
choices or moral decisions. The text gestures towards its fulfillment and, thus, the
conjunction of truth and love in the lived moral lives of its readers. Will’s developing
relationship to God parallels that of the engaged reader who responds to the sentential thrust of the text.

*Piers Plowman*’s unlimited nature, moreover, identifies it as an iterable text;\(^{21}\) its successive readings by its diverse readers reproduce and process its exigent epistemo-ethical stance. On the point that the poem does not come to a final end, Gillian Rudd recognizes that ‘This trick of denying the audience a final full stop is in accordance with the view that one must always seek to move on in understanding, or in application of that understanding.’\(^{22}\) Reading the poem amounts to a meditative deliberation, and the attentive, authentic reader is moved to choose: dowell, dobet or dobest. Mary Clemente Davlin agrees, presenting the view, thus:

> The reader must participate in *Piers*, play with it, so that its purpose – a particular kind of experience at once aesthetic and religious – can be achieved...It is not unusual for medieval poems to have as their purpose some religious or moral change in their readers or audience...such change was a conventional expectation, and...readers were expected to read actively to the point that ‘reading [could] be a kind of rewriting’.\(^{23}\)

Hence, I will argue in this chapter that the operation of divine speech in *Piers Plowman* is rhetorical; that is, its goal is to urgently persuade the involved reader to choose love, to bridge the gap between knowing what to do and doing it, thus, eliciting the reader’s derivation of an ought from an is, bridging the prior disjunction in the free obligation of charitable action towards Truth.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{21}\) I appropriate the notion of the ‘iterable’ text from Derrida; he writes: ‘...by virtue of its essential iterability, a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning, if not all possibility of ‘communicating,’ precisely. One can perhaps come to recognise other possibilities in it by inscribing it or *grafting* it onto other chains. No context can entirely close it. Nor any code, the code here being both possibility and the impossibility of writing, of its essential iterability (repetition/alterity).’ Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff and trans. Alan Bass (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 9.


\(^{24}\) This could be viewed as a proto-Kantian categorical imperative.
Having established the *intentio* and *utilitas operis* of *Piers Plowman*, it is necessary to turn to the text of the poem itself, focusing on its numerous representations of divine speech. Not every instance of divine speech will be dealt with, for the data are too abundant; however, each of the major kinds of representations will be analysed, and an overall picture of the crucial inherence and significance of such speech in the text will emerge.

To begin, it is important to note the role that the dream-vision form of *Piers Plowman* plays in the context of its presentation of divine speech. Helen Phillips and Nick Havely note: 'Many ancient dream narratives present messages from God or the gods.' Examples of such ancient dream narratives might include: Joseph and Pharaoh’s dreams (Genesis 37, 41); the visions of the Book of Daniel; and messages sent by the gods to humans during sleep in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Later commentators on dreams such as Macrobius argued that the *somnium coeleste* (as opposed to *naturale* or *animale*) is a true dream of divine origin. Thus, *Piers Plowman* frames its representations of divine speech in the context of an overarching theopneustic series of dreams that combine in a whole *visio* or vision sent by God, stamped with His authority. Hence, if the text is a true vision sent by God, then the authenticity of any representation of divine speech in it is confirmed by the dream’s divine warrant.

The first dream opens satirically; the dreamer-narrator bitterly censures those in the ‘fair feeld ful of folk’ (Prologue 17) who are ‘japeres and jangleres, Judas children’ (Prol. 35), for they ‘Feynen hem fantasies, and fooles hem maketh’ (Prol. 36). Their art is *turpiiloquium* or foul and deceiving speech. Furthermore, some of the pilgrims are censured because ‘To ech a tale that thei tolde hire tonge was tempered to lye / Moore than to seye sooth, it semed bi hire speche’ (Prol. 51-2). Later in Passus VI, Piers himself echoes and amplifies this disgust at the connection between lying and taletelling when admonishing a knight:

‘...be trewe of thi tonge, and tales that thow hatie,

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But if thei ben of wisdom or of wit, thi werkmen to chaste.
Hold noght with none harlotes ne here noght hir tales,
And namely at the mete swiche men eschuwe –
For it ben the develes disours, I do the to understonde.’ (VI 50-54)²⁷

Later again in Passus XIII, Will the dreamer-narrator, arguably, in persona auctoris, vituperates ‘flateres and fooles thorough hir foule wordes / Leden tho that loved hem to Luciferis feste / With turpiloquo, a lay of sorwe, and Luciferis fithele.’ (XIII 455-57) Piers Plowman itself, of course, is a fabula, a fantastic fiction, but its goal is not to make fools of its readers or audience; rather, quite the opposite. The explicit and deep concern for truth in storytelling in the above-quoted passages implies the poet’s commitment to truth in his own fabula, and, furthermore, it entails the importance of truth when considering the fabulation of divine speech too. Furthermore, in Passus XVI it is ‘lele wordes’ (XVI 6) that shade the fruits of charity borne by the tree of Patience; thus, there is figured the essential or natural connection between trustworthy language and love such that Piers Plowman, the text of the poem itself and, of course, its fabulations of divine speech, must also be true – in the sense that it asserts nothing that contradicts the Word - if it is to bear charitible fruit in its readers, building their relationship to God.

So much for the author’s perspective on the authenticity of his poetic production in terms of its dream-vision form and its concern for truth in storytelling; what about the reader and the vagaries of interpretation? Returning to the Prologue, the friars are castigated because – among other things – they ‘Glosed the gospel as hem good liked’ (Prol. 60). Indeed, they do so out of greed, ‘For coveitise of copes construwed it as thei wolde’ (Prol. 61), but there is also that central and allied disapproval of their abuse of sacred scripture. Here the concern is for hermeneutical abuse or the misreading and overinterpretation of texts for pragmatic or selfish ends. On the one hand, there is a warning to the reader to take care in interpretation; on the other, there is, arguably, an implicit concern for the text’s appropriation and use of scripture in its production. This latter consideration has important implications for the representation of divine speech in the text, for if the fabulation of such speech is to be in line with truth and so with the

²⁷ It might be argued that Chaucer’s Knight holds to the first half of this advice, but he definitely eschews the second.
Gospels, then there is a sense in which its fabulation is a kind of glossing of the Word. Langland’s moral stance towards Truth and the Word of God, overall, entails that his representations of divine speech accord with both; that is, that the intentio operis inscribe its conformity to the Word. If the text fails to conform to the Word; if it fails to align its ‘sentence’ with it, then it is to be blamed and corrected.\textsuperscript{28}

One of the most frequent kinds of instances of divine speech in the text is presented by way of quotation, either in the original Latin of the Vulgate or in translation or both. This raises the question, what is the relation of Latin to English with respect to divine speech in the text? In the section of the Prologue concerned with political justice, an angel ‘Lowed to speke in Latin’ (Prol. 129); and an angel, of course, is a messenger sent by God to be His intermediary.\textsuperscript{29} In a certain sense, then, the angel’s Latin speech conveys God’s speech by proxy; this shows God’s use of a prestige language, in fact, one of the tres linguae sacrae.\textsuperscript{30} Paradoxically, however, it is noted that the angel delivers his message because ‘lewed men ne koude / Jangle ne jugge that justifie hem sholde’ (Prol. 129-130); how might the uneducated – precisely those unschooled in the trivium and, thus, grammar or Latin – benefit from such a speech? The goliard or vagabond clerk has the Latin and the knowledge to offer an engaged response to the angel’s speech, but the common people cry out, uncomprehendingly: ‘“\textit{Precepta Regis sunt nobis vincula legis!}’’ (Prol. 145) Such a political slogan is a complete \textit{non sequitur} to the angel’s message. If the common people, the mass of whom in this passage are implicitly identified with the ‘lewed’, are to be taught, then it will have to be in their own tongue. Thus, in Passus III the (usually naïve) narrator, in a relatively rare assertion \textit{in persona auctoris} of didactic \textit{auctoritas}, admonishes ‘alle good folk’ (III 64) and ‘lordes’ (III 69) against the vanity of having their names publicly associated with their good deeds, for, he argues: ‘\textit{Nesciat sinistra quid faciat dextra: / Lat noght thi left half, late ne rathe, / Wite}

\textsuperscript{28} Langland’s continuing revision and reworking of his text confirm his commitment to getting it right.

\textsuperscript{29} Compare the two angels who communicate God’s warning to Lot in Cleanness.

\textsuperscript{30} Of the tres linguae sacrae, John M. Fyler writes: ‘In medieval accounts, Latin and Greek join Hebrew to make up the three sacred languages, the ones that appear on the Cross (John 19.20) and in which Holy Scripture is recorded and authoritatively translated’, in Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante and Jean de Meun, p. 40.
what thow werchest with thi right syde’ (III 72-74). The immediate translation of the key scriptural premise implies the poet’s concern that the text be clearly understood and, thus, taken to heart by the the common people and the ‘lewed’; if these are to be persuaded by recourse to *auctoritas* and argument, then it must be by virtue of the vernacular.

In Passus XIII, on the other hand, Patience in dialogue with Will quotes from St Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians: ‘*Periculum est in falsis fratribus*’ (XIII 70). Immediately and *sotto voce*, Patience explains why he will not translate the scripture: ‘Holi Writ bit men be war – I wol noght write it here / In Englissh, on aventure it sholde be rehearsed to ofte / And greve therwith that goode men ben’ (XIII 71-73). Clearly, then, the attitude to English is that it is a medium for overt statements whereas Latin by contrast is an obscure medium for covert statements or criticism. It is possible to extrapolate, therefore, that if the principal motivation for representing divine speech in the text is to move the general or universal reader, then its expression in plain English complements this objective.31

Langland quotes divine speech from the Vulgate almost like any other scriptural passage except that he often draws attention to God or Jesus as speaker; the effect is one of an increased emphasis on the authority of the verse or verses quoted. For instance, Holy Church — the mediator of Truth and, thus, a figure of *auctoritas* or authority to be trusted — when teaching Will about the proper use of money, turns to the scriptures, specifically Matthew 22, for an authoritative statement on the subject: “Go to the Gospel,” quod she, “that God seide hymselfen” (I 46). She emphasises that this particular statement is spoken by God himself, thus, impressing Will and by extension the reader with its importance. She begins by introducing the divine speech indirectly: “And God asked of hem, of whom spak the lettre, / And the ymage ylike that therinne

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31 A. V. C. Schmidt recognises two model readers for *Piers Plowman*, encompassing both the ‘lered’ and the ‘lewed’: ‘The clerical primary audience, however, without whom the Latinity and learnedness of the poem would be hard to explain, was by no means the exclusive audience. Langland, not the less a clerk in this, was also concerned to communicate to the common people; his poem, even more than Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, is ‘A bok for Engelondes sake’ (Prol. 24), his concern for the Church a concern for the whole English people who were its members.’ A. V. C. Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, p. 3. See also Tim Machan, ‘Language Contact in *Piers Plowman*’, *Speculum*, 69:2 (1994), 359-385 who argues that Langland ultimately does not valorize Latin over English, thus, including the *illiterati* or ‘lewed’ among the text’s model readers.
stonedeth?” (I 49-50) Then she quotes the speech directly: “Reddite Cesari,” quod God, “that Cesari bifalleth, / Et que sunt Dei Deo, or ellis ye don ille” (I 52-53). Notice, however, the macaronic verse, mixing the Latin of the Vulgate with the poet’s vernacular translation; remember, too, that this is the first direct representation of divine speech in the poem.

There is a particular decorum to this presentation; first, the Gospel is mentioned, then the fact that God Himself in the Gospel speaks, and through what He says will answer the question; then his speech is introduced indirectly, and after presented directly in the quotation of the Vulgate’s Latin phrase ‘Reddite Cesari’ which itself is quickly followed by a macaronic mix of Latin and English, completing the verse in question. The English part of the verse quotation represents the first instance of translation from the Vulgate in the poem. Does the macaronic verse imply that both Latin and the vernacular are equally worthy vehicles for the Word of God and, in particular, divine locution itself? Perhaps, the intermingling of the prestigious and the vulgar mediums of Latin and English in the communication of God’s Word to man connotes the greater importance of the essential ‘sentence’ over the accidental ‘matter’ or the supervenience of the message to the medium.

Setting aside the representation of divine speech by dint of scriptural quotation, in what other ways does the text respresent the Word of God? Piers Plowman opens with a vision of creation and Holy Church’s teaching concerning man’s place in that creation as well as his ideal relation and return to God. Holy Church elucidates the ‘wise wordes of Holy Writ” (I 72); her mediation of God’s Word is authentic, authoritative and, thus, to be trusted. In one sense, then, she is a metonomy of the voice of God; her teaching aligns with God’s intention and represents His will. Hence, the poem opens with a deep concern for God’s plan, man’s knowledge of that plan, and God’s words concerning the plan, mediated by scripture, by an angel and by an allegorical figure of the Church. Holy Church, however, disappears from the poem in Passus II, but the representation of divine speech and discourse and, thus, the problem of its auctoritas and significance continues throughout the rest of the text.

In Passus III there is suggestive/tantalising evidence that Langland is constructing himself as vates or prophetic poet, like Dante, whose self-presented office it is to mediate
God's Word to His people. God speaks to his prophets; thus, Conscience says, "God saide to Samuel that Saul sholde deye" (III 276). God in figuris will speak to Will too. Hence, there is a sense in which Piers Plowman like the Commedia inscribes within its discourse its own authoritative claim to be a vatic text; the Middle English text unlike the Italian implicitly authorises its claim chiefly through the medium of divine speech. The text, however, also inscribes a warning against false prophets or mediators of divine speech; thus, in Passus XV the exemplum of Mohammed is offered as a caution regarding heresy and its origins. Mohammed:

'Daunted a dowve, and day and nyght hire fedde.
The corn that she croppede, he caste it in his ere;
And if he among the peple preched, or in places come,
Thanne wolde the colvere come to the clerkes ere
Menynge as after mete – thus Makometh hire enchauntedede,
And dide folk thanne falle on knees, for he swoor in his prechyng
That the colvere that com so com from God of hevene
As messager to Makometh, men for to teche' (XV 400-7).

Hence, the implicit claim for the vatic quality of the text additionally abrogates any notion of leading its readers into error. On the one hand, the text implicitly claims that Mohammed fakes divine speech for personal profit while, on the other, its own fabulation of divine speech is not a function of greed; rather, it is a function of charity, namely, the desire to effect a genuine moral awakening in its readers that will result in their certain salvation.

Piers Plowman incorporates a diverse range of divine discourse not only locutions or speech in the usual sense, for God is represented too as 'speaking' through events. For instance, in Passus V Reason preaches before the king and all the people of the realm:

He preved that thise pestilences was for pure synne,
And the south-west wynd on Saterday at even
Was pertliche for pride and for no point ellis (V 13-15).

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32 See Paradiso, XXXIII 67-75 where Dante refers explicitly to the 'futura gente' for whom he presents the glory of God in his epic poem. See also chapter 4 for discussion of Dante's puzzling relation to the (non-)representation of divine speech.
This passage presents a belief that God reveals His will in the events of history, and, of course, this idea is commonly expressed in the Bible where pestilences are an effect of Providence and a sign of divine displeasure. Divine speech, then, encompasses more than retic locution, for in Langland’s worldview God speaks not only through people, be they prophets or poets, but also through events.

A God who speaks through events may seem remote, but this is just one of God’s many modes of communication with human beings. Langland presents God’s intimate relationship with mankind as one of familial closeness and intimacy, for by virtue of the Incarnation God is ‘oure fader and oure brother’ (V 504). As such, it is no wonder that He speaks to His children, His brothers and sisters. Piers, tutored by Conscience and Kynde Wit, emphasises this intimacy of God and man when he looks forward to salvation: "‘And if Grace graunte thee to go in [to Paradise] in this wise / Thow shalt see in thiselve Truthe sitte in thyn herte / In a cheyne of charite’” (V 605-7). This is the potential and ideal relation of man to God that the text affirms and figures in its relation to God; such intimacy entails friendly communication and discourse.

In Passus VII, God in the figure of Truth communicates with Piers and, thus, man by means of a letter. The content of the letter is initially revealed by the narrator in indirect speech:

Ac under his secret seel Truthe sente hem a lettre,
[And bad hem] buggen boldely what hem best liked,
And sithenes selle it ayein and save the wynnynges.
And amende mesondieux therwith and myseisé folk helpe (VII 23-26).

Then the direct speech is reported:

‘And I shal sende yow myselfe Seynt Michel myn angel,
That no devel shal yow dere ne [drede] in your deying,
And witen yow fro wanhope, if ye wol thus werche,
And sende youre soules in saufte to my Seintes in joye’ (VII 33-36).

The letter’s context is Truth’s delivery of a pardon to Piers ‘and for hise heires everemoore after’ (VII 4); the pardon is an absolute one, ‘a pena et a culpa’ (VII 3), but its nature causes confusion, so a priest offers to read it, and ‘construe ech clause and
kenne it thee [that is, to Piers] on Englissh’ (VII 106). The narrator moves in behind Piers and the priest, and reports of the pardon:

In two lynes it lay, and noght a le[ttre] moore,
And was ywriten right thus in witnesse of Truthe:

*Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternum;*

*Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum* (VII 109-112).

The two lines of Latin are taken from the fortieth clause of the Athanasian Creed. On the one hand, then, Truth or God writes plainly in the vernacular to Piers and his heirs, and, on the other, in Latin requiring translation and glossing; what is to be made of these two juxtapositions of divine speech recorded in written form? Certainly, there is a plain historical reason why the Pardon is written in Latin; such documents were drawn up in Latin, and so it is consistent with the fiction that the Pardon is in that language. On the other hand, as Emily Steiner notes: ‘indulgences…were recited by pardoners and parish priests in town squares and pulpits, and presumably in English as well as Latin’,33 so although a pardon or indulgence would be written in Latin, its aural delivery could be in English, and this is the situation in Passus VII. There remains a general question, however, concerning the linguistically mixed expression of divine discourse in the text.

On the one hand, there are instances of divine speech that are clear while, on the other, there are instances that remain untranslated and puzzling. What does this ongoing dialectic between clarity and opacity mean? Why does God speak to the ‘lewed’ in the vernacular at one moment, but then in Latin that requires translation by the ‘lered’ the next? Certainly, the lack of a ready solution to the puzzle must relate to the poem’s unlimited nature; it proffers a point of rest only to complicate it in order to generate further text and exploration of its key issues, chief of which concerns the relation of knowledge to will or, in other words, the is/ought disjunction discussed earlier in this chapter. It seems that knowledge is not enough for salvation in *Piers Plowman*; rather, the will to do well, better and best is crucial, and the perfection of the will lies in relationship to God. Will’s education corresponds to that of the reader; both are brought

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into a redeemed relationship to God. How, then, does divine speech fit into the exploration of the will to and praxis of virtue in the remainder of the poem?

So far the text has presented God figuratively as Truth, and has represented divine speech as uttered by Truth. The epistemic emphasis, thus, on its verity has been the rhetorical function of persuasion and trustworthiness. In Passus IX a new figure for God is introduced: Kind. Wit explains to Will that: "‘Kynde...is creatour of alle kynnes thynges, / Fader and formour of al that evere was maked – / And that is the grete God that gynnyng hadde neve’" (IX 26-28). At this point, under the figure of Kind, the illocutionary force or potency of the divine speech act is presented: ‘thorugh the word that he spak woxen forth beestes: / Dixit et facta sunt’ (IX 32-33). The quotation from Psalm 148:5 breaks the metre of the poem, and this effect of metrical disruption draws attention to the powerful concept of divine speech, especially its pristine accord of word and deed, something that fallen human speech lacks. Langland, however, emphasises that the creation of man required more than just speech: ‘For he was synguler hymself seide Faciamus – / As who seith, “Moore moot herto than my word oone: / My myght moot helpe now with my speche”’ (IX 35-37). Man, thus, is made by both God’s ‘word and werkmanshipe’ (IX 45); it is the intellectual soul of man like to God because made in imago Dei that requires that God ‘wroghte with werk and with word bothe’ (IX 51). Thus, Langland distinguishes between the bare illocutionary force of divine speech with respect to the creation of all but man whose likeness to God requires power above and beyond mere locution. This distinction implies different orders of divine speech in Langland’s thinking, namely, those accompanied or not by willed power with respect to engendering entities such as human beings although both kinds of speech act maintain an overall accord between word and deed. And, of course, it reflects, in particular, on the

34 Compare Chaucer’s ironic assertion, following Plato’s authority, that ‘The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede’ (General Prologue, I 742). Chaucer plays with the notion that this is the best one can hope for with regard to the referential quality of fallen human language. See chapter 4.
35 Compare Spenser’s treatment of the fantastic Garden of Adonis in the Faerie Queene where he presents the illocutionary force of ‘the mightie word / Which first was spoken by th’Almightie lord’, in The Faerie Queene, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London and New York: Longman, 1977), III.vi.34; he asserts that the perennial force of that ‘word’
natural intimacy of God and man that is reflected in Will’s growing inclination to do best, to live towards God.

What is the substance of divine speech? In Passus XI Trajan implies that the essence of divine speech is ‘love and leautee’ (XI 166). He extols truth ‘that so brak helle yates’ (XI 163), but rejects mere knowledge or ‘clergie’ (XI 165); nevertheless, he refers to love and ‘leautee’ or fidelity as subjects worth studying:

‘For that is the book blissid of blisse and of joye:

God wroghte it and wroot it with his on fynger

And took it Moises upon the mount, alle men to lere’ (XI 167-69).

Once again, then, the evidence of the text implies that divine speech springs from love, be it God’s Word in sacred scripture or in other formats. This, of course, relates back to Holy Church’s key theme: Deus caritas est (I 86). It is no exaggeration to claim that Piers Plowman as a whole amounts to an amplification and elucidation of this text, and the representation of divine speech both accords with and reflects this project, especially as it inclines to persuading its reader to a loving relationship to God.

The love that drives divine speech in the text, that binds man to God, is first presented personally although still figuratively in the text in the dreamer’s encounter with Kind who ‘nempned me by my name, and bad me nymen hede’ (XI 321). This verse affirms God’s personal relationship with each individual and His perlocutionary relation to that individual, for God’s speech is such that it aims to move the individual to the knowledge and love of God; the narratorial stance throughout the text continually emphasises the immediate importance to the self of all that is witnessed in the vision. Insofar as the reader recognises his relation to Will, then he recognises God’s personal relationship to himself.

In Passus XIV, Patience in dialogue with Haukin returns to the theme of God’s illocutionary creation of the animals when he contends:

‘For thorugh his breeth beestes woxen and abrood yeden:

Dixit et facta sunt…

Ergo thorugh his breeth mowen [bothe] men and beestes lyven’ (XIV 60-62).

unperturbed by any Fall continues to rule a pristine nature within the confines of the garden.
The implicature of this argument is that the speech that breathed life into animals and man continues to animate both; hence, divine speech is fundamental to existence, and its perennial operation, its unfading nature, keeps all in being. This is a powerful belief in the crucial importance of the Word and its eternal act of locution to human being. In Passus XV the closeness of the human soul to God – already dependent on Him for its initial and continued existence – is further emphasised when Anima says: “I am Cristes creature…and Cristene in many a place, / In Cristes court yknowe wel, and of his kyn a party” (XV 16-17). Then, just after presenting the famous cryptic and punning clue to his authorial identity, ‘I have lyved in londe...my name is Lange Wille’ (XV 152), Will, seeking the paragon of charity, affirms:

'Clerkes kenne me that Crist is in alle places;
Ac I seigh hym neve re soothly but as myself in a mirour:

Hic in enigmate, tune facie ad faciem’ (XV 161-63).

Thus, the intimacy of Christ and the human soul, indeed, the will or executive decision-making function of the soul, is affirmed. The text presents and concentrates so closely on the soul’s intimacy with God that one wonders why there is, nevertheless, turning away from God; why there is sin. God could command man’s virtue such that he would have no choice but to do as God bid; thus, at the conclusion of Passus XV Anima refers to Christ’s ‘stif voice’ (XV 593) that can command the dead to rise up: ‘Lazare, veni foras’ (XV 594). In the context of God’s closeness to the soul, issuing in divine speech or persuasion, and God’s refusal to force obedience to His will, then, turning away from God or sinning connotes wilful deafness to divine speech. Hearing divine speech, therefore, is not the same as listening to it.

Passus XVI to XVIII or the Vita Christi section of the text amounts to a focal or nexus point for the representation of divine speech. All the previous kinds of representation – scriptural quotation and the amplification thereof, figuration and indirectly reported – are all presented and concentrated in and on the central coordinating figure of Christ and His speech. The various figural integumenta are peeled away and the allegorical mode itself dissolves into the historical until Christ candidly combines breath, speech and power in the salvation of mankind, bringing man and God
together. This is the literal apotheosis of divine speech by the God-made-man who, thus, makes men gods.36

Passus XVI marks Will’s fall into the second and final inner dream of the text; he calls it a ‘love-dream’ (XVI 20), and it contains a recasting of the life of Christ from the Annunciation to the Harrowing of Hell. It is a ‘love-dream’, for it reveals the nature and working of God’s intimate and loving friendship with man; and this presents yet another aspect of the key theme of the whole text: Deus caritas est. Will reports of the Annunciation: ‘And thanne spak Spiritus Sanctus in Gabriellis mouthe / To a maide that highte Marie’ (XVI 90-91); thus, the Annunciation marks God’s fresh communication with man in the movement towards a new convenant and relational realignment between creature and Creator. At first, the new relation is mediated by a messenger, but soon it will issue from the mouth of one who ‘weex a faunt thorugh hir flessh’ (XVI 101), that is, God incarnate. The ‘faunt’ proves himself God by working miracles, but his authenticity is questioned. He is accused of having a devil within him: ‘Demonium habes’ (XVI 120), but He responds:

‘Thanne are ye cherles…and youre children bothe,  
And Sathan youre Saveour – yowself now ye witnessen:  
For I have saved yowself, and youre sones after,  
Youre bodies, youre beestes, and blynde men holpen,  
And fed yow with fisshes and with fyve loves,  
And lefte baskettes ful of broke mete – bere awey whoso wolde’ (XVI 121-26).

This speech corresponds to no one scriptural episode; rather, Langland draws its general ‘matter’ from scripture, disposing it according to scriptural ‘sentence’. In effect, the speech amounts to an amplification of Jesus’s message; it is interpreted by the poet but essentially in line with the authoritative Gospel texts. Will’s dream conflates this speech with Jesus’s angry attack on and excoriation of the money-changers in the Temple; Jesus continues:

‘I shal overturne this temple and adoun throwe,  
And in thre daies after edifie it newe,  
And maken it as muche outhere moore in alle manere poyntes

36 See John 10:34.
As evere it was, and as wid – wherfore I hote yow,

Of preieres and of parfitnesse this place that ye callen:

*Domus mea domus oracionis vocabitur* (XVI 131-36).

This speech draws on both John 2:14-19 and Matt. 10:20 for the final quotation rendered in the Latin, and itself taken from Isa. 56:7. John 2:19 reads: ‘solvite templum hoc et in tribus diebus excitabo illud’, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’. Langland has expanded the sense of *solvere* in order to vividly point the image of breaking up, separating and undoing the edifice of the temple and by figurative extension the integrity of Jesus’s own body. Lines 133-34, ‘And maken it as muche outher moore in alle manere poyntes / As evere it was, and as wid’, constitute a creative amplification, imaging the rebuilding of the temple, emphasising its improvement, ‘as muche outher moore’, whereby the reconstitution and transformation of the resurrected body is subtly prefigured. Clearly, the poet’s amplification, the augmented additions, are ordered by virtue of a thorough reading of and meditation on the whole scripture. These fabulated words that the poet places in the mouth of God are not idle, throwaway lines; rather, they serve to amplify and augment the authentic scriptural speeches. Overall, this illustrates Langland’s conscious abbreviation of scriptural matter, cutting, joining and concentrating it to emphatic and ecphrastic effect; the artist reworks his matter, but always in accordance with the chief principle of the source material: love.

Langland continues his abbreviated account of the life of Christ, moving on to the events of Holy Thursday and the Last Supper. Jesus turns to the disciples generally, accusing one of them of betrayal: ‘I am sold thorugh so[m] of yow – he shal the tyme rewe / That evere he his Saveour solde for silver or ellis’ (XVI 142-43). Judas protests, but ‘Jesus hym tolde / It was hymself soothly, and seide, “Tu dicis”’ (XVI 144-45). The Latin is taken from Matt. 26:25. The prior accusation of betrayal corresponds to Matt. 26:21 where Jesus simply says: ‘amen dico vobis quia unus vestrum me traditurus est’, ‘Amen I say to you, that one of you is about to betray me.’ There is no threat, ‘he shal the tyme rewe / That evere he his Saveour solde for silver or ellis’, in the original; the threatening sentiment derives from Matt. 18:17 which foreshadowed the betrayal, and which Langland places in Jesus’s mouth at his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemani; Jesus addresses Judas and the Jewish mob:

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‘Falsnesse I fynde in thi faire speche,
And gile in thi glad chere, and galle is in thi laughing.
Thow shalt be myrour to many, men to deceive,
Ac the worse, and the wikkednesse shal worthe upon thiselve:

*Necesse est ut veniant scandala; ve homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.*

Though I bi treson be take, [and at] youre owene wille,
Suffreth myne apostles in pays, and in pees gange’ (XVI 154-59).

This whole speech is fabulated although it fits its context; it implies a sterner figure of Jesus than that of the corresponding Gospel account, Matt. 26:46-56, who does not stint in his condemnation of Judas’s betrayal, moralising him as an *exemplum* of deceit.

Passus XVII consists of a didactic dialogue between the Good Samaritan, a figure of charity, and Will. The Samaritan as a figure of charity represents Christ, but is not Christ in the *fabula*. The Samaritan’s discourse on love and the Trinity prepares the way for the account of the Passion and the redemption of souls in Passus XVIII where Langland fabulates divine speech in all its power. He emphasises Christ’s humanity by conflating his person with those of the Samaritan and Piers, for Jesus is figured as: ‘Oon semblable to the Samaritan, and somdeel to Piers the Plowman’ (XVIII 10); Faith explains:

‘This Jesus of his gentries wol juste in Piers armes,
In his helm and in his haubergeon, *humana natura*,
That Crist be noght biknowe here for *consummatus Deus*,
In Piers paltok the Plowman this prikiere shal ryde;
For no dynt shal hym dere as *in deitate Patris*’ (XVIII 22-26).

The attention paid to Christ’s human nature involves the reader in the outcome of the joust; God incarnate is recognisable to man *qua* man. It is easy, then, to invest in and relate to His struggle, and build a relationship to Him. An abbreviated account of the passion narrative, deriving from the Gospels of John and Matthew, follows; it concludes by citing Christ’s last words on the cross taken from John 19:30: ‘*Consummatum est*’ (XVIII 57). The next occasion for divine speech is in Hell when Christ coming in glory unleashes the full, inexorable force of the Word.
Langland's account of the Harrowing of Hell derives from the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*; thus, Will claims of his descent into Hell: 'I drow me in that derknesse to *descendit ad inferna*, / And there I saugh smoothly, *secundum scripturas* (XVIII 111-12). The Latin phrase, 'descendit ad inferna', derives from article 8 of the Apostles’ Creed and 'secundum scripturas' derives from the end of the third clause of the Nicene Creed. Langland is keen to emphasise the dogma behind Christ’s descent to the Dead. Chapters 21 and 24 of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* contain some scant representations of divine speech; Langland greatly amplifies these episodes and invents wholly new dialogue too. A number of different Middle English verse translations of the Latin *Gospel of Nicodemus* are extant; for the purpose of comparing and contrasting Langland’s version of the ‘Harrowing of Hell’ with that of a Middle English translation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, I will refer to W. H. Hulme’s edition of London, British Library, MS Cotton Galba E. IX (which dates from the fifteenth century while its text dates from before 1325). Even if Langland was not familiar with this particular version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, it remains a universal source for his own ‘Harrowing of Hell’ in passus XVIII.

The Middle English ‘Harrowing of Hell’ introduces Christ’s commanding voice, in the following terms:

A voice spak loud and clere:

"Ye princes, I bid ye opin wide
Yowre endless Yates here,
The King of Blis now in sall glide" (1322-25).

Langland quotes Psalm 23:49, ‘*Attolite portas*’ (XVIII 261), elaborating, thus:

A vois loude in that light to Lucifer crieth,

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37 The *Gospel of Nicodemus* was sometimes included in medieval Bibles, but it was not regarded as canonical.
38 See Richard F. Johnson, *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend* (Boydell Press, 2005), p. 84, n. 70 for details concerning a number of other versions of the text.
“Prynces of this place, unpynneth and unlouketh!
For cometh with crowne that kyng is of glorie” (XVIII 262-64).

Langland’s approach, then, is to proffer the typological Old Testament text that prefigures the Harrowing, placing it in the mouth of Christ, immediately followed by his own characteristically amplified version of the ‘Harrowing of Hell’ text itself. The telescoping of scriptures into Christ’s imperative, the illocutionary act of commanding the barred doors of Hell to be opened, emphasises the ineluctable force of the Word. A. V. C. Schmidt notes that: ‘The divine use of words may be regarded as its norm or absolute standard: according to it, words operate sacramentally, enacting that which they signify’; hence, Christ’s words enact their ‘sentence’. Lucifer temporises, trying to draw Christ into a legalistic debate, but to no effect, for Christ repeats his command: ‘Dukes of this dymme place, anoon undo thise yates, / That Crist may come in, the Kynges sone of Hevene!’ (XVIII 320-21) There is to be no third command, for ‘with that breeth helle brak, with Belialles barres - / For any wye or warde, wide open the Yates’ (XVIII 322-23). The redeemed souls, ‘tho that Oure Lord lovede’ (XVIII 327), stream out of Hell; Christ turns to Satan, launching on an uninterrupted 76 lines of legal justification for the freeing of souls from Hell. In ‘The Harrowing of Hell’, Jesus’s second speech is addressed to those whom he frees from the Devil:

“Cumes unto me, my childer dere,
That my liknes war wroght;
Ye that for syn war presond here,
To blis ye sall be broght” (1466-69).

Langland eschews this speech whose function is essentially narrative in favour of one that is comprised of theological content, and is presented in the form of a legal argument. Of it, A. V. C. Schmidt writes: ‘Both reson and feith come triumphantly together in Christ’s case as, with scintillating clerkly relish, he confounds the ‘lusard’ Lucifer, whose lesynges are now unmasked.’ And Mary Clemente Davlin focuses on the perfection of Christ’s use of words: ‘...his words are ‘trewe’: they are used precisely and they fulfil promises and prophecies exactly. Yet they are at the same time truly astounding because

41 Ibid., p. 134.
'filled ful' of the whole range of their meanings and their hitherto unforeseen implications." Having broken the doors of Hell, freeing its elect souls from perdition, Christ, then, offers a rational account of the action; Langland, thus, puts into Christ's mouth a dialectical discourse that harmonises power and reason, might and right. This difficult conundrum could only be solved by Christ, and its account in words, reported by Will, fittingly cites II Cor 12:4, 'Audivi archana verba que non licet homini loqui' (XVIII 396), for the depths of the mystery exceed the range of human intellection. Some of the argument, it is implied, has not been reported; some of it is necessarily ineffable in merely human words. Hence, Langland's explanation of the redemption, as it is figured in Christ's victory speech, may be taken as an adumbration of its nature while its actual nature remains a matter of transcendent archana verba, the mystery of the Word.

Christ's spoken victory in Hell, the paradigm-shifting effect of His words is such that the previously debating Truth, Peace, Righteousness and Love are accorded in their celebration of Easter: 'Til the day dawed thise damyseles carolden, / That men rongen to the resurexion...' (XVIII 426-7); and Will's immediate response is to wake up:

...and right with that I wakede,
And callede Kytte my wif and Calote my doghter:
'Ariseth and go reverenceth Goddes resurexion,
And crepeth to the cros on knees, and kisseth it for a juwel!
For Goddes blissede body it bar for oure boote,
And it afereth the fend – for swich is the myghte,
May no grisly goost glide there it shadweth!' (XVIII 427-33)

It is Easter Sunday, and Will embraces the occasion by practising a new and authentic piety that fully recognises Christ's sacrifice and love for man. His desire to involve his family in the response implies, again, the collective import of the 'sentence' of the vision. The climax of the poem, the Harrowing of Hell, finds its fulfilment in Will's new relationship to God. Such, implies the text, is the power of the Word in Christ.

In Passus XIX, Langland turns to the speech of the resurrected Christ and that of the Holy Spirit in the figure of Grace. This passus presents the current relation of God to man, and the nature of God's continuing communication with man through divine

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42 Mary Clemente Davlin, A Game of Heuene, p. 103.
discourse. Langland turns to John 20:26-29 for the encounter between the risen Jesus and doubting Thomas. After placing his hands through Jesus’s wounds, Jesus speaks to Thomas:

...and curteisliche seide,

“Thomas, for thow trowest this and treweliche bilevest it,
Blessed mote thou be, and be shalt for evere.
And blessed mote thei be, in body and soule,
That nevere shul se me in sighte as thow seest nowthe,
And lelliche bileve al this – I love hem and blesse hem:

Beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt” (XIX 177-182).

John 20:29 presents the speech: ‘dicit ei Jesus quia vidisti me credidisti beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt’, ‘Jesus saith to him: Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed.’ Once again, Langland heavily amplifies the source text. Jesus does not blandly speak to Thomas; rather, he speaks ‘curteisliche’, indicating the quality of the new friendship between redeemed man and God. Thomas is addressed personally by name just as Will was by Kinde in Passus XI. Thomas’s belief in Jesus blesses him as does the belief of those future men and women who have not seen him blesses them; this, above all, includes the implied believing reader of Piers Plowman; thus, Jesus’s confirmation,

‘And blessed mote thei be, in body and soule,
That nevere shul se me in sighte as thow seest nowthe,
And lelliche bileve al this – I love hem and blesse hem,”

reverberates in the engaged reader’s affirmation of Jesus as ‘Dominus meus et Deus meus’ (XIX 173; John 20:28). Hence, this instance of amplified divine speech speaks to its reader through text and time; indeed, it promises the intimate friendship with God that the following dialogue between Piers and Grace, described as ‘Spiritus Paraclitus’ (XIX 202), finally achieves.

Grace appears in ‘liknesse of a lightnynge’ (XIX 203) or in ‘fires liknesse’ (XIX 206); nevertheless, the Holy Spirit acts as ‘Cristes messager, / And cometh fro the grete

\[43\] This corresponds to the vatic nature of the text; as auctor Langland addresses his text to an implied future reader.
God’ (XIX 208-9), thus, speaking to Piers and Conscience or, in other words, redeemed man. Grace gives freely God’s gifts to man:

‘...I wole dele today and dyvyde grace
To alle kynne creatures that kan hise five wittes –
Tresour to lyve by to hir lyves ende,
And wepne to fighte with that wole nevere faille’ (XIX 216-19).

In order that Piers ‘tilie truthe’ (XIX 263), Grace provides him with a ‘teeme – foure grete oxen’ (XIX 264), the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and these cultivate truth in the good news of their gospels that mediate the Divine Word. Grace provides also a team to harrow what the Evangelists plough, and these are the four great Latin Fathers: Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Gregory. Thus, Grace provides the theopneustic scriptures and the inspired exegesis of those texts; hence, the Word of God inspires its inscription and its interpretation. Divine speech is recorded and cultivated in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible: ‘Vetus Testamentum et Novum’ (XIX 275).

The final gift of Grace is that of a storehouse in which the grain grown through the Word be stored; it is constructed, thus:

And of his [Christ’s] baptisme and blood that he bledde on roode
He made a manere morter, and mercy it highte.
And therwith Grace bigan to make a good foundement,
And watlede it and walled it with hise peynes and his passion,
And of al Holy Writ he made a roof after,
And called that hous Unite – Holy Chirche on Englissh (XIX 326-31).

Grace calls the ‘hous Unite – Holy Chirche on English’, and thus the text circles back to the authority of Holy Church in Passus I. Langland implies that so long as a verbal construct issues from these materials, then that text will possess the authority of the Holy Spirit in unity with God. Hence, the poem itself ends with Conscience’s ‘gradde after Grace’ (XX 387) such that it wakes Will from his dreaming, leaving the reader to his own desire for Grace, the intimate friendship with God through the eternal action of the Holy Spirit or Love.
Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and analysed the varied representations and, in particular, fabulations of divine speech in *Piers Plowman*. It has been shown that the text might best be described as a ‘poem unlimited’, for it exceeds formal, aesthetic and sentential limitation. Consequently, its representations of divine speech do not conform to a definite order or paradigm; however, divine speech does play an important part in constructing the formal ‘sentence’ of the text, and so there is, at least, a measure of structure to its representation.

Divine speech first enters the text in the form of scriptural quotations that are expressed in Latin or English and sometimes a mix of both. The text addresses itself to model readers of different levels of education; its goal is to lead its reader, ‘lered’ or ‘lewed’, to a more loving relation to God. The quotations, furthermore, provide key propositions for arguments, and they mark the scripturally recorded concern of God for man. Above all, the language of scripture is implied to be secondary to its message; hence, Langland freely offers translations of key passages that pertain to the the text’s salvific ‘sentence’.

The most interesting instances of divine speech that the text represents are those that are fabulated. The text’s most fundamental attitude to such fabulation must be read as being firmly grounded in its candid desire and aim for truth, for ‘treuthe is the beste’ (I 85). The implicature of the affirmation that ‘treuthe is the beste’ is that all the fabulations of divine speech in the text accord with the Word. Moreover, the proposition that truth is best is grounded in God’s identity with Love as Holy Church affirms: ‘Whan alle tresors arn tried...treuthe is the beste. / I do it on Deus caritas to deme the sothe’ (I 85-6). Love and Truth, furthermore, become Incarnate (I 148-58). God in Christ enters history to become man in order to save his beloved creature. His closeness to man is affirmed (V 605-7 and XV 16-17), and so too is His knowledge of and address to the individual (XI 321). If he addresses man, what is the substance of His speech? Its essence is ‘love and leautee’ (XI 166). God’s speech is such that it aims to move the individual to the knowledge and love of God; the narratorial stance throughout the text continually emphasises the immediate importance to the self of all that is witnessed in the vision.
Will, the narrator, wants to know the truth, and this desire for knowledge propels him through his series of visions.

Not only is the essence of divine speech ‘love and leautee’, it is also power, for divine speech is fundamental to existence, and its perennial operation, its unfading nature, keeps all in being; this is a powerful affirmation of the crucial importance of the Word and its eternal act of locution to continued human being (XIV 60-62). The love and power of the Word triumphantly harmonise in the Harrowing of Hell (XVIII). The termination of the allegorical mode and the entry into sacred history that this episode narrates fit the event in question, for Christ’s triumphant confrontation with and victory over the Devil amounts to an unveiling of the true nature of the significance of the Incarnation and the power of the Word. The illocutionary power of Christ speaking authoritatively, commanding His creation to conform to His will is emphasised; His words enact His deeds. This episode goes to the heart of God’s love for man, for it marks the confirmation of that love, and it is driven by divine speech, the illocutionary and logical force of the Word in Christ.

Finally, in the present Grace continues to speak to man, constructing for him the house of ‘Unite’ or Holy Church, the roof of which is made of Holy Writ (XIX 326-31). Langland implies that so long as a verbal construct issues from these materials, then that text will possess the authority of the Holy Spirit in unity with God. *Piers Plowman*, arguably, is one such text, for its fabulations, including those of divine speech are a function of its reading of the Bible, the Church Fathers and all that is in line with the teaching authority of Holy Church. The text inclines to unity, and fittingly concludes on an open plea for Grace, for all lies in the love of God.

*Deus caritas est* (I 86) constitutes the core ‘sentence’ of *Piers Plowman*, and its diverse representations of divine discourse reflect that core, so the fabulation of divine speech in the text owes its justification to the implied notion that it aligns with and represents the operations of Divine Love; in other words, the fabulations are true insofar as they accord with and affirm the Love that is God. The perlocutionary effect of its fabulated divine locutions in line with the ‘sentence’ of the text produces a synthesis of love and truth, of the moral and epistemic categories of human being in the world. Will’s absorption and participation in the vision entails a narratorial stance that invites the
reader to reread the text, responding to its 'sentence', making love and real relationship to
God the principle of life. In the end, it is through the agency of divine speech that man is
raised up to friendship and intimate relation to God, and Piers Plowman in providing a
voice for God, representing Him talking to the people in their tongue, opens up to man
the Word.
Dante and Chaucer: The Silent Word

‘If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The Word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word.’

Although this thesis is based on the study of Middle English literature, when one considers the topic of divine speech with respect to Chaucer, the question of Chaucer’s encounter with and response to Dante’s poetry, especially, the *Commedia*, immediately suggests itself, for the Italian poet – above any other – proffers his English admirer both a paradigm for elevating his vernacular into a medium capable of expressing high style and, arguably, a possible model for approaching matters theological and ineffable in his poetry. Consequently, I begin my investigation of Chaucer’s attitude to divine discourse by briefly turning to his Italian auctor, critically reflecting on the probable reason as to why Dante, like Chaucer, pointedly eschews the representation of fabulated or amplified divine speech in order to establish whether there is a connection between both authors’ decision to limit the locutionary range of their texts to the silence of the Word.

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Dante

In his early *Vita Nuova*, Dante represents the God of Love in a dream addressing the narrator in Latin rather than the vernacular Italian in which the rest of the work is written. Of the god, the narrator recalls that ‘ne le sue parole dicea molte cose, le quali io non intendea se non poche; tra le quali intendea queste: “Ego dominus tuus”’, ‘He said many things, of which I understood only a few; among them were the words: *Ego dominus tuus*’ (*La Vita Nuova*, III).\(^3\) That the god speaks in Latin rather than the vernacular seems to imply the prestige of the former over the latter and its concomitant fittingness for the representation of divine speech.\(^4\) (This decision, of course, runs contrary to that of the Master-Anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x and Langland who choose to represent divine speech in the English vernacular in their texts.) In the later *Convivio*, Dante ironically accepts the pre-eminence of Latin to the vernacular.\(^5\) He argues that Latin is nobler than the vernacular because it is ‘perpetuo e non corruttibile’, ‘immutable and incorruptible’ and that the vernacular is ‘non stabile e corruttibile’, ‘unstable and corruptible’, and so he acknowledges Latin’s ‘nobilità…vertù e…bellezza’, ‘nobility…power and…beauty’ (*Convivio*, I v 7).\(^6\) On the other hand, his defence of his choice of the vernacular for his poetry and concomitant commentary impels him to extol his love for his mother tongue that brought his parents together, gave him his identity and opened him to growth in learning, for it was through the vernacular that he learned Latin the language of learning. Before composing the *Commedia* (beginning c.1305-7), then, Dante more-or-less accepted the learned or literary prestige of Latin by contrast to the vulgar tongue of the people, and so when he represented a divine figure – albeit a quasi-pagan one – speaking in the *Vita Nuova*, he put Latin into his mouth rather than Italian. By the time, however, that he abandons the *Convivio* (c. 1307) in favour of the

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\(^4\) In the *Vita Nuova*, XXV Dante digresses on the relation of Latin to vernacular poetry with respect to subject and imagery; the discussion operates on the assumption that Latin poetry possesses the greater prestige.

\(^5\) See the *Convivio*, I v-xiii, esp. vi-vii.

Commedia, he has fully embraced his ‘illustre volgare’ as a nobler medium of expression than the unchanging grammatical languages such as Latin. In De Vulgari Eloquentia (c. 1304-7) he states: ‘Of these two kinds of language, the more noble is the vernacular: first because it was the language originally used by the human race; second, because the whole world employs it, though with different pronunciations and using different words; and third, because it is natural to us, while the other is, in contrast, artificial’ (De Vulgari Eloquentia, I.i.4). Hence, when he commenced the Commedia, he had embraced the belief that the vernacular was an able and fitting medium for the representation of the entire cosmos from Lucifer frozen in the depths of Hell to the Beatific Vision of God in the Empyrean. Nevertheless, in the course of his ‘poema sacro’ (Paradiso, XXV 1) he never once represents God talking. Why might this be?

Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling in the Introduction to their masterful new translation and commentary on the Commedia offer a succinct judgement of the epic poem’s essential theme: ‘Dante’s ultimate subject might be described as the ways the great cosmic and historical drama of God’s creation of the world, man’s fall, and humanity’s redemption from sin is visible in history and in his own personal experience.’ The poem is grounded in the experience of its narrator, Dante-character, and, of course and by extension, that of its implied and empirical author, Dante Alighieri. In order to understand the ‘great cosmic and historical drama’ or Providence, one starts with what is best known to man, moving then to those things least known to him but best known qua themselves. This is exactly the Aristotelian approach to the epistemology of metaphysics (discussed in section two of the Introduction) which Dante had already affirmed in the Convivio: ‘la natura vuole che ordinatamente si proceda ne la nostra conoscenza, cioè procedendo da quello che conosciamo meglio in quello che conosciamo non così bene’, ‘nature wishes us to proceed in an ordered way in our knowing, that is, by advancing from what we know well to what we know less well’ (Convivio II i 13).

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8 The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno, p. 3.
9 See Aristotle, Physics, 184a10-23 and Metaphysics, 1029b3-13; in the latter he writes: ‘For learning proceeds for all in this way – through that which is less intelligible by nature to that which is more intelligible; and just as in conduct our work is to start from
Dante-character, having erred from the straight path through life, awakens in darkness that is both spiritual and intellectual in nature; thence, a series of insights raise his understanding incrementally over the course of his long journey to the ultimate full revelation of the principle of reality, God.

The *Commedia* charts a hierarchical, graded view of knowledge. Dante-character rises to God in understanding even as he descends physically into Hell; from the very opening of the poem and its *kairos* of divinely-assisted self-insight, he progresses step-by-step ever-upward to the knowledge of God; there is no backsliding, and there are no erring digressions on that ineluctable ‘cammin’ (*Inferno*, I 1) or pathway. In a certain sense, the *Commedia* itself is an implied divine discourse; that is, the text elucidates God’s order or the order of the Word, and it communicates a message of salvation to mankind, including those ‘futura gente’, ‘people yet to come’ (*Paradiso*, XXXIII 72). When Dante identifies his text as a ‘poema sacro’, he links his ingenuity to God, implying God as *duplex causa efficiens* of the text: in conversation with the poet Bonagiunta, Dante-character says:

And I to him: “I in myself am one who, when Love breathes within me, take note, and to that measure which he dictates within, I go signifying” (*Purgatorio*, XXIV 52-4).

And later in *Paradiso* he reaffirms the involvement of God in his poetry: ‘Se mai continga che ’l poema sacro / al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra...’, ‘If it ever come to pass that the sacred poem to which both heaven and earth have set their hand...’ (*Paradiso*, XXV 1-2). The *Commedia*, then, may be regarded as an implied synecdoche

what is good for each and make what is good in itself good for each, so it is our work to start from what is more intelligible to oneself and make what is intelligible by nature intelligible to oneself. Now what is intelligible and primary for particular sets of people is often intelligible to a very small extent, and has little or nothing of reality. But yet one must start from that which is barely intelligible but intelligible to oneself, and try to understand what is intelligible in itself, passing, as has been said, by way of those very things which one understands.’

10 On the theory of *duplex causa efficiens*, see Preface, p. 1, n. 2.
or metonomy of divine discourse. In the climactic *Visio Dei* at the conclusion of *Paradiso* Dante sees the Word as infinite paradigm of all that exists contingently and in finitude; he likens it to a book that is bound by love whose pages and text are disseminated throughout the universe:

...vidi che s'intema,
legato con amore in un volume,
ciò che per l'universo si squaderna.

I saw that it contained, bound by love in one volume, that which is scattered in leaves through the universe (*Paradiso*, XXXIII 85-7).

Viewed as synecdoche, then, the *Commedia* represents a partial text or some leaves of the divine discourse that is bound in one volume by love in the Word; viewed as metonomy it represents a text associated with divine discourse. In either case, it asserts a figurative relation to divine discourse, claiming a prestige that elevates it to the exalted status of sacred scripture. If the 'poema sacro' dares to make such a reflexive claim for itself, why does Dante eschew the poetic liberty taken by, for instance, Langland, in deciding not to represent individual utterances of fabulated divine speech; why, specifically, does divine speech not play a role in Dante-character's education as it does Will's in *Piers Plowman*? Why does God not talk to Dante-character in person or in figure as God talks to Will?

At the beginning of the *Commedia* the nature of beatitude is made plain by its opposite, perdition. Vergil explains the condition of the damned; they are: 'le genti dolorose / c'hanno perduto il ben de l'intelletto', 'the grieving peoples who have lost the good of the intellect' (*Inferno*, III 17-18). Beatitude, thus, constitutes the possession of that good, that is, the intellection of God. Hence, the cognitive movement from the nascent awakening of the first canto to the total yet transient enlightenment of the last one charts a growing illumination along a continuum of successive epistemic perfections, 'dall' infima lacuna / dell'universo.../...verso l'ultima salute', 'from the nethermost pit of the universe...towards the last salvation' (*Paradiso*, XXXIII 22-7), as Dante has St Bernard put it. Concomitant to the idea of successive perfections of knowledge is the idea of mediation. Dante's relation to God is mediated by the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Lucy and the beatified Beatrice; he is guided to God by Virgil, Beatrice and St Bernard who by a series of dialectical examinations and subtle heuristics successively perfect his
knowledge of God. Dante's education, thus, proceeds by dint of tutelary guides who are agents of God's grace. The final intermediary agent of God's grace is the Virgin Mary to whom St Bernard sings in petitionary prayer that Dante-character be afforded a vision of the 'ultima salute' (Paradiso, XXXIII 1-39). The prayer is the last uttered speech of the text. Following it, St Bernard gestures to Dante-character by a smile to look upward, and from that point on vision supersedes the range of speech: 'Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio / che 'l parlar nostro, ch'a tal vista cede', 'From that moment my vision was greater than our speech, which fails at such a sight' (Paradiso, XXXIII 55-6). And again on witnessing the tri-circular looping of the Trinity, he bewails the poverty of speech to convey the substance of his vision: 'O quanto è corto il dire e come fioco / al mio concetto!', 'O how scant is speech and how feeble to my conception!' (Paradiso, XXXIII 121-2) The final divine 'fulgore', 'flash' (Paradiso, XXXIII 141), that smites his mind, ravishing his intellect, lifts his understanding to a level that exceeds language; thus, the understanding of the Incarnation, the hypostasis of man and God in the Word or Christ may only be affirmed not reported, and so any fabulation of divine speech to be uttered by the Trinity or Christ is a priori ruled out.

I am arguing that the plan of the Commedia, which is a function of Dante-character's journey from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from alienation to friendship with God, necessarily excludes any representation of divine speech, especially fabulated speech in advance of the climactic Visio Dei. At the moment of the final ecstatic rapture there are reasons as to why the representation of divine speech would be impossible. Paradiso, XXXIII maps the limits of coherent human being, especially the limits of the distinctive faculties of the rational soul, including memory, language, thought and intellection, and Dante had acknowledged this as early as the proem of the first canto of the final canticle, thus:

Nel ciel che più della sua luce prende
fu'io, e vidi cose che redire
nè sa nè può chi di là su discende;
perchè appresando sè al suo disire,
nostro intelletto si profonda tanto,
che dietro la memoria non può ire.
I was in the heaven that most receives His light and I saw things which he that
descends from it has not the knowledge or the power to tell again; for our
intellect, drawing near to its desire, sinks so deep that memory cannot follow it
(Paradiso, I 4-9).

In other words, Dante does not represent divine speech in the Commedia because to do so
would be to violate the fundamental logic of the work; there can be no direct contact with
God until the Visio Dei; prior to it, the pilgrim soul inclines to the knowledge of God by a
series of aspectual illuminations or epistemic perfections that attain their ultimate end in
the Beatific Vision; and the experience of that may only be affirmed not represented, for
its essence is ineffable.

Chaucer, it must be admitted, never dares as much as Dante in poetry; his work
contains no Visio Dei; rather, there is but the gesture towards 'the wey.../ Of thilke parfit
glorious pilgryme / That highte Jerusalem celestial' (Canterbury Tales, X 49-51).

Where Dante disposed his text according to an ordered hierarchy of perfections of
knowledge, leading to the climactic vision of God at the conclusion of the Commedia,
Chaucer's texts, early and late, habitually problematise or even deliberately confuse the
epistemic modes of experience and authority, refusing to resolve the conundrum of their
relative merits. Hence, Chaucer cannot have the same reason as Dante for eschewing the
representation of divine speech throughout his oeuvre. Nevertheless, Chaucer does
employ a form of poetry that could sustain engagement with matters theological,
including, possibly, the representation of divine speech, and this is the dream-vision
genre that his contemporary Langland employed so fruitfully as the literary form in
which he represented fabulated divine speech.

Chaucer: The Early or Courtly Poetry

There is no single explicit instance of divine locution or speech, either translated or
fabulated, in Chaucer's pre-Canterbury Tales poetry. There are, of course, many
instances of biblical allusion, explicit and implicit, but God does not speak qua Father or
Son in any of them.\textsuperscript{11} Despite the lack of such data, I intend to infer some probable reasons for such an exclusion by closely attending to the sentential implicature of these texts. Perhaps, there may be an objection to drawing inferences from the lack of evidence in these texts, but a lack of such evidence is \textit{not} evidence that the issue did not impinge on Chaucer’s imagination. Furthermore, it is of the very essence of a literary text that it provoke imaginative readings and conjectures, and the discussion of such texts is not exhausted by their interpretative reduction to a series of information-bearing propositions, so the unwritten, the subverted or disappointed expectations of such texts are the legitimate purview of the speculative literary critic. Any of the dream-visions, arguably, could have included instances of divine speech, for the genre itself operates according to conventions that support expectations of supernatural ‘matter’, and such expectations are fulfilled in, for instance, \textit{Pearl} and \textit{Piers Plowman} although, as shall be seen below, any inclusion of divine speech in Chaucer’s dream visions would have changed utterly the ‘sentence’ of the texts in question. In fact, the chief reason why these texts exclude divine speech centres on a consistent sceptical narrative point-of-view running through the early \textit{oeuvre}, and this scepticism \textit{a priori} closes off the possibility of fabulating – perhaps, even translating – divine speech in any of these texts.\textsuperscript{12} Nevertheless, although there are no instances of divine speech in these texts, there is an argument to be made that some of them, at least, tantalise the reader that they may present in their visionary matter forms of covert divine discourse, that is, God communicating with the dreamer via the royal road of dreams.

In the \textit{Book of the Duchess}, one of Chaucer’s earliest extant texts, the implied author’s constructed narrator-persona presents a sceptical, ironic attitude that abrogates any responsibility for offering an embedded or reflexive authoritative interpretation of the


\textsuperscript{12} Chaucer, in fact, reserves the translation of divine speech to the Parson’s Tale, coming at the end of his story collection and just before the Retraction of his fiction, and expressly operating outside the range of ‘fables’ (X 34).
written text. He begins his narration with a complaint concerning his insomnia and depression, but refuses to tell the cause of his ‘sicknesse’ (36):

\begin{quote}
      But men myght axe me why soo  
      I may not slepe and what me is.  
      But natheless, who aske this  
      Leseth his asking trewely.  
      Myselven can not telle why  
      The sothe...(30-5).
\end{quote}

The perplexed reader, therefore, if he wishes to know the cause of the narrator’s insomnia must be prepared to make a provisional diagnosis based on the narrator’s opening and copious account of his various symptoms. Having read the ‘romaunce’ (48) tale of Ceyx and Alcyone, the insomniac narrator in the grip of his idée fixe focuses comically on the tale’s detail of there being a god of sleep, Morpheus; then, despite previously knowing ‘never god but oon’ (237), he petitions in ‘game’ (238) both Morpheus and Juno to grant him sleep, promising them among other things a rich ‘fether-bed’ (251) in grateful recompense. Hardly has he made the prayer than he falls asleep, dreaming a ‘sweven’ (276); and of this dream-vision he affirms its enigmatic, ‘wonderful’ (277) nature:

\begin{quote}
      Y trowe no man had the wyt  
      To konne wel my sweven rede;  
      No, not Joseph, withoute drede,  
      Of Egipte, he that redde so  
      The kynges metynge Pharao,  
      No more than koude the lest of us;  
      Ne nat skarsly Macrobeus  
      (He that wrot al th’avysyoun  
      That he mette, kyng Scipioun,  
      The noble man, the Affrikan –
\end{quote}

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Suche marvayles fortuned than),
I trowe, arede my dremes even (278-89).
The narrator, thus, implies that the 'sentence' or covert meaning of his dream is open to interpretation, but its depth and obscurity are such that only the keenest, most perspicacious reader will discover its hidden message, its encoded secret.

What is of interest in the context of the investigation of the representation of divine speech, however, is not the 'sentence' of the text – whatever that might be – but, rather, its peculiar operation and related implicature of the dream-vision device. The contiguity of the petitionary prayer and promise to the pagan gods or 'som wight elles, I ne rought who' (244), as the narrator qualifies its addressee, in return for sleep, and the subsequent sleep and dream could be read to imply a connection between both; the narrator asserts:

I hadde unneth that word ysayd
Ryght thus as I have told hyt yow,
That sodeynly, I nyste how,
Such a lust anoon me took
To slepe that ryght upon my book
Y fil aslepe, and therwith even
Me mette so ynly swete a sweven (270-6).

On the other hand, if one event follows another, it is not valid to infer that the former event caused the latter (the post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy); so, for instance, a prayer followed by its fulfillment does not necessarily warrant the belief that the prayer was answered. The narrator himself does not know why or how, 'I nyste how', he falls asleep; he simply reports the order of events. It would be odd, indeed, if the narrator, a nominal – at least – monotheist, 'For I ne knew never god but oon' (237), should affirm the causal powers and, thus, existence of pagan gods; but he does no such thing, so the sleep and 'swete...wonderful' (276-7) dream may yet be sent by God, for note the clause, 'Or som wight elles, I ne rought who' (244) added to the promise that opens up the possibility that some being other than Morpheus or Juno might send the desired sleep. In other words, the dream may be a somnium coeleste or divinely inspired and guaranteed one. A. C. Spearing writes that such a dream 'comes from outside the mind, being produced, as the
theologians see it, by God or by angels or devils, or, as astrologers see it, indirectly through planetary influences.  

Certainly, those dreams of Pharaoh’s interpreted by Joseph were taken in the Middle Ages to be instances of genuine divine discourse through the medium of dream, and Macrobius in his commentary on the Somnium Scipionis identified the eponymous dream in question as God-sent; so might the bold denial of Joseph and Macrobius’s ability to interpret the narrator’s dream aright imply its transcendence of those celestial dreams that they had famously interpreted; and if so, would that imply that the narrator’s own dream was a somnium coeleste too albeit one of an especially recondite hermeneutical difficulty? It need not necessarily be so, for the narrator’s dream may simply be a somnium animale, that is, a dream caused by abnormal perturbations in the soul or psychological upset such as that complained of in the opening of the text, that is, the narrator’s insomnia and implied depression. In such wise, A. C. Spearing writes:

The dream in The Book of the Duchess, then, could be classified as a somnium naturale, a somnium animale, or a somnium coeleste...Seen in one way, the dream is a heavenly vision, conveying the truth in a symbolic form...At the same time, the merely psychological explanation of the dream would provide suggestions for the organization of the dream-poem as an intricate late-medieval work of art.  

I do not think there is a definitive answer to this question because the intentio operis has been constructed in such a way that the reader – even the model reader – necessarily finds himself unable to decide the origin of the dream, thus, leaving open the question of its warrant and truth value. The reader is meant to be puzzled, and to be, thus, impelled to think beyond the text to its ethical import. Nevertheless, it remains legitimate to infer that if the dream were a somnium coeleste, then it would constitute a form of divine discourse, enigmatic and requiring interpretation; whether it is intended to be an instance of covert divine speech, however, remains a perennially open question.

14 A. C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry, p. 56.
15 Ibid., p. 61.
16 For the theory of model addressees and readers see Umberto Eco, The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 3-44.
The House of Fame's latest editor, Kathryn L. Lynch, asserts that it:
...remains stubbornly skeptical about the validity of human communication, both written and oral, and the narrator dissatisfied with the kinds of revelations he discovers in either the palace of the Goddess Fame or the contiguous spinning House of Rumor...Ultimately, the poem seems determined to avoid a coherent synthesis of topics, or any philosophical or literary position beyond a bantering mockery of earthly fame.¹⁷

Furthermore, she notes how: 'This posture certainly has implications for understanding what is probably the greatest puzzle posed by the House of Fame, its lack of an ending.'¹⁸

She is, of course, referring to the mysterious 'man of gret auctorite' (House of Fame, 2158) who briefly appears at the end of the poem, and whose quality of 'gret auctorite' seems suited to resolving the decentred and unsettled sceptical 'sentence' of the dream vision to that point; moreover, one might go so far as to expect the vision to conclude on a revelation that would finally satisfy the narrator where all else had left him restless. Indeed, it is arguable that the text’s obvious formal parallels to Dante's Commedia, including the three-book structure, the invocations and so forth, all lead the literate reader to expect a concluding vision or revelation of some description, corresponding intertextually to that of Paradiso, XXXIII.¹⁹ However, the text breaks off suddenly, presumably unfinished, and the disappointed reader, medieval and modern, is left to wonder as to the unnamed authority’s identity. Chaucer includes mention of the House of Fame in the two prologues to the Legend of Good Women, 'the book that hight the Hous of Fame' (F 417) and 'the bok that highte the Hous of Fame' (G 405) and, finally, in his Retraction to the Canterbury Tales, 'the book also of Fame' (X 1085). Whether, however, it was ever his intention that the text be disseminated in its extant state, thus, implying that it be read despite its lack of conclusion, must – without new manuscript evidence – remain unknown.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.
¹⁹ See John M. Fyler, Language and the Declining World, pp. 139-54 for a discussion of the 'ironic counterpart' and parallelisms that the House of Fame sustains to the Commedia.
Many proposals have been brought forward as to the identity of the 'man of gret auctorite', and, of course, none of them can ever be anything other than more or less likely, but in the immediate context of the investigation of the representation of divine speech, the most interesting identification is B.G. Koonce’s who argues in his allegorical reading of the poem that the man in question is Christ.\textsuperscript{20} If Christ were the man of 'gret auctorite', then it may be that He would have uttered some definitive 'sentence' that would have settled the sceptical posture of the poem to that point. If he were not Christ Himself, perhaps, the figure might have represented Him. It has not previously been noted how the \textit{House of Fame}'s phrase 'man of gret auctorite' is echoed in \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} when Criseyde’s father Calkas is introduced as a 'lord of gret auctorite':

\begin{quote}
Now fel it so that in the town ther was
Dwellynge a lord of gret auctorite,
A gret devyn, that clepid was Calkas,
That in science so expert was that he
Knew wel that Troie sholde destroyed be,
By answere of his god, that highte thus:
Daun Phebus or Appollo Delphicus (\textit{Troilus and Criseyde}, I 64-70).
\end{quote}

Chaucer’s qualification of Calkas as a 'lord of gret auctorite, / A gret devyn' is original to him, departing from his source in the \textit{Filostrato}, and the addition affirms an unironised expertise that is otherwise evaded in his works.\textsuperscript{21} Calkas’s ‘auctorite’ springs from his being a divine, a soothsayer or prophet able to interpret accurately divine discourse; his prediction that ‘Troie sholde destroyed be’, of course, comes true, so his science is proved true. If the ‘man of gret auctorite’ were to be as expert as Calkas in the science of reading


divine discourse, then, perhaps, he would have been able to solve the compounding of the true and the false in the *House of Fame* (2088-2109) by fixing some truth with certainty.

Chaucer’s narrator-persona, later identified with himself, ‘Geffrey’ (729), begins his *House of Fame* with a prayer to God, expressing complete confusion concerning the abstruse nature and obscure origins of dreams, ‘But why the cause is, noght wot I’ (52); nevertheless, he petitions God that He guarantee that every dream – no matter its nature – have a good end: ‘God turne us every drem to goode!’ (1) and ‘the holy roode / Turne us every drem to goode!’ (57-8) If he is confused about the nature of dreams, he is, nonetheless, certain as to what he wants to happen to those who interpret his dream with the correct intention:

And he that is mover ys of al,
That is and was and ever shal,
So yive hem joye that hyt here
...
That take hit wel and skorne hyt noght,
Ne hyt mysdemen in her thoght,
Thorgh malicious entencion (81-93).

And he is equally certain about what he wants to happen to those who misinterpret it:

...pray I Jesus God
That (dreme he barefot, dreme he shod),
That every harm that any man
Hath had syth the world began
Befalle hym therof or he sterve,
And graunte he mote hit ful deserve,
...
This prayer shal he have of me;
I am no bet in charyte! (97-108)

These two related prayers capture the faith of the narrator-persona; he does not assert indicatively that God will do as he says; rather, he prays subjunctively that God act to reward and punish those who deserve it. Hence, he acknowledges, recalling Dante’s final line of the *Commedia*, ‘l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle’ (*Paradiso*, XXXIII 145),
God as the ‘mover…of al’, and he looks to ‘Jesus God’ as a righteous judge who will
guarantee that those of virtuous ‘entencion’ are rewarded and those of vicious
‘entencioun’ punished. This ‘charyte’ that is qualified by desert (102) is of the same kind
as Dante’s evidenced throughout *Inferno* where although or even because God is Love
and Goodness, He is also Just.

Why is there such emphasis on God and Christ in the opening proem and
invocation of the *House of Fame*; and why are those references all articulated in the
subjunctive? In the *fabula* of the text, of course, the composition of the proem and
invocation follow on from the narrator’s experience of the dream itself, so, surely, its
Christian references and their modality must relate to the scepticism of the dream’s
content, and by extension the ‘sentence’ of the dream-vision text. The whole vision
serves to build a picture and concomitant posture that emphasises the untrustworthiness
of both experience and authority, driving a wedge between appearance and reality. Thus,
the narrator exclaims of Aeneas’s betrayal of Dido, ‘Allas! what harm doth apparence, /
Whan hit is fals in existence!’ (265-6) and, furthermore:

...be Cryste, lo, thus yt fareth:
‘Hyt is not al gold that glareth.’
For also browke I wel myn hed,
Ther may be under godlyhed
Kevered many a shrewed vice (271-5).
The oath, ‘be Cryste’, comes at exactly the first moment of epistemic and moral crisis
that acknowledges without solution the troubling discontinuity between appearance and
reality in life and culture. Similarly, when the dreamer-narrator emerges from the ‘temple
ymad of glas’ (120), he finds himself lost in a desert wasteland, terrified by ‘illusion’, and
in near despair he turns to Christ:

‘O Crist,’ thoughte I, ‘that art in blysse,
Fro fantome and illusion
Me save!’ And with devocion
Myn eyen to the hevene I caste.
Thoo was I war, lo, at the laste,
That faste be the sonne, as hye
As kenne myghte I with myn yē,
Me thoughte I sawgh an egle sore...(492-9).

The contiguity of the prayer and the subsequent arrival of the eagle invites the reader, as in the prayer episode narrated in the Book of the Duchess, to infer a cause and effect relation between prayer and response. Is the appearance of the eagle and his conveyance of the dreamer to the Palace of Fame a result of Christ's intention? Might that link the whole subsequent adventure to Christ as the 'man of gret auctorite'? It might, indeed, but it is impossible to say for certain.

In the course of their flight to the Palace of Fame, the eagle lectures Geffrey on the nature of speech (765-852); but it is his conclusion that is most interesting in the context of the investigation of divine speech:

...every speche of every man,
As I thee telle first began,
Moveth up on high to pace
Kindely to Fames place (849-52).

The eagle explains, furthermore, that the roaring noise of all the speech roiling about Fame's house or palace is constituted 'Bothe of faire speche and chydinges, / And of fals and sooth compounded' (1029-30); and in her palace speech takes the form of those who uttered it (1073-83), and there are figures of the great poets and historians throughout the structure, including 'Josephus' (1433), 'Stace' (1460), 'Omere' (1466), 'Dare and Tytus' (1467), 'Lollius' (1468), 'Guido...de Columnnis' (1469), 'Englishh Gaufride' (1470), 'Virgyle' (1483), 'Ovyde' (1487), 'Lucan' (1499) and 'Claudian' (1509); however, there is no recorder of divine speech represented; that is, there is no mention of Moses as the supposed compiler of the Torah or the Evangelists as the compilers of the Gospels. Why does Chaucer exclude these works and their writers from any mention in the House of Fame? Does God's Word as recorded by Moses and the Evangelists belong to a different category of speech than those of Josephus and Virgil? Arguably, it does, so the catalogue of authors and works affected or infected by the compounding of truth and falsehood necessarily must exclude sacra scriptura. This salient exclusion implies a possible link to the 'man of gret auctorite', for it may be that his 'auctorite' in the midst of the House of Rumour hinges on or derives from the only speech that otherwise transcends the
vertiginous contingency of Fame and Rumour. If Christ’s words uttered as a man on earth ended up in the Palace of Fame as the eagle’s lecture suggests they should, then they ought to take the form of the one who uttered them, namely, Christ Himself; in other words, if the ‘man of gret auctorite’ is not a spokesperson for God, a Moses or an Evangelist, he could well be, indeed, Christ Himself.

Sheila Delany has called the *House of Fame* a model of ‘skeptical fideism’, and even though that awkward phrase presents an obviously paradoxical concept, there is a sense in which it fits the *House of Fame* in its unfinished, fragmentary state, for the text constructs a mobile dialectic between faith, ‘God turne us every drem to goode!’ (1), and skepticism, ‘Thus saugh I fals and soth compounded / Togeder fle for oo tydynge’ (2108-9) that is never resolved because the unnamed ‘man of gret auctorite’ – whoever he could be – remains silent at its non-conclusion. The whole text builds the expectation of some unifying revelation that will show that God and Christ actively operate in the world as ‘mover…of al’ like Dante’s ‘Amor’ that indubitably and inexorably moves all; but, in the end, there is no *Visio Dei*, nor any report of a ‘greit sentence diffinitiue’. Although the text might have included a representation of divine speech at its conclusion, then, it does not do so; rather, the puzzled reader is left in a hermeneutic wasteland like that surrounding the Temple of Glass, beyond which and only by prayer and a leap of faith along a *via negativa* may an apophatic and transcendent God be reached.

Of the remaining two dream-visions, the *Parliament of Fowls* and the *Legend of Good Women*, neither presents episodes that might invite an expectation of divine speech. There are the same *aporiae* concerning the nature of the visions; are they natural or supernatural in origin? And they both continue the dialectic begun in the *House of Fame* between harmony and disharmony, faith and skepticism. On the one hand, the *Parliament* presents in the *locus amoenus* in which the Temple of Venus is situated a vision of harmony that references and implies God as its author:

> Of instruments of strenges in acord

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23 Of the ‘man of gret auctorite’, John M. Fyler believes that even if he were to speak, it ‘would be highly unlikely in this poem to be the source of anything authoritative.’ John M. Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p. 154.
Herde I so pleye a ravyshyng swetnesse,  
That God, that makere is of al and lord,  
Ne herde nevere beter, as I gesse.  
Therwith a wynd, unnethe it myghte be lesse,  
Made in the leves grene a noyse softe  
 Accordaunt to the foules song alofte (The Parliament of Fowls, 197-203).

On the other hand, disturbing figures such as ‘Foolhardynesse, Flaterye, and Desyr, / Messagerye, and Meede’ (227-8) also make discordant appearances; and, of course, the concluding debate on the choice of mate the female formel eagle must make ends in deferral and aporia. The Legend opens with a dizzying argument that oscillates and prevaricates between faith and skepticism, leaving the reader bewildered as to the narrator’s point-of-view:

A thousand sythes have I herd men telle  
That there is joye in hevene and peyne in helle,  
And I acorde wel that it be so;  
But natheles, this wot I wel also,  
That there ne is non that dwelleth in this contre  
That eyther hath in helle or hevene ybe,  
Ne may of it non other weyes witen  
But as he hath herd seyd or founde it written;  
For by assay there may no man it preve (Prologue, G 1-9).

This section imples a thoroughgoing empiricism that refuses to countenance first-hand experience of the supernatural, ‘For by assay may no man it preve’, no matter, presumably, their ‘contre’. Nevertheless, the narrator subsequently asserts:

But Goddes forbode but men shulde leve  
Wel more thyng than men han seyn with ye!  
Men shal nat wenen every thyng a lye  
For that he say it nat of yore ago.  
God wot a thyng is nevere the lesse so  
Thow every wyght ne may it nat yse.  
Bernard the monk ne say nat al, pardee!
Thanne mote we to bokes that we fynde,
Thourgh whiche that olde thynges ben in mynde

... 

Wel oughte us thanne on olde bokes leve,
There as there is non other assay (10-28).

Here the evidence of things unseen, in other words, faith, is affirmed, so that the opening lines as a whole affirm empirical scepticism while appearing to leave open a space for faith; however, instead of grounding faith in the trustworthy experience of God, the narrator turns, significantly, to books. Indeed, later he repeats the statement of his faith in books before getting to the ‘matter’ of his text:

But wherfore that I spak, to yeve credence
To bokes olde and don hem reverence,
Is for men shulde autoritees beleve,
There as there lyth non other assay by preve.
For myn entent is, or I fro yow fare,
The naked text in English to declare
Of many a story, or elles of many a geste,
As autours seyn; leveth hem if yow lest (81-8).

Note that final caveat, ‘leveth hem if yow lest’, that throws the whole enterprise into doubt. This recourse to books and their dubious authority seals the vicious circle of scepticism and aporia, for how is Chaucer’s reader, especially the one who has read the House of Fame, mentioned by Alceste among his other works, (405-17) to trust in their authority that had been so devastatingly deconstructed in that former dream-vision, and which is so ironically recommended here: ‘leveth hem if yow lest’.

The tenor, then, of Chaucer’s dream-vision poetry is sceptical when it comes to matters theological. This is not to say that Chaucer rejects such ‘matter’; rather, he excludes it from his art because he is sceptical of fiction, ‘many a story, or elles...many a geste’, and he is sceptical of fiction because he holds such high standards of objectivity and truth. And this scepticism, of course, contrasts to the position of both his auctor

24 Hebrews 11:1: ‘Now faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not.’
Dante and contemporary Langland who both employ the visionary genre to explore transcendental reality and God. On the one hand, then, Chaucer’s dream-visions are filled with petitionary prayers to God, but they are uttered in the subjunctive mood, oscillating between a wish and a doubt. Even the stirring prayer to the Trinity, uttered at the conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the most mature and sophisticated of Chaucer’s work before the composition of the *Canterbury Tales*, is uttered in uncertain petition:

> And to that sothfast Crist, that starf on rode,  
> With al myn herte of mercy evere I preye,  
> And to the Lord right thus I speke and seye:

> Thow oon, and two, and thre, eterne on lyve,  
> That regnest ay in thre, and two, and oon,  
> Uncircumscrip, and al maist circumscrive,  
> Us from visible and invisible foon  
> Defende, and to thy mercy, everichon,  
> So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy, digné,  
> For love of mayde and moder thyn benigne.  
> Amen (1860-70).

The Trinity is affirmed, but mercy is begged not presumed. And, on the other hand, these courtly texts imply or explicitly express sceptical questions concerning Providence and God’s guarantee of justice:

> Thow yevere of the formes, that hast wrought  
> This fayre world and bar it in thy thought  
> Eternaly er thow thy werk began,  
> Why madest thow, unto the slaunder of man,  
> Or, al be that it was nat thy doing,  
> As for that fyn, to make swich a thyng,  
> Whi sufferest thow that Tereus was bore...(*Legend of Good Women*, 2228-34).

The question is asked, and, indeed, written chronologically after the conclusion of *Troilus*, but it remains troublingly unanswered. Chaucer’s puzzled reader is left to solve the question for himself.
The dream-vision form allows the possibility of representing divine speech; thus, Langland in *Piers Plowman* represents it freely throughout his visionary text, indeed, making such speech central to the principal sentence of his work, namely, that God is Love.²⁵ Chaucer, on the other hand, eschews such a clearcut attitude in favour of problematising the nature of dreams, issuing in denials of knowledge, irony and *aporia*. God is not denied, but remains firmly outside the text; He is to be prayed to, but His answer always remains unspoken, unreported and open to question, and so there is no representation of divine speech.

*The Canterbury Tales*

Although the *House of Fame* presented a disturbing picture of the true and the false compounded in storytelling, it dwelt only on the slippery nature of words, both spoken and written, not, however, their referents, namely, deeds or human action. Yes, the long section detailing Fame’s capricious allotment of reputation and renown asserted and illustrated the contingent relation between word and deed, but it did not serve to destabilise the nature of deeds themselves, for the unjustly defamed, nevertheless, could be identified as such by the reporting narrator, and, likewise, their contradictory and all the other diverse groupings and permutations of fame awarded and denied (*House of Fame*, 1549-1867). In the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer constructs his text such that his embedded narrator-persona pauses to apologise for the nature of some of the ‘matter’ and language of the tales that he will report; he does not wish to be blamed for his verbatim report because:

> Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
> He moot rehearse as ny as evere he kan
> Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
> Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
> Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewes,
> Or fynye thyng, or fynde wordes newe.

²⁵ See chapter 3.
Crist spak hymself ful brode in holly writ,
And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.
Eek Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede,
The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede (I 731-42).

Chaucer's narrator, thus, refers to Christ as an exemplary plain speaker, one whose 'ful brode' speech avoided being 'untrewe'; indeed, the implicature of pointing to Christ as an exemplar of ideal speech copperfastens the notion that divine speech, as contained in 'holy writ', is of a different order to merely human speech which must ever negotiate the gap between 'wordes' and 'dede' that in Plato's notion may only ever come as close in relation as a 'cosyn'. Of Christ speaking 'broadly', Fyler notes: 'The reference here might be to the parables, "as fictions or fabulae," though the context appears to restrict the meaning of speaking "broadly" to plain and even coarse speech.' It may be, on the one hand, that the narrator's adverting to Christ's example attempts an apology for the subsequent verbatim report of coarse speech; but, on the other hand, and from the perspective of the implied author, this reference to Christ's speech as grounds for reporting coarse speech may be purely ironic, for the contrary of coarse speech must be divine speech. Christ's speech, thus, is presented as the standard, and its sermo humilis or plain style effects the ideal relation of word and deed; but this, then, raises the question, what possible space does the Tales leave for any representation of divine speech, especially the amplification or fabulation of such?

The Miller's Tale, the first text in the disposition of the Tales composed specifically for the story collection, does not represent any instances of divine speech, but it does present a parody or treacherous manipulation of such speech, reported indirectly and deceitfully by Nicholas, against a sentential background of the recommended

26 Chaucer derives this linguistic notion from Boethius's De consolatione philosophiae; Boethius places it in the mouth of Philosophy addressing Boethius-character, and Chaucer translates it in his Boece, thus: 'thow hast lernyd by the sentence of Plato that nedes the wordes moot be cosynes to the thynges of whiche thei speken' (Boece, III.12, 205-7). See also John M. Fyler, Language and the Declining World, pp. 179-88.
28 John M. Fyler asserts that 'The reason for plain style in Scripture is to assist our understanding; God's word requires simple, easily understood language to reach more than a few erudite people.' Ibid., p. 147.
ignorance of ‘Goddes pryvetee’ (I 3454) that would appear to be in line with the monitory spirit of 1 Corinthians 2:11, ‘quis enim scit hominum quae sint hominis nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est ita et quae Dei sunt nemo cognovit nisi Spiritus Dei’, ‘For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things also that are of God no man knoweth, but the Spirit of God.’ The deceitful clerk’s manipulation of fabulated divine speech may betray an anxiety or rejection of such practice by the author; at least, the text does not imply the recommendation of such licence.

Nicholas, the Miller informs the listening pilgrims and, by extension, the reader, ‘Hadde lerned art, but al his fantasye / Was turned for to lerne astrologye’ (3191). As such he aspires to practise the art of divination or soothsaying like Calkas in Troilus; however, while Calkas, ‘a lord of auctorite’, makes and acts on a true prediction, Nicholas fabulates a false one to effect his selfish goals of ‘deerne love…and…solas’ (3200). In order to sleep with Alisoun, he schemes to beguile John, her husband, by holding himself in his room over a weekend, playing the role of an entranced mystic, ‘evere capyng upright, / As he had kiked on the newe moone’ (3444-5). The news of Nicholas’s transfixed and weird state horrifies the ‘lewed’ carpenter who exclaims:

…‘Help us, Seinte Frydeswyde!
A man woot litel what hym shal bityde.
This man is falle, with his astromye,
In some woodnesse or in som agonye.
I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!
Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.
Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man
That noght but oonly his bileve kan!’ (3449-56)

The carpenter’s lack of sophistication and the purely local nature of his intellectual world are betrayed by the initial startled invocation of St Frydeswyde, an Oxford saint. There are, moreover, two chief ironies in this speech: John himself can little guess at what will happen to him when he places his faith, contrary to his own advice, in Nicholas’s ‘astromye’; and if he only knew more about his faith than that expressed in the creed, if he knew more of ‘Goddes pryvetee’, then he would not fall foul of Nicholas’s ludicrous
tale and trick concerning God's sending of a second Flood. His 'lewed' or simple faith avails him nought in defending against Nicholas's 'lered' and cynical wiles.

Nicholas claims that he will share 'Cristes conseil' (3504) with John, but in secrecy and on pain of madness if he reveal it to anyone else, for as Nicholas asserts, echoing John's own earlier words, the divination amounts to a discovery of 'Goddes pryvetee' (3558). Furthermore, when he demands that all three remain silent in the 'knedyng tubbes' (3564), Nicholas impresses on the carpenter that the condition 'is Goddes owene heeste deere' (3588). John despite his earlier distrust and skepticism concerning 'astromye', as he comically termed it, falls immediately for Nicholas's trick.

Of the connection of the mystery plays to the religious education of vernacular audiences and the Miller's Tale, in particular, Wendy Scase writes:

The tale, moreover, suggests that this kind of biblical education makes possible outrageous mischief and deceit. In order to trick John into getting out of the way so that he can spend a night with Alison, John's wife, Nicholas refers him to the story of Noah...If, like Noah, John listens to God's warning and follows similar advice..., he may be saved.29

But if John had actually paid attention to the mystery play version of Noah's Flood, whenever he saw it last performed, 'ful yoore ago' (3537), then he might have recalled the dramatisation of God's promise to Noah never to destroy the world again, and this could have put him on his guard, for how might God contradict one 'heeste' with another.30 However, his 'lewed' and gullible nature is key to his role as the butt of the

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30 Compare the Chester 'Noah' in which God makes the following 'heaste':

'And forward now with yow I make,
And all thy seede for thy sake
Of suche vengeance for to slake,
For now I have my will.
Here I behet the a heaste
That man, woman, ne fowle ne beaste
With water, while the world shall last,
I will no more spill' (349-56),

fabliau joke, and so the Miller repeatedly censures him as a ‘sely carpenter’ (3601 and 3614); thus, for John character is fate.

Of course, the parody of divine discourse in the tale relates overwhelmingly to its comic end; everything in the text inclines towards its hilarious dénouement, and it would be to tempt overinterpretation to draw too many serious conclusions from Nicholas’s abuse of ‘Goddes pryvetee’. However, it is clear that when the laughter at the ‘nyce cas’ (3855) dies away, the text’s utter demolition of the ‘lewed’ carpenter puts the alert reader on his guard concerning the free and easy manipulation of ‘Cristes conseil’. There is no correlation between word and deed in Nicholas’s cruel trick, and his deceitful fabulation of divine discourse further problematises the question of any such discourse’s representation, including, naturally, that of divine speech in the context of the Tales.

In the first part of the Man of Law’s Tale, in a passage original to Chaucer, the narrator digresses on the determination of the Sultan of Syria’s fate:

Paraventure in thilke large book
Which that men clepe the hevene ywriten was
With sterres, whan that he his birthe took,
That he for love sholde han his deeth, alas!
For in the sterres, clerer than is glas,
Is writen, God woot, whoso koude it rede,
The deeth of every man, withouten drede (190-6). 31

This view of the heavens suggests that the astrologer can read it like a book in which is written the will of Providence; unfortunately, however, ‘mennes wittes ben so dulle / That no wight kan wel rede it atte fulle’ (202-3). Chaucer, thus, has the Man of Law assert that the heavens express divine discourse, and that it may be read by those with the skill, but, characteristically, he then subverts that notion by denying that any have the requisite intelligence to do so with any certainty. Hence, the possibility of knowledge of God’s intention is problematised and sceptically deconstructed. On the other hand, the narrator precisely commences to read Custance’s fate into the stars, censuring their

cruelty and by implication their First Mover or God in apostrophe, 'O firste moevyng! Cruel firmament' (295), thus, blaming Providence for the heroine's subsequent suffering.

If the First Mover is blamed for her suffering, He is equally praised for her safekeeping. The narrator identifies God as her rescuer just as he rescued Daniel from the lion (473-7) and Jonah from the whale (486-7); he interprets God's miraculous actions, thus:

God liste to shewe his wonderful myracle  
In hire, for we sholde seen his myghty werkis;  
Crist, which that is to every harm triacle,  
By certeine meenes ofte, as knowen clerkis,  
Dooth thyng for certein ende that ful derk is  
To mannes wit, that for oure ignorance  
Ne konne noght knowe his prudent purveiance (477-83).

The narrator affirms his faith in God's ultimate benevolence, but admits that His 'ende...ful derk is', again, because of 'oure ignorance' or the limit of human understanding. Providence, the 'sentence' of divine discourse written in the heavens and the events of human history, remains inscrutable, ineffable and transcendent.

When Custance is unjustly accused of murder in Northumberland, she finds herself once more at the mercy of Providence. The narrator makes the exigency of her perilous situation explicit: 'For, but if Crist open myracle kithe, / Withouten gilt thou shalt be slayn as swithe' (636-7). Custance prays to God and Mary for 'socour' (644); King Alla has compassion on her, and calls for a Bible on which the false knight, her accuser, must swear to his witness of her alleged crime. When he does so, perjuring himself, he drops dead immediately, and then:

A voys was herd in general audience,  
And seyde, 'Thou hast desclaundered, giltelees,  
The doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence;  
Thus hastou doon, and yet holde I my pees!' (673-6)

Whose is the voice? It is strictly unidentified, but the accuser's perjuring himself on the Bible, his immediate subsequent death, followed by the monitory voice all combine to
imply that the voice may be God's. The episode prompts the king 'and many another in that place' (685) to convert, and the narrator asserts:

And after this Jhesus, of his mercy,
Made Alla wedden ful solemnly
This hooely mayden, that is so bright and sheene;
And thus hath Crist ymaad Custance a queene (690-3).

The repeated emphasis on Christ ordering events, that is, providentially, to favour Custance, 'doghter of hooly chirche' and 'hooly mayden', all imply that He speaks His will through through events, but also that it was He who spoke literally at the miraculous moment of Custance's rescue from death. In fact, the line, 'Thus hastou doon, and yet holde I my pees', echoes that of Psalm 49:21: 'haec fecisti et tacui existimasti inique quod ero tui similis arguam te et statuam contra faciem tuam', 'These things hast thou done, and I was silent. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee: but I will reprove thee, and set before thy face'; and these lines are attributed by the Psalmist to God as part of a long speech in which He reproves the vicious and promises to save the virtuous. Chaucer's chief source for the tale, Nicholas Trevet's Anglo-Norman chronicle of world history, Les Cronicles, adds the detail of God's intervention at Custance's trial to the original story: 'Et a ceo dit un voiz en Toy de touz: "Adversus filiam matris ecclesie ponebas scandalum; hoc fecisti et non tacui."; 'And at this a voice said in the hearing of all, "You were placing a stumbling block against the daughter of mother Church; this you have done and I have not remained silent."32 Chaucer, therefore, in including the episode and the speech is following his source. The main difference between Trevet and Chaucer in the parallel episode, then, is that Trevet gives the Psalm in Latin while Chaucer paraphrases it in English. Of course, Chaucer could have chosen to omit either the whole episode or just the speech if he had any especial desire or supervening reason to do so, and the fact that he does not do so must be significant. The origin of the verse in a speech attributed to God in the Psalms as invented by Trevet certainly implies that it is God who utters the miraculous speech – even if it is in English

— in Chaucer’s tale; yet, characteristically, of Chaucer, it remains impossible to say for sure because the attribution of the speech to God is not explicit in his version; there is, thus, scope for doubt.33

The Friar’s Tale illustrates the illocutionary power of speech as it relates to damnation, and this presents an example of speech where the word becomes more than cousin to the deed. The tale the Friar tells is not original to Chaucer, for there are a series of analogues related to it going back to the thirteenth century; however, characteristically, Chaucer’s version amplifies and elaborates the ‘matter’ according to his particular purpose, and that purpose, as shall be seen, includes reflection on the relation of intention to language use.34 In the fabula of the narrative framework of the Tales, the Friar and the Summoner are at odds with each other, and so the former tells his tale in order to insult and hurt the latter, his enemy; this invidious intention is not accidental to the ‘sentence’ of the subsequent text.

The tale draws attention to the notion of ‘entente’ (1556), and the role it plays in the operation of illocutionary speech. When the tale’s summoner and devil come across a struggling carter who curses his horses to the devil in frustration, the summoner recommends that the devil take the man’s speech literally, and carry off “‘Bothe hey and cart, and eek his caples thre’” (1554). The devil knows better, however, for as he asserts of the carter’s curse, “‘It is nat his entente’” (1556), and so when the carter’s horses finally manage to haul the cart out of the slough, the devil turns to the summoner, and explains that “‘The carl spak oo thing, but he thoghte another’” (1568). The summoner subsequently learns the importance of ‘entente’ through personal experience when harassing an old woman for twelve pence, she curses him to the devil: “‘The devel...so fecche hym er he deye, / And panne and al, but he wol hym repente!’” (1628-9) He immediately responds: “‘nay, olde stot, that is nat myn entente’” (1630). Having, thus,

33 Yvette Kisor infers that the voice is God’s in her article on the tale, thus: ‘He [that is, Alla] converts not in order to marry her [that is, Custance], but because he has seen the hand of God smite her accuser and heard the voice of God proclaim her innocence.’ Yvette Kisor, ‘Moments of Silence, Acts of Speech: Uncovering the Incest Motif in The Man of Law’s Tale’, The Chaucer Review, 40.2 (2005), 155.
aligned his ‘entente’ with the condition of the old woman’s curse, the devil acts to bring both her word and his intention together in one deed:

‘Now, brother,’ quod the devel, ‘be nat wrooth;
Thy body and this panne been myne by right.
Thou shalt with me to helle yet tonight’

... 
And with that word this foule feend hym hente (1634-9).

Note the phrase, ‘And with that word’, for it emphasises the now perfect relation of word and deed in the illocutionary act of the old woman’s curse. In effect, the tale highlights the important connections between ‘entente’, ‘word’ and ‘dede’ in Chaucer’s implicit theory of language and speech acts. Furthermore, the centrality of ‘entente’ to speech implies a salient difficulty for any possible representation of divine speech in the *Tales*. Throughout his work, as I have been arguing, Chaucer affirms God’s existence, but his epistemic attitude to knowing God by virtue of any rational approach to that knowledge is characterised by a sceptical modality that is usually expressed in hopeful prayer or subjunctive petitions; indeed, at the conclusion of the Friar’s Tale itself, its narrator prays: “‘And God, that maked after his ymage / Mankynde, save and gyde us, alle and some’” (1642-3). Since this stance entails the notion of a transcendent God, it seems reasonable to suppose that Chaucer would not affirm knowledge of God’s ‘entente’; and if he cannot know God’s ‘entente’, then he cannot fabulate and represent divine speech faithfully, for such fabulation would amount to gross presumption and hubris.

If the Friar’s Tale involved the representation of diabolic speech, then the Summoner, in retort, turns to the representation of angelic speech. In the Prologue to his tale, he relates a short *fabula* or anecdote of a friar’s vision of hell, and, significantly, this short story is original to Chaucer. The friar surprised by the apparent absence of any of his order from hell asks his angelic guide if the appearance matches the reality: “‘han freres swich a grace / That noon of hem shal come to this place?’” (1683-4); the angel replies: “‘Yis...many a millioun!’” (1685), promptly directing him down to Satan, ordering the latter:

'Hold up thy tayl, thou Sathanas!...
Shewe forth thyn ers, and lat the frere se
Where is the nest of freres in this place!' (1689-91)
The angel acts as divine intermediary or messenger; indeed, the vision is explicitly affirmed to have been effected by God, for on its conclusion, the Summoner states:
  This frere, whan he looked hadde his fille
  Upon the tormentz of this sory place,
  His spirit God restored, of his grace,
  Unto his body agayn, and he awook (1700-3).
The angel's illocutionary command over Satan, the speech act that results in the Devil's immediate compliance affirms the supervenient power of the Word to act on all creation even by intermediary. The Summoner's Prologue, thus, presents a powerful view of divine speech by proxy, for the angel, the intermediary messenger of God, speaks as God's plenipotentiary such that his commands are informed by the illocutionary act of the Word and result in immediate perlocutionary effect: the opening of the devil's arse to reveal its swarm of damned friars. This episode of angelic speech, therefore, affirms covertly the transcendence of divine speech, but Chaucer still remains chary of representing explicit or overt such speech.

In the link between the interrupted Tale of Sir Thopas and the Tale of Melibee, Chaucer-character apologises for any variation from his source, or, at least, the versions of the 'murye tale' (VII 964) that he will tell that the pilgrim audience may already have heard; and he does so by dint of drawing an intriguing analogy to the concordance of the accounts of the Passion in the four Gospels:

'...ye woot that every Evaungelist
That telleth us the peyne of Jhesu Crist
Ne seith nat alle thyng as his felawe dooth;
But natheless hir sentence is al sooth,
And alle acorden as in hire sentence,
Al be ther in hir telling difference.
For somme of hem seyn moore, and somme seyn lesse,
Whan they his pitous passioun expresse –
I meene of Mark, Mathew, Luc and John –

But doutelees hir sentence is al oon' (943-52).

Setting aside the use of the analogy to defend the subsequent version of the Melibee, what is interesting about it with respect to the investigation of the representation of divine speech is its emphasis on ‘sentence’ over ‘matter’. The matter of the four Evangelists’ accounts may vary, and so with respect to Jesus’s speeches, one Gospel may include this instance of speech whereas another may exclude it; what is key, however, is that the substance, the essential meaning of all accounts of divine speech be one. The implicature of this argument presents a possible rationale for representing fabulated divine speech. One could fabulate such speech, and claim that it, nevertheless, accords in ‘sentence’ with all other instances of divine speech, especially those recorded in the sacred scripture, and this, arguably, is what Langland does in Piers Plowman. Tucked away, then, between the two tales Chaucer chooses to apportion his pilgrim-persona is a clever argument that would allow its author the licence to represent fabulated divine speech if he so desired. Despite this, he never does so, and so the reason why he does not do so becomes even more tantalising.

The disposition of the Second Nun’s Tale in the order of the Canterbury Tales marks the beginning of the end of the pilgrimage as the opening of the Canon’s Yeoman’s Prologue implies:

When ended was the lyf of Seinte Cecile,
Er we hadde ridden fully fyve mile,
At Boghton under Blee... (VIII 554-6).

36 The notion that the accounts of the Gospels are not whole with respect to potential matter that they could report, including, naturally, every instance of divine speech, is supported by the authority of John 21:25: ‘sunt autem et alia multa quae fecit Jesus quae si scribantur per singula nec ipsum arbitror mundum capere eos qui scribendi sunt libros’, ‘But there are also many other things which Jesus did; which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written.’ It may be that this verse had some influence on Chaucer’s analogy. Furthermore, he may have been thinking of the Gospel Harmonies that derive from Tatian’s second-century Diatessaron such as the Middle English Pepysian Gospel Harmony (MS Pepys 2498); see M. Goates, ed., Pepysian Gospel Harmony, Early English Text Society, Original Series, 157 (London, 1922).
Canterbury Cathedral, the pilgrims' destination in the frame narrative is, finally, within sight, and, thus, the Second Nun's Tale emphatically affirms its faith in God at the apposite moment. Although the prologue and tale are assigned to the Second Nun, little has been done to align teller and tale. Indeed, the text pre-dates the composition of the *Tales* as a whole; Chaucer included a reference to the 'lyf of Seint Cecile' in the list of his works mentioned in the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women* (F 426), and its prologue implies a male narrator-persona (62). Setting these issues aside, and turning to the substance of the prologue, it is suffused with the sense of God's being; however, although it asserts the Incarnation, detailing how Christ took on 'blood and flessh' (VIII 42) and 'mannes shap' (44), it stops short of petitioning Christ or God directly; rather, the narrator-persona addresses his prayer to Mary, personally:

O thou, that art so fair and ful of grace,
Be myn advocat in that heighe place
Theras withouten ende is songe “Osanne,”
Thow Cristes mooder, doghter of Anne! (67-70)

Saint Cecilia in the subsequent tale, by contrast, directs all her prayer to God alone:

And whil the organs maden melodie,
To God allone in herte thus sang she:
“O Lord, my soule and eek my body gye…” (134-6).

Does, however, the narrator-persona's reluctance to petition God directly stem from a sense of unworthiness or distance from God?

Lines 36 to 56 of the prologue *invocatio ad Mariam* draw on the matter and imagery of St Bernard's prayer to the Virgin in Dante's *Commedia* (*Paradiso*, XXXIII 1-39). In its Dantesian context the prayer is addressed to the Virgin in order to petition her intercession that Dante-character be afforded a vision of 'l'ultima salute' (27), 'l sommo piacer' (33). In Chaucer's text, by contrast, there is no inclination to *unio mystica*; rather, in the prologue, the narrator-persona reveals a deep anxiety concerning his moral worth and fate:

And, for that feith is deed withouten werkis,

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37 See Florence H. Ridley's note on the dating of the text in the *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 942.
The place ‘that most derk is’ is hell, and its darkness is a function of the absence of God. The fear of the dark absence of God impels the narrator to petition Mary’s intercession to his aid; it is the fully human and womanly ‘mooder’ and ‘doghter’ (70) that he turns to rather than the distant ‘Makere’ (41) and ‘Creatour’ (51). Once again, the implicature of the narrator’s stance invites speculation that the eschewal of divine speech in Chaucer’s work may stem from a fundamental lack of intimacy with God. If the author had a personal relationship with Christ, then, perhaps, he would have been open to representing divine speech in his work. The question is strictly unanswerable on the basis of the extant texts alone, of course, but the implicature remains open to discussion, at least.

The subsequent tale itself is, of course, translated from the *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine and *In festo Sancte Cecilie virginis et martyris*, the latter being an abridgment of the former that Chaucer employs from line 345 on.38 Since it is a translation, its representation of Valerian’s conversion and the roles that angelic speech and miraculous scripture play in that conversion are not original to Chaucer, but it is significant that he chooses to translate it, and include it in his *Tales*. When Valerian meets Pope Urban in the catacombs in Rome, a mysterious old man, clothed in white appears, bearing a book, in which are written the following verses in gold:

"O Lord, o feith, o God, withouten mo,
O Cristendom, and Fader of alle also,
Aboven alle and over alle everywhere" (207-9).

These verses are a paraphrase of Ephesians 4:5-6, and they constitute a fundamental proposition of Christian faith. Valerian’s assent to the text affirms his faith in God:

“I leeve al this thyng,” quod Valerian,
“For sother thyng than this, I dar wel say,
Under the hevene no wight thyinke may" (213-5).

The old man vanishes, and when Valerian returns home, he finds his wife, Cecilia, in conversation with an angel whom he can now perceive. The angel hands them each a

crown of lilies and roses that signifies their guaranteed beatitude; the angel emphasizes
the praiseworthy speed of Valerian's conversion, and grants him a boon. He asks that his
brother, Tiburce, 'may han grace / To knowe the trouthe' (237-8), and the angel responds,
affirmatively, for, as he says, "'God liketh thy requeste'" (239). The crucial aspect of the
tale centres on the certitude of God's being and promise. When Valerian assents to God's
sovereignty, he wins his reward, eternal life, and the angel confirms it by gifting him the
crown of lilies and roses, perceptible only to the virtuous, those who are "'chaste and hate
vileynye'" (231). Angelic mediation confirms the substance of divine discourse, and,
reciprocally, the converts to God utter their affirmation of Him in the face of death.
Cecilia, even with her 'nekke ycorven' (533) continues to speak of God, 'nevere cessed
to hem the feith to teche / That she hadde fostred' (538-9). Jankowski, thus, is right when
she contends that 'the Second Nun's Tale graphically demonstrates the proper end of
speech, to affirm one's faith in God's truth.'

The faith and miraculous power that animates Cecilia's witness to God, moreover, affirms by synecdoche the operation of
divine discourse, but, once again, it is presented covertly and by intermediary.

The Manciple's Tale provides further clues as to why Chaucer may have decided
to eschew the representation of divine speech. It is the last work of fiction in the story
collection, implying its significance with respect to the overall design of the work; and its
reflections on language and storytelling, furthermore, imply much concerning Chaucer's
mature stance towards his art. Its moralised conclusion starkly — and, of course, ironically
— warns against authorship: "'...be war, and be noon auctour newe / Of tidynges,
whether they been false or trewe'" (IX 359-60). When referring to writers, Chaucer only
ever uses the word 'auctour' with reference to writers of auctoritas such as the great
poets, and the sufficient condition to become an 'auctour' is precisely to go beyond the
existing tradition, to make and add something new to the canon.

When it comes to writing of God, Chaucer has the Manciple recount his mother's
advice:

"My sone, thy tonge sholdestow restreyne
At alle tymes, but whan thou doost thy peyne

39 Eileen S. Jankowski, 'Chaucer's Second Nun's Tale and the Apocalyptic Imagination',
To speke of God, in honour and preyere” (329-31).

Characteristically, Chaucer has doubly distanced himself from his embedded narrator by the device of apportioning the lesson of the fable to the reported moralising speech of an absent authority. Nevertheless, it is notable that the one expressed exception to restraint in speech of some forty four lines of moralisation should be the worship of God and prayer offered to Him, and that these two exceptions cover Chaucer’s writing of God throughout his oeuvre although there is an evasion of the many sceptical questions raised of God that are left unanswered. Chaucer, then, may not have taken the advice to eschew the role of ‘auctour’, but he did avoid attributing any ‘newe...tidynges’ to God that might be represented in the form of fabulated divine speech.

Leaving fiction behind, Chaucer concludes the Tales not with a story but a moral treatise in prose, the aim of which is, as the Parson says:

“To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,  
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage  
That highte Jerusalem celestial” (X 49-51).

At the beginning of his ‘meditacioun’ (55) the Parson identifies penitence as the chief route to God:

Manye been the weyes espirituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie. / Of whiche weyes ther is a ful noble wey and a ful covenable, which may nat fayle to man ne to woman that thurgh synne hath mysgoon fro the righte wey of Jerusalem celestial; / and this wey is cleped Penitence, of which man sholde gladly herknen and enquere with al his herte...(78-80).

In the subsequent treatise, finally, Christ’s authoritative speech, Christ speaking ‘ful brode’, as broached in the General Prologue, comes to the fore. Of all the authorities, pagan and Christian, cited in the Melibee, for instance, not one was of Christ’s sayings. Now, however, Christ’s speech, divine speech, enters the Tales in order to direct the pilgrims within the story and its readers without to Him. And the Parson, indeed, is the

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40 See Lee Patterson, ‘The Parson’s Tale and the Quitting of the Canterbury Tales,’ Traditio, 34 (1978), 370-80 for a discussion of the opposition between the fabulae of the Tales and the Parson’s treatise of sancta doctrina.

41 Having raised the question of Chaucer’s attitude to language, and having made the case that he ‘continuously undermines the possibility that the word can ever be truly cousin to
ideal narrator for such speech, for he himself imitates Christ’s example, for ‘first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte’ (I 497); he follows Christ’s example, thus, in according his words to his deeds.

The first instance of the representation of Christ’s divine speech comes in relation to the subject of contrition. The Parson explains:

Of the roote of Contricioun spryngeth a stalke that bereth braunches and leves of Confessioun, and fruyt of Satisfaccioun. / For which Crist seith in his gospel, “Dooth digne fruyt of Penitence”; for by this fruyt may men knowe this tree, and nat by the braunches, ne by the leves of Confessioun. / And therfore oure Lord Jhesu Crist seith thus: “By the fruyt of hem shul ye knowne hem” (113-5).

The first speech, ‘Dooth digne fruyt of Penitence’, is not, in fact, uttered by Christ, but rather by St John the Baptist in Matthew 3:8; however, the second speech, ‘By the fruyt of hem shul ye knowne hem’, is, indeed, uttered by Christ in Matthew 7:20. The whole passage derives from the Compileison de Seinte Penance where the first speech is not identified as Christ’s: ‘De queu fruit parout la euangelie e nus amoneste de fere le quant ele nus dit: “Fetes,” dit ele, “dignes fruiz de penance”’, ‘Of this fruit the Gospel speaks and admonishes us to carry out what it says to us: “Create,” it says, “worthy fruits of penance.”’ This raises the question, why does Chaucer attribute it to Christ? Is it a mistake, or is he assuming that the whole Gospel is a mode of divine discourse that expresses the tenor or ‘sentence’ of the Word? (Think of the passage on the concordance of the four Gospels in the link between the Tale of Sir Thopas and the Melibee.) With reference to the first speech, Chaucer writes, ‘Crist seith in his gospel’, whereas in relation to the second speech, he writes, ‘oure Lord Jhesu Christ seith thus’; perhaps, the different formulations distinguish between two exegetical perspectives on the Gospels. In the first the Gospels are the written Word, and John as prophet acts as intermediary for God, and in the second Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, speaks ‘ful brode’, according to the deed in this fallen world’, John M. Fyler skips over the Parson’s Tale as a gesture ‘toward the transcendence of language, accomplished paradoxically by verbal flattening’.

John M. Fyler, Language and the Declining World, p. 186. I seek, by contrast, to consider in greater detail the expression of divine speech in the unvarnished vernacular at the conclusion of the Tales.

the finite temporal limits of human speech such that this or that speech may be attributed to Him personally.

To develop on the notion that Chaucer may deliberately mean to identify John the Baptist's speech as a metonomy of the Word or Christ's speech, I turn to the Parson's subsequent consideration of the six causes of contrition (133-291). Chaucer adheres to Raimond de Pennafort's basic plan of such in the *Summa de paenitentia*, but his treatment of those causes departs from that of the source. In relation to the first cause of contrition, the acknowledgement and remembrance of sin, Chaucer draws on the sentential *auctoritas* of God and His prophets, thus: 'And God seith in the Apocalipse, “Remembreth yow fro whennes that ye been falle”' (136) and ‘as God seith by the prophet Ezechiel, / “Ye shal remembre yow of youre weyes, and they shuln displesse yow”’ (139-40). The first quotation is taken from Apocalypse 2:5 concerning Christ's instructions to the Church of Ephesus; the second quotation is taken from Ezekiel 20:43 concerning God's rebuke of the elders of Israel through His prophet Ezekiel. Clearly, then, Chaucer recognises the distinction between direct and indirect divine speech, and he indicates that difference in the words he attributes the Parson. Hence, although it is impossible to say for certain, it, nonetheless, seems more likely that any reading that holds that Chaucer mistakenly attributed John the Baptist's speech to Christ in the passage on contrition would be wrong; rather, the attribution of the speech to Christ implies that Chaucer accepts that the whole Bible is spoken by God.

This is a fitting juncture to refer to the contemporary native English heresy of Lollardy, and how certain of its tenets may be reflected in the treatment of the Parson's Tale.  

43 John of Gaunt offered his patronage and protection to John Wyclif and other key
figures of the heresy, and moving in Gaunt’s circle, many of Chaucer’s friends were identified as Lollards.\textsuperscript{44} This does not indicate that Chaucer himself was a Lollard, of course, but he was ideally positioned to assess, evaluate and respond to the heresy. Valerie Edden summarises the key tenets of Wycliffite Lollardy, thus:

1. That the plain text of the Bible is to be read, stripped of its gloss. 2. The unity of sacred Scripture: \textit{tota scriptura est unum dei verbum}, ‘the whole of Scripture is the single Word of God’. 3. The sacred scripture is to be read as a whole, that is, not in fragments or disconnected extracts. 4. That a proper understanding of the Bible depends upon the virtue of the interpreter. 5. The literal meaning is privileged... 6. That the Bible be made available in the vernacular to be read by the laity. 7. That the Bible be considered the only authority for the Christian (as distinct from the teachings of the Church). 8. That every man may interpret the Bible for himself (provided he has a ‘moral disposition’).\textsuperscript{45}

Clearly, tenets 2, 4 and 5 may be inferred as operating in the Parson’s Tale; equally, however, tenets 1, 7 and, arguably, 8 are repudiated by it. Nevertheless, the Parson’s undoubted emphasis on the Bible as the sole Word of God, thereby implicitly delimiting the range of divine speech to its sacred textual space, marries tantalisingly well with what has, in effect, been Chaucer’s own career approach to the issue. Unlike Langland and the master-anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x, Chaucer never represented divine speech, either by fabulation or translation, in such a fashion that it might lie open to the kinds of hermeneutic and epistemic doubts he characteristically plays with in his fictions; rather,


\textsuperscript{44} Anne Hudson writes: ‘Chaucer’s interest in topics Wyclif discussed is not, of course, startling: both men were patronized by John of Gaunt, a common friend was Ralph Strode, and the dedication of \textit{Troilus and Criseyde} to Strode makes more pointed the discussion in it of the issue of predestination, one which Wyclif a decade earlier had made the centre-piece for a definition of the church.’ Anne Hudson, \textit{The Premature Reformation}, pp. 392-3.

its representation, its entry into the *Tales* has been expressly positioned outside the storytelling competition. The Parson’s Tale is no narrative; it is a treatise or manual, compiled and composed in prose, translated from Latin to English, not to entertain or engage the imagination, or to while away the time; rather, it is intended to instruct, to communicate vital information pertaining to the salvation of one’s soul. Yes, these notions do reflect or echo certain Lollard ideas and practices, but that they do, does not confirm Lollard intent on Chaucer’s part; the overlap of concerns may be accidental rather than essential. Furthermore, while his faith may be interpreted as cold and crystalline rather than warm and expansive, such intellectual asceticism does not place him beyond the bounds of orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the Lollard note, perhaps, as counterpoint, at least, plays between the lines of the Parson’s Tale and its stance towards divine speech and man’s relation to God.

Finally, turning to the section of the Parson’s Tale on the Seven Deadly Sins, specifically, the sin of ire, Chaucer through the Parson makes his clearest statement of the ideal relation of language and reality, word and deed, as it pertains to the Word or Christ. In relation to swearing correctly, the Parson notes that one should swear to the truth, for ‘every lesynge is agayns Crist; for Crist is verray trouthe’ (593). Christ or the Word, thus, is the standard against which the relation of word and deed may be judged, and He is the very ground of truth. How might an auctor, then, relate his fabulations to Christ, that is, Truth? The final part of the section on ire treats of ‘ydel wordes’ (647) and ‘janglynge’ (649):

Now cometh ydel wordes, that is withouten profit of hym that speketh tho wordes, and eek of hym that herkneth tho wordes. Or elles ydel wordes been tho that been nedeles or withouten entente of natureel profit. / And al be it that ydel wordes been somtyme venial synne, yet sholde men doute hem, for we shul yeve rekenynge of hem bifore God. / Now comth janglynge, that may nat been withoute synne. And, as seith Salomon, “It is a sygne of apert folye.” / And

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therefore a philosopher seyde, whan men axed hym how that men sholde plese the peple, and he answered, "Do many good werkes, and spek fewe jangles" (647-50).

Do certain of Chaucer's works count as 'ydel wordes' or 'janglynge'? The distinction he draws in the Retraction - where the author identifies himself as a model reader of the Parson's call to penitence - between 'the translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees' (1085), 'the tales of Canterbury thilke that sownen into synne' (1086), and 'many a song and many a leccherous lay' (1087), on the one hand, and his other works of 'moralitee and devocioun' (1088), on the other, implies that he did count certain of his works as deficient in 'entente of natureel profit'.

Implicit too in the Parson's Tale is, perhaps, the ultimate reason why Chaucer eschews the representation of divine speech: it would have been sinful to have presumed to fabulate such speech, to compound the true and false in 'som newe thing' (House of Fame, 1887), attributing it to the very standard of truth, namely, Christ. The Parson's Tale and the author's responding Retraction marks a return to the material and sentential limits of the Bible, and so to the absolute limit of the Word. The Word is the standard of all representation, the ground of the perfect relation of word and deed, and it is, above all, transcendent and ineffable in Itself, but the Parson's Tale implies that both the 'matter' and 'sentence' of the Word may be expressed in English, that language is not without the power to capture something of the Word. In connection with this view, Gregory Roper argues:

The Parson opens up the text...to a realm where it...is in process, is on the way to its goal, where it may need assistance, reform, re-shaping; but he trusts that the sentence is essentially right - not because he controls it linguistically but because he trusts that it is guaranteed by the Word which it addresses. Human language, however, must always 'stonde to correccioun' under this trusting faith; the Parson's epistemology is a realist one that suggests that language, though it might
not be able to create paradise in fiction, can, for all its vagaries, do the job, show us how to get to heaven.\textsuperscript{47}

Thus, although the Tale eschews the fabulation of divine speech, it embraces the sober translation and expression – \textit{sermo humilis} – of the Word in the service of its ‘entente’ and ‘sentence’, that is, the saving of souls. Hence, it is fitting and significant that it conclude on the ‘trouthe’ of Christ’s word by circling back to His opening speeches: “‘Dooth digne fruyt of Penitence’.../... “By the fruyt of hem shul ye knowen hem”” (114-5), the first uttered through His prophet, John the Baptist, and the second spoken \textit{in persona propria}. The Parson confidently affirms the nature of the promised future reward due to penitence:

\begin{quote}
Thanne shal men understonde what is the fru)nt of penaunce; and, \textit{after the word of Jhesu Crist}, it is the endless blisse of hevene, / ther joye hath no contrarioustee of wo ne grevaunce; ther alle harms been passed of this present lyf; ther as is the sikernesse fro the peyne of helle; ther as is the blissful compaignye that rejoysen hem everemo, everich of otheres joye; / ther as the body of man, that whilom was foul and derk, is moore cleer than the sonne; ther as the body, that whilom was syk, freele, and fiele, and mortal, is inmortal, and so strong and so hool that ther may no thyng apeyren it; / ther as ne is neither hunger, thurst, ne coold, but every soule replenyssed with the sighte of the parfit knowynge of God (X 1076-9; my emphasis added).
\end{quote}

All that the Parson's treatise seeks to communicate, its very \textit{raison d'étre}, in fact, is grounded in and 'after the word of Jhesu Crist' and those words' promise of beatitude which itself is the true relation of man to God.

Recalling John 18:38 in 'Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton', Chaucer reminds his correspondent:

\begin{quote}
...whan of Crist our kyng
Was axed what is trouthe or sothfastnesse,
He nat a word answered to that axing,
\end{quote}

As who saith, “No man is al trewe,” I gesse (1-4).

The living embodiment and standard of Truth is silent; the Incarnate Word in its silence gestures beyond the limits of language to the ground of that which is, namely, Being. Lisa Kiser has argued that the difficult relationship between truth and textuality charted in Chaucer’s work confirms the conclusion that ‘The only truth that emerges from Chaucer’s work...is that truth is impossible to ascertain.’

She is wrong. Chaucer does not deny the existence of truth, for to do so would be to deny Christ, and there is no hint of such a denial to be found in his work. Kathryn Lynch refers to him as being ‘terminally shy of certitude’; he does seem to suggest that the truth is difficult to ascertain, and so the seeker after ultimate truth, the pilgrim on the way to the New Jerusalem, must pray with hope for the grace to arrive secure at that final destination. Textuality can but gesture towards this; beyond the text, though, there must be action and silence.

Conclusion

The key difference between Chaucer and the other Middle English writers discussed in this thesis concerns the personal distance his implied authors construct between themselves and God. Dante, by contrast, as noted above, invites his reader to identify Dante-character with the implied author, and both of them with the empirical author; his poetry, especially, his Commedia is, at one level, a personal confession sublimated in art. Chaucer, on the other hand, plays with the conceptual and rhetorical distances between embedded narrator-persona, implied author and, arguably, empirical author in order to absent himself from any responsibility for his work; his ‘entente’, at every level, is a matter for speculation. It is true, nevertheless, that Chaucer’s texts do affirm that God is, so they are not sceptical in that regard; however, they do not affirm that God is personal, that God is man’s friend. Julian and Margery, the Pearl-poet and Langland all emphasise God’s friendship with man, but this notion of homeliness or friendship, of close personal


relation never arises in Chaucer’s works in a fashion that connects them to the implied author. Chaucer continuously distances himself from his texts in the manner of a Renaissance author whose aim is *sprezzatura*, the art of artlessness or the air of nonchalant disinterestedness that is also the hallmark of the modernist author and artist. Chaucer fashions his texts to generate interpretation, leaving the reader with puzzles and questions. It is impossible to say, then, what the attitude of the empirical author may have been, what his personal relationship with God may have been so far as he experienced any such thing; his literature, his writing – with the possible exception of the Retraction – is not confessional. Nevertheless, when it comes to the texts that he produced, one can point to their peculiar qualities by contrast to their contemporary literary contexts, such as *Piers Plowman* or *Pearl*, and one such quality is, of course, the absence of any representation of divine speech.

I have shown in this chapter that there are moments of tension in Chaucer’s work where divine speech might have been represented. The dream-visions playfully conjure the possibility that as *somnia coelestia* they may be forms of divine discourse; the *House of Fame*, in particular, inclines to a concluding *visio* or revelation that it unceremoniously aborts or defers in silence, its author continuing to claim it as one of his works, unfinished or not. Is the ‘man of gret auctorite’ Christ; is he, at least, a representative of Christ, a prophet or soothsayer; and does his silence mirror the silence of Christ before Pilate on the question of truth and certainty? These questions are strictly unanswerable with reference to the data provided by the texts alone; but is it not in the very spirit of those same texts to provoke questioning that goes beyond their own bounds?

If his early and middle poetry refuses to represent divine speech, so too does his later poetry in the *Canterbury Tales*. However, the *Tales* offer a dialogical drama of language and speech that runs the gamut of truth and falsehood from Christ as the sovereign standard of truth in language to the dissembling Pardoner whose words and deeds are in complete contradiction. The Man of Law’s Tale implies divine speech, but draws back from a clear affirmation of such; rather, the explicit representation of divine

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speech takes place outside the range of fiction and fables in the ironically titled Parson’s Tale. Christ speaks the words he utters in the Gospels and other New Testament texts; God lends infallible *au toritas* to the information the Parson imparts in his moral manual. If one adheres to the sentence of God’s words, then words and deeds shall accord in life lived towards God. The Parson does not speak to pass the time or win a supper; rather, his prize is greater, for he teaches how to save one’s soul. God speaks beyond the compounding of the true and the false, beyond the vagaries of fiction and fable.

I conclude, then, that the absence of a represented God from Chaucer’s poetry stems from a predilection to ask rather than answer questions; a sense of the inadequacy of human language, thought and intellect in the face of the transcendent and ineffable; and, finally, a peculiar distance from the acknowledgement or representation of Christ’s personhood and friendship. The ethics of friendship with Christ operate outside mere textuality, and so, then, does the experience of divine discourse; these, ultimately, are no matters of ‘game’ or ‘pley’. Unlike Dante’s assurance of personal salvation, Chaucer assumes nothing of the sort, inclining, instead, to petition mercy and grace of God. He moves humbly towards God, leaving words behind, presuming nothing.
Conclusion

In the Preface to this thesis, I promised to answer the principal question that the investigation of the representation of divine speech in Middle English literature raises: what is its meaning? The data of the investigation have included: quotation of divine speech taken from canonical scripture (translated or not); amplification or elaboration of divine speech drawn from scriptural episodes; fabulation of divine speech and its attribution to Christ or God; the report of claimed experience of divine locutions as part of visionary or mystical revelation; and, finally, in the case of Chaucer, the issue of the non-representation of divine speech raised the question, why did he confine the representation of such to the unadorned translations of Christ’s speech invented from the scriptures and compiled in the penitential treatise that is the Parson’s Tale?

Before I address this question, I turn to a second but related issue raised also in the Preface: while the topic of divine speech is indeed new to the criticism of Middle English literature, I suggested that its discussion would make a contribution to an area of criticism already opened up by Jesse M. Gellrich and Eric Jager who inaugurated study into the relation of language to the poetic representation of reality in the Middle Ages, and most recently, John M. Fyler has contributed also to this field with his study, Language and the Declining World; in particular, these scholars emphasised the importance of Augustinian semiotics and hermeneutics to medieval poets’ reflection on the nature of language. What unites these critics is their promulgation of a narrative that stresses pessimism concerning the representational power of the word. All three concentrate on the Augustinian theory of language as foundational to the medieval poet’s critical reflection on the medium of his art: language is fallen; man is lost in a regio dissimilitudinis, a labyrinthine region of unlikeness, and the best one can hope for in such circumstances is the likely story that lies in the gift of the allegorical mode. Allegory as the art of saying one thing while meaning and being understood to mean something else gestures in its hermeneutic negotiation beyond the region of unlikeness to the ineffable.

transcendental Signified that is the Word or God. What, however, do those texts studied in this thesis that represent divine speech in the *sermo humilis* of the lowly vernacular contribute to this discussion?

Plato, ultimately, and Augustine, authoritatively for the medieval Christian writer, stand behind the tradition that problematises language and its referential relation to the world. If this is the paradigmatic attitude to language for the Middle Ages, it seems hard to credit that any sophisticated or 'lered' medieval writer or poet might dare to represent divine speech in the vernacular. On the contrary, this thesis has shown precisely that sophisticated and reflective poets like the Master-Anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x and Langland both confidently represent divine speech in their Middle English mother tongue that is not strictly translated from scripture; what is more remarkable, they do not express or inscribe any identifiable anxiety in doing so. The first important conclusion of this thesis, then, concerns the considerable challenge the plain fact of the representation of divine speech presents to the conventional critical paradigm that emphasises medieval scepticism concerning the signifying power of language. Clearly, the confidence of the master-anonymous of Cotton Nero A.x and Langland in representing such speech complicates or problematises the notion that the only 'lered' medieval attitude to language might be the pessimistic one. Even Chaucer, who eschews the representation of such speech until he finally compiles the words of Christ into the penitential treatise that constitutes the Parson’s Tale, implies the authoritative importance of the *sermo humilis* of divine speech in Middle English – the language of the Parson’s parishoners, the Canterbury pilgrim characters and, of course, the implied and model reader of the text – to the key question of life: how ought one to live well in order to see God?

Augustine acknowledged that the whole of creation is a function of the self-enunciating Word spoken by God in Genesis and revealed in its metaphysical priority in the visionary Prologue to St John’s Gospel. The illocutionary act of the Word is affirmed to be the ground of all contingent being, for: ‘omnia per ipsum factura sunt et sine ipso factum est nihil quod factum est’, ‘All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made’ (John 1:3). However, his view of the Word emphasised its distance from human beings, for it is a word only by analogy to our words, so we require divine illumination in order to know it, to relate to God. Augustine ever unable to forget
the Fall and its consequences relates to God as transcendent and ineffable. He even introduces the idea of ineffability into Christian theology precisely in order to grapple with the problematic nature of all human talk about God: ‘But in these words what have I said, my God, my life, my holy sweetness? What has anyone achieved in words when he speaks about you? Yet woe to those who are silent about you because, though loquacious with verbosity, they have nothing to say’ (Confessions I.iv). No wonder, then, that those poets influenced by his theocentric thinking might ultimately reject the power of their art, the possibility of representing the Word of God in language, and a fortiori the vernacular.

On the other hand, there is a distinctly Christocentric attitude implied by those writers who go against the general Augustinian grain in their representation of divine speech. Julian, Margery, the master-anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x and Langland all make God in Christ the central message of their respective texts: Deus caritas est, they proclaim, and the love that Christ’s sacrifice expresses for His creature in His redemptive passion and death forms the meditative and sentential core of their work. This distinctively Christocentric attitude – not necessarily antithetical to the theocentric attitude of Augustine or Boethius – derives from the late-medieval increased religious and spiritual focus on the humanity of Christ qua Son of Man; the Word in Christ, thus, becomes related to man, and so the believer, the one relating in trust to God in Christ finds himself in an intimate relationship to his Creator. It is most natural that such a relation should issue in a confidence, especially among poets, to represent the essence of that intimacy with God in Christ in the amplification of existing scriptural records of divine speech or the fabulation of new such speech insofar as the licentia auctoris is to be measured by the moral standards of love and truth that are grounded in the Christ-Logos. The representation of divine speech, thus, is both Christologogenetic and Christologocentric; in other words, the inspiration – poetic and, perhaps, historical (in the cases of Julian and Margery) – for such represented speech derives from the very person of Christ, and the orientation of such representations relate back to Christ. The Christ-Logos circumscribes all art; all language ultimately bespeaks It; and the record or representation of divine speech effectively makes such universal circumscription and relation explicit.
What, however, of the issue of representing divine speech in the vernacular? Why do both the master anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x and Langland not express anxiety about representing God speaking in the vernacular? And why when the representation of divine speech in the vernacular comes, does it come in the fourteenth century and not the thirteenth or twelfth centuries? English had lost its prestige in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest when it had become subservient to French and Latin, the languages of government, law and the Church. It achieved, however, resurgent prestige in the latter half of the fourteenth century when in 1362 the chancellor opened Parliament for the first time with a speech in English, and in the same year the Statute of Pleading decreed that English should be the language of all legal proceedings. These two instances combined with the attempt to make English the language of the Pale – by way of the Kilkenny Statutes, 1366/7 – and even the attempt to impose English on Lancastrian Normandy in the first half of the fifteenth century all combine to proclaim the renewed national confidence in the English mother tongue. It is doubtless that this resurgent confidence in the vernacular played its part in the decision by medieval poets to represent divine speech in that same language.

Concomitant to this fresh esteem for the vernacular, the second half of the fourteenth century also witnessed the translation of the Word of God into English in the Wycliffite Bibles. In the final section of the Prologue to its first edition (c. 1390) the translator argues that both Bede and King Alfred had already translated the Bible into the common English language of their times; moreover, he outlines his reasons for rendering God’s Word in the vernacular that include his concern that God’s message in the scriptures reach a universal audience, particularly, the ‘lewid puple [who] crieth aftir Holi Writ, to kunne it, and kepe it’ (Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible, XV). He also claims: ‘to make the sentence as trewe and open in English as it is in Latyn, either more trewe and

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2 For the history of the reestablishment of English in the fourteenth century see A. C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, A History of the English Language, fifth edition (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), pp. 143-56. Although the Statute of Pleading decreed that English should be the language of all legal proceedings, W. Rothwell has shown that it did not, in fact, become so; see his ‘English and French after 1362’, English Studies, 82 (2001), 539-59.

more open than it is in Latyn' (XV). It is plain that the Wycliffite intention to address the 'lewid puple' and open up the 'sentence' of the Word of God is also that of those writers dicussed in this thesis; however, these shared aims, arguably, go no further in terms of broader Wycliffite and Lollard controversies. The translation of the Bible into English – although lacking official status – evidences yet again the increased prestige of the English language, not only in relation to government and law but the expression of the very Word of God.

Chaucer, it may be noted, in the Preface to *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, rehearse,

playfully, some of the reasons given in the Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible for translation from Latin into English, but, of course, in relation to astronomical rather than sacred science. He argues that one language is at least as good as another for the expression of 'trewe conclusions' (*A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, 28-40), and he alludes to the Wycliffite translator's boast 'to make the sentence as trewe and open in English as it is in Latyn, either more trewe and more open than it is in Latyn' when he says to his son: 'And Lowys, yf so be that I shewe the in my lighte Englissh as trewe conclusions touching this mater, and not oonly as trewe but as many and as subtile conclusiouns, as ben shewid in Latyn in eny commune tretys of the Astrelabie, konne me the more thank' (50-5). Immediately after this conditional – and so characteristically Chaucerian – boast that implies the power of the vernacular, he associates it with the king: 'And preie God save the king, that is lord of this langage' (56-7). This first reference to the vernacular as the King's English in conjunction with a claim for its equality or even superiority to Latin emphatically demonstrate the altered prestige and newly centralised status of 'naked wordes in English' (26-7) at the end of the fourteenth century.

In fact, the confident representations of divine speech in the vernacular by the writers discussed in this thesis overwhelmingly complicate and challenge the pessimistic narrative of Gellrich, Jager and Fyler regarding the the relation of language to reality in medieval poetry, and this itself broaches the answer to the initial question raised: what is the meaning of the representation of divine speech? In effect, the findings of this thesis

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taken together imply that the meaning of such speech resides in faith or the relationship to God; Aquinas defines faith as a relationship to God (Summa Theologiae, II.II.81:1). Julian and Margery experience a deepening of their personal relationship to God as an effect of their visionary and mystical revelations; they find themselves drawn into relation to God by God. Julian desires God’s favour as a young woman, but never expected the degree to which that favour would be expressed in the experience of sixteen visions and a whole revelation. She finds herself slowly being drawn into dialogue with Christ who reveals Himself, in line with scripture and the teaching of the Church, emphatically to be the principle of life and love, dwelling intimately in the soul of His beloved creature, speaking with her in ‘homely’ fashion, above all, as a friend. Margery, similarly, does not expect the revelation that she is granted; and, equally, she finds herself drawn into relationship to a gregarious God who converses intimately with her as one friend to another. The love, intimacy and friendship that is expressed in and through divine speech in the mystics is echoed in the poetic texts of the master-anonymous of MS Cotton Nero A.x and Langland. The former in his artful recastings of biblical narrative episodes as they relate to the ‘sentence’ of Christ’s spoken promises of the Beatitudes, dramatises the relation of various biblical interlocutors to God. The implicature of these texts is that right relation to God opens the channel to divine discourse; God is a being of awesome and destructive power, but He also wants the love of His favoured creature, and when man lives well, according to the tenets of God’s moral law, then intimate and friendly speech follows. In Pearl, not a recasting of a biblical narrative, the disaffected narrator-persona although himself denied the experience of divine speech is brought by the Pearl-maiden’s mediating relationship to God; through her communion and friendship with the Lamb, he is drawn to a new personal relationship to God that will be grounded in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; and God here too is affirmed to be an everpresent friend. Finally, in Piers Plowman the central ‘sentence’ of the text, Deus caritas est, is affirmed at its dramatic and moral climax when the historical person of Christ harrows Hell for the love of His creature and through the power of His Word. He aligns word and deed in the illocutionary and dialectical acts of breaking the gates of Hell and arguing the Devil to abject defeat. Although Langland peppers the speech with Latin quotations and an admission that it contained ineffable and inexpressible archana verba,
he, nevertheless, affirms the power and scope of his humble vernacular in the expression of Christ’s words and their triumphant victory. The narrator’s stance towards this event is revealed in his renewed relationship to Christ in the waking world that celebrates the Paschal mysteries of Christ’s redemptive passion, death and resurrection; by implicit extension, the reader too is invited to respond to Christ’s words and deeds by changing his life, making himself a new friend to God.

Chaucer, of course, does not quite fit the above critical paradigm, for he eschews the representation of divine speech throughout his oeuvre until the Parson’s Tale that, deliberately or not, marks the end of his storytelling career. He fashions characteristically sceptical narrators through whom he playfully challenges and subverts the authority of fabulae and the power of language to represent a transient world ruled by a fickle Fortune. He raises intellectual questions concerning the relation of such mutability to God, but hardly ever offers the doctrinal answers to these questions; rather, he raises the question, and then claims ignorance as to the answer, preferring to pray in hope to God for mercy and grace. His mercurial poses and the sceptical stances of his narrator personae and constructs are Socratic in character; morality and ethics are of central importance to him, but he cannot help seeing the degree to which human knowledge is fallible and subject to limitation. Hence, although his texts contain devices such as the dream-vision that might prove likely vehicles for revelation of truth, he shys away from certitude, from authority, dazzled as he is by the ‘solaas’ of fabulae. Nevertheless, the demands of ‘sentence’ shadow all of his tales, and by the time he comes to compose the Parson’s Tale as the final text in the series of Canterbury Tales, he decides to fashion a persona, moral and Christocentric, who rejects fables and their distracting ‘solaas’ in favour of pure and sure ‘sentence’ that grounds itself, significantly, after the words of Christ. Divine speech imbues Chaucer’s final anti-tale with salvific promise; if one hears and follows the sermo humilis of Christ’s universal message, expressed in the humble vernacular, if one changes one’s life, then the reward of such a change, the fruit of such penitence will be paradise or the eternal beatific relationship to God.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that the fact of the existence of divine speech in Middle English literature challenges the notion that ‘lered’ medieval poets would eschew such representation as either facile or mistaken. On the contrary, both the master-
anonymous of Cotton Nero A.x and Langland embrace such speech as a vehicle for presenting God’s personhood and love to their readers; their texts imply a confidence in the knowledge and relationship to God that derives, ultimately, from an attitude that is essentially Christocentric. Finally, the relationship to God in Christ that all the writers discussed in this thesis ultimately affirm implies the deep and urgent meaning of divine speech: the Word in Christ calls to His creation in love, persuading him in ‘homely’ fashion to reciprocate in the union of both in an everlasting happiness and friendship.
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